The "Minor Prophets"

Thoughts come from a wide variety of sources. Some from messages I have heard from individuals, some from assemblies Bible studies, some from home life and some from books I have read. The Holy Spirit is the Teacher who makes them real to me.

- "Major truths from the Minor Prophets." John E. Hunter. Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI
- "The Life Application Bible." Tyndale House and Zondervan
- "Living Prophecies." The Minor Prophets Paraphrased. Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, IL
- "Exploring the Minor Prophets." John Phillips. Loizeaux Brothers, Neptune, NJ

What we call the books of the "minor prophets" is a revelation to us of God and what He is like in His dealing with human beings. Three of the prophets were messengers to Israel, the northern kingdom. They were Hosea, Amos and Jonah. Three were messengers to Judah, the southern kingdom. They were Joel, Micah and Zephaniah. Three were messengers to the Gentiles - Obadiah to Edom, Nahum to Nineveh and Habakkuk to Babylon. Three were messengers to the remnant of the Jews who returned to the land of promise. They were Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

Prophets really are not "major" or "minor" in themselves, because a prophet was a person chosen by God to communicate directly with the people when the kings and priests failed in their leadership. When they did not do what God intended but led God's people astray, He chose men from different walks of life and gave them authority to speak for Him. They owed their allegiance only to God and were not to be manipulated by the will of the people. It was important that God made failing kings and a failing people aware that they knew none of their actions were hidden from God's eyes. There was departure morally, socially and spiritually from what God wanted from His people and He was not going to leave them without warning as to what was the result of their sins.

Some of the prophets like Elijah and Elisha performed miracles to lend weight to their warnings of coming consequences of the choices of the people and their leaders. Other prophets told the people of the mind of God regarding their practices of sin in the present and others warned of judgments that would come in the future, as well as blessings that are yet to be fulfilled when our Lord Jesus Christ reigns in the future and the throne of David is reestablished in Israel.

Israel, even though it is one of the smallest nations on earth, is the only nation with which God has made a treaty. By an act of divine sovereignty, He chose Israel to be His representative people on earth to all other nations. Instead of choosing some great nation who would pride themselves on their strength, He picked out a small group who would not boast of themselves but put their faith and trust in God. But as the generations passed who ignored the hand of God with them by establishing them in the geographical center of the earth, the people of Israel and their leaders began to think they became great by their own power and skill. God does not give His glory to others and so the twelve prophets who we call "minor prophets" had a work to do for God. The only reason they are called "minor" is because of the size of the writings in the books compared with Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel.

Israel occupies the most strategic place on the earth because God chose to put this small obscure people there when He called Abram from Ur of the Chaldees to move to that specific location. He was the father of the nation which was to be the spiritual heart of all the people in the world. From them was to come the blessing which would be to all mankind. Other nations are blessed when they favor Israel. God blesses those who by their positive association with Israel allow the truth of God to come to their own people. Britain one time, favored Israel but at the end of WWII turned their protection of Israel over to the Arabs and has since lost its place of importance worldwide.

The light of God has come to all humanity through Israel, and the nations that reject that light will not be able to succeed in their ambition to "drive Israel into the sea." To many people, support for such a small nation seems a waste of time and money. However, the final pages of history have not been written and so we have the writings of the prophets to give us the end of the story. The prophets of Israel began with Elijah and concluded with John the Baptist who came in the "spirit and power of Elias" to turn the nation of Israel to the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." How sad that the departure that began so long ago still is a fact in that nation, and will still be "until Shiloh comes, and unto Him shall the gathering of the people be."

When the Israelites came into the promised land, they were an agricultural people in which people were given an inheritance that was to remain in the family from one generation to the next. Urbanization brought people to measure their worth in wealth and power instead of heritage. It was then that the first prophets were called by God to speak to the people for Him. Elijah, Elisha and Joel spoke out in the times of Ahab until Jehoash. Jonah, Amos and Hosea then were the spokespersons for God in the times of prosperity during the reign of Uzziah, and in the case of Hosea, through the short times of leadership until Hezekiah.
The world power of Assyria and the captivity and dispersion of the northern tribes by Assyria, made it urgent that the word of God would be written. Then one hundred and fifty years later, the Babylonians came, but not as a savage people like the Assyrians. They carried the Jews captive to Babylon where they retained their identity. Nebuchadnezzar dealt ruthlessly with the leadership of the Jews when they were defeated, but led the people as a whole to like Babylon and its prosperity and urban lifestyle. During this time there was the need of prophets to warn the Jews against materialism, worldliness and idolatry. When comparatively few returned to Israel under the auspices of Cyrus, they quickly got discouraged and settled into a formal religious hypocrisy which called for a final word from God.

As a young man, Isaiah was awakened to the call of God at the death of Uzziah and said, "Here am I send me." During the reigns of five kings both he and Micah spoke the word of the Lord to the people of Israel and Judah. Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk and Jeremiah continued to prophesy after those before them, and in the case of Jeremiah, all the way to the return of Jews under Zerubbabel.

Daniel, Ezekiel and Obadiah were there when the people of Judah were taken to Babylon and their prophesies are related to that time and on into the future. Zechariah and Haggai were in there when the temple was being rebuilt and finally finished under their prodding. After the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, Malachi had the last prophetic word as hypocrisy and spiritual darkness settled down on the Jews for four hundred years until the miracle child John was born. The unfolding history of the Jews as written in the Kings and Chronicles closes with Malachi, the last Old Testament prophet making a final appeal to the third generation of repatriated Jews to repent but that did not happen. They kept and added to their formal religion. Their secular materialism consumed their interest and religious hypocrisy was became normal to them. Daniel had foretold this would happen, and sure enough it did as darkness again descended on the chosen people of Israel.

**TEN MINOR PROPHETS**

THE GOD WHO...

Hosea: loves to the uttermost.
Joel: appeals before judgment.
Obadiah: is the God of poetic justice.
Jonah: God spares the repentant.
Micah: smites in order to bless.
Nahum: is not mocked.
Habakkuk: vindicates the righteous.
Zephaniah: avenges abused privilege.
Haggai: restores lost blessing.
Zechariah: promises new mercies.
Malachi: says "proves Me;" bring tithes.

3 MESSENGERS TO ISRAEL:
Hosea, Amos, Jonah — the northern kingdom.

3 MESSENGERS TO JUDAH:
Joel, Micah, Zephaniah — the southern kingdom.

3 MESSENGERS TO THE GENTILES:
Obadiah to Edom; Nahum to Nineveh; Habakkuk to Babylon.

3 MESSENGERS TO THE REMNANT:
Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

**HOSEA**

An Unusual Love Story

Hosea was a contemporary of Amos, Isaiah and Micah. He labored in Samaria approximately 72 years. His message was to the 10 tribes (Israel, Ephraim). Israel is Jehovah’s bride; the Church is the Lamb’s bride.

Key word: “Return” is mentioned 15 times.
Message: God’s method in restoring backsliders. This is a treatise on repentance.

Chapter 1: Israel’s sad condition.
Chapter 2: Israel’s awful fall.
Chapter 3: Israel’s ransom price paid.
Chapter 4 - 5: Terrible results of Israel’s fall.
Chapter 6:1-3: Israel’s penitent cry.
Chapter 14:1-3: The prophet’s final appeal to Israel.
Chapter 14:4-9: Israel’s final restoration.

“I WILL’S” OF GRACE: Hosea 13:14; 14:4-5
• The “I will” of Resurrection: “I will ransom thee from the power of the grave”. The Lord Jesus is the first-fruits of resurrection. Because He lives, we will live also.
• The “I will” of Redemption: “I will redeem thee from death.” The price for sin is paid so death now has no claim over us. By grace ye are saved…
• The “I will” of Retribution: “O death, I will be thy plagues.” By a sinless One dying, death has lost its power. A human over whom death had no power, used His key and died by His own volition.
• The “I will” of Removal: “O grave, I will be thy destruction.” The last enemy that will be destroyed is death – but it will be destroyed!
• The “I will” of Restoration: “I will heal their backsliding.” The progression leads to them being back in fellowship. That means to me that “we are accepted in the Beloved.”
• The “I will” of Regard: “I will love them freely.” All barriers are removed. We shall be like Him.
• The “I will” of Refreshment: “will be as the dew unto Israel.” The freshness of unbroken fellowship bring enjoyment, growth, depth of spiritual nourishment.

Hosea 1

IS THIS FOR REAL?
A fine young man who loved his country in spite of all the evil that was going on, and who wanted the best for his people, was told by the Lord to marry a prostitute. Hosea must have wondered if this was really a word from God or a trick of the devil. One hundred and fifty years after Jeroboam had led the ten northern tribes known as Israel from Judah and the temple at Jerusalem, the Lord clearly told Hosea that his marriage to Gomer was going to be an illustration to the Jewish people of what they were doing to the Lord God of Israel. Fourteen wicked kings, some weak and some strong had continued to lead the nation to the false gods around them beginning with the golden calves made by the first Jeroboam. Ahab and Jezebel had instituted the immoral religions of Baal and Ashtoreth to where it became appealing and popular to the people who believed they were released from the restraints of God's righteous laws.

The second Jeroboam was on the throne, and although he was successful in some ways by regaining some land that was lost, he still was an evil ruler. For years God had mercy on Israel but they still mixed the worship of idols with the worship of God which was an abomination. Overriding all the evil actions of the kings and the nation, was the sovereignty of God who chose then to allow people to make choices. The principle remains today as it did then, the day will come when we have to accept the consequences of our own actions. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." We will reap. We will reap more than we sow. We will reap what we sowed. We will reap more than we sowed.

Prophets had prophesied before Hosea and had largely been ignored. Apart from a few brief times the evil of the nation and the leadership continued unabated. God does not limit Himself as to how He is going to deal with people who break their covenants with Him, defy His authority, demean His spokesmen, deny His word, and denigrate that which He intends to be holy. So in the case of Hosea He chose a living illustration to be enacted before the very eyes of the people. This time the Lord spoke through His servant, not only in words but in a dramatic living illustration of unfaithfulness with which everyone could identify. According to the first verse of the book, Hosea's ministry was for 72 years. If he started prophesying in his twenties he would have been in his nineties when he died. The whole book has many poetical metaphors with the most impacting one the living one of the sad domestic life of Hosea and Gomer, his wife.

Hosea, a prophet of God, took for a wife a prostitute, who though she was likely beautiful, was known for what she did more than who she was. In spite of who she was and what she did, Hosea chose to love her with devotion and in spite of unrequited love. His obedience to God led him into an unhappy marriage that became an example to thousands of people in Israel of the love of God for His unfaithful people. His unbroken commitment contrast with their unfaithfulness. He reaffirmed His love again and again and yet that love was spurned. He was rejected by those He loved and yet He showed mercy. Constant consistent love is contrasted with multiple affairs. With heartache He calls and there is only hardhearted refusal. His call to repentance is ignored by persistent wickedness. Hosea was called to live his message. Ingratitude is contrasted with amazing grace. His undying hopefulness is contrasted with the deliberate blindness of foolish people. This a picture of unregenerate people in every age and ungrateful nations that have been blessed by God.

I imagine people who knew Hosea and who also knew Gomer would have said to him, "What in the world are you doing? You know this woman's reputation! You know what she has been doing! Don't go any further in this relationship!" Those who obey God as did the prophets, are often called to do extraordinary things that will not be understood by those who know
Hosea's obedience to God caused him emotional pain, humiliation and grief. He knew he could not change her, and he knew she would break his heart and make him a man of sorrows. But as a servant of God he also knew there are things of much more importance than my comfort, desires, and blessing.

Israel had been unfaithful to God who had provided for them, protected them and cared for them. Instead of showing appreciation to God for His grace, mercy and love, Israel had "married" idols - false gods, and had ignored His will and word. Breaking God's righteous laws without concern must break God's heart like the unfaithfulness of Gomer to Hosea made him a man of a broken heart. She had a child for Hosea but them went to other men and had a daughter and a son, likely by different men. Hosea's son Jezebel was significant and prophetic. But the name of the little girl, Lo-ruhamah, "not loved, unpitied," must have hurt her to the heart as she grew. The son of Gomer, Lo-ammi, "not my people, no son of mine," must have been hard for Hosea to give to the children because it identifies the tragedy that accompanies unfaithfulness.

These names of the children were given as a message from God to Israel warning of divine justice to come on those who are strangers to God and who will be disowned by Him. Idolatry is our false images of God. It is a human problem, and most people when faced with the charge of it would say, "Worship idols? Not me." However, everyone has a certain reverence for something greater than us. When we measure the time and attention given to various topics in a conversation, you soon get a picture, of what a person worships. That kind of worship is dangerous, because we come to adore that which outranks us. Such unfaithfulness as God's people showed toward Him has affected the children and the generations that have followed in the footsteps of those like Gomer who would not be restrained from her lustful ways. The northern tribes had passed the point of no return so God could not demonstrate His love to His people. Because they had abandoned Him, He had to abandon them.

Even after Gomer sank to the point of being a drunk prostitute, Hosea still loved her. He bought and paid for her like a slave and took her home again, cleaned her up, gave her a bed to lie on and told her he loved her and would wait for her to come back to him. God has promised that Israel will be restored in the future to the special union He made long ago with their forefathers. His commitment to Israel as His chosen earthly people remains unchanged in spite of the nation being unfaithful to Him to this very day. The modern nation is there today only as a political entity and is still in unbelief. A new day for Israel is coming when finally, they will see our Lord Jesus as their true Messiah, and then will see the promises of God that they have so long ignored, despised and rejected, actually come to pass just as the prophet foretold so long ago.

Hosea 1:6. “And she conceived again, and bare a daughter. And God said unto him, ‘Call her name Loruhamah: for I will have no more mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away.”’

NO MORE MERCY.

It had gone too far - not just few things
But everything righteous, godly, honorable and God-honoring
Was gone -

Mercy had been shown year after year - but been spurned
God had waited, promised, called and sent prophets but mercy -
Was gone-

The armies were already marching, the goal was God's people
They came and came and kept coming - and conquered and took - Israel
Was gone -

God is the same - He still calls out to His own people
He still is willing to show mercy to a wandering child who -
Was gone -

His promise is still true to those far away - “Return…”
“Call upon Me in the day of trouble.” He is still waiting to restore -
Those who were gone.

“O Lord God, how fearful it is for those who belong to Thee, to turn away from Thee. To be found out in the world as a prodigal must leave a terrible sense of failure and longing for the joy of the Lord again. I am feeling so bad for my brother and sister in Christ who just buried their son who had not returned to Thee. Lift them up some way Father, and also the wife and family he left for his wild journey into the world and the domain of Satan. Thou hast promised to be to the widows and orphans what they need. Please meet their needs today. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Hosea 1:11. “Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great shall be the day of Jezreel.”
OBJECT LESSONS.

It is good for us to learn from the mistakes of others. Lessons are often taught us by our fathers and mothers. Who pass on to us what they have learned by experience. That we will learn too, God doesn’t do things by chance.

There are plans and purposes to all that God does. Often it is necessary to allow difficulties for an overall cause. It doesn’t mean He has abandoned us and no longer cares. But that there are changes that must happen of which we may be unaware.

We have a tendency to follow what goes on around us. And think that is normal or even leads to a personal plus - Until we learn the lesson that what others may do - Is not the template for living by the time it is through.

God’s way is often quite different from the way of the world. And His goal is not always immediate as the lessons unfold. The changes He desires come not just outwardly but within. In that way He teaches lessons to keep us from sin.

It is not always the easy things that happen that are the best. God’s object lessons may be given to us as some test. That will in the future brings benefits that last - And we will see then the reasons for the lessons that are past.

“Father in heaven, I think I know more of Thee by the lessons learned long ago but understood much better now. I do know that “all things work together for good…” If there are lessons to learn today, help me to be a good student. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Hosea 2

AN AWFUL FALL

This chapter begins with a pathetic picture of Hosea pleading with the children of Gomer to stop being a harlot and to change her ways immediately. One wonders what happened to the children who were put in such a position by their ungodly mother. Hosea accepted the two who were children of adultery by opening his heart and arms to them. He called Lo-Ammi, Ammi, which means "mine." He called Lo-Ruhamah, Ruhamah, which means "pitied." The children were not at fault of course but they were the channel Hosea had to their mother. He begged them to tell their mother to give up the terrible lifestyle she had chosen or there would be serious consequences that would come.

This was a visible lesson to Israel to repent and come back to the Lord. God is referred to as "Lord" in the book of Hosea as the attribute of God that appeals most to the message of Israel as the wayward wife. Hosea is speaking for the Lord calling for His people to repent, change and return to Him. He was wanting and willing to receive His people and start all over again with them as His own loved ones. If they did, He was faithful and would be merciful toward them. If they chose not to repent and return to the Lord, there would be severe judgment and they would be disowned. He would make the way very hard for them and they would lose everything, even the respect of the evil nations around them. The false gods they had chosen to follow so their way would be easy would not be able to deliver them.

However, Israel chose perverted religion and the way of life suited to idolatry. The false religions of Baal and Ashtoreth had the appeal of idols to look at and sensual and licentious practices in the name of religion that satisfied the lusts of the flesh. They could “feel good” about themselves and what they were doing. This practice continues today in the name of religion. People want to “feel good” and “feel the love” instead of worshipping God and honoring Him. They want the comfort of a “feel good religion” and the excitement of an emotional “high” that can come from loud music, clapping and dancing to tunes that happen to have some religious words attached to the tunes.

The Jews themselves have designed a form of religion of their own that is apart from God and His word. The Talmud has become an important part of their tradition with all of its “dos and don’ts.” These worthless practices and traditions to suit their own will, came into effect during the four hundred dark years when there was no word from the Lord. When our Lord Jesus Christ came, it was those who practiced those man-made traditions who were so opposed to the Lord and His teaching of the word of God without the additions of men.

The prosperous times in which the first message of Hosea came had made them think that wealth and material possessions were the evidence of their success and all was well with them. That same mind-set is in the world today in almost all societies and cultures. People have not been willing to accept the fact that everything we have comes from the benevolent
hand of God. We have been given all things to use for God's honor and to meet our own legitimate needs. When we get to the place where think we deserve all of this, we are in danger of losing everything.

Israel had become so idolatrous that they believed the idols had given them what they claimed was their own. People still credit luck, skill, good management, hard work, smart thinking and good contacts with other people as the reason for their success rather than the grace of God. They do not even consider that "the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance." In ways similar to those of idolatrous Israel, people today mix the worship of the creature and Creator, idolatry and Christianity. It was a concern of the apostle Paul that unbelievers and believers might become yoked together. Righteousness and unrighteousness, light and dark, Christ and Belial, believers with unbelievers, the temple of God with idols should never be joined in any way, and yet it is being done all over as a means of "showing love and acceptance" without truth and grace.

Hosea warned Israel through the illustration of the terrible choices of his wife, of the "I wills" of coming punishment in contrast to the "I wills" of divine grace. Disasters of nature, the devastation of war and the destruction of the nation as an identifiable people would come if there was not repentance and restoration to the Lord. The Assyrian empire was just beyond the horizon to the north ready to come and disperse them among the nations so they would soon lose their identity. Very few Jews today can claim a tribal identity because of the choices made at that time. Israel had made a covenant with God, but broke that by spiritual harlotry when the people began to worship calves. But then we need to ask ourselves, "What do we kiss?" Is it business success, power, financial gain, comfort, intellectual skill, pleasure or even patriotism?

Israel is warned of the awful consequences of failure and departure in the first part of this chapter. Yet, in spite of the rejection of the Lord by the people of Israel in Hosea's day, God is not finished with them. The Lord will take them to a "desert place" in the future where they will have nothing or no one but the Lord to connect with. The "time of Jacob's trouble" will be a terrible time for them, but will open a door of hope even in the "valley of Achor (Troubles)." At the end of the tribulation all the luxuries of urban living and the sinfulness associated with it will be abandoned. They will find the wonderful "I wills" of God's grace will be extended to them and what they had hoped for, but ignored so long will be there coming from the hand of God who will be like a "husband" to them.

The nation will be bound to Him in righteousness, justice, love and faithfulness. A new beginning for Israel in the future will take place when in compassion, our Lord takes His unfaithful earthly people back to the close, intimate and personal relationship like that of a husband and wife that He had intended when He chose them out of the nations because He "loved them."

There is a lesson for us today in that it is possible for us to know all about God without really knowing Him. Ritual without reality is evidence of this. Satisfaction with forms without fellowship is evidence of this. Right words spoken and right songs sung as a practice without the affection of our hearts is evidence of knowing about God but not knowing Him. In these days of prosperity, we too can show all the same characteristics of religious practice and hypocrisy that Israel showed, and at the same time be far away from God in heart, soul and spirit.

**Hosea 2:15.** "And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope: and she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt."

**HOPE OUT OF TROUBLE.**

From the place of disaster there comes hope through the din.

From where the forbidden was buried, hope rises again.

Unfaithfulness to God will not be overlooked or ignored.

There is a price to be paid before one can be restored.

Sin has to be confessed and then truly forsaken.

Before restoration takes place, repentance for the path one has taken.

Then God in compassion forgives us and we are right with Him.

And when fellowship is restored, a new life can begin.

In mercy God forgave us and brought us to His place.

He continues to love us and show us His grace.

When failure and sin come in and brings separation,

It breaks down the joy and blessings of true sanctification.

Holiness is important for God is eternally holy.

And cannot accept us when we don't obey Him truly.

To pretend righteousness is there when we turn to sin.

Is to deny our position in Christ and obedience to Him.

And no longer for satisfaction in the dark world we grope

We can dwell in the light and the warmth of God's love.

And experience and appreciate the blessings we have.
“O Gracious Father, again I thank Thee for being able to come again openly to Thee and know I am not out of place I thank Thee for grace that is given in life to serve Thee acceptably. If there are times, I stray from Thee, please make me quickly aware of it so I can get to the door of hope and acceptance as soon as possible. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Hosea 2:23. “And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, ‘Thou art my people;’ and they shall say, ‘Thou art my God.’”

Hosea 3

THE RANSOM PRICE PAID

The first chapter of Hosea describes Israel's sad condition and how God looked upon them. The second chapter tells about the awful fall of Israel into disgrace and sin to the extent they are taken away from the protection and love of God. In this short third chapter, the drama of Hosea and Gomer concludes with the ransom price being paid and Gomer brought back but in isolation until Hosea can show his love to her and she is able to love him in return. However, that part of the human story is not revealed to us. But what we do learn in the opening three chapters of Hosea is that our God loves to the uttermost. What a wonder is the love of God even to sinful, disobedient and unthankful mankind.

Gomer had finally come to the place where she had sunk to being either a slave or a mistress to one man who did not value her. In fact, to the one who owned her she wasn't worth the price of a slave. It was when she was in that condition the Lord told Hosea to do something that is amazing in what we would think is unreasonable. He was to go and get her and bring her home in spite of all her adultery and sinful condition. More than that he was to love her in the same way God loves Israel in spite of how far that race of people has sunk, and turned away from Him. The whole tragic story of this family must have been well known among the people of Israel, and when Hosea

"O Lord God, how assuring it is that even when one has gone so far away - there is ‘A way back to God from the dark paths of sin.' May wandering sheep never keep on going when the call to return comes. However, it has to be, bring them to the place where they will go no further - and will repent and turn to Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Hosea 7
finally bought her and brought her home again in spite of all she had done must have fascinated them as this scandal was lived before them.

One would wonder what the people thought when they were told that this was an illustration of how the Lord God of Israel looked upon them and what was going to happen to them if they did not repent. The final outcome should have struck a cord of some kind in the people when they were told this was how they were treating the Lord and how He looked upon them. The story of the family of Hosea stops there. We do not know what happened to the children, or if Hosea and Gomer were finally and fully brought together in a loving relationship, but the lesson is there. God looks on sin as serious. Rejection of Him, denial and apostasy do have serious consequences. It is foolish and irresponsible to think that what I do does not have an effect on others around me beside myself.

Israel today is still in isolation because of the rejection of our Lord Jesus Christ by the nation. There was a small measure of recovery when some of the Jews returned from exile to the land, but even then, there was no wholehearted return to the Lord. That little recovery brought about the forms of the past glory of Israel with the rebuilding of the temple, restoration of the priesthood and the safety of the walled city. After the last prophecy of Malachi and four hundred years that followed, all of that religious practice became compromised and ended when the high priest tore his garments and the people said, "His blood be on us and on our children." So, the Jews presently have no prince, no king, no sacrifice, no temple, no priesthood. The rejection was accepted by God and they are in the waiting period - and God waits.

Many Jews today are agnostics or atheists. They are scattered among the nations of the world, although since 1948 they have a national identity. There are many Jews who have gone to Israel, not in belief or faith in God, but simply as those who want a nation of their own. They are still gathering in unbelief and will remain as an isolated people until Christ comes in power and glory to reign as "David their king," a reference to the return of the dynasty promised by God. Then they will truly repent and bow before the Lord in humility and submit to His authority.

There are still dark days ahead for Israel as there are for any person or nation that refuses to submit to divine authority. Our own nation is being challenged by atheistic people who want any reference to God removed from national coinage, courthouses and government building, the pledge of allegiance, our national anthem and public hymns and songs that we have sung for generations. Nations will fade and fall, but out of the darkness of the tribulation the nation of Israel will come in trembling before their Messiah and will become His wife during the peaceful reign of the millennium. The church will always be the bride of Christ as His heavenly people. The story of Hosea and Gomer will end with the "Son of David" sitting upon the throne and the Jews finally being where He wants them to be. The word "return" is mentioned fifteen times in the book indicating God will restore the backsliding nation when there is true repentance.

Hosea 3:5. "Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days."

RETURN.

You went away thinking there was much you were missing -
For some reason you rejected God’s grace and His blessing.
No matter how far into sin you may have gone -
There is a way back to God who knows what you have done
And waits for you to return from the dark paths of sin;
His door is open wide that you may go in.

There is a way back to God when in true-hearted contrition,
We turn away from sin and come in honest confession
To Him who is waiting with arms outstretched and wide
To receive us with forgiveness and draw us to His side.
So, the Valley of Trouble then becomes a Door of Hope
And now with life’s present difficulties we are able to cope.

Perhaps there are times when as children we stray,
And later stop to wonder why we ever went away
With a sense of deep guilt, we wonder what to do
After failing in the trust given, are we really through?
The answer is "No." we can repent and return,
And the lessons from failure we finally learn.

We can return in faith knowing God our Father is there
To accept us and forgive us when our souls we bare
Before His all-knowing eyes, and our sins we confess -
He can in turn forgive and our lives He can bless.
The fear of the Lord and His goodness He shows -
To the one who returns and fellowship again he knows.
“Forgiving God. while I know the blessing of fellowship with Thee. I also know there are times when I fail Thee and do not represent Thee well before those who look on. I confess the failure and neglect. In returning I find rest. I thank Thee in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Hosea 3:5. “Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days.”

GOD IS NOT FINISHED.

It’s not over yet! Things around may seem hopeless and so ungodly that there is no way to return. But it’s not over till it’s over! God has His plans that haven’t been completed. It seems like the total depravity of the world, the nation, the church itself has taken over and there is no way to stop the downward slide. But God has His plans that haven’t been completed. The lifestyle of many people seems to be so like that of dissatisfied Gomer who was chasing after lovers and didn’t even know her “first husband” was the one keeping her alive. She had so much and lost it all. But God has His plans that haven’t been completed. There she was, “for sale” and worth so little – half the price of a slave. Just like so many today who have so little sense of self-worth. They have given themselves to be sold for fleeting pleasure or fame; for a careless moment of passion; for something that looks good but is only a fake. How can such things go on? God has His plans that haven’t been completed.

It was in God’s plans to restore that which He took not away. It was in God’s plans to make Him to be sin for us who knew no sin. It was in God’s plans to use the weak and despised to confound the mighty. It was in God’s plan to have a people for His name. It was in God’s plans to bring many sons to glory. It was in God’s plans to show the riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

In spite of all the sinful waywardness; the blatant willfulness; the self-centered covetousness – God is still in the process of carrying out His plans to completion. That is why we can maintain a positive outlook on the work God has given us to do. We can still press ahead in full confidence that His word is still the sanctifying force of our generation the same as in the past. He has said it, and He will do it. The Holy Spirit is still in the believers and in the church carrying on the work He was given to do through us. The Father and the Son are still making their abode with us. The day of grace isn’t over yet; the church is still in the process of being built and the gates of hell shall never prevail against it.

“O God of history, the story looks dark if I only look around. But I can see ahead and there is still light in the world. I look farther and can see bright light farther on. I want to keep my spiritual eyesight so please help me to not get overly concerned with all the disasters going on around me. Give me the courage to give off some reflected light. In the name of Him who is the Light of the world.

Amen.”

Hosea 4

A “CONTROVERSY”

This chapter is a description of the sins of Israel given in plain unmistakable words that no one can miss. They were without morality even in their religious practices and had chosen to be willfully ignorant of God and His ways in their idolatry. The description of the present condition of Israel is contrasted with the final words of the last chapter. The people had become sold out to their sins, both of what they did that was wrong, and what they did not do that was right. In chapter four they are hugging their idols in contrast with a future day when they will throw them away [Hos.14:8]. God has no choice but to judge those who ignore sin. Punishment for wrong is a necessary action for survival. That is why the cross-work of our Lord Jesus Christ is so meaningful to those who have faced their sin, repented of it to God, and accepted the work of Christ personally.

Hosea’s broken home and tragic home-life was an illustration of the broken relationship between Israel and the Lord. It is also a reflection of how the whole world today is seen by God and the reason there is judgment coming. God has eternal purposes for this world and has a good future for Israel, but not in the present condition of things. “Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.”

Likely the people of Israel condemned Gomer for what she had done, but didn't see that they were doing the same thing in their unfaithfulness to the Lord in their spiritual, physical and immoral lives. In their idolatry they seemed to think all the forms of prostitution they practiced were "par for the course." Through Hosea the Lord gives a list of what was missing, and what they were doing that was so evil. They were deliberately without truth, mercy and knowledge, and were guilty of "swearing, lying, killing and stealing, and committing adultery." When people to continue to perjure themselves because of their sin, they affect not only themselves but all those around them. When God takes action against sinful people, even nature: natural disasters, animals, birds and the fish in the sea can become sick and die and then disappear. In Israel instead of the spiritual advisors calling for repentance, humility, change and a return to faith in God, they were leading the way into idolatry and immorality.

False prophets and wicked priests were bringing destruction on Israel, their “mother”, and were responsible for the "lack of knowledge" in the sin-loving population that had thrown restraint to the winds. The tendency of others to turn away from
God, should move us to be whole-heartedly faithful to the word of God rather than accommodate to the sinful ways of the world around us and the compromising ways of religion. In spite of the sinful practices and bad choices of the Jews in Hosea’s day, God still referred to them as “My people.” What grace! Even though they were willfully ignorant of God by deliberate choice, and didn’t want the Lord in all their ways, God still recognized them.

The leadership of the priests was a model of evil instead of good. Those low-life priests were chosen by the first Jeroboam and were a counterfeit priesthood right from the start. Then when evil Jezebel imported pagan priests from idolatry, all kinds of sexual sins accompanied the religious practices of an increasingly sinful population. People often say about their so-called spiritual advisors, “If they can do it, so can we.” However bad the models are, we are responsible for our own actions even when there is bad leadership. Those unprincipled priests were actually glad when people sinned because they could claim a proportion of the sin offerings they would bring.

Leaders in countries, churches and homes have responsibilities that they must meet, because their actions and decisions affect others. Those “sticks of wood” they used were like divining rods to try to tell the future. People today use horoscopes, astrology charts, tea leaves and palmistry thinking those things will help them make appropriate choices. Some make idols and images out of wood and will bow before idols of their own making and pray to whatever personage they think that idol represents. Behind every kind of idol, there are evil spirits waiting for an opportunity to bring people down in decadence, immorality, sinfulness and into hell.

Hosea’s wife had turned to prostitution under the influence of such an ungodly priesthood in an ungodly age. Just like her, Israel had turned away from the Lord to other false gods. Sadly, and with coming consequences, history is repeating itself today in our country as well as other countries around the world. Even evangelical religions are accommodating to sexual perversions in their congregations and “priesthood” in order to appeal to people to attend their churches. Some today are accepting the immoral lifestyle declared legal by legislated ungodly and unbelieving government leaders.

In Israel the people were going to the mountaintops, into the forests - wherever they could go, to carry out their debased, debauched, immoral practices of sexual perversion in the name of religion. When such a lifestyle is practiced and there is no evidence at all of repentance and restoration, the Lord says to people today similar to what He said to Israel, “Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone.” When God says, “Let him alone,” and gives up on a person, only judgment remains. “Whosoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap,” is a principle that is on-going today in the same way as it was then.

This serious example of an ungodly nation of people being lost, is being repeated in our country. People bow to sticks of wood and piles of stone on the side of the roads which become symbols to which people pay attention and sometimes bow. Spiritual leaders practice immoral living. Money in the name of religion comes into the hands of unscrupulous TV evangelists and local “Christian” churches. Bethel (the house of God) in Israel became Beth Aven (house of vanity). Gigal became associated with idols instead for righteous spiritual experiences. God gave warning to Judah that had remained to a degree faithful to their spiritual heritage, to not sell out to idolatry nor follow the ways of Israel their northern brethren. The people of Israel had become as stubborn as a balky heifer in their resistance against the Lord. There will always be pressure applied on those who are faithful to the Lord to be more like the world and churches around. To not be considered intolerant and unaccommodating to people, the Lord’s people are told that we must adapt to worldly ways. We must remain committed to the word of God and the will of God in obedience to Him, and trust Him to do what we cannot do. We give warnings and entreaties. He saves people. We are to remain faithful. He will do what His sovereign will has purposed.

**Hosea 4: 6; 6:3, 6.** “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee...Then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord...and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.”

**WHAT DO YOU MEAN, “YOU DIDN’T KNOW?”**

To try to excuse myself because I don’t know God’s will, God’s mind and God’s ways, is totally unacceptable. Knowledge is not beyond any of us but it does call for a choice on my part. The knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ can be learned by reading the Gospels. His life, His ways, His word, His teachings, His interest in people, His miracles, His death, His resurrection and His ascension are all there for me to know about. For me to reject such a line of truth as the Person of Christ, is an affront to God who has given me so much clear instruction in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. If one does not apply himself to know the Lord, he or she will never have eternal life. “This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.”

We do not need to remain children in knowledge either. Keep turning the pages of the Bible and we will know the Lord more each day. The Lord Himself gave an example of this when He walked on the road to Emmaus with two disciples and opened the scriptures to them. He showed them all the way through, “things concerning Himself.” Their hearts burned as they saw what they had missed before. We must “follow on to know the Lord” or else remain as “a cake not turned;” burned on one side and raw, slimy and gooey on the other. We are unusable, inedible, unsavory, unreliable, unacceptable and distasteful if we do not follow on to know the Lord.
When we do commit ourselves to knowing God, He reckons that, in the same category as obedience. That is better than any sacrifices we might bring. In the knowledge of God, we gain the right perspective to all the issues of life as well as all the desires of God for us. Mercy is better than sacrifices; obedience is better than sacrifices and the knowledge of God is better than sacrifices. That is because it gives God a higher priority than anything that we might try to do.

"O Father, of longsuffering and patience, thanks so much for not casting us off when we are disobedient, hard-boiled and ignorant. We need so much, to be committed to the knowledge of Thee. I do want to take steps to not just know the Bible and how to pass on the truth of God, but I want to know Thee. Perhaps if I know Thee more, I will become more like Thee my heavenly Father. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen."

Hosea 5

THE TERRIBLE RESULTS OF BAD CHOICES

God knows the intentions of those who deliberately turn away from Him. He says in this chapter, "I know" everything they are doing, and "I know they will not" cease doing them nor will they return to God. They chose to not turn away from evil practices and chose not to seek the Lord and His mercy. Whether people like to admit it or not, does not change the fact that the wrong decisions and choices we make become a snare to those involved and the net that captures and holds them, it a net of their own making.

The people of Israel were led by civil and religious men who were corrupt themselves and encouraged the people in their sin. The leaders were able to profit from the sinfulness of the people who followed their wrong guidance. The people didn't really have a chance as long as they didn't think for themselves but listened and obeyed false prophets and priests. We have the option today of choosing our own leaders in this nation, but even those people can lead us away from God. The truths taught in the scriptures today are ignored and despised as too restrictive and judgmental. The majority of people are willing to reject the Bible and act on the permissive decisions of the courts that are contrary to the unchanging word of God. God holds us all responsible for our actions and will settle up our failing accounts in His own time and way. We cannot absolve ourselves from the evil choices we make or allow to influence us and our own actions.

Israel was like a harlot who left her husband when the nation turned to the gods of the idolaters. Ahaz even had an altar made like one he saw in Damascus and had it set up in the temple. Continuing to deliberately sin makes it very hard to repent. Continued disobedience sears the conscience and hardens the heart against that which inherently we know is right. If we allow sin to continue in our lives it soon takes full control and claims a person body, soul and spirit. It is imperative for one to move as far away as possible from sin and the practices that accompany sin.

When sin is allowed to reign in dominion over a person or a person, God will leave them alone. All the religious activity and benevolent works will be of no value to God when we take control of what we do simply because of our own choices. God withdrew from Israel because of their betrayal of the house of the Lord. He withdraws from people today who ignore the word of God and substitute their own ideas and opinions as the criteria by which church life is conducted. Many who claim to be believers are revealed as "strange children" when they want God's things done in their own way.

When the pressure from the north became too strong for them, Israel decided to take their sacrifices of flocks and herds to the Lord at the time of their own choosing and said, "We will" return to God in a vain attempt to escape the coming doom they could see on the horizon. But they found out that God was no longer available to them and in essence He said, "No. You won't find Me." He had knocked time and time again. His messengers had warned over and over of consequences that follow disobedience, but they determined to do their own thing in their own way and time. So, God finally left them alone.

Hosea gave warnings of coming judgment that would leave nothing behind but the rubble of war. He used the word "Assyrian" which some probably thought would be their help, but soon found out that the Assyrians would be the tool God allowed to be used in bring judgment. There are things that happen which are foreshadowing events of that which is going to come in force. A "day of rebuke" or a "day of reckoning" will come without question. It will happen and those who are like the criminals who move "boundary stones" will be found guilty. To ignore and seek to remove spiritual truths from the lives of God's people and the churches of this day, will not be overlooked as some simple act of convenience. The wrath of God will come on those who treat His word as if it has no consequence. That is making God out to be no more than a figment of man's imagination.

The warning Hosea gave was that God would destroy Israel like a moth destroys a wool garment. The sap of Judah, the life-source, would be gone and rottenness would take the place of life like dry rot does in a dead tree. No great world power can help or cure the problem of apostasy. It claims life itself and leaves dead forms in the place where life once flourished. Instead of recovery, Israel and Judah would be defeated and devoured like a lion does its prey. No rescuers will be found to come to their aid. God will remove Himself from them until they finally admit their guilt and seek the Lord with earnest entreaty. That has not happened yet. Israel has not yet recovered from the consequences of their choices in the ancient past. They will remain in difficulty and trouble until they finally acknowledge their need of God.
Then Christ will be revealed to them as a nation of people who have barely survived the tribulation. The One they rejected for centuries will be acknowledged as their Messiah and King. It is well for us to learn the lesson, and consequences of ignoring our Lord and His word as if it is not the final word to which we must submit. All over the world people are putting man up and God down to where He is considered of no more authority that men. It is happening even in churches including those evangelical churches that consider what they do as of more importance than what God says.

**Hosea 5:7.** “They have dealt treacherously against the Lord: for they have begotten strange children: now shall a month devour them with their portions.”

**STRANGE CHILDREN.**
- Deaf to truth, blind to righteousness
- A snare to the feet of those who follow them
- A net spread to capture the simple and the foolish
- Revolting against the tried and proven - the true guides
- Killers of the joy of the Lord to those who praise
- Enticers of the young in faith to stray
- False guides, leading earnest seekers astray
- Practitioners of new and strange perversions
- Herdsmen who don’t know where food is to be found
- Deceivers changing truth into a lie and not knowing the difference
- Begetters of children without a heart
- Wanderers on the desert of desolation
- Surveyors without landmarks or boundaries
- Judges without laws or standards to guide them
- Attorneys who counsel without rules
- Diseased in mind without medication
- Wounded in body with wounds that will not heal
- Sinking slowly in quicksand beyond voices
- Still darkly wandering and wondering why all others are sick - "**STRANGE CHILDREN!"**

“O Holy. Righteous God, there seem to be so many who take the name “Christian” yet have no family life signs - no characteristics of those who belong to Thee by birth and/or adoption. I have in the past wondered what to do about them or how to consider them - are they brothers or sisters? I sense there is not much I can do except consider them “strange children” and urge them to return to Thee and come for Thy salvation. Have I not been careful enough in preaching the Gospel or in preaching repentance? Help me Lord, lest I leave some thinking they are Thine own when they are not. I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

**Hosea 6**

**UNREAL REPENTANCE**

As Hosea was writing these words he was likely thinking of Gomer and how far she had gone in her lifestyle of whoredom and unfaithfulness. He knew what he thought about his wife, and that in the same way God thought about the nation of Israel. He loved her and was angry with her at the same time. It did not only affect her and him but also the poor children. Hosea's thoughts would be of how to show grace one moment, and how to carry out just judgment the next. He would likely think of Israel’s sin and shame, and at the same time about God's compassion and anger.

At one time he would write about the millennium, "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord," and would write about peace and tranquility and a beautiful morning. Then he would write about what was actually happening then and there that he could see. He knew they had gone too far. He knew they had entered into evil connections without regard for God's laws and His mercy. He knew the consequences that would come upon them for their spiritual adultery.

The words of Israel as they could see danger coming sound like the words of penitent people: "Come, and let us return unto the Lord," and "O that we might know the Lord," sounded real - but there was not a word of repentance or acknowledging of their sins. They took God's mercy for granted and said in essence to themselves, "In two days, three at the most He will set us on our feet again and will be kind to us." It is true, to those who are unrepentant He is as a lion with its prey [Ho.5:14], and to the repentant He is like a gentle falling rain that brings hope, healing and life. But the problem with those who don't know God but have their own view of God in their imagination, is they presume upon God's mercy without knowing Him and without facing themselves as guilty sinners. Like those in Israel, most people when they call upon God in their desperation, are only concerned with the condition they are in, not the sins they have committed, the idolatry in which they participate, and the willful lifestyle they live - and have no intention of making changes.

The attitude of sinful people is the key to the reality of their words. Words spoken can be right and seem like those who speak have come to an end of themselves, but those words have no value when one's attitude isn't consistent with the
words. The profession of returning to the Lord had no more substance than the appearing of dew in the early morning that soon evaporated. The plaintive cry of the Lord is that of one who loves the guilty in spite of their guilt and shame, but can see right through the words to the intention and the heart. Professed loyalty and commitment must be backed up with actions that are consistent with the words people speak.

God wants loyalty and justice, mercy and truth from His people. He has no interest in their ritual sacrifices and religious forms that they devise from their own imaginations. In fact, that is what Hosea was writing about. God looks on such manmade worship in the same way a husband would look on his wife being a whore. It is on those who practice a worship of their own imagination that God will bring His divine justice and judgments. It is when there is reality made in repentance and the practice of truth, not counterfeit religion that God can forgive and restore the errant soul.

God had intended that the little nation of Israel would be a light to the nations of the world and a blessing to all those who would seek Him. When they actually did that, He blessed them and those connected to them. But when they broke the covenant they made with the Lord; they suffered the consequences of breaking the promises inherent in the vow. In spite of God's compassion and love for His people, there were consequences to suffer; physically - they would be taken captive; emotionally - they would be dispersed among the nations around and would not see their homes again; spiritually - they would find that God will not answer when they pray, nor recover them to worship that pleases Him that He expected from a redeemed people.

Instead of being a place set apart for God, Gilead became a corrupt place, notable for wickedness that was there. What should have been a city of refuge where righteousness and justice would have been carried out by judges and priests, had become a center of evil. People passing by on the way to the city were murdered by gangs of priests who wanted their money. The citizens became robbers and those who should have led the way in righteousness, led in the horrible practice of chasing other gods and defiling the people who followed them.

Perhaps the people of Judah thought, "We don't do that," when they heard what was going on in Israel, but they too were guilty. They had desecrated the temple by allowing sinful practices in the place where worship should have been "in spirit and in truth." The people of Judah were warned that there was a harvest of punishment coming to them because they had allowed perverted religion to be done in the place of the name. The Lord wanted to bless them, but instead they too were going their own way. The same things are happening today in the name of the "Christian religion." People choose to do what they want to do and ignore what God says. Money and popularity are becoming the measure of success in churches that are being designed for pleasure. To "make people feel comfortable" is more important to many groups rather than what God desire of His people. The expectations of the people around are the criteria for what is practiced when people come together. Instead of acknowledging divine authority, people vote on what they want to believe and do as a religious organization. God's assemblies are living organisms rather than business-like organizations. Each member has the privilege and responsibility to use his/her gifts for the benefit of all. When all parts are functioning as our Lord intends, the worship and service of God's people is truly unto the Lord.

Hosea 6:3. “Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: His going forth is prepared as the morning; and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter rain and former rain unto the earth.”

**TWO RAINS.**

A voice of reason calls from pain
"Come" - awaken, we have gone too far
"Let us return" - to go farther we cannot survive
'The Lord' - He is still where He always was
It is our fault all this has happened
He is still "The God that healeth thee"
He is Life - He gives life - He revives the near-dead
He raises up - He heals - even broken hearts
He sees us where we are - He always has
He is as unchanging as the sunrise
He is still "The Way" - His steps lead to light and life.
HE IS THE EARLY RAIN!

The ground is fertile - the early rain has fallen
The seed can fall into the ground full of life
Latent abundance lies waiting for the light and heat
The warming takes place the life shivers to escape
The breaking of the hard shell is silent
Life-force moves to carry out its God-given function
The humid warmth of divine intervention does its work
The near-dead has died and new life begins to stir
The early rain still does its wonders - roots and shoots
Move to fall and rise each doing what the Creator planned
The dark ground moves to make way for new life awaiting -
HE WHO IS THE LATTER RAIN!

“I am thankful for the rain that brings new life, Father God. It is without question a wonder of Thy power and design to bring life to be seen coming forth against all obstacles. There are some new life shoots showing themselves and I am grateful to have been a part of the process. Even to have placed a seed where it can be moved upon by Thee to bring forth life is a great delight and privilege. Thanks for allowing me to see the evidence in the newly greening shoots. Amen.”

Hosea 7

A PASSION FOR SIN

When evil becomes so common that there is no restraint, there is really no way to deal with it and the consequences that follow. Israel never considered that the Lord knew about everything they were doing and kept track of it all. He probes Israel's wounds in various ways to see if any of their words of repentance was real, but alas, it was like the morning dew, like bread dough that does not rise, like a bud on a tree that does not become fruit. Israel was like a bird flitting about with no purpose. They made altars, but they were altars to sin. Like a donkey with no master to guide it, Israel was sniffing here and there among other nations looking for some guidance. The Lord said they were like a vine without fruit, a heifer without a calf doing the work of an ox, and like a field where nothing grows. All they had to feed on was wind. What a sad description of a people that was once a vital and powerful force for good!

Leadership has both its responsibility and its influence. The leaders of Israel were corrupt in their licentious way of living and they found pleasure in watching the sins of those whom they were leading. The descriptions of court scenes is of drunk people vomiting and sick because of drinking so much. They even fall down murdered but do not return to the Lord. Murder becomes a way to the throne and to silence all opposition. Nine of the kings of Israel died violently, four assassinated in a period of seven months. Only eight of Israel's kings died from natural causes. Harshness and ungodly leadership leads to chaos, disruption and discontent among people.

Spiritual and physical adultery was rampant like a hot oven as the people became like the heathen nations around them. They had become totally out of touch with the Lord in their lust for power. We must never forget that God knows everything, and even though temptation is there to test us and get us to sin, our God is watching what we do and knows why we do it. The lust for power can become as hot as an oven, but like in the case of Israel, will fail when we ignore God and His word.

Israel had intermarried with idolatrous foreigners and had become like them in attitudes and actions. Unbelievers have a strong influence on believers when believers associate with them in their pleasures, pastimes, even in business - and particularly in religious activities. We need to influence others to be like us rather than allow them to influence us to be like them. Arrogance and pride keep people from returning to God when we do not think we need His help or the help of His people. We cannot deal with sin until we deal with our pride.

The people of Israel had become so totally out of touch with God that they we like "a cake not turned." They were like a baker who had gone to sleep and let the cake burn on one side and still be doughy on the other side. They were going gray and didn't know their age was showing and premature death was fast approaching. Carelessness spoils us and repentance does not remove the actions of the past. We cannot go back and do over the wrong we have done, but true repentance can restore us to fellowship with God. The bakery description should call us to stop and consider what the Lord wants from us, not what we want.

There is also another description of those people of God who go from one ungodly alliance to another just like Israel went from one nation to another looking for some stability and safety. They were like a "silly dove." Like a pigeon in a barnyard going from one dung-heap to another to find satisfaction. The calls of one bird to another is only noise when there no purpose. They made altars, but they were altars to sin. Like a donkey with no master to guide it, Israel was sniffing here and there among other nations looking for some guidance. The Lord said they were like a vine without fruit, a heifer without a calf doing the work of an ox, and like a field where nothing grows. All they had to feed on was wind. What a sad description of a people that was once a vital and powerful force for good!

There is also another description of those people of God who go from one ungodly alliance to another just like Israel went from one nation to another looking for some stability and safety. They were like a "silly dove." Like a pigeon in a barnyard going from one dung-heap to another to find satisfaction. The calls of one bird to another is only noise when there no controlling force. That is also what it is like to be totally out of with God. They fly away from where they should be and go to donde destruction is bound to come. The Lord has His own way of capturing them like with a net and bringing them down. The warning is clear. A day will come when all of willful sinning will have to be faced and chastisement will be applied. It is so sad to think that people will even speak lies about God to others when their anxiety at all that happens to them keeps them awake at night. The world is not becoming a better place. Challenges to young people to “change the world” are silly because the changes being made are more reprehensible than ever. Only a return to the Lord will bring the changes that are needed to bring peace.

Israel is also described as a faulty bow that cannot be relied on to send an arrow to the right place. On a battlefield this would be disastrous. A “deceitful bow” is only fit to be destroyed. The negative effect will not only be felt by the archer but also by those he is supposed to support by his actions. People will die because of deceit when it is spoken as the “truth.” It is sad but true, that many people will be lost because they listen to that which is false rather than find out if a message is true. Many people will listen to those who profess to be preaching the truth, and will agree with them, instead of seeking the
truth from the word of God and making sure that they listen to is scripturally sound. The metaphors in this chapter let us see how far people can go from the mind and will of God and still have the pretense of being the people of God.

**Hosea 7:16.** “They return, but not to the Most High: they are like a deceitful bow: their princes shall fall by the sword for the rage of their tongue: this shall be their derision in the land of Egypt.”

**A FAULTY BOW.**

To those looking on that bow looks quite good
In fact, because it looks good it can be intimidating.
The string is in place and it is made of the right wood
And the use of that bow should be devastating.
The reason for a bow is to take your personal strength
And send an arrow flying to a far and distant place.
The better the wood is and the longer the bow’s length -
The more effective it is to help the bowman keep his space.

When the wood is twisted by not taking care
The bowman can be as good as they come -
But the missile he sends will miss the mark by far
For the object it is sent for - its effectiveness is gone.
My words may sound good, said in just the right way
But if I as a “faulty bow” send my words misguided -
It would far better be if not a word I would say
Then say partial truths and leave a listener undecided.

The strength of a man can send his children like arrows
Across the street to a friend’s house they know
I may send a wrong message through my children that tomorrow
Will turn someone astray because this crooked bow
Sent aloft an arrow that should have been straight and truthful
With a message full of hope and in the darkness - light;
But what was needed missed the mark because a bow deceitful
Turned aside a word that was needed to bring eternal life.

“Father God, this bow needs to be reworked every now and then. My spiritual muscles are sometimes weak and the wood is at times, too dry. I am praying that I will be flexible but remain true; strong but with enough length to have some power. May I not be off balance with too much grace on one end and not enough truth on the other. May I be usable at all times. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

**Hosea 8**

**SOUND THE ALARM**

Hosea could see what was happening in the nation and knew the enemy was coming like an eagle that waits until a precise moment and then quickly attacks and takes its prey. Assyria who the leadership of Israel had asked for help, was now coming to take the people captive. Israel had sought help from Assyria and broke their covenant with Him and revolted against His laws. To trample on a covenant as if it was unimportant was to reject God Himself. Israel’s cry, “We know Thee...help us,” was too late. They had turned away with disdain from the One who truly loved them and had cared for them so long, and so they were now rejected by God and chased by their enemies.

People often call on God when they are in trouble and are hurting in some way. But without repentance, that call really means nothing and does nothing because the consequences of sin not repented of are already here. Ethical conduct is scriptural, so to reject that which is good and to have a form of worship without morality is to reject God. God is not behind the spiritual idolatry or attempts to ally the false religions of men with the worship of God “in spirit and in truth.”

Israel had appointed their own leaders without even asking God. They had cut themselves off from God by making and worshipping idols. The golden calves they made to keep the people from going to the house of the Lord in Jerusalem did nothing for them, “cast thee off,” and God had rejected them and the idols and left them on their own. To the Israelites those calves represented God. What an abomination is was to demean their Maker into nothing more than the form of a beast. The only way to deal with such a perversion of religious hypocrisy was to smash it to bits. There is no way to reconcile the rites and religions made by men with the worship of God.

Good seed, good soil, good sunlight, good moisture and fertilizer produces good crops. But when seed is sown to the wind, no matter how good the seed is, it will not produce that for which it intended. There may come a flimsy stalk but without being sown as it should be, there will be no bountiful harvest. Israel sowed wind by seeking alliances with the ungodly and they would reap the whirlwind of war and captivity from the same people they had hoped to befriend. idolatry, alliances with
sinful people and practices, seeking security without God, exposes people to the wild force of a whirlwind of evil that is bound to come. The whirlwind ruins everything that is needed to produce a good harvest for their survival.

Hosea warned that everything they have will be taken by foreigners and the nation would be "swallowed up" by the Gentiles like a useless broken pot of bits and pieces. Israel was the embodiment of a "wild ass's colt in being obstinate, unruly and determined to be independent from God. As a useless donkey used by the "lovers" (friends) Israel thought it had, it would happen that the nation soon would not be burdened by their evil king.

Mere rituals with sacrifices to gain the approval of the people around and to avoid the risk of being thought strange because we are not like others people nor do the things they do, are valueless rituals. Rituals make the process of thinking about what we do and why we do things, unnecessary. They may even become a substitute for a personal relationship with God and meaningful relationship with His people. Rituals are sometimes engaged in to make up for bad behavior and to seek God's favor and relief from a guilty conscience.

To focus on God by gathering together with His people unto His name and Person as an assembly; by giving thanks for our food before we eat; by reading the Bible and praying are all good rituals. They help keep us stable and safe in a changeable world and society.

False altars are really altars to sin. Such altars of sin that Israel had made were not to worship God, but were for their own pleasure. Even the laws of God which had been given to Israel to keep order and give guidance were rejected as if they applied only to others. Altars become places of sin when there is activity in the name of God without repentance for sin and true faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. God remembered their hypocrisy and left them in bondage to the world. To forget our God our Maker is the essence of sin. When a nation forgets our Maker, all its military strength and economic stability does not take the place of the inner moral strength of the people when their faith is in God. Outward strengths are useless when there is no inner strength.

Even Judah was warned of coming judgment. Their great buildings and walled up cities would not save them because they too were forgetting God who made them. Their time was farther in the future than that of Israel, but it was coming because even though they hadn't done as wickedly as the northern tribes, justice will be served. Because of their half-heartedness and lack of faithfulness to God, their cities and buildings will be burned and nothing will remain. When we see signs of evil departure and religious hypocrisy, then there will be coming judgment, and it is well to sound the alarm.

**Hosea 8:7.** "For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind: it hath no stalk: the bud shall yield no meal: if so be it yield, the strangers shall swallow it up."

**WHIRLWIND.**
- The noise they make is not for joy
- Beyond the decibels of honesty
- The sounds that are made to cover empty hearts
- Consciences that won't be silent yet are fading
- The idols they make are not for worship
- The calls they make try to cover the voice of God.
- The efforts they make are not for gain
- The winds is only sound and moving air and passes quickly by
- The seeds they plant have no life, the stalks no fruit
- The grain is only chaff, no bread for all their labor
- The whirlwind leaves behind no life, no fruit, no bread
- Desolation, hunger, abandonment - the whirlwind is coming - EXPECT IT SOON.

"The rituals people go through, O Lord God, must really seriously offend Thee. Empty forms to gain approval of people, no real thought behind what is done, no relationship with Thee, but an attempt to make it appear they are in favor with Thee - how serious it must be to lower their estimation of a Holy God to such a low place. I am thankful Thou art a merciful and longsuffering God. I guess, now that I review it, that I was in much the same condition before Thou didst save me. I thank Thee in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."
Hosea 9

DAYS OF PUNISHMENT

Israel had days of feasting called the Feasts of Jehovah and one of those was the Feast of Tabernacles when they celebrated the blessings of a bountiful harvest and remembered their journey to the land of promise. But something had changed all of that even though it seemed like the usual festival. Like the idolatrous nations around, Israel did the singing, dancing and feasting - but it was to idols instead of the Lord. The threshing floors were used as places to make sacrifices to idols. Baal had taken the place of God in the hearts of God's people. They had deserted the God who had blessed them and "partied" in defiance and sinfulness.

Hosea's message would not be welcomed at all in that setting. "Rejoice not, O Israel, for joy, as other people..." Other nations did their feasting, partying and perverted worship in ignorance, but the Jews did the same things in defiance and wilful sinning against the light they had received from the Lord. When Hosea spoke his warning of judgment coming on them, he would have been like a skunk coming to the party. To ignore and/or reject what God wants and substitute that which pleases people is spiritual adultery. To make that which is intended to be holy something that is pleasing to the perverse pleasure of human beings, is totally unacceptable to God.

Hosea warned them that the harvests to come would be so small and the grapes so bad that they would hardly have anything to eat, let alone use for a feast day. The leaders of the people had tried to form alliances with the enemies of God but those same enemies would be their captors. In spite of the warning Israel would not return to God. So judgment was coming from both Egypt and Assyria. Coming feast days would only be days of haunting memories and remorse as the joy of fellowship and appreciation of God were replaced with the sadness of bondage and rejection. In their captivity there would be nothing to bring. The "days of visitation," and "the days of recompense" are going to come even though it may seem at the present nothing bad is going to happen because of sin. Some say that God is too merciful to punish people for evil. They reject the fact of justice and recompense being carried out by a holy God.

Israel was not listening to God's prophets, and would not accept the truth about their sin. Apostate priests and leaders set snares to trap the faithful prophet Hosea and to stir up hatred against him. To the Israelites their mind toward Hosea was, "The prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is mad." To Hosea, the false prophets were fools and the counterfeit messages they gave were insane. True prophets were guards for the people but they were refused and hated. Israel's mockery of the prophets of God will bring a recompense for their sin and animosity.

The depravity of His people is not something the Lord overlooks nor will He not carry out just punishment because of it. Hosea mentioned the event that took place in the time of the judges when the men of Gibeah wanted a traveler to be given to them to use sexually but instead his "significant other" was given to them and after they performed terrible acts of evil against her, he went even farther and cut her into twelve pieces for each tribe. Israel had sunk to an awful low then and now they were in a similar state again. Idolatry of any kind corrupts those who engage in it. People take on the characteristics of what or who they love. That is a present-day lesson for us. Who am I like? What am I becoming because of my love?

Hosea even prayed that the Israelites would not have children or that they would die in infancy so they wouldn't have to go through all the terrible things that were ahead of the Jews in captivity. He prayed that they would be like a barren woman because of their spiritual prostitution, their departure from God and their violence because of willful sin. The worship of God and their vitality as a nation had dried up. That is a natural result of their choice to do evil. At one time Israel had been a joy to the Lord like refreshing food and drink when they were in the wilderness. The Lord remembered those good days, and then they deserted Him. It was at Gilgal Saul was crowned as king beginning their political failure. It was at Gilgal when idols were first introduced to the nation making their spiritual failure. Both kings and idols took the place of God in their national life so the time had come for them to be abandoned to the consequences of their choices and the effect would be there for generations to come - even today.

The lying prophets and false spiritual leaders gave their counterfeit message and the glory departed from "Ephraim," (Israel) because of their attraction to Baalpeor and all that was associated with wicked deception. The dispersion would take them into bondage like they had been in Egypt long before. They would be like the city of Tyre that disappeared. Their identity would be lost among the nations with nothing to identify them as God's chosen people. Those who would survive the coming invasion would be driven from the land of promise and become instead "wandering Jews" - homeless people among the nations they had once ruled.

People today make pronouncements claiming to be prophets that are come from God with a message to our times. Some set dates for the coming of the Lord. Some say the end of time is almost here and get news coverage from stations that are willing to report anything that contradicts the Bible. We need to be aware of the fact that judgment from God is inevitable, but it will be according to His timetable and brought about in His way. Speculation about divine intention is not right. We have in the scriptures of truth all that God intends us to know. It is our responsibility to do what He has clearly commanded us and pay no attention to those things that are spurious speculations.
Hosea 9:7. “The days of visitation are come, the days of recompense are come; Israel shall know it: the prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is mad, for the multitude of thine iniquity, and the great hatred.”

**DAYS OF VISITATION.**

Find joy - if you can - others seem to say they do
A threshing floor with stalks and husks - no grain
Why no produce will yield - all labor - no gain
All this has happened - not to them but to you.

**EVIL SACRIFICES**

You who offer emptiness to God and expect to get
From Him some fruitful recompense not earned
You who from Him were given and taught - you didn't learn
That what you sow you reap - and the reaping is not over yet.

**EVIL DEEDS**

You offer unto the Lord - how dramatic, trivial - careless
Yet back again and again to make worship into a show
Nothing from your heart - only so watchers think you know
And all the form and pomp and struttings - acting is useless.

**EVIL WORSHIP**

Payday comes - the shame and recompense to face
The days of visitation when 'The prophet is a fool, the spiritual - Mad'
But in those days of recompense it will be the multitude that's sad
God steps in righteous justice, you will be slaves in a foreign place.

**EVIL DAYS**

Why can't people learn from those who bring the Gospel story?
What is wrong with normal people when it comes to them and God?
What is it about the Bible or even honest living for the Lord?
That darkens the mind to forget 'Days of visitation: in our past history?

**EVIL PEOPLE**

"Darkness is coming here, O God. I can see it casting black shadows over the country, people and the churches. Most don't seem to sense the decline of morality and ethics as an evidence of spiritual darkness. They're only concerned with how much money they are losing. The self-control we lost as a people, has turned to government control and our nation is perishing and doesn't know it. Save us, O God. Amen."

**Hosea 10**

**CUT OFF**

There was no difficulty for Hosea to see evidence of idolatry everywhere in the northern tribes of Israel. The more prosperity they had, the greater their attraction was to idols. The Baals they had erected were sex symbols that were visible to everyone. Idolatry has attractions that are never satisfied, and they constantly demand more and more of those who submit to the appeal of whatever idol a person has. Some today worship fame. Others live for money. Still others pursue pleasure of every kind, and yet no one ever finds true satisfaction until they come to the Lord.

Hosea told them the golden calves the northern Israelites had looked to for so long were of no value and they soon would be carried away in pieces from Beth-Aven (house of wickedness), that had one time been called Bethel (house of God). When the people of God turn from the revealed will of God given to us in the scriptures of truth to religious practices of their own making, it is gross wickedness. "You cannot serve two masters." It is either the worship of God or the worship of Baal that we choose. There is no way to mix the two because they are extreme opposites. There is nothing in common between the worship of the Father "in spirit and in truth," and the worship of mans making and choosing.

It is our responsibility to control everything we allow our minds to think about, because "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." Guilt has a way of seeking to cover itself with activity and insincere promises like the Israelites made. God knew their promises were not real even though God is always true to His promises. If we make a promise, we are to keep it. If one is pressured to make a promise to do something, do not make that promise if you are not sure you can fulfill its terms.

The guilt and willful idolatry of Israel must be punished because God is a righteous God. He is merciful in withholding His just judgment in His desire to give time and place for repentance. But one way or another sin and guilt because of sin must be faced and dealt with in righteousness. The substitute of a sinless innocent victim for a sinful person was provided for
when done in the right way, but it was not dealt with in front of golden calves and other idols. So, the idols will be destroyed and the guilty will be punished. Israel had rejected God as the One who reigned over them. So now their king was being taken away, their idols destroyed and they were to be taken into captivity.

But in their arrogance, they will say, "We have no king," which in essence meant, "So what. We don't need one." Consequently, there was no hope of deliverance from captivity and no hope of a deliverer. The land of Israel became desolate. Thorns and thistles grew up on the crumbling altars they had erected to their false gods on their threshing floors. When sinful men are confronted with the judgment of God, their great fear of God makes them long for a place to hide from Him. They call on the mountains to cover them and the hills to fall on them. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Hosea's message referenced Gibeah again where rape and murder ultimately brought about the death of thousands of people. The Jews should have learned that sin will be punished. There are always "wages" to sin, but instead they continued in the course of their deliberate willful wickedness. Israel had been like a heifer trained to thresh the harvest of grain by walking on it and when desired, the animal could eat some of the straw and grain because it was not to be muzzled.

Because of their sin and wicked choices, a yoke would be put on them by those who would conquer them, and they would be like animals who had to strain to plow ground that had not been used. Their days of ease and prosperity were past. Now there would be the hard times of breaking up hard ground and hard clods of dirt. Without a doubt there had been many times opportunity was given to them to repent and return to the Lord. "It is time to seek the Lord" is a call we all need to heed when we realize we are unable to do what needs to be done, or we are unsure of which way to turn to fulfill the will of God. To Israel that will be in a coming day when the Lord comes and there will be "rain of righteousness" upon people who had lived in wickedness and rebellion.

Israel had lived a lie and as a result of the vileness of their idolatry and their vice of trusting in their own rulers and military power instead of trusting God, they would suffer severe consequences for a long time. The coming army of Assyria would do the same to Israel and Shalman did when he invaded Gilead around 740 BC and destroyed Beth-Arbel. The scenes of brutality against the women and children, and the viciousness of the attackers who have been well known by the Jews of the northern ten tribes. They were told that same thing would happen to them because of their choice to abandon God's way and choose their own wicked ways. There never were good leaders in the northern tribes of Israel, and there never will be until our Lord Jesus Christ comes to reign. Hoshea was the last king of those ten tribes then the darkness of separation from God would settle on those captives who were taken to all parts of the Assyrian empire and dispersed among the people so they would not unite with other Jews and rebel against the Assyrians.

Hosea 10:12. “Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till He come and rain righteousness upon you.”

IT IS TIME!

The field is hard, the unplowed ground its deep potential hidden. Where is that plowman, who so long his work has left undone? Is he asleep while seasons come and go, and there is no one. Anxiously awaiting the fruit that in that field lies unhidden?

Come plowman, challenge the hearts so hard and harder getting. Each passing season, makes it harder still to stir the heart and will Of men and women so deeply steeped in sin, and still Their soul is as precious as that of the children they’re begetting.

The plow goes in, the labor long and heavy as the breaking process So necessary for the precious seed to find a resting place, goes on; And finally, finally as the sweating of the laborer joins moisture in the ground, The plowing work, long left undone, leaves ready ground waiting the life-seed to possess.

The field is ready, the ground is well prepared The time has come for blessings rich to fall Upon the land, so long lying dormant; it’s time to call The sower from his slumbering bed, the seed to plant and share.

Come sower, that seed you long have kept unused and thus unfruitful; Rise to your feet, and spread that seed so needed by the masses. Life quickly comes and goes; before long the time passes; That season, when the warmth and rain bring life and light, available to all.

And back and forth across the field so long and broad and waiting The seed is sown by sower with unhesitating steps and hands so skilled; The word is spread to every corner, every spot the plowman carefully tilled
And thus, is sparked the fire of life that brings new hope to those so wanting.

Come reaper, the time is now, the place is here, the harvest full is ripe;
It's white; no time any longer can you dare to wait for any better
Weather; the dark clouds overhead gives warning that ahead is danger;
Danger of losing that for which the owner of the field, paid so high a price.

Thrust in the sickle, scythe, the harvester so large, and keep them moving;
Never hesitate nor linger, time itself is flying to the time and place
Of no return; it's perishable, it's precious, it's His and ours the pace
To keep, until the last full load of precious cargo, final glory bringing.

Bringing to the Lord of the harvest, whose great compassion saw in all the laborers,
A value great, so great He paid redemption's price for plowman, sower, reaper - all;
And then to work in His great field, He sent them with feet and hands and voice to call
From every land on earth, those for whom He died and rose again - His worshippers.

"O Lord of the harvest: I am getting older and for some reason can't seem to get the response to the Gospel message that I feel should be coming. Please show me where I am missing relevant points in the Gospel that need to be thrust into the hearts of the hearers by the divine Spirit of God through the Word preached. In the name of Him who paid the price of sin in blood. Amen."

**Hosea 11**

**WHAT A PITY!**

A loving Father who doesn't give up on His wayward son, is contrasted with the ingratitude of a willful people - Israel. A God who pities those who have brought the wages of sin upon themselves, is contrasted with deceitful people who are willing to turn to anyone else but God for help. Hosea must have been able to identify easily with the heart of God as he wrote these words. What God had been going through with His people Israel for centuries, he was going through in a few short years with his wife Gomer. The longsuffering of God for His people was like a father teaching his child how to walk. Or like a husband lamenting over his wayward wife. Or like a Savior not giving up on his people.

God's love for Israel had been directed towards them all through their sad history. He had called them out of Egypt, but because they had rejected Him, they must become captives again, but this time to the Assyrians. A stubborn child is hard to teach when their behavior makes instruction and correction necessary. Parental affection is not lessened but cannot be demonstrated in the same way as toward an obedient child. A disobedient son is hard to live with when they are very young, but a parent lives in hope that there will be a change as a result of their love and concern being directed to changing that attitude toward one of appreciation and acceptance. We try by many ways to change the attitude of rebellion and wrong behavior to that which will be a benefit to them in years to come. But there does come a time when they have to assume responsibility for their own actions, and we have to leave them to accept the consequences of those actions.

When an Israeli's rebellious son reached a certain age and still continued in the course of rebellion and antagonism toward his parents, the parents were instructed by the law of God to bring that son before the elders of the people for an impartial judgment of his behavior. The judges had the responsibility to then bring upon that rebellious son just judgment. A son left uncorrected was a problem to his family when he was a child, but as he got older, his attitude and actions affected all the people who were associated with him in some way. Israel as a nation had become rebellious, ungrateful, unrepentant, and now the time was come to do something about the problem they had created.

"Out of Egypt have I called my son," was a phrase that was first applied to the nation when they were delivered from slavery by the mighty power of God. It also was a prophecy concerning our Lord Jesus Christ when He had been taken to Egypt by Joseph and Mary until the death of Herod. Then, "Out of Egypt have I called My Son," was a fulfillment of that prophecy in the life of our Lord.

God had loved, taught and drew Israel to Him as a father would his child, but "they knew it not." His "cords of a man, with bands of love" were taken for granted. God had constantly provided for His people but they were unthankful and unappreciative of everything He had done for them, and had turned to idolatry. Lack of appreciation and an attitude of entitlement in ungrateful people is a very common human trait today. Many parents never hear a genuine, "Thank you," after a good meal or act of kindness shown toward their children. Few teachers today ever hear a word of appreciation from students or the parents of students. Doctors and nurses seldom hear people say a sincere "Thank you" because people say to themselves, "That's what they are getting paid for." Most serious though, is the neglect of people to give an intelligent, "Thank You" to God for His mercy, grace, love, longsuffering, fullness of provision for us, and for the gift of eternal life provided for us at the infinite cost of the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf. We have what we enjoy because of the benefits, blessings and actions of people who lived before us. We should not forget that all we have; we have received in one way or another from someone else. We need to remember that no one can go up against God's will and win.
Discipline is a fundamental need to the well-being of any people. It is given ahead of time with the desire to keep anything untoward from happening in the life of a person, and assembly and a country. Discipline always has to be with the view of creating positive behavior and/or correcting bad behavior. It should always be with the intent that the one we love is preserved to fulfill their full potential which a legitimate objective. Parameters of behavior need to be clearly understood as to what they are and why they are in place. There are times when we may have to change the methods of discipline. The growth of an individual, the aging process and other variables in life have to be considered with common sense. Some discipline is for guidance and some is for the nurture and admonition needed.

The ten northern tribes of Israel only survived as an entity for 200 years because of a bad start, bad political and religious leadership and unwillingness to repent of sin. God did not want to have to give up on "Ephraim" like He did on the cities associated with Sodom and Gomorrah. Judgment is inevitable when wickedness and inward sin is not faced and repented of. God's grief over His people reflects His compassion, but His character demands consequences consistent with the evil committed.

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The perception of most people about God, is that He is slightly higher than man in knowledge, power, wisdom and authority. So many will only seek the Lord when there is a difficulty they can't handle personally and they turn to God as a last resort. When God doesn't respond they way they think He should, they blame Him for the outcome that is different than what they wanted. God Himself made the plain distinction that cannot be misunderstood, "I am God, and not man." That indicates in the form of a warning, that if He were only a mere man, they would have been gone long ago. Their present survival was only because He is God who loves them. Israel was like Gomer, Hosea's wife, and like he still loved her and did not want to give her up, God did not want to give up on Israel.

Justice and mercy are not often seen or experienced together. In spite of where the Jews are now, there is a different end to their story. Israel was deceitful in negotiating with other nations and were certainly deceitful in their association with God. Deceit in nations and in individuals does not produce anything good. It calls into question anything that might seem good at the moment but reputation is always considered in making decisions regarding that people or person. Judah had some good kings who brought the people back to God and to obeying His laws at least for periods of time. Priests served in the temple and the feasts were occasionally kept. However, the attraction of pagan worship and evil rituals were infecting the nation just under the surface. Because of the positive influence of a few, the nation of Judah continued one hundred fifty years after the northern tribes were taken away.

There are still some vestiges of truth in Christendom today in this country. In some parts of the world there are strong influences for righteousness amid unrighteous laws and strong persecution against the people of God. Unfortunately, in this country we have gotten so used to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and God, that people now ignore God as an inconvenience and the name of our Lord as a curse word. In our religious practices it is far more popular to entertain the people than to tell them the truth about sin, righteousness and judgment to come. We must be warned, "Just judgment is coming in God's own time and way. Repentance toward God still is possible if we confess and forsake sin.

Hosea 11:8. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? My heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together."

**HOW SHALL I GIVE THEE UP?**

You have provoked Me until I can take no more
You have ignored Me in ways that grieve Me sore
You have defied My will and broken My laws
You have turned aside and hated Me without a cause.
And yet... How....?

You bowed to images you made yourselves
You have put My laws up on dusty shelves
You have left righteousness and honor far behind
You have put truth and grace in places no one can find
And yet... How shall....?

I loved you as a child when you needed Me
I loved you as a son when you were in slavery
I loved you as only a Father can love a son
I loved you and called you - and you will not return
And yet... How shall I...?

You listened to the world, and its tinseling sound
You catered to your flesh and it left you naked on the ground
You listened to the devil and thousands of you died
You turned deaf ears to Me when through the prophets I cried
And yet... How shall I give...?

I gave you a good land that flowed with milk and honey
I gave you homes and lands when none of you had any
I gave you rains and sunshine to make your crops to grow
And you turned from Me to idols who neither love, nor see, nor know
And yet... How shall I give thee...?

How can I see you burn as those cities of the ungodly?
How can I make you understand - how can I deliver thee?
How can I quench this love that in Me burns so hot?
How can I bring an end to retribution when your sinning will not stop?
And yet... How shall I give thee up?

"What a deep heart of love is in Thee, O God! Israel failed Thee and yet Thou continued to love them. We fail Thee as a nation today, and yet we must be loved. The people of God fall far short of where we should be and still, we are loved. I know I am a poor failure in so many ways and yet Thou hast loved me - and continued to give me the privilege of speaking for Thee. I am overwhelmed with Thy mighty love so vast and powerful and continuing. I praise Thee and thank Thee for such unquenchable love. Amen."

Hosea 12

LEARN FROM YOUR HERITAGE

By taking the time to go over our past and that of our forefathers, we can learn many valuable lessons and hopefully not make the same mistakes that others did. At the time of Hosea, the people of Israel were using their olive oil as a way to buy military support from Egypt. But the cost of disobedience is far higher than the price of oil. Feeding on wind and chasing the wind would only give them worthless promises from Egypt and Assyria. So, God called upon Judah first and then Israel to go back over their heritage and learn lessons from Jacob.

God had a legal complaint against Judah because of their deceit. All of the descendants of Jacob were using deceit and self-sufficiency to get ahead like Jacob did. Right from the time he was born he was in conflict with God when he took hold of Esau's foot. Hosea's message follows Jacob from the time of his birth and the deceitful acts of the "supplanter," to the time of his blessing when he put away the idols from his household and became Israel, "a prince with God." Then he reminds Judah of the blessings of Bethel. The difference between Jacob, the ancestor and the people of Israel was that he quit idolatry, deceit and self-sufficiency and returned to the Lord. All of us need to remember it is the Lord God of hosts with whom we are dealing. God promised to deliver them if they would return to Him like Jacob did.

When we return to the Lord, the principles of love and justice that He shows to us work. God intends His people to live by these two principles because they are based in the character of God. They are essential but must be kept in balance. Love without justice leaves people in their sins without a standard, and it excuses their wrongdoing. Justice without love can be harsh because it has no heart and drives people away in bitterness. We need both principles to balance our lives as families, churches and nations.

But no. Israel was like a cheating merchant who uses scales to weigh and measure that were not in balance and they were living dishonestly. They were rich, but success and riches do not make up for sin. Dishonesty can become a way to get rich, but wealth is not a sign of God's approval. wealth that is spent in right ways does not make up for the sin of getting it in wrong ways. God calls His people to faithfulness to Him, not affluence. Hard work, initiative and intelligence may be the way we get material success, but that does not mean we do not need God. All of our riches and resources come from God in the first place, and He expects them to be used as a stewardship for His purposes.

Hosea's message went on from Judah to Israel reminding them of their rich heritage but now they were guilty of apostasy. Jacob's wages were the wages of deceit but his wives were objects of devotion. Israel was deceitful in its relationship with God, but God was still loving in His relationship to Israel. Love is not given at the expense of the law. Israel had ignored the warnings from prophets, so instead of having an annual feast they would go into poverty and bondage. To forget our humble beginnings is to forget God's grace to us all through the years to bring us to where we are now.

Both Jacob and Moses, a patriarch and a prophet, had both been shepherds and fugitives, and both had had personal experiences with God when they ran away from where God had placed them. Both of them returned to the Lord and were accepted and blessed. God used Moses to bring the Israelites out of Egypt to the place of blessing. Now they had left God, had sacrificed their children to idols and there was an account to be repaid. There will be judgment even though God's love is real and changeless. The useless altars at Gilead in the east and Gilgal in the west that Israel had erected were valueless as far as any benefit to them, but now they were going to be left alone by God to suffer the consequences of guilt and
contempt they had never repented of. By their wickedness as a people and their idolatry they have been condemned to pay for their sins - and it is still happening.

**Hosea 12:1.** “Ephraim feedeth on wind, and followeth after the east wind: he daily increaseth lies and desolation; and they do make a covenant with the Assyrians, and oil is carried into Egypt.”

**FEEDETH ON WIND.**

Stop for a minute and think back to the start:
A twin showing a desire to get on with life while still in the womb
Reaching out a hand in the wet darkness
Finding other life and holding on - you had strength even then.

Stop and remember that distant time:
Deception it was true - yet God gave you promises in the night
God prospered you and you returned a prince
“A prince with God” and you were numbered among the mighty

Stop and consider that wrestling match:
God visited you - His messenger in power held you fast
You asked and he answered - the limping walk a reminder
God is not done with you yet and He went with you.

Stop and review that place above all others:
The stone pillar, the ladder, the angels of God - heaven itself
That was the house of God - you were there - God was there
You returned to Bethel - the memorials - the memories are there.

You have the blood of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in your veins:
You have a pedigree, a heritage, a name to live up to
The wind you feed on, that you chase all day
It has nothing for you - that wind is only sound - no substance.

Leave the deceitful wind that promises much and gives nothing
Leave the things you have chased after for so long
You will never catch them - they are not real - there is really nothing there
Return to the Lord God of hosts - Remember Him!

“How gracious and longsuffering of Thee, O God, to not abandon those for whom Thou hast longed for. Surely there are people who have been chasing the wind who realize there is nothing there. By Thy grace and Gospel, bring them into our sphere of influence in some way that we may pass on the truth of the hope that lieth in us. I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

**Hosea 13**

**THE WIND OF THE LORD**

Greatness in the past is no guarantee of a pleasant or profitable future. It is God working for us, and our relationship with Him each day that preserves us from failure and a lost testimony. In the past, nations in the Middle East feared Israel because it was like a mighty prince among them. But Israel died as a leader among the nations when the worship of idols was introduced and golden calves were made to represent the gods. Baal worship was vile in its immorality and vicious in its demands of human sacrifices along with other form of outright evil. There is no way to change that which is fundamental evil into something with which a compromise can be made.

The variety of themes in this chapter begins with the contrast of the past and the present. To be unfaithful to the Lord results in a death sentence that comes. Self-sufficiency is as destructive today as it was in the day in which Hosea lived. It is God alone who has made possible the good life we have, and He can take it away when we no longer trust Him alone to meet our needs and supply that which is necessary for us to survive. The fullness of the earth can be cut off in a very short time if “the wind of the Lord” blows and dries up all that is needed to produce even life itself.

It is hard to imagine watching people who had once bowed in humility and thankfulness to the Lord God of Israel, now bowing and “kissing calves” which they had made themselves. The disobedience of God's people seemed to know no bounds when they melted metal into a mold of their own making and then said, "Sacrifice to these." That would have had as much sense as kissing the slimy nose of a living calf and saying, "This is your savior." Yet people today worship at the shrine of pleasure, money and popularity and think this is what life is all about. The wind of the Lord can dry all of that which people today think is important in the same way He did in the past. Obedience to the Lord is the only hope of stability in any person, family, assembly and nation.
God was the Lord of Israel, not some idol. He was their Deliverer from bondage and the One who was their Provider when they had no hope. But this generation of people had ignored Him and had forgotten their heritage, where they came from, and how they got to the place they were. His commandments remain unchanged. No other gods can deliver or help in times of need. When we remember and obey Him, He is faithful to us. When we ignore Him and forget Him like the Israelites did, He who has preserved us from all the evil around that threatens us constantly, will remove Himself from us and destruction will inevitably come.

Hosea’s message told Israel of their future. It would be like a morning cloud that promises needed rain but passes on leaving them high and dry. It would be like the early morning dew that as soon as some heat strikes it evaporates. It is like chaff that blows away from the threshed grain. All their future held was dry chaff that has no nutrients to preserve life. The future of those Israelites was like smoke coming out of a chimney. There is no substance and it is totally of no worth or use. There is no savior in false religions, in the cults of Christendom, in good works, humanism, communism or materialism. It is all of no value and is even the cause of coming judgment. Because of apostasy there was no future for them even though they had been favored by God. That principle remains the same today. We have been favored because in our past there were those who led us who had at least a respect and acknowledgement of God. But now as a people, in government, churches, families and personally by a majority of people, God is ignored. The wind of the Lord will come.

God’s love and His wrath were illustrated in His care for His people in the wilderness and His anger at their rejection of Him. In their early days there was the fellowship of love and grace as God blessed His people who followed and trust Him. But that was soon gone. They wanted a king like other ungodly nations so He reluctantly gave them Saul, but took him away because of his disobedience to God’s word. David, Solomon and a few other kings of Judah had their strengths, but when the division came there was not one good king over the ten northern tribes. Man imposed leadership is bound to fail. The kings they wanted, led them into sin and idolatry. They ignored the first and greatest commandment, “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.” Their sin was measured and the consequences was stored up in view of coming punishment.

Israel was offered new birth, but resisted, refusing to be born again but like a child in the womb, they wanted to remain in darkness and refused the ransoming power of God’s grace. Instead of birth pangs that bring life into the light, Israel was in the throes of death pangs that would claim the life of the nation. Judgments had been held back, but “the iniquity of Ephraim” had stored up wrath that was inevitable and unavoidable. God was willing to remove the sting of death and the victory of the grave, but Israel would not repent and return to God in faith. Death, the grave and hell will destroy the most fruitful of the sons of Jacob, and “the wind of the Lord” will dry up everything about them completely.

The sins and guilt of Ephraim are on record against them, and we do well to remember that ourselves. For those individuals who trust Christ alone for salvation from sin, there is no fear of being lost forever. On the other hand, those who reject what they know to be true, or were taught the truth and deliberately turned away from it, will find the results of apostasy may not come immediately but judgment will come. There will be no more ransom paid, and no redemption offered when there is no repentance.

The destruction and desolation of Israel was certain. All they had gained and produced was going to be taken from them and the brutality of their enemies would be released against men, women and children. The vicious invading army of the Assyrians brought terrible death and judgment because of the guilt of Israel that knew better than to follow the course they chose, but did it anyway. The description of the coming judgment showed that it would be complete, final and terrible.

Hosea 13:2. “And now they sin more and more, and have made them molten images if their silver, and idols according to their own understanding, all of the work of the craftsmen: they say of them, ‘Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves.’”

**KISS THE CALVES.**

One time he was a power - exalted in pride  
Now he is an idolater - to God he has died  
One time a skilled craftsman - building the house of the Lord  
Now making idols - of metal and wood.

One time true worshippers, giving God what they had  
Now bowing down and kissing metal calves  
One time a green fig tree bringing glory to God  
Now like passing dew, blowing chaff, or a cloud.

One time they were nourishing and their barns were filled  
Now they are empty and their worship is stilled  
One time they were strong with God as their king  
Now weak as water not worth anything.

One time they were fruitful bringing God much glory  
Now they are like the dead at the end of a story
One time like a son in fellowship with his father
Now like an alien going farther and farther.

One time strong warriors, like strong men in battle
Now empty vessels that won’t even hold water
How far can a nation or a person go astray-
And expect God to help they when they don’t even pray.

“It is so strange that those whom Thou hast blessed, O God, should stoop to making such silly representations of deities. It would appear that the gods people bow to are representing attempts of men to exalt themselves with such foolish things to make it seem religious. I never want to see such a thing in any of the places I go. I only want to see my Lord Jesus Christ by the eyes of faith. Amen.”

Hosea 14

THEY SHALL RETURN

Hosea gave a final appeal to Israel to face the fact that their own sin was the reason for the condition in which they were found. They had to face themselves and reject putting any hope in men or other nations. They had to acknowledge the only hope they had was in God who shows mercy to “the fatherless” - the orphans. As a nation Israel was done. The curse of separation and all that it accomplished, was evil. It was real and final. Hosea’s call to repentance was like a prayer of genuine penitence when a sinner comes to God. There is the confession, “I am wrong,” and it is to the Lord, not just to one’s self or to another person. The true penitent confesses their own inability to help themselves, they acknowledge their helplessness, ask for forgiveness from God and cast themselves on His mercy. Judgment is not God’s last word. Beyond judgment, forgiveness is offered. God's forgiveness is real and is based on His grace. But rejected grace is rejected forgiveness.

Words without actions are useless. Honesty does not try to manipulate God to grant what we want without giving ourselves up to Him completely and without reservation. Genuine repentance is obvious and will be evident to others. In Hosea’s message there is hope and a final appeal to individual people. The nation was finished but “the Lord is nigh unto all that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth.”

Restoration can begin when we take full ownership and responsibility for our own sin and face the futility and failure of life without God. In confession there is the admission of guilt. In an unbeliever a person admits to their own lost condition without comparing themselves with others. Such a person knows their only hope is in God and His mercy. Believers who “confess and forsake” their sin find mercy even though we know we do not deserve mercy and forgiveness. We know justice has every right to be carried out on us, but “God who is rich in mercy,” can accept us on the basis that we are “accepted in the Beloved.”

God truly wants Israel back and prospering. Israel had trusted in Assyria, Egypt and idols, but when the Lord replies to the call of individuals, His reply is full of grace. He hears and responds when people mean what they say, “Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously (according to the riches of Thy grace).” God replies to such a true and open-hearted confession with words of grace. He will heal them and love them freely. There will be refreshing and growth to their soul. Outwardly there will be beauty and the fragrance of a life lived for God. There will be fruit and fellowship from the Lord that blesses them, and through them others.

When confession of sin and repentance is real, there will be evidence in the change of heart. We know we do not deserve mercy. We know we do not deserve forgiveness. We know we do deserve divine justice to be carried out on us. We cannot demand forgiveness, but it can be granted by a forgiving, gracious Father who loves us and wants us restored to Himself. God never ceases to be holy, just, righteous and love. He does not fail; he does not change. He does not lie. His mercy endures forever. His grace is sufficient to meet our every need. His provision for our needs comes from His fullness. His compassions fail not.

We need to listen to Him, learn from Him, and benefit by applying the word of God to every situation in life we face. God's justice requires faithfulness that does not overlook sin nor discount its effect in any way. God's love does offer forgiveness to those who repent and turn to Him in faith. When we come to Him, He forgives on the basis of sin's wages being paid by a sinless Substitute, our Lord Jesus Christ. When we fail and sin as a believer in Christ, He forgives when we confess and forsake that sin. It is in that way we are accepted and fellowship is restored by a just God, and on our part that causes great appreciation of our Lord and His present work on our behalf.

The peace Israel wants will be real when there is evidence of recovery and a change of heart towards our Lord Jesus Christ. They will then reject all the wrong that brought them to judgment. In repentance, wisdom and prudence - the failing people will return, repent, be born again and live forever in fellowship with the Lord. They will live in communion with the Lord and they will be a blessing to the nations of earth. God responds to true confession and the fruits of repentance. Faith in God is
the fundamental requirement for acceptance by Him and it must be real, immediate and directly focused on the Lord against whom they had sinned. Ephraim, as a people, had learned to their own grief, the bitterness of being joined to idols.

The Lord will be like a sheltering tree to Israel in a day yet to come. Wisdom and prudence go together in everything, and in particular when it comes to spiritual things. It is not enough to be intelligent about a matter. We need to be able to act according to that wisdom with true conviction that comes with prudence. These two connecting principles when coordinated with obedience, lead to blessing. We never learn what happened to Hosea and Gomer, but we do know what happens when people return to the Lord. Unsaved people will find mercy in God's saving grace. A believer who sins, finds forgiveness from God when sin is confessed and forsaken. Perhaps that happened with Gomer and Hosea.

Hosea 14:8. "Ephraim shall say, 'What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard Him and observed Him: I am like a green fir tree. From me thy fruit is found.'"

A GREEN FIR TREE.

Can it be these are the same people who had wandered so far?
Now they are growing again like a green fir.
So far, they did go it was like they were dead -
But love did its work and now they're brought near.

There was dryness for years - no dew in the morning,
No offerings to God - no voices lifted to praise -
But now they are returning and there is the sound of singing
In repentance and returning their voices they raise.

The lily has been missing for years it seems -
The pureness and perfection, so long has been lost.
But as a lily the wanderer returns to flowing streams
And in its beauty, it blossoms even after all that is past.

The scent of the cedar is back again in the air -
As the backsliding return to the Lord they had spurned.
The fragrance of fellowship is a great joy we share
With those who long gone, now finally have returned.

There the olive tree flourishes and new fruit is on its branches
The oil of the Spirit once again begins to flow.
The corn and the vine again provide their bounties
And life revived in God's people now begins to show.

Like Ephraim of old, the idols have left us -
No satisfaction, no lasting joy to God or to men.
The revived saints of God now rejoice at God's blessings
Like a fresh growing green fir, it is like life begins again.

“O God of recovery, the encouragement given by this last chapter, helps me to have hope for these small assemblies we have been ministering to for these last two months. If it please Thee, Father, to have them continue in testimony to Thee for time yet to come, please revive them and cause them again to look to Thee and to the reasons for which Thou hast called them. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”
There are times when because of wind storms, fires, floods and other disasters that come from nature, that people ask each other, "Why do so many things go wrong? What is the reason for so many bad things to happen?" To learn from a calamity, we have to be willing to take the time and think what is going on around us in the environment. But we are also wise to think about is happening in us and through us.

Some people see the dramatic increase of earthquakes as a harbinger of a major shift in the plates that form the crust of the earth. That is certainly true, but are there reasons why it is happening now. The increase of the size and power of hurricanes that cause so much damage, and the increasing frequency of them, make people say, "This is certainly not normal." Wild fires and devastating floods and death tolls as a result of them stir our minds to question is there something, we as humans are doing that is making these things happen. Some have a pet buzz-word, "global-warming," that is their pat answer. Some see events as merely an act of chance or an accident of nature - more or less a mishap. Others explain it as purely a cycle of nature. It happened in the past and it will happen again, so just live with it. People who read horoscopes, tea leaves and other cultic things believe these things are demonic and are a display of the power of Satan. There are likely elements of truth in all of these ideas.

The Bible looks at a calamity as a work of God, sent or allowed for a specific reason. The flood in the days of Noah that made such changes on the face of the earth was an act of God to purify the moral and physical pollution of earth caused by man's sin. Great rock-breaking earthquakes on the weekend of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ were an act of God because of man's sin and God's remedy for sin. There are lessons to be learned when natural disasters occur.

God has provided us with all we need for life and survival on earth from the "fullness" He has placed in the very surface of the earth within the reach of roots of plant life. Billions of tons of food lie inches beneath our feet, just waiting for us to plant the right seed. Fire and water are available to us for warmth and health. Animals, plants and minerals are all around us to sustain our lives and provide the needed nutrients for healthy living. But we should never take God's for granted. What He gives, He can easily and quickly take away. It is only right to express our gratitude to God in words and deeds. We not only have the provisions of God given freely for our use, but we can experience the power of God. "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

Blessings we receive from God are not to be tampered with nor taken lightly. These are all acts of divine grace. Do not despise God's grace. God has designed a lot of things for our comfort in life, but He is not unwilling to make us uncomfortable nor is he embarrassed when the forces of nature are used to make us stop and listen to Him and learn about Him. We have not been loaded with benefits by chance or because we deserve it for some reason. Our character is being developed during the times of difficulty and the problems of life which God has arranged for our learning. He is preparing us for a fuller and more meaningful future for which we have been made. We are here to learn how "to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."

We need to learn how to live with calamity. We cannot stop it, stave it off by a force of our will or scientific schemes. Nor should we ignore calamities. They will come. The Spirit of God tells us why they come in Joel 2:12-13. "Turn to Me now while there is time. Give Me your hearts. Come with fasting, weeping and mourning. Let your remorse tear at your hearts and not your garments. Return to the Lord..." Then according to Joel 2:28-29 He will make the rain come and the Holy Spirit will be poured out on His people. Intact families will again do what is right. Old men will be content and young men will have an understanding of why they are here and what they should do.

It was to the people of Judah at the time of a serious famine and then a pestilence of locusts, that Joel's message was given. He was probably young when Elijah and Elisha began the times of the prophets giving warnings to a failing society. His name "Joel," means "Jehovah is God; Jehovah is my God." He speaks of the early enemies of Israel so probably one of the early prophets. His mission was to Judah and his message was the importance of genuine repentance. He gives an alarm that an invasion of locusts will come as a warning of an invasion of an enemy army that will come. He makes an appeal to the people of Judah to turn to God and He promises He will "restore the years that the locusts hath eaten." At the end of his message he gives an annex relating to the end times and the glory of Zion that will come.
Joel was probably the earliest prophetic writer in the early reign of Joash [2Kg.11-12]. He would have known Elijah and Elisha in his youth.

- It contains the best description in all literature of locust devastation.
- It has the first intimation of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all flesh.
- His prophecies extend from his day to the end of time.

Key phrase: “Day of the Lord.”
Message: the value and importance of repentance.

1:15. Day of the Lord foreshadowed.
2:12-17. The reason why Israel should repent.

**Joel 1**

**NATIONAL CALAMITY**

There is no question as to where Joel’s warning message came from. It was “the word of the Lord” that he gave to the people. He was a prophet of revival who called for genuine repentance. That is at the root of all revival. A “rent heart” is where revival starts and then the rent veil and rent heaven follows. Access to God and the work of the Holy Spirit follows true repentance. Joel’s prophecy concerned the present time in which he lived, and the final topic of his prophecy was the end time when sin and evil will end and our Lord Jesus Christ reigns on a peaceful earth.

The old men were to listen, “Hear this...” because what he was going to tell them was an awful story that would be told from one generation to another. “Tell your children of it...” so they will learn from what happened in the past and why it happened. If we do not learn from our history, the same lessons will have to be learned again only the next time it will be worse. One generation should learn from another what the older ones had done wrong and the discipline that had to be applied. What happens when things seem hopeless was, they were delivered when repentance was real and they changed. There are three things one generation should learn from the ones before. When wrong is done, there will have to be discipline. What happened when things seemed hopeless is God sends deliverance to those who face their sin and repent of it to God. And finally, we know what is right for every generation according to the doctrine of the word of God.

There had been a drought that lasted at least three years and it was followed by a pestilence of locusts that moved across their land. Locusts multiply when food is abundant. There can be up to 5000 grasshopper eggs in a square yard where eggs pods are put around four inches into damp ground or sand. If there is plenty of food in that place for them to eat, they just stay there. Sometimes when walking through grass or a field of grain grasshoppers are jumping all around a person. But when drought comes, they begin to band together. Small bands become larger and they form bigger groups until they become multiplied millions that move in waves eating everything that is before them. When some find something to eat others move over the ones eating until they get to something they can eat. They are like the waves of the sea rolling over each other eating everything they can devour.

During the droughts of the 1930s, locusts on the prairies of North America ate food, clothes, leather belts and harness, they even ate the bark off trees until they were down to the bare wood. When there is nothing else to eat, they eat each other. The only thing that stops them is the drought itself when there is no food of any kind. Then they die. The locusts move across the land sometime about four inches thick on the ground and flying like a dark cloud. There were trains that could get no traction on the rails because the locusts were like grease on the tracks.

Joel writes of four kinds of locusts that would come. The cutter locusts would come first and the plants would die. The swarmer locusts would come in clouds behind them, and they would be followed by the hopper locusts, and behind them the stripper locusts that would leave nothing living behind them. The area they crossed would be like burned over land with nothing alive after they passed. Even the domestic animals had nothing to eat. The plague of locusts he wrote about was unprecedented. The point of being sent by God was to bring an end to the sins of Judah as a nation. The drunkards were called to wake up and weep because there was no fruit on the vine. Those dwelling in cities were called to lament because there was no food to buy. The farmers were ashamed because they had nothing growing and nothing to sell. The priests were to gird themselves, lament, howl, come, sanctify themselves, fast, call an assembly of the people together to cry unto the Lord.

God had warned the children of Israel long before through Moses and Solomon, that a plague of locusts would be a way He would chastise His people when they sin and turned away from Him. Joel's message was to tell the people of Judah their spiritual departure from God was why the locusts were sent. National repentance was needed, and is the essential first step to return to the Lord. The opening verses of Joel describes the national calamity and the desolation that came because of
the sins of the people. They were urged to repent and show they really meant it by the whole nation fasting. The drought, locusts and desolation of the country were God's way of calling to a people who had chosen to reject Him. This was a foretaste to them of the judgment of God during the "Day of the Lord" which would affect the whole country, and in the larger sense of the coming day in the future - the whole world.

When God is rejected, ignored and despised by people, there will come a time when His displeasure will bring consequences far greater than can be controlled by human ingenuity or scientific methods that are so important to many people. To desecrate that which God has given will inevitably bring punishment for sin. Accounts with God must be settled. We cannot ignore God and think we have nothing to face because of our arrogance. Times of desolation that human sin and greed has brought on us will some day bring desperation when everything we need is gone. At present we are living in "man's day" in which God is allowing mankind to run the world in the way we want. Much of what is happening has the imprint of the god of this world on it because it goes so far beyond human decency. The "day of Christ" will come when our Lord comes for His people at the rapture of the church. The "Day of the Lord" as it refers to the whole world, not just Israel, begins after the rapture and goes through the tribulation and millennium. During that time the Lord will be exalted among the nations and man will take the place he should have been satisfied with.

The locust attack was representative of a more terrible attack by the armies of soldiers who will overcome their country. In a more specific way, it is a reference to the "Day of the Lord" yet to come. The "day of God" will be the time when "God is all in all and there will be a new heaven and new earth. So, the foreshadowing of the day of the Lord in a lesser way took place when Judah was overrun by enemies because of their sin and rejection of the Lord. Joel's warning was plain. God is ready to forgive when people turn away from sin and turn to Him. If and when that happens, God pours out the Holy Spirit and there is a new beginning like there was in Acts chapter two. That was a foreshadowing of a day still yet in the future when the whole world will have a new beginning.

Dangers to the people come when there is complacency and a carefree and indulgent lifestyle. Such are called to Awake, because the barrenness of life leads to barrenness of souls and spirit. Spiritual carelessness brings spiritual confusion. The comes coldness when true worship is lacking. Spiritual life is wasted, dried up, mourned for and languishes because of a counterfeit worship that has taken the place of reality. Lack of concern follows coldness. There is no gladness because the vine is gone. No sweetness because the fig tree is gone. No freshness because the pomegranate is gone. No righteousness because the palm tree is gone. No attractiveness because the apple is gone. There comes after that a casualness about spiritual things and people no longer take God seriously. Respect for God and carelessness in regard to the condition of people accompanies a "take it or leave it" attitude.

Like Joel prophesied to Judah, parents need to be urged to pass on to their children and grandchildren their history and the things they have learned by experience. Tell your life story including both the failures and successes, the mistakes and the wise choices. People become oblivious to sin when our moral senses are dulled and our physical life even becomes affected by licentious living and unrestrained sin. Peace and prosperity make us complacent and lull us to sleep spiritually even when all is coming apart around us. Material gain makes spiritual loss much greater. There are times when God's people must join in prayer, repentance, fasting and calls for mercy.

Joel's cry, "Alas!" was because the house of God became a dreaded place. There was nothing real going on. There was noting for the sanctuary or for sacrifices. Everything was gone because of the drought, desolation from the locusts - that was just the beginning. A day will come when there will be the last judgment on evil and sin, and there will be rewards to those believers who are faithful to the Lord. The "Day of the Lord" is coming.

**Joel 1:2-3.** "Hear this, ye old men, and give ear; all ye inhabitants of the land. Hath this been in your days, or even the days of your fathers? Tell ye your children of it. And let your children tell their children, and their children another generation."

**YOU OLD MEN.**
Pass on what you heard about the past
Tell the young of their heritage and do it fast.
You are getting older don't you know
Your old age and grey hair already show
And the children and grandchildren, need to grasp
With real and clear understanding
The message to them you now are handing
Is the only one through coming generations that will really last.

Your heritage-story will tell, how to your family the Gospel came;
And then how your fore-bearers gathered in Jesus' name.
In many different places they were scattered,
But for generations they did gather
In the way we do or very much the same.
To them it was important to deliberately seek
Places where God's people regularly meet
They gathered simply without a lot of fuss or seeking of fame.

Now old men, it is time for you to pass on
What God to you through the Holy Spirit has shown.
It is now our own responsibility
To tell the children how our family
Came down through the generations to be known
As those who love the Lord
And sought to obey His Holy Word
That through the passing years, now to the children has come.

Take time to let the next generation know
There is an honorable and righteous way to go.
The heritage they have now is good and great.
God Himself knows the way you will take.
To those to whom much has been given, much they owe.
Urge them to seriously consider
Before the Lord comes or God calls them hither
People around them need through them, God's love to show.

"I thank Thee Father, for the daughters Thou hast given Linda and me. I thank Thee that they are reaching out in Thy name to people around them. Give them wisdom, understanding, grace and truth to show through them to others, evidence of the God they serve. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Joel 2

DAY OF DARKNESS

When the sirens begin to sound in a city today, we usually expect them to soon stop because the urgency is quickly met by those who are trained to deal with a problem. But when they start to howl and keep on sounding, then we realize something beyond a minor or local matter is coming. Tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes etc. set off the warnings so people can find a place of safety from impending danger. When the alarm was sounded in Zion (Jerusalem) by the prophet Joel, there was a warning given of a national emergency that was coming. The effects of it are described and the reason was plain. Judgment for national sin does not wait. There will be the "judgment of the nations" in the future relating to how nations related to the Jews, but when a nation of people today ignores the Lord God of hosts, and rejects righteousness and truth, judgment will come.

The "Day of the Lord," used in the book of Joel to describe both immediate judgments on a sinful nation, and a day in the future of world-wide judgment. For the people of Judah, it was a warning relating to another plague of locusts and the coming "northern army" led by the Lord to execute judgment upon a sinful people. The day of darkness described in graphic poetry would begin with a second locust invasion as a foretaste of the invading army that would overcome and defeat the nation. That army was a foretaste of the invasion in the future of millions who would come against Israel at the end of the tribulation.

The description of the coming army and the characteristics of the devastation are thoroughly given as Joel contrasts the land like the garden of Eden before the locusts come, and a parched desert with nothing living behind after they leave. The desolation is complete. There is noise like a field fire and order like a marching army as nothing is left untouched at their passing. Walls, houses, earth - everything is covered as the enemy looks for that which can be devoured. That army of insects is an irresistible force controlled only by the Lord Himself. The only way the plague can be stopped is if the Lord steps in and does a miracle. That army of insects is an irresistible force controlled only by the Lord Himself. The only way the plague can be stopped is if the Lord steps in and does a miracle. The same will be true when the great northern army comes upon the land as the Lord thunders at the head of His army. These judgments are no accident of nature or scheme of a government of men. This is an act of divine justice upon an unthankful, unholy, guilty nation of people who have despised God's grace and mercy. Even today, the reason justice has not yet been carried out on sinful nations and people is because "the Lord is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

The only reason for guilty hell-deserving people can survive the judgment of God, is because of the sovereignty of God. "The Day of the Lord" is so great and dreadful that no one would be left alive unless God intervenes. In grace He does that very thing. He introduces hope as a day of deliverance in which He calls His people to repentance. This is not the half-hearted actions of those who know what they should do and make an outward show of it by tearing their garments. God's call to repentance means a turning to Him with all their heart, with the evidence of reality and sincerity. Outward repentance is what people are quite used to giving, but then they go back to doing the same things again. That is not what God wants. Inward repentance from hearts that are rent is real. Attitude is involved, not just actions. The expected response of
repentance is fasting, calling a halt in normal activities. Mourning is genuine remorse because of honestly facing the fact of guilt. Prayer is not just a form to follow but is the outpouring of grief and the hope mercy. Then we wait for God to act.

The prophet calls for the trumpet to be blown in Zion again. This time it is to call the people together in order to sanctify themselves. They were to assemble together in humility and the fellowship of men, women and children - even the newly-weds, all united as one humbled people. The priests who are to be intercessors, were to stand weeping between the porch and the altar in intercessory prayer and ask the Lord to spare His people and not remove of those who are the heritage of the Lord. True repentance cannot be mimicked and is not ignored. They were to turn "now," "unto the Lord," and the result was, "who knoweth if He will repent..." and bless. When there is repentance there is hope.

Joel's prophesying turns from promised judgment to promised forgiveness and blessing in the future. The answer to the call to prayer was recovery of needed food and national identity again. The foes would be removed, the famine would be reversed and the future would be one of renewal. This day will come, but it is still in the future. There will be fullness of substance, satisfaction in the abundance of God's gracious provision, and salvation for them as a nation when the Lord appears in glory and the King reigns after the defeat of the enemies of the Lord at Armageddon. Blessings follow sincerity, consistency and reality, but even those can be lost when the Lord is neglected and rejected.

The call to revival will result in a spiritual revival that was foreshadowed at the day of Pentecost that Peter referred to when he preached. The Holy Spirit's coming to dwell in the church was accompanied by miracles at the introduction of this age of grace. The Holy Spirit with God's people gave power to do what was right but not consistently. The Holy Spirit in God's people gives us power to do what is right consistently when He is not grieved or quenched. There will be spiritual revival in the time of tribulation when 144,000 Jewish evangelists preach the Gospel world-wide and multitudes will be saved from hell, but will die because of their testimony of faith in Christ. "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord will be delivered," is a promise of unlimited atonement for people in that day the same as today. God's promises are real. The Lord will "do great things." His people will be glad and rejoice because of the "former rain" that brings generation of the seed, and the "latter rain" that brings fullness. He will provide "full" and "plenty" when He "restores to you the years that the locusts have eaten." He will be "in the midst" of His people and the Holy Spirit will be "poured out" on His people. Any who call on "the name of the Lord" will be saved. What a wonderful list of promises after such and terrible time of departure and judgment!

Joel 2:13. "And rend your hearts, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil."

REND YOUR HEARTS.

-bleeding hearts- are not just the name we put on some flowers.
  -The hearts that bleed, are not just those we pray for - they should be ours.
  -When sin claims the vitals of a nation, and hearts more hardener get -
  -Some hearts need to be broken in intercession that God will have mercy yet.

  There is a callous indifference to things holy and the things of God.
  -There is a concerted effort to stop the public proclamation of His Word.
  -The children are being indoctrinated by those who teach in schools.
  -And they are challenged to take their own way and not mind the Golden Rule.

  Our nation is drying up, still people don't understand
  -The righteous acts of God that are increasing across the land.
  -They try to find some scientific reasons for things being the way they are -
  -And won't consider that God is the One speaking in nature's power.

  People get excited about some game or a new worldly song.
  -But they will not stop to consider what God says is right or wrong.
  -The interest of the nation as a whole is in self-aggrandizement.
  -And most stare blankly at a preacher who calls for the nation to repent.

  Those who hearts are rent, are those to whom God speaks.
  -And through the veil rent when Jesus died, He calls on us to seek
  -The kingdom of God first and trust Him in simple faith
  -To rend the heavens and come down and bless again with saving grace.

  When that happens and the name of God is again treated with respect.
  -And hearts are rent and tears flow, and softening comes to hardened necks -
  -Then the Holy Spirit works as people call on God to be saved.
  -And the nation returns to God because of rent hearts of those who faithfully prayed.
“O God of all grace. I pray for this country and my people, that there will be a return to Thee from hearts that are truly broken. I pray that there will be a resurgence of Gospel effort and that people will come in true repentance and faith to Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Joel 2:26. “And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed.”

NOT DONE YET.

Peter had it figured out when the Holy Spirit finally came. The disciples had heard the words of the Lord; they had seen the works of the Lord. They had been eyewitnesses of His majesty when He was transfigured before them. Peter had been one of the three who watched in amazement when, for the first time, the Lord Jesus raised a person from the dead. He saw the evidence of death in the girl’s young face. He heard the words the Lord said to her. He watched the color come back into her face as the One who had the keys of life and death, turned the “life-key” and she sat up. He watched her eat. And still with the evidence all around to see the great things the Lord had done: the locust, cankerworm, caterpillar and palmerworm were still doing their destructive work among the people and they despised and rejected the Lord. But He is not done yet.

Peter watched, and listened and learned, so that when the Spirit of God came, he knew this was the time for people to “eat in plenty and be satisfied.” When he stood to speak, he was ready because he knew how to apply what he had learned. He knew what fit the situation. He knew the work of the Lord wasn’t done yet – it was only getting started. So, as he preached the word with boldness and the other brethren stood right beside him supporting him like Aaron and Hur did Moses, he knew the scriptures were true and were working their mighty power in the hearts of those who had lost so many years. He is not done yet!

Peter heard the calls from the listeners, “What shall we do?” and he was ready with the right words at the right time in the right way. No, the work was not done yet. Before the day was out, the name of the Lord his God was praised as thousands stepped into the water of baptism and identified themselves with the risen Savior of sinners. God did deal wondrously that day and many days since. God’s people stepped out in public faith and were not ashamed. He is not done yet!

Joel 3

GOD DEALS WITH ISRAEL ENEMIES

After the plague of the locusts and after the invasion of the enemies of Israel, it is hard to imagine that things could get worse. God does use nations at times to be the means He uses to bring about punishment on His people for their disobedience, rejection of Him and their sinful idolatry and pursuits. Joel had prophesied of a time of blessing for Israel [2:16-19], and a time of freedom from those who had kept them in bondage [2:20]. He had told them of a time of prosperity that would some day come [2:21-27] and when the Holy Spirit would be poured out not only at Jerusalem, but upon all flesh. At that time and in every age, “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered [28-29].

"In those days," or "at that time" the Jews will return to Israel. What we see today is the rebirth of a nation and the beginning of the return of the Jews from various parts of the world, but they are not returning in faith in God. They are returning still in unbelief. Blessings will be restored to those who are saved who call on the name of the Lord. "By grace are ye saved through faith" is the same for everyone in every age - including the Jews. The evidence of saving faith is seen in different ways in different times and in different places. God is going to provide for His own with material blessings, and He is also
going to deal with evil, idolatry, pain and suffering on earth. God's judgment had immediate consequences and His restoration of the Jews to the land was only partial. 50,000 came back from Babylon at the time of Zerubbabel, and occasionally some returned from time to time but that is not the re-gathering of the nation.

When that happens all the nations of the world, especially those who have united in opposition to Israel will face the Lord who will judge the nations for their treatment of the Jews. Long ago the Lord chose to call Abraham out of Ur, and from one of the smallest of the ancient tribes on earth, brought them to the place where in spite of being small among the nations, they have one of the most prominent places on earth today. What happens in the little state of Israel affects all the big nations in the world - for good or bad. The Lord has not forsaken Israel completely because they are His people. He was one of them when He came on earth to save us.

Many of the nations God used to deal with the sins of Israel, used excessive brutality to such an extent that attempts have been made to annihilate the Jews completely. The nations around Israel used the Jews they captured in some of the worst ways possible as slaves, in coliseums, and even today there are nations around Israel determined to drive them into the sea even though through their intelligence and innovation they other nations have become wealthy. Such nations will face their treatment of God's chosen earthly people. The opposition from ancient days to this present day will end in the "Valley of Jehoshaphat" when all the nations will be brought before the "Judge of all the earth." There people waiting in the valley will be those who have come from all directions to bring defeat and exterminate those who God had chosen so long ago. Nations as well as individuals will know the principle of what is sown will be reaped when God recompenses evil as well as good.

The war people wage against God's people is a war against God Himself. That battle will be so important that agricultural tools and machinery will be used as tools for war. The armies from the north, south and east will converge in that spot, and it will be there that the word of the Lord will defeat the assembled armies like grapes crushed in a winepress. That will not be a time for repentance but for justice, accountability and retribution on nations and individuals because this is the real "Day of the Lord." Even nature will add its verdict as the sun, moon and stars are darkened. Israel will be sheltered by the Lord who is their Refuge and Strength, when He shouts like a lion terrifying His enemies as the sky and earth shakes.

At the judgment of the nations, what was sown will be reaped; what was stolen will be recompensed, what the nations did to the Jews will be exposed for the evil it was. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me," will be understood for the indictment it is, or the blessing it is. That is how the Lord views the treatment of the Jews who have been so long dispersed among the nations, and persecuted as a people world-wide. Those who have refused to submit to divine authority will have to face the consequences of that choice.

There will be no question in the minds of those who lead the nations as to who is in control of events. "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision" will know what decision God makes. That will not be a decision made by men as to who or what they believe. It is God's decision as to what to do to the nations. Zion (Jerusalem) will be the center of things on earth rather than being "trodden down" and despised. Restoration will bring full and plenty to Israel again and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit will be on God's people in that day yet to come. The millennium will bring the blessing long promised in prophecies. The land will produce from the fullness of the Lord. The enemies who had been so opposed to the laws from every direction, will be dealt with by the Lord. There will be "peace on earth" because of righteousness and justice finally being real.

The end of the prophecy of Joel is restoration for the people of Israel. Joel had sought to awaken the complacent people to the danger they were in but they wouldn't listen. He called them to repentance and urged them to call on the name of the Lord. He made it plain that those who obeyed and turned to God would be blessed and those who refused and rejected God's call would be destroyed. The journey of the Jewish people has been sad, suffering and it is not over yet. In the end of the story they will dwell in peace in Zion with the Lord who will reign on the throne of David.

Joel 3:14. "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision."

**VALLEY OF DECISION.**

I watch from where I stand looking at people hopefully through God's eyes;  
And I see people making decisions - and I am afraid.  
Though little children surround their legs - they are thinking of themselves.  
And they make a decision - to dissolve a marriage.  

I listen as I sit in a place where perhaps Jesus sat before;  
And I hear plans being made - based not on principle but on profit,  
Though all around seems to be failing to meet human needs -  
A decision is made to abandon honesty and mortgage the future.

I walk among people as they hurry about the tasks that need to be repeated;  
And see the pursuit of pleasure take precedence over people.
The gauge of value is no longer filling needs but filling greed
A decision is being made that will affect future generations.

I lie awake in the darkness and hear loud laughter -
Sometimes screams of moral abandonment echo down dark streets.
A glass is raised, a powder sniffed, a needle inserted -
A decision is made that will hasten moral and physical death.

I read the Bible, and as I read, I learn the day of the Lord is near.
The sickle of holy justice is being raised to reap the harvest of evil.
People will not accept the warnings; will not turn from sin.
A decision is made in the valley of decision - that lasts forever.

"O Righteous God, may there be some today that will make the right decision to listen to
Thee through Thy Word. May genuine repentance lead to genuine salvation. I think of families
here that should know better but are making bad decisions. Have mercy I pray, in the name of the
Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."
AMOS
"God speaks to complacent people"

Egypt had been the superpower in the Middle East for generations and then faded for some time as Israel rose to a power to be reckoned with under the reigns of David and Solomon. When Rehoboam, Solomon's son, took the throne of Israel, he did not listen to the older men and Jeroboam I led a rebellion that divided the nation of Israel into two, Judah in the south, and Israel in the north. He set up two golden calves, one in Dan and one in Bethel, so the people of the north wouldn't go to Jerusalem to worship at the temple, and perhaps be inclined to reunite as one nation. There had been times of war and unrest in the north. There had also been famine but by the time the writing of Amos' prophecy that was all in the past. Jeroboam II was king of the northern tribes and Uzziah was king in Judah when Amos was called by the Lord [7:15] to go to Israel and prophesy.

The times of hunger and war had passed and externally the northern kingdom was in a time of flourishing business, a solid economy and a stable government. Prosperity and international prestige brought national success, and many of the people of Israel were engaged in the pursuit of luxury and self-indulgence. There seems to be a pattern in human life. When times are tough like when Israel was in the wilderness, they were conscious of their need of God and they depended on Him for everything. In their wilderness journey they looked to God for daily food and water. It was there they built the tabernacle and there they were guided and protected by the fire and the cloud.

When they moved from the wilderness life to an agricultural life, they were confronted with the gods of the people in the land, and became attracted to the immoral activity of the worship of Ashtoreth and Baal. So God had Solomon build a temple for Him to dwell in the midst of His people, and it was to the temple they came with their gifts, offerings and sacrifices. When many of the people of Israel moved from agriculture to urbanization and business became the national focus, there emerged a wealthy ruling class which lived in luxury and self-indulgence, but oppressed the poor and used them to become rich themselves. The rich had no interest in, nor did they care and provide for the poor. It was to deal with this problem and these people God sent His twelve prophets to warn the people and urge them to repent and turn back to God.

Nine of the twelve prophetic books were written before the Jews were taken into exile, and three after. Jonah was an early prophet who prophesied to Nineveh. Amos prophesied to the northern kingdom, Hosea to the southern kingdom and Obadiah to Edom which was neighbor to Judah. Then there was Joel, Micah, Nahum (prophesied to Nineveh), Zephaniah and Habakkuk who all warned the people from God about what would happen if there was no repentance and no return to the Lord. Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi prophesied to the people who returned from the exile to Israel again when Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah led the people to rebuild the city the temple and the walls of Jerusalem.

It was to this people in Samaria and the northern tribes who had turned sentimental and tolerant of sin, idolatry, injustice and hypocrisy that Amos was called from the barren hills of Tekoa east of Jerusalem, to go to the north with his message. He was a farmer by occupation who took care of sheep and an orchard of fig trees. This may indicate why God called him from his farm work to be a prophet. He was a "layman" who was devoted to serving the Lord in the place he was. We know enough about him to know he was a model worker. When we read through the book, we find descriptions of Amos that tells us of his humility, he didn't hid his origins. He was industrious which we learn from the illustrations he uses from everyday life. He had wisdom needed to reach people by using everyday terms. His discernment was such that he got the attention of the people by speaking against their enemies first. In his faithfulness to the Lord and the people, he went right for their consciences. As a steadfast man, he refused to be turned aside from his calling. His message was plain. It was from God. He was successful in influencing the whole nation.

Perhaps he had gone to Samaria to sell wool and figs in that busy, wealthy city. Sometimes people today make the same mistake the people of Israel did. They think financial and national success is evidence of the favor of God upon them. Amos saw through all that quickly when he got there under divine commission to take a message from God. He wasn't looking for a new job as a prophet, but perhaps the meaning of his name, "burden," gives to us a view of the man's heart. He recognized his responsibility to God and obeyed the Lord. When he got to Samaria, he preached the righteousness and justice of God that was contrasted by what was happening in the city. God expects that righteousness and justice in His people.

More obvious as the reason for warning the people, was the outward show of religion with the obvious trappings that were a covering for the moral corruption behind it. Rituals that testify of faith do not clean up the unethical and evil behaviors going on behind the scene. Often people want God in their lives like a relief
pitcher in a baseball game to come in and help when they are going to lose the game. Or there are some who want the Lord only on the edge of their life to pour the gravy or wash the dishes as it were, rather than be the Center of everything. Many only want God in emergencies or when they want Him for something. They complain when things go seriously wrong and as "Why doesn't God do something about this?" or "Why does God allow this to happen?"

A wrong understanding of God is nothing new today. It was the same in the day when Amos was called to tell Israel to "repent or perish." Amos' preaching condemned sin but he also preached what the righteous God requires of people. To ignore what God requires will bring God's displeasure and judgment on His people. At the end of the book of Amos, the light of God's love shines through, but that did not mean that God overlooks every form of sin people do. God's character does not compromise God's actions.

Amos 1:1. “The words of Amos, who was among the herdsmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.”

THE EARTHQUAKE.
The Lord's people had had their times alright: there had been famine so great that their teeth were always clean. Then there came the pestilence and the fruit-bearing trees and vineyards shriveled and died for good. Following that the young men went off to war and died by the thousands but yet they still forsook God and His ways for the ways of the world around them. Prosperity came and still they didn't appreciate what the Lord was doing for them. What was God going to do next?

He got a man, herdsman and a orchardist to leave his home and livelihood to go into the cities and warn the people from God. His message was plan and simple: “Prepare to meet thy God.” “The Lord, the God of hosts is His name.” He was to tell the people to seek the Lord and they would live. Forget about religion or church attendance; forget about past spiritual experiences; don't go on some great pilgrimage to a distant place — seek the Lord here and now. And they were not to forget that there was a cut-off time for God's mercy to be experienced. He was passing then and there but this was the "Last call of mercy."

But no, they didn't pay attention to that farmer's message. They didn't respond in repentance and a life change. There wasn't so much as a change in life-style. They wanted it their own way. Like C.S. Lewis said, "There are two ways people can respond to God, 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?' or those to whom God says, 'Alright, have it your way.'" Those from the seminary of Amaziah were all fussed up because he wasn't one of them.

And then two years later came the earthquake! Things changed fast! They began to run for safety to the mountains but they shook too. There was no place to hide then because the foundations of the earth itself were moved. And the experience of the earthquake was remembered for years. It was indelibly impressed on their minds by fear. Time for many was measured by the day of the earthquake.

History will repeat itself according to Zechariah and again people will run for the mountains in fear. The ground will shake and break as the Lord dismounts from His heavenly steed and puts His feet on the earth again at the Mt. of Olives. People that are careless will be careless no longer. Those that remembered the famines, the pestilences of earth, the wars in which their sons died, and yet did not repent and seek the Lord, will run in terror and will find no place to hide. Learn the lesson of the earthquake, and "prepare" and "seek"; God still rules the universe and can do on earth again as He did before.

“O Holy God, with a sense of fear and dread I preach the words of warnings to the people of my day. I know what they are like and how indifferent to Thee they are. I wonder sometimes how Amos spoke; what he looked and dressed like; how he approached the task of warning people who were not interested. It doesn’t seem like it helped much then but at least they were warned and mercy was offered. I will do the same and leave the results to them and to Thee. I am glad I have already been to the mountain. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Amos 1

DECLAMATION
Not everyone who claims to speak for God really is a spokesperson for Him. When prophecies are made, the prophets are not looking for a way to get rich or a following that will make them leaders like happens in modern-day cults. There is an inner desire to warn people of the consequences of their bad choices that they will not be able to avoid unless they turn unto the Lord in repentance. None of the prophets became
rich by asking for money. Some became poor, despised and imprisoned. Others were cast out and others were killed because they told the truth in the name of the Lord.

Amos knew the Lord had sent him to Samaria and Israel to warn them of coming judgment. God had told him what was coming and what would happen to Israel. Two years before the earthquake that was so severe it was remembered and talked about many years later, Amos left the sheep and the orchard to obey the word of the Lord. It is incumbent on us to be sure what we say in the name of the Lord is biblical in the context of the words and setting as well as in the actual message. It is possible to use scriptural words and phrases in unscriptural ways to manipulate people into error.

The message of Amos is presented in four different ways. There is the declamation regarding the punishment of the nations around Israel. Then there is the proclamation of punishment against Judah and Israel. Third there is the revelation of visions concerning Israel, and finally at the very last of the book there is the good news of the restoration of all Israel. He begins with eight burdens regarding the eight nations. Then there are three sermons telling of coming judgment that is deserve and decreed. At the later part of the book there are five visions Amos had that effected Israel in different ways.

Amos' first words are the fearful words of the Lord roaring like a lion. He was still dwelling with His people at Zion (Jerusalem) but there was an urgency that terrifies the souls when God's speaks with a loud voice. Our Lord Jesus did that on occasions when He was here. When God raises His voice, something important is about to happen. At the grave of Lazarus, the loud voice of love from the Lord brought a man from the dead. At the end of the feast the Lord called with a loud voice to those who were lost. At the cross His loud voice declared a finished work on account of our sin.

To accomplish His own sovereign purposes, God uses people to communicate His messages to other people in words that they can easily understand. In the first two chapters there are eight messages to the nations regarding sins for which they never repented and forsook. In each message there is a final sin that tips the scale to judgment - "For three transgressions, and for four" is a reminder that God is aware of every transgression committed and there is a reason for His judgment that is coming. The warnings of the fullness of God's wrath against sin isn't only to His people but to all. God does not forget, nor does He overlook sin as if it doesn't matter.

The first declaration of coming judgment is against Damascus which is the capital of Syria. When they invaded Israel under the leadership of Hazael, the Syrians committed terrible atrocities against the Israelites. They had sown extreme violence on the Jews and they would experience the same themselves when they would become slaves to the Assyrians. They had been slaves in Kir in the past, and they would be slaves there again.

Gaza was one of five major cities of the Philistines. Gath had already been conquered by Uzziah and the forces of Judah. The Philistines had been historic enemies of the Hebrews from ancient times even when the Israelites were freed from Egyptian bondage. Gaza is a representative of all of the Philistines, who had tipped the scales when they sold the captives of Israel they had taken and sold them to the Edomites for a good profit. Slavery was one thing. Abusive slavery was another.

Tyrus (Tyre) had one time had a good relationship with Israel, particularly in the time of David. A treaty of good will had been signed, but Tyre had reversed its policy. There had never been war between Israel or Judah with Tyre. Everything may seem alright between God's people and those around them, unless there is the same commitment to God, to truth and to righteousness, there can be no real lasting fellowship. The Phoenicians were slave traders, and in their own financial interests, they broke the treaty made with Israel when they took Israelites as slaves and sold them to the Edomites.

Quite likely when the Israelites heard Amos' prophecy against the three nations to the north and west of them, they would be saying with upraised fists, "Yes!! They have picked on us for years, and now they will get a taste of their own medicine. It's about time God punished them. Hopefully He will eliminate them completely."

The second group of three were sort of like "shirt-tail relatives." They had ancient ties through Esau, the originator of the Edomites, and Lot, who incestuous union with his own daughters was the origin of the Ammonites and the Moabites. These nations to the south and east of Israel were antagonistic toward the Hebrews right from the time they left Egypt and were going into the promised land. That antagonism led to wars and bitterness that was passed from one generation to the next. For a Hebrew to be a slave to the Edomites was the worst thing that could happen to them. Even today Arabs quarrel and fight among
themselves, but they will come together under common-cause when the objective is to war against the Jews. The nations around Israel in the Middle East are united in their desire to "drive Israel into the sea."

The deep-seated malice of Edom against the Hebrews was such that "he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off pity, and his anger did tear perpetually." The Edomites were pitiless and unrelenting in their brutality against the Jews. Because there was absolutely no quarter given even to those of ancient family ties, Edom would be burned - would only be an old memory.

Ammon must have had an inborn bitterness because his own grandfather was his father. The present-day country of Jordan was the land of the Ammonites, and Rabbah of Amos' day is Amman, Jordan today. The Ammonites were known for their sacrilege and idolatry. The chose gods who were like themselves and worshipped the works of their own hands. Their idolatry was degraded by seduction and immoral practices in the name of their gods. Their own children were used as sacrifices, perhaps indicative of how Ammon felt about his own origins. The polluted immoral worship of the Ammonites actually became attractive to the Hebrews. In the invasion of Gilead by the Ammonites, they actually cut open pregnant women and committed terrible acts of depravity.

Amos 1:15. "And the king shall go into captivity, he and his princes together, saith the Lord."

INJUSTICE.

Prosperity has its dangers and many forget
There comes a smug complacency with the possessions you get.
With that comes a tendency to harshly treat those with less.
And make the mistake that because you are richer, you are blessed.
But beware of this fact that God knows who is unfaithful.
And uses whatever means necessary to deal with sinning people.
He may reach out to other sources that are unexpected.
And allow whatever needs to happen to work until the sinning is corrected.

Sometimes from a position of power, nations or persons turn to threats.
To force others into compliance and the desired results to get.
Remember there is an Authority far higher than nations or men.
When God steps in to deal with threats, all power is owned by Him.
Actions without compassion are judged even while being done.
With infinite knowledge the Righteous Judge evaluates every one.
The motivation behind the deeds are known. God reads all human minds.
There is no falsehood or hidden reasons, in His omniscience He cannot find.

Men and women come together and talk when covenants are made.
One feints here and the other there in the interests of their trade.
When a pen is raised and a name is signed, the covenant is to be a fact.
What has been agreed to by both, neither one is to get what's given back.
But covenants are being broken; people ignore the words they wrote.
Injustice again brings tension and hate when the covenant is broke.
I let all remember this; there was a witness who did not sign.
He has the final say in everything, and will bring justice in His time.

"I know Holy God, that much has been said and done by nations and individuals that has been unfair, unjust and deceptive. I pray that I might be known as a man of my word; that I will not allow myself to act in haste without considering how it affects all involved - and particularly, how it affects Thee my Gracious Father. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Amos 2

TIPPING THE SCALES

"for three transgressions, and for four," is a idiomatic expression that means, "more than enough." In other words, "I have had enough. You have gone too far." Those words were used by God toward the nations around Israel to point out the reasons for judgment coming on them. The first three indictments are toward Gentile nations. The second three are toward Gentile nations who had a "shirt-tail relationship" with the Hebrews through their ancestors, Esau and Lot. Then an indictment was made against Judah which likely would have delighted those people of the northern ten tribes. But last of all, and most condemning of all is the indictment against Israel.

Chapter two begins with the condemnation of Moab, not for what they did to Israel, but for their unrestrained hate and anger against Edom. Their vengeance was so great and bitterness so deep-seated, that they
desecrated the tomb of a dead king to get his bones and burn them. There is something inhuman and beyond the bounds of normal human nature when there is no respect for the dead. Ignorance is one thing, but to have such animosity and lack of restraint for a human being, is to resist the One who has the keys of life and death and to discount His authority over human existence. Sadly, that attitude toward enemies still persists in the Middle East where vengeance seems to “go over the top” in demonstrating animosity against those who are considered enemies.

Likely the Jews of the northern tribes would have been glad to hear Amos prophecy the doom of Judah. The people of Judah had rejected the law of God by refusing to obey God and were half-hearted in their spiritual life. The people of Judah were condemned because of their lies and falsehood. Also because of turning their backs of the truth for temporary advantage or acceptance by others. Both Israel and Judah knew better than to do what they were doing, and following the ways of the idolatrous nations around. But instead of being content to be different and be ostracized, they ignored God and His word, and joined the idol worship of other nations. They refused to do that they had been taught for generations. Consequently, their guilt was greater than the Gentiles because they knew what was right, but deliberately chose to do what was wrong.

It would be well for us to consider what kind of a legacy we are leaving for the generations that are coming behind us. The things our fathers left us as to integrity, decency, morality, honesty and even spirituality are for our learning. It is up to us to apply that which we have learned and adapt it to the life and work that is in our day. Each generation has unavoidable changes that we have to accept, but when they are sinful and/or wrong, we must reject the temptation to compromise righteousness and holiness. Some things our fathers have left us to deal with are not good. But the general rule of history is that we learn from the mistakes of the past as well as the positive things. We owe that same obligation to those who come after us.

When Amos finally got to his prophecy concerning Israel, that is the northern tribes, he would have had the attention and favor because of what God had to say about “the outsiders.” But when he got to the main point of his prophecy, they would have had an awful awakening. He begins to give a detailed account of all they were guilty of before God and what they could expect because of it. Their pleasure over hearing Amos denounce other nations would have pleased them, but when they heard what was going to happen to them and why, everything was different.

The prophet spoke about their social sins that would have tipped the scales and was going to bring judgment. He listed five in particular. The right had been selling people as slaves. If the slave was considered valuable, he would be sold for money. A person considered of less value was only worth to them the price of a pair of shoes. Secondly, the rich were exploiting the poor in their greed for gain. Then they were engaging in sexual sins in which a father and son connected with the same prostitute, perhaps in the idols temple where they lay down on garments they had wrongfully taken from others. They also took illegal collateral when they gave loans. A man’s garment for security on a temporary loan could not be kept overnight. You took a garment as collateral only for an emergency loan for an hour or more until a person could get back to where he had his own form of payment. Lastly, they were worshiping false gods and the idol worship was of the worst kind.

There were not only social sins in the public and domestic lives of the people, but they despised and ignored their spiritual heritage and its privileges. The people of Israel sinned in their resistance to the truth and righteousness of life. Sinful religious practices were an affront to divine order and God’s law. Rejected light has far greater consequences than ignorance. Injustice, immorality, idolatry, ingratitude and intolerance by those who know what is right but do what is wrong willfully will bring greater condemnation than ignorance.

Not content with their own sin, the prophets who warned them were commanded not to speak out against sin and the results of it. Those who took seriously their spiritual responsibility and intended to keep their vows to God, were pressured to break their vows and be like everybody else. There were only the rich and poor in Israel. The rich kept up their pious religious practices and were satisfied with the outward appearances, even though they mocked and pressured those who wanted the right thing. Amos was faithful to the Lord and His word in his warnings and reminders of God’s faithfulness to them, but it did not change their attitude.

So, Amos told them what God was going to do. All of them would become slaves to others and would be weighed down under heavy burdens. The young soldiers who were considered “tough guys” full of pride and bravado would run in retreat like rabbits from their enemies. The most skilled soldiers and the best athletes will not be able to escape the invaders and the best soldiers will not be able to help anyone. God’s judgment for sin will be greater that all their combined ability to resist and overcome the power of divine judgment.
allowed by the hands of Israel's enemies. People who have no fear of God now will certainly have the fear of God on them when they try to run from His just dealings with sin.

**Amos 2:10.** "Also I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and led you forty years through the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite."

**DON'T FORGET.**

You were in the past, in slavery to men and to sin.
When you were at your lowest, God with you then began
To lead you in His way, ancient promises to fulfill.
And God has been looking out for you and is doing so still.

But for reasons you think are for you, all right
You have turned to the ways of the world instead of the light.
Instead of faith you have turned to your own way.
Understand this though, for your sin you must pay.

Oppression of the poor has a punishment attached -
For what you have taken, four times you give back.
The accounts you think no one knows about or even cares -
Will be collected by God in a way He knows is fair.

The religious activities you make sure everyone sees -
Is under God's eyes and with it He is not pleased.
Men only look on the outward appearance. God looks on the heart.
Do not forget God has been following you right from the start.

Everything is not settled just in the way you think.
After years of idolatry and living your life on the brink
Of eternity, just stop and remember this -
God knows your way - now don't you forget His.

"I do remember the way things were, Lord God, and to me it seemed like there was a greater fear of Thee and respect for others. I can trace the way Thou hast led and would like to continue to serve Thee in an acceptable way that would honor Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

**Amos 3**

**THE PARTING OF WAYS**

Beginning in chapter three the prophets speaks in the next three chapters to the present situation first. Then he speaks to the past and then to the future. In a series of seven questions two things are linked together. Warnings and judgments go together. Warnings, are really acts of mercy, and the Lord addresses His people through Amos reminding them when as a united nation of freed slaves, they were delivered from the bondage of Egypt by the mighty hand of the Lord. They walked with the Lord through the wilderness and into the land of promise. For many years they had walked together, but now the question is asked, "How can two, walk together except they be agreed?"

Israel's sin of presumption had come between them and the Lord. There was "No fear of God!" Privileges bring with them responsibilities. "To whom much is given, much is required." The love of God, the mercies of God and the grace of God should motivate us to be ready and willing for anything God wants from us. Amos was God's spokesman and he was compelled to warn the people of that which was coming. The people could have been, and should have been walking with God, but now that was over. When two, walk together we expect fellowship, companionship, satisfaction and, hopefully, joy. But if all that happens are quarrels and complaints, they part ways. At this parting of the ways, Israel would experience God's just judgment.

It is a fact that when there is no repentance there is no forgiveness. When there is no forsaking of sin there is no escaping judgment for sin. Israel hadn't done anything special, nor were they a significant tribe of people. God chose them simply because He wanted to, not because they deserved special treatment. But pride ruined their appreciation of God and made them insensitive to His will and the needs of others. That unfortunate attitude toward God and people still persists today among those whom God wants to bless and use for His glory.

The roaring of a lion does not come before it has claimed its prey, but after, and when it is about to be devoured. The Lord had reason to roar as a lion against Israel. All that He had done for them through many generations had been rejected, ignored and treated as if it were of no value. The trap does not snap shut
catching the prey until it is stepped on. The trumpet alarm is sounded so that people will be afraid of the disaster that is coming. So, Amos did not dare remain silent but warned the people again that the Lion - God, is bringing judgment on them for their sin.

Often there are obvious dangers for the people of God, and when we are "walking together" with Him it is clear and obvious what needs to be done. However, when the problem of compromise brings temptation, and temptation is yielded to and brings sin, there are consequences that are coming. Distortion of facts, denial of responsibility, defeat in testimony all go before the downfall of God's people. Warnings and judgments go together. Warnings are acts of mercy. But the problem is, the more we sin, the harder it is to do right. Then we forget what is right and forget to do that which is right.

Israel's moral compass was gone. "They know not to do right." The indolent, complacent people of Israel would have absolutely nothing when the "lion" of Assyria was finished with them. They would have nothing but a couple of well chewed shin bones and a small piece of an ear. The accumulated debt of the nation would be called in and all that the nation of Israel had going for it, would be end quickly. The Lord called the leaders of Assyria and Egypt as witnesses to watch what was going to happen to the people of Israel who had forgotten what it means to do right and had prospered at the expense of others when they took what didn't belong to them. The warning made it clear that when the enemy that was coming was done, they would be totally ruined without a chair to sit on or a pillow to lie on. The witnesses to this downfall were their enemies and oppressors.

When God visits in judgment, every area of life is dealt with fully for their sin. Public sins of government will not avoid divine retribution. Private citizens will suffer the consequences of complacency and lack of personal commitment to the Lord. Those for whom success was their goal will face the loss of everything for which they had worked. Religious leaders and those who followed their false ways and teaching will not escape the result of deliberately turning away from the truth for the sake of convenience, expediency and popularity. The idols and altars of Bethel, the forms that have no biblical basis and represent to the ideas of man, will be destroyed. Even the luxurious homes and vacation homes of the wealthy will be torn down when God allows judgment to take its course.

Everything that mankind holds dear for the pleasure and self-satisfaction people hope that will come because of it, will bring nothing at all but will be completely eliminated when God steps out in holy judgment. Principles, practices and purposes that have been overlooked in the busy pursuits of pleasure, fortune and fame, will be vindicated when God decides enough is enough. The watering down of Christianity has brought those who claim to be Christians into contempt among the people of the world. Those who stand for God and refuse to accept the "modern smooth cross," but esteem the reproach of Christ, "Greater riches than the treasures of Egypt," will find themselves the focus of contempt from professing Christians as well as the world.

**Amos 3:3.** "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?"

**IF...THEN.**

- They met, each proposing a solution to an issue that needs to be solved.
- And after considerable discussion, consider how each would be involved.
- So then, after agreement is reached, they turn to the task ahead -
- Each with the same goal before them doing what each had agreed.

- There is an attraction that seems more than normal; two have a lot in common.
- Two personalities suggest that perhaps there could be a bonding.
- There are questions to be asked and answered; time is taken to seriously commune.
- If the Lord is in the attraction, then through marriage it’s right to become one.

- An interest in God’s work is discussed, and a vision both shares, comes to light.
- By earnest prayer and conversation, it is plain, to reach out in the Gospel is right.
- So, each one has a different way of approaching the problems they’re sure to face.
- If one knows how to apply truth to the matter, then the other can show needed grace.

- When a people who should know better, turn away and God calls them to repent,
- And they refuse to acknowledge their sin is the reason this trouble to them was sent -
- Then what could be really expected, when God’s truth they choose to ignore -
- If people continue in willful sin, then God lets them know what for them is in store.

- When fervent prayer is made and our will submits to God’s will -
- And the dilemma that looms ahead seems too large to us still -
Then it is wise to be sure what we are doing has God's glory as the end in sight. If we go at the matter in full assurance of faith, then God will make it turn out right.

"Heavenly Father, thanks for giving Linda and me similar views of the work to which we have been called. Thanks for allowing me to work in the Gospel with those who have the same goal. Thanks for being able to be in fellowship in this assembly where we find our joy in the same things. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Amos 4

"PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD"

In chapter three there was no fear of God as the people of Israel continued to sin presumptuously. In chapter four they had no love for God and refused His pleas for them to return to Him. Amos again makes his call for the attention of the people - "Hear this word." The arrogant attitude of the women of Samaria was an affront to the holiness of God who swore that a day of reckoning would come. The description of those women Amos gave was that of fat, sleek, well-fed cattle. Fat cows are only concerned with their own well-being and comfort.

Apparently, they had become used to wealth and material possessions to the extent they did not care how their husbands got what they wanted. All they seemed to want was more and more even though it was at the expense of taking from the poor and needy what they wanted. It is very possible for people to get used to a pampered lavish lifestyle and think that is normal and our right. It is our responsibility to exercise "true religion and undefiled" by visiting the fatherless and widows, and keeping ourselves unspotted from the world. We must always remember that "ever good and perfect gift" comes from above from our heavenly Father. We deserve nothing, but in mercy He supplies our needs. When we start taking His "benefits" for granted, we are in danger of losing them all.

An indulgent lifestyle can be found among assembly believers when we get our eyes on material things and ignore humility, grace, compassion and care for those around us who are needy. It often amazes us to see the devotion people have to false religions that makes demands on their adherents which are impossible to honestly meet. There is something particularly offensive when a person makes sure other people know of their own "work for God." God is the One who knows then there is religious adultery and infidelity. Much of what people do today in the name of religion is to display their own success in "pleasing God" in their own way, not God's way.

As Amos continued his warning message, he told the people of Samaria that those same sleek, self-centered, extravagant women with extravagant tastes would be led out of Samaria like cows tied in a row in their bondage. Those who thought to escape would be caught like a fish on a hook. They would be taken from their beautiful homes and thrown out through a hole in the walls of the city that would be broken down. In spite of all they had counted on to continue on in their lavish lifestyle, they would end up with nothing.

Social evils are sins that are open before the eyes of God and of which He takes account. Once they become popular, they are impossible to stop. Religious evils are also open sins before the eyes of God. He will not ignore the sins and those who engaged in religious activities that are contrary to His divine purposes and holiness. Cultural evils lead to just recompense on society itself and often on geographical locations when the power of God-controlled natural disasters brings a halt to life as people have previously experienced.

Israel had become deluded by the national religion of idolatry which was an odious affront and insult to God. So even though Amos tried to jolt them out of their wicked complacency with sarcasm, it did not bring any change. Because everything seemed fine to them at the moment, they ignored and likely mocked the passionate pleas of the prophet. All false religion is an offense to God and people who practice it are not secure nor are they safe from divine justice against religious sin. Every time they disobeyed God in worshipping idols, their sin piled higher. The more they sacrificed, and the more tithes they gave to idolatry the worse it was for them. When they made extra offerings and paid extra money about which they were proud. and made sure others knew about it, the greater their guilt increased.

Amos preached to them of the various ways the Lord had spoken to them already, but in spite of all the disaster they had experienced, the Lord God was ignored. They thought that because they were presently in a time of prosperity, the bad times were finally permanently gone. The doors of their hearts were closed as they continued to grovel before idols. We have false religions today and the practices are anything but holy even though done in "the name of God." Some religions have idols and statues before which people bow. Even so-called Christian religion have statues of people they venerate and symbolic crosses of various kind to which they genuflect. Traditions of men, dogmas they follow, false sanctity is quite popular among those
who profess to be Christians and attend religious ceremonies at their own convenience. But there is no repentance of sin nor forsaking sin. There is no desire for reading the word of God, let alone obeying it. There is no personal commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ who died for their sins. In fact, people today define sin according to "their own truth." How terribly offensive all that must be to God.

Amos pointed out the people of Israel that the hard times, like "the dirty thirties," the unusual weather patterns that sent rain at times it was not helpful and withheld rain when it was needed, were acts of God to get the people to return to Him. People we so hungry during those times that they didn't need to clean their teeth. There was nothing to eat. The fields were dried up and no crops were there to gather. They had to go a long way to find water to drink, but they would not return to the Lord. Young men were killed in war and some were not even buried, but they would not return to the Lord. Plagues, natural disasters, destruction for cities and warfare did not move the people to return to the Lord.

Great fires in our cities like Chicago and other cities that have burned have taken hundreds of lives. Earthquakes in cities like San Francisco have happened and thousands of people in cities that have been bombed and burned in war have taken place in our day but still people do the same as those Israelites in the ancient past. Fires, floods and other disasters over which mankind has no control are happening around the world, and yet "evil men and seducers are waxing worse and worse." Failure to respond in repentance for sin and putting faith in our Lord Jesus Christ alone for salvation is common today. Even though there have been, are and will yet be such overpowering events, this is only a foreshadowing of judgments yet to come.

The people of Israel refused to return to the Lord, so Amos' message was "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." They did not realize who the Lord was and ignored Him. Then they had to learn the hard way who they were really dealing with. He made mountains and could squash them. He controlled the winds and the seasons. He knew every thought they had and used various means to make them want to come to Him, but now - He is finished with you. He is Jehovah, the Lord, the God of hosts. Prepare to meet Him because meet Him you will.

Failure to respond to warnings that are obviously greater than mankind can control, means that more are coming. The call to prepare to meet God means we all will meet Him without exception. His power has been demonstrated and is often demonstrated today. His presence is such that even "the thoughts and intents of the heart" are known by Him. His presence is in every place and that reminds us that there is no place for anyone to hide where God will not find them.

**Amos 4:12.** "Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel."

**PREPARE.**

Each one needs to prepare to meet God, because such a meeting is going to take place.

- It is impossible for one to avoid this meeting, God is going to look you in the face. And when that event does happen be sure you have prepared before.
  - The events and choices we make now will directly affect what is in store.

Prepare now, is a wise admonition because we don't know how much longer we have.

- This is the time to get ready to meet God, now is the time God does save.
- To put off a decision to trust God puts you in jeopardy, for death may occur - And this lifetime God gave us when it is over, leaves no other time to prepare.

Preparation is needed for another reason; by nature, we are not ready to meet God.

- So, God gives us the time that is needed to read and think on His Word.
- When we go over the way of salvation and then we learn what we must Look to the Lord Jesus alone, in no one nor anything else can we trust.

Some may think there is a time in the future where we will have time to prepare.

- This is not true, for God has given us this life that we might get ready right here.
- It is the highest folly to take a chance on changing destinies after life comes to an end.
- The highest wisdom for a sinner to make is to trust completely in Christ who God did send.

By our nature we have a problem; we have a tendency to procrastinate.

- And people as a whole seem to think it is beyond them to affect their fate.
- God has made very plain this life has been given as a time to prepare.
- It is futile to think we can in the future, when we refuse to believe on Him here.

"O Righteous God, may I be able in the upcoming Gospel series, to express with faithfulness and empathy the facts of the way of Thy salvation. Please keep me from
using trite phrases or unbiblical terms to try to make people see Thy truth. Help me to use Thy Word effectively, and bless it I pray, in saving precious souls. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Amos 5

A SAD SONG

For the third time Amos calls on the people of Israel to “Hear the word of the Lord,” but this time his prophecy and call for repentance takes the form of a funeral dirge. His song is a song of grief and lament as he looks ahead to what is going to happen to those idolatrous people who should have known better than to continue in their willful, sinful ways. He is crying in the sad song over people the Lord loved, but who rejected Him. There was no hope for them but God, but they ignored Him and would have nothing to do with Him.

Sometimes a sad song can convey a message that reaches the heart when a denouncing of sin in words only, can be easily forgotten. Hymns and spiritual songs can move emotions at time when sung with an appropriate attitude. How often people are touched at the end of a Gospel message with words like, “Almost Persuaded, now to believe,” or “Pass me not, O Gentle Savior.” “The entreaty of a song like, “Come every soul by sin oppressed, there’s mercy with the Lord,” can make a person stop and consider what they had heard in a message just preached.

Amos sang this lamentation for Israel as if they were already destroyed. He depicts a few people wandering among the ruins of a city where thousands had lived in luxury and pleasure. They had thought their wealth and religion was all they needed to be secure and safe. Complacency had lulled them to indolence and sinful pleasures, and Amos could see this and saw where it was going to end. And then in a rather startling way the Lord breaks into the song.

The Lord brought Amos back to the present situation, and through His prophet again called to the people with a simple straightforward message: “Seek ye Me, and ye shall live.” This dramatic call of mercy was the only remedy for them. The same is true today for a sick and dying person who is “without hope.” The same message is true for a dying nation and a dying world. “Seek the Lord, and ye shall live.” All sin ultimately does is destroy. Hope for the future is found alone in God. Whether sick, dismayed, discouraged and disheartened - hope is in God alone. The time to seek is now, and the place to seek is here, not in some faraway place where there is a shrine or you heard some famous believer had a life-changing experience with God. “The Lord is nigh unto all that call upon Him out of a pure (honest) heart.”

To go to a place and try to relive what happened to another person at another time is not an act of faith. Abraham dug a well at Beersheba on the edge of the desert, but for people to go there to worship at the shrine or altar someone may have made there will do no good. God made a promise to the patriarchs at Bethel, the house of God, but the present generation had gone far from the God of Bethel and made it into a place of idolatry with the statue of a golden calf taking the place of the Living Lord God of hosts. Joshua renewed the covenant with God at Gilgal when the people of Israel came into the promised land, but the Jews had broken the terms of the covenant of separation.

The faith of the people of God is not based on forms, traditions or the renewal of all that was lost because of sin, by going to some exotic place or doing some dramatic action in the name of the Lord. It is people of the present day, doing that which God expects of people in every generation. “Seek the Lord, and ye shall live.” God commands, and expects us to obey that command right here, right now, without any reservation. “Seek the Lord,” is not a complicated message that is beyond our ability to do. The message of Amos to the people of his day is the same message those who speak for God give to people in our day. Don't seek the church. Don't seek religious experiences. Don't seek some ethereal out of the body, or out of the language experience. “Seek the Lord and ye shall live.”

The public courts held in the gates of Samaria had become places of greed, injustice and avarice. The people hated the judges that were honest and upheld the truth and were committed to justice. Many of those who should have enforced the law, compromise the truth. When the judicial courts of any country compromise the fundamental laws that have been tried and proven to be right because they are founded on the righteousness of God's law, that society is in trouble and will soon destroy itself. When the truth and justice are set aside to please the will of a sinful society or the moral standards upon which any stable government can rely are ignored and/or changed, the end is near.

The injustice of the wealthy who influenced the judges against the poor, was well known. The rich and mighty contributed much to the judges, and the judges were influenced by what they hoped to get from the
rich. The poor and needy could contribute nothing in the way of financial support to the common good, and so they were neglected. How we treat the poor is a reflection of our character. Common excuses people use for neglecting the poor are: "They got into poverty themselves. Let them get themselves out. They don't deserve our help." Another excuse is, "God's call to help the poor was before there was government assistance. That was for another time. Not now." Then some people actually say, "We don't know any poor people." Others say, "I have my own needs. That's more important to me." It is not uncommon to hear people remark, Money I give to help others will likely be wasted. If I give to them, I'll become poor myself." And some comments are like this, "The little bit I have to give won't make any difference."

In spite of all that was wrong in society and religion in Amos' day, he still stood out in public places and preached warnings to everyone to "Seek good," "Seek the Lord," and perhaps God would show mercy and grace to them, He was basically saying, "Get rid of all the corruption in which you are involved and start over. Insist on justice. Change your hearts. Reform the whole corrupt social and legal system of which you are a part." His message warned them that if there isn't repentance and change, there ill be many funerals that they won't be able to find mourners unless they got farmers to leave the fields and become mourners. The initial stage of the Day of the Lord as far as Israel was concerned was the invasion of Assyria that would come on Israel as judgment from God. They would have no hope and no end to their troubles. The dark days of captivity to Assyria would be a foreshadowing of the Day of the Lord yet to come in a far greater sense.

We cannot expect to continue in our lives of pleasure and ease as a nation without coming consequences coming. To ignore and forget God or even deny there is a God is quite common today. To consider God as no more than a figment of imagination is quite accepted by many as a simple way to scare children into behaving in an acceptable way. God was disgusted with the religious practices of the people of Israel. They had a false worship that was no more than pretense or going through the motions to make themselves look good. That was not acceptable then nor is it acceptable now. It is abhorrent to Him when people attend church services to "interface" with people. Churches can become merely a social gathering place to find friendships and do business rather than a place to "worship the Father in spirit and in truth."

Attending assembly meetings is important to God because when those who are "in the house of God" realize they are not in their own religious house, but in the house of the Almighty God, we take care to behave ourselves properly, doing what He asks us to do, and not change things to suit ourselves. Any hypocritical reason or attitude for being there is offensive to the Lord who calls His people to "gather together unto Me. Those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice."

Amos spoke of seven things God hated about the religious activities and pretense of the people of Israel. They had special feast days He despised. The solemn assemblies of their own design were a stench to Him. The burnt offerings, "worship services," were appealing to people, not to the Lord. The meal offerings, the words they used as platitudes about God were offensive and unacceptable. The peace offerings in which they "share some thoughts I have had," were not what a peace offering was all about. The words in the songs they sang, and the instrumental music they liked so much were nothing to the Lord and He wanted it all gone.

Religious fakery is rampant today. It takes the same forms as the idolatrous religion of the people of Israel in the past, and is done in the name of Christianity. People add their own ideas to the truth of God and use the name of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ to justify and promote their "worship services." The word of God is not followed at the template and pattern of church life. Some even practice mind control by insisting the mind over matter takes care of pain. Or pain in the physical body is eliminated from those believe on the Lord Jesus Christ because He died so we would be healed from our sickness, not necessarily our sins. They say we are responsible to keep ourselves saved by not sinning. If we sin, they say, we have lost our salvation. Other "Christian religions" have far-out fantasies they have dreamed and people are willing to follow those false prophets rather than submit to the convictions of the Holy Spirit. Such "extra-biblical revelations" are spurious and are offensive to the One who has given us His word in written form. To the people of Israel those attitudes and actions led them into captivity, dispersion, exile and the loss of their identity. In a similar way today, the same is true. To supplant the revealed will of God in the Bible with human forms of religious ideas and practice puts people in bondage to the flesh, either their own or another person's. That in turn brings such a splintered number of "Christian religions" that unbelievers reject all of Christianity including the truth. Many people who see and hear those who claim to be the children of God will say that such people are no different than they are so why should they believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amos 5:4. "For thus saith the Lord unto the house of Israel, Seek ye me and ye shall live."

A GLIMMER OF HOPE.
What can we say to those who don't care:
They close mind and ear, not wanting to hear
Words of warning, entreaty and love.
Content in their sins and the evil life they have.

What can we do for those who resist:
They live for self and hope God does not exist.
They won't pay heed to reason, will not consider God's word.
Their hearts seem as hard as a solid oak board.

What can we show so that reality they see:
Probably only the Gospel according to me.
They watch and wonder, and think in their mind.
Whatever makes him different, I wish I could find.

Warnings of judgment we are obligated to give:
Some people may need to consider the way that we live.
When the Spirit convicts them, and God's word gives them light.
Then they will turn to the Savior from the darkness of sin's night.

"Father, may this day and every day be used by Thy servant for one or more good purposes. I want to help the Lord's people be strengthened in their faith and grow in the Lord. I want to help and encourage the laborers in the harvest field. I want to be able in some way or with some words, testify to Thy grace to me and to lost souls. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Amos 6

JUDGMENT IS CLOSE

Chapter six ends the section of the book of Amos that describes the sin of the people of Judah and Israel that would bring righteous judgment down upon themselves. As Amos prophesied of God's coming judgment upon both Judah and Israel, he pronounces it as a terrible time when he uses the word "woe." Woe to the famous and popular rich people of both Jerusalem and Samaria. All they had claimed for themselves would soon be gone just like it had happened to other city-states around them. Ease, self-indulgence and complacency will not last forever. When God intervenes and brings justice, all we count upon can be gone in a very short time.

Success and luxury can quickly lull people into a smug complacency and a false sense of security in which we forget the hard times and difficulties of the past that formed our character. Character is not developed when we settle back thinking our skill, expertise and effort are why we are "rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing." A smug complacency in God's people hinders the work of the Gospel because there is a tendency to become soft and not care about others. To ease our conscience, we will support those who go out into the harvest field of the world, but limit ourselves to the areas of life in which we feel comfortable.

When Amos observed the indolence of those who were surrounded with luxury and had the best of everything, he did not hesitate to warn them of the consequences that would follow. Indolent pampered people may think, "This is the life!" but that can quickly be taken away. The rich people of Israel had surrounded themselves with the best of everything they thought would bring them contentment. Just like today, they thought entertainment, excessive drinking and worldly music was what they needed. Those things go together it is true, and when people go out "to party" even when those around are in need, their interests and pleasure are all they think about. Amos warned those people that when the balloon was popped, those people would be the first to go out as captives to slavery. To be a slave to sin now means one will be a slave to sin and its consequences forever.

It is wrong to isolate and insulate ourselves from the needs of others. Multiplied millions of people are in the bondage of sin and need the light of truth in the Gospel to give them the hope for the future they are really wanting inside. People seek to calm their consciences and drown their underlying uncertainties with an unrestrained lifestyle that gives them temporary relief in "the pleasures of sin for a season." Selfishness and indifference have no place in the kingdom of God. It is in the new nature God gives at salvation, to have a concern for the welfare of others. When we can meet needs that are obvious around us, we should do so. Let us learn from the failures of others that there are consequences that fall on those who are complacent and indifference to the plight of others.
Extravagance and Christian commitment do not go together. Our success and material possessions should never become sources of pride and exaltation. Personal accomplishments should actually humble us as we consider that God has entrusted us with bounty from His storehouse, to be used for the purposes we believe will bring the greatest glory to Him. Stewardship of divine largesse carries with it the responsibility to use it in the way we believe God intends. The real value of anything is, what will it produce for eternity, and what will it bring to glorify God.

Revelry can be stopped in a moment when God steps into the picture. The titles of God in the narrative changes the whole picture from one of unrestrained pleasure and extravagance to one of serious consideration. When only one person remains from a household and fear had gripped the soul of the one still alive, it is well to stop and think about who God is. His authority and power were made plain to those who heard Amos preach. It was God who will put a stop to the party and to the sinfulness of Israel. It was God who would allow the enemies of Israel to defeat them, nearly annihilate them and enslave those who remained alive.

To reject the Lord means to invite divine intervention and retribution for the grievous sins committed. We should learn from the history of those who have gone before us how stupid it is to glory in all we have been allowed to have. For us to think we deserve such bountiful blessings is to demean our Lord who gave it to us in the first place. Moral integrity fails and falls when foolish people indulge themselves for their own selfish pleasure and believe it came from their own skill and expertise.

Amos pointed out to the people that because of their sinfulness as idolaters and the lifestyle that is associated with licentious living, they would fall before their enemies. Even when an uncle came to bury the dead bodies and wondered if anyone is left alive, the fearful one who is alive whispers, "Don't mention the name of the Lord. He might hear you!" The judgment of God that would come through the Assyrian invasion would leave even the large luxurious home as well as the small homes in bits and pieces of rubble. It is as stupid as asking if a horse can run through rocks or an ox plow water, to ask if one can make a mockery of the justice of God, corrupt what is good and right, and not have consequences to face. It is just as foolish to take pride in one's little bit of power and success when we ourselves are less than nothing. When people are afraid of mentioning God's name because they fear His judgment, they are in danger of experiencing it.

The future was grim for the people of Israel and Samaria. It wasn't because God did not want them to do right nor because He did not love them. Their own sin was the cause of all that fell on them. It was their fault, not God's that they fell to the enemy from the north. God warned them through Amos. Amos did not hold anything back in his preaching. He was scathing in his contempt for the lifestyle of the rich, and he could see where this was leading and where it would end up. The Assyrians were going to come and oppress, oppose, torment and defeat the people of Israel from the most northerly point of the country to the southern tip. When we find ourselves in a comfortable situation and have more than we really need, we must remember: "The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

**Amos 6:1.** "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came."

**HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF.**

There was no concern about the deteriorating moral climate
Its effect was felt across the nation
People lusted for pleasure wherever they could find it -
  They reveled in sin and degradation.
  But we can't boast or look down on them -
  The same things are happening to us.
  As a nation of people, we have turned to sin.
  And become complacent about things that are gross.

  Pride of possessions and even personal pride -
  Had exalted citizens in their own eyes.
  They looked down on others and didn't try to hide
  That they thought themselves the world's greatest prize.
  But we haven't learned either this important fact -
  That righteousness exalts a nation.
  We have forgotten what is right and chosen not to act
  With humility in every situation.

  In times past they often persecuted the poor -
  And made idols of trivial things.
The materialistic society was always wanting more -
Not admitting that peace from justice springs.
But we can't gloat that we are on higher moral ground -
Our view of what is right, is what is pleasing to me.
It has been a long time since real peace has been found -
Evidence of injustice is everywhere to see.

There came a time when the seed they had sown,
Started to bear fruit and that fruit was bitter.
They learned that really, there was nothing they owned -
All they thought important didn't even matter.
We too in our day must learn there is a time
Which God gives us as space to repent.
We have to learn the only things that are mine
Are the unseen things, which God Himself has sent.

"Heavenly Father, this new day is an opportunity to do some things that are useful.
Please help me not to waste the precious hours. Thank You for taking Linda to the end of her long journey in safety. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Amos 7

DELAY NO LONGER

The Lord showed Amos the first three of five visions of coming judgment: a great swarm of grasshoppers, a fire, the Lord standing on a wall with a plumb-line in His hand, a basket of ripe fruit and the Lord standing on the altar. These represented punishment for sin that was coming upon Israel. Righteous punishment is plain and unavoidable. But in the case of the first two, the judgments were withheld by the intercession of Amos for the people.

The first cutting of hay each year belonged to the king in the land of Israel. This was part of the taxation that maintained the animals of the king. The Lord had warned Israel in the days before the kings that this would happen and they would have to pay heavily to support a human ruler. The second heavy cutting of hay would follow well along in the growing season, and that would belong to the farmer for his use. The vision of the great swarm of grasshoppers coming to devour the grass was that they would leave nothing for the one who worked the land and had need for fodder for his cattle, sheep and other animals. Amos knew enough about farming because he was one himself, that he made earnest intercession for the people in prayer.

Fervent prayer is not a casual coming to the throne of grace with general requests in a calm casual way.
"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." When there is an urgent need, the Christian's most powerful resource for dealing a problem is communion with God in prayer. When we are willing to identify the need in a precise manner and confess and forsake any sin that may have led to this need, we can be confident the Lord will hear our prayer. How He chooses to answer the prayer is His divine prerogative. The power of God is infinite, and He tells us to come "boldly to the throne of grace," that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. It is not God's delight to punish sin, but in keeping with His character and the need of people to have life abundantly as He intends, justice has to be served to keep chaos from ruining everything because of man's sin. Fervency in prayer often is accompanied with tears and cries from our spirit as we look ahead and see what is going to happen unless there is a divine intervention. God heard Amos' prayer for the people and knew of his earnest concern, and in grace said of the judgment of the grasshoppers, "It shall not be."

The second vision was of fire that affected the sea as well as the land because of the intense heat. A heat-wave can change the temperature of the water as well as scorch every living thing on the land when the temperature rises well above normal and is not alleviated by rainfall. The urgency of Amos in prayer this time seemed to be more of persistent prayer because high heat day after day can wear people, animal and plants gradually down to where things shrivel and die slowly. This judgment is quite different from a noisy invasion of insects. Day after day looking at the hot sky for a glimpse of relief like Elijah when he prayed, would move Amos to persistent prayer. He knew the times he was prophesying were different even from that of Elijah. In mercy God answered his prayer with, "This also shall not be."

Not all prayers of intercession are answered quickly. Parents have prayed for their wayward children for years and finally have seen the prodigals come home. Loved ones in persistent intercessory prayer have experienced great joy when answers in peace come against all expectation. God does exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think when it is within the parameters of His divine will. Believers have often united in persistent prayer and God has been pleased to amaze doctors and caregivers in some cases that
have seemed hopeless by raising to health those that had been close to death. Prayers of intercession are a privilege of believers who know the power of God and are confident that He is able to preserve life if it is in His will or to make changes that are impossible to man.

In a kind way of sympathetic concern, the Lord addresses Amos by name when He showed Him the third vision. Israel had gone too far in sin and had been unresponsive to the prophecies of Amos and others before him. The leaning wall had been built with a plumb-line at the first. The moral, spiritual and ethical truths taught to Israel by the Lord and His servants in the past were just, true and unchangeable. But now the wall was about to fall and the plumb-line showed how far they had gone away from that which was the truth of God. The righteous standards of God do not change.

A straight wall will not lean over and collapse. But when a wall begins to lean and it seems like it will go no further or it doesn't fall at once, that does not mean that it is safe. Postponed punishment does not mean it will not come. Instead it means mercy has been extended. Sin makes the life of a person or nation crooked and in imminent danger of collapse. Standards of true righteousness do not change in spite of the acceptance of evil as normal on the part of the majority of people. Those who stand up and speak out against prevailing present opinions and practices are considered intolerant, unpatriotic and enemies. The plumb-line of the truth of God's word cannot be altered in any way. If people do not respond to the infallible, unalterable and unchangeable word of God, there is no way to escape the consequences of breaking the terms of an unchanging standard.

Laws in nations today that have been tried and proven for generations are being ignored. After time passes without changing and returning to the fundamentals of just laws designed by God, there is no hope for recovery or sustaining national life as we knew it when justice and righteousness prevailed. It is possible for us to allow position, prestige, power and money to influence us to the extent that we resent the truth of God, and do not want that to interfere with our lives.

Amaziah, the idolatrous high priest of Bethel, did not want the truth of God to be told by Amos. He wanted to maintain the status quo and his position to continue to be secure. He wasn't concerned about the consequences of sin that were coming as prophesied. All he wanted to maintain his prestige and so made his complaint to the king who apparently didn't pay much attention even though Amaziah lied to the king by saying he would die by the sword. Both the political and religious leadership failed the nation but they reacted in different way. Jeroboam must have just ignored the warnings of Amos, and Amaziah was angered, particularly when Amos did not obey his demand to "Get out! Go home! Don't bother us with your predictions!"

God prepares His servants for the service He has before them. He trains His men in the way He wants and know is best. Like Amos, God can use a keeper of cattle to give the needed understanding of certain things. His labor in horticulture and how to produce fruit in the best ways taught him how to do what was his responsibility and then trust God to "give the increase." Education, upbringing and personal ambition do not necessarily prepare us for divine service. It is our Lord who equips and empowers His servants to do His bidding. It is our responsibility to obey Him without complaint and hesitation. Amos knew his limitations and he also knew who he was and why God had sent him, so he was not intimidated by the opposition of Amaziah. In fact, he repeated the warning of coming judgment and told Amaziah in precise terms how it would affect him and his family. Amaziah seemed totally stunned by the prophecy and probably understood that such a precise warning did not come from vague speculation like his demon-controlled religious worship would give.

Amos was not a pretender. He knew God and he knew when God called him to leave what he was doing and go do something else, it was his responsibility to act on divine guidance. When God says, "Go!" to a person, there is not a whole lot of room for speculation or wondering what "Go" means. There are times when we may be unsure at first as to where He wants us to go because "into all the world" is a big place. What He wants us to do is quite specific. "Preach the Gospel," "Make disciples," "Baptize," "Teach them to observe," are not complicated statements. When a servant knows this is in the place God wants me, then we can deal with the disappointments, opposition and difficulties that arise, with assurance and full trust in the One who has called us, to bring through us the results He desires.

**Amos 7:8.** "And the Lord said unto me, Amos what seest thou? And I said, A plumbline. Then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb-line in the midst of my people Israel: I will not again pass by them any more:"

**NOT PLUMB.**

The insects were hatching, they were like the dust of the ground.

49
When the locusts started to swarm, they could be heard all around.
But God stopped them from doing what they naturally do -
For one man prayed for the people, God His great mercy did show.

The fires of judgment were just waiting to claim
Vengeance on His people who had dishonored His name -
But prayer was made again and God withheld His hand.
Because one man prayed and the Sovereign God spared the land.

There was one obvious failure that men were responsible for.
The wall was off kilter where it joined to the floor.
God’s standard of righteousness men chose to ignore -
And the praying man knew there was no use of mercy to implore.

God has set standards and these standards do not change.
Those laws are in men’s hearts, they are not strange.
For reasons that are sinful they ignore righteous laws -
And substitute their lower standards for a selfish cause.

Once a wall starts learning everything in a house goes wrong.
The floor remains level, but nothing else remains strong.
The roof starts to sag and soon the weather comes in.
When moral laws are changed, there’s no defense against sin.

As the wall leans farther over, the windows soon will break.
Shelter against cold winds the windows and doors cannot make.
The only solution to the problem is to destroy the house and start again.
Without the plumb-line of righteousness, we cannot stand against sin.

“For so many reasons, Father God, this nation has been changing standards.
Immediate gratification is legal by man’s standards; covetousness is considered good business; wealth is a sign of blessing. O God, hear my prayer on behalf of this people and help me to raise Thy standard high before the eyes of those I am associated with, that they may honor Thee.

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Amos 8

RIPE FRUIT and SILENCE

The interruption of Amos’ prophecy by Amaziah neither intimidated nor stopped Amos from fulfilling the work the Lord had given him. In fact, his warnings seemed louder and more insistent than before as the Lord tells him, “the end is come.” Many people today make comics of this prophecy of Amos by drawing a figure dressed in a long white gown, wearing sandals and carrying a sign-poster that says, “The end is near,” or “The end has come.” This kind of mockery does not change the fact that what the prophecy says will take place and the days of making jokes about God and the Bible will come to an end in a time of darkness, morally, spiritually and physically.

The vision the Lord gave was first of all of a sign. A basket of ripe summer fruit at the end of the harvest season, was particularly of significance because it was at that time ancient people had a harvest festival and a real time of partying was looked for. This basket of fruit though, was not a cause for joy but a sin that God had had it with His people and they were ripe for picking by their enemies. The basket of fruit was Israel and a prophecy that punishment for their sin was no longer deferred but was about to happen. “The end is come upon My people of Israel,” the Lord said, and “I will not again pass by them any more.” When God gives up on people there is nothing more that can be done to help them. That makes our commission of great urgency as we see similar times in our day and in our country and among our people.

As the prophecy is applied specifically to that time and place, it simply meant that days of toleration on the part of the Lord God was past. Instead of songs sung in the temple or at the places of idolatry, there would be people howling in their anguish, grief and anger. Their celebrations of sin turned into a nightmare and people were mourning the loss of so many people. Bodies were carried out in silence because there were so many that the mourners had no more voice. Corpses were everywhere and the eerie silence stopped people from saying anything. “Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” That is a principle that is never changed. “The wages of sin is death.” May we never consider sin to be less than it really is.

The indictment of the people was specific and left no question as to how grievous it was. It was against all the law of God stated and stood for. “Righteousness exalteth a nation but sin is a reproach to any people.”
The religious feasts were an inconvenience to those who were making money by robbing the poor and taking advantage of the needy. The crimes of the rich against the poor were dishonest cheating with their scales and measures. Short-changing people, deceiving them with unscrupulous business practices in which they forced those who owed them into situations from which they could not get out. To those who deal with the public these warnings from history are very important. People are often rejected and one's reputation is lost more quickly over bad financial dealings that almost anything else. A person can go to church, be on the board of a committee and appear to be religious on the Sabbath or Sunday, but if they are crooked in business, their testimony as a believer is nil. Those people who heard Amos had demeaned people to no more than indentured servants worth only a day's pay, a pair of shoes, or a bag of grain with the chaff still mixed in with it.

"The Lord, the Excellency of Jacob (The Pride of Israel)," said "I will" seven times over, telling them what he was going to do because of all they had done. He lists the sins they had done so they would know why the disasters that were coming were just judgments they had brought upon themselves. If people ever have the idea that God approves of their success because of sinful practices, they have an awful awakening ahead of them. Their sins are never far from the mind of God. Disasters from nature like earthquakes and floods are forewarnings of greater disastrous things yet to come.

Ignorance of the word of God is the greatest tragedy of all that can happen because rejected light becomes the great darkness, and "if that light that be in thee is darkness, how great is that darkness." One wrote...

"Never soul in hell shall burn,
Who never had a chance to turn;
Whether he be a pagan wild,
Or born a Christian's favored child,
God will not suffer one to go,
Unwarned to everlasting woe.
For nothing burn rejected light,
Will doom a soul to endless night."

Even the moral light that is in mankind by nature, goes out when people choose sin and deliberate reject that which is right because "men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." Parties were going to become wakes, and songs become funeral dirges. People were going to become as sorrowful as if their only son died on that bitter, bitter day. In the days of Amos one coup after another happened after the death of Jeroboam II. Pekah brought a bit of order until he turned against Judah. Then he was murdered and the Assyrians invaded Israel bringing greater disasters than the ones from nature.

Then there was spiritual silence that smothered the whole land like a famine. No prophet came with a word from the Lord. There were no more warnings. No words of hope. No one was there to turn to. No prayers were answered bringing relief from the consequences of their sin. The people of Israel had no interest in the word of the Lord when the prophets brought it to them. Then in their times of trouble there was opportunity or way to hear God's word. Spiritual famine followed as rabbis began promoting traditions and wrote the volume of the Talmud to take the place of the word of God. It was all religious chaff mixing truth and falsehood and claiming it to be truth. The people of Israel had no interest in nor appetite for the word of God and the spiritual darkness and famine for Israel continues to this day.

It is in the scriptures of truth, the word of God, where we get the answers to problems and guidance for making decisions. It is important that all God's people ask themselves: "What is more important to me - the things of the Lord or money?" When we are involved in some work for the Lord, our hearts should be in it with enthusiasm and commitment to doing it as best we can. I need to also consider when I go to the meetings of the Lord's people if I am only going to interface with others for some ulterior motives, or am I going to hear God's word and participate in worship, remembrance, learning and testimony.

Mixtures of scriptural truth and popular activities are found in many "churches" today. The young and strong are left with no solid foundation and they "faint for thirst" and fall. People who want the idolatry of "Dan" and at the same time want the far-out experiences of the flesh without the discipline of holiness, will "fall, and never rise up again." Old and young alike will wonder what to do when they face the fact that sin will be dealt with by our Holy and Just God. Those know what is right and are called to declare the truth of God need to help other people find the answers they need in the word of God before they fall and rise no more.

Amos 8:11. *Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord."

THE FAMINE OF SILENCE.
The busy pursuit of business has passed -

51
In its place there is nothing but silence.
The enemies around us here greatly increased -
Days of darkness are falling upon us.
Let us turn to the Bible to learn what God says -
It may be there is some answer there to these troublesome days.
Does anyone here know someone who prays?
From God there is nothing but silence!

Pleasure has become the major pursuit of most -
Even their work has pleasure in view.
How can we explain to our citizens, the awful cost;
When these days of pleasure are through?
As people get older, they find they can’t do what once they did.
People they shared pleasure with, now seem to be hid.
There is nothing new to be found even for the highest bid -
From God there is nothing but silence!

The early years were spent trying to make a name.
But that time seemed to take so long.
Then later on came a short exciting time of fame -
But within a brief time, it was totally gone.
Now they look for God to come near -
They want someone to help their burdens to bear.
Nobody around seems to even care -
From God there is nothing but silence!

“O Lord God, how awful it must be to look for a word from Thee and not be able to get one. How fearful it must be to try to pray and know you are not heard. I pray Thee to help me and keep my mind and the ability to read Thy Word and pray in faith. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.”

Amos 9

NO PLACE TO HIDE

The final chapter of Amos begins with the last vision Amos had. "I saw the Lord standing upon the altar." That is likely best understood as the Lord is standing beside the altar where the first Jeroboam stood when he introduced idol worship to the ten northern tribes of Israel. Apparently, there was some kind of temple erected there where the altar was the center of Israel's rebellion and the sin of false worship. Now it was the focal point of the wrath of God. Judgment begins at the altar, the center of worship where the ominous forecast of coming calamity on Israel and their false, worthless worship is seen in the collapse of the temple on those gathered there, and most died. If it had been the altar of the Lord and the temple where God dwelt in happy fellowship with His people, it would have been a place where people would have found security and safety.

Divine discipline must take place when idolatry, rebellion, rejection of God and the pleasures of sin take the place of holiness, righteousness, godliness and true worship. Justice has its demands and one who truly cares and loves, does not allow evil to be tolerated indefinitely. The nature of sin is coming short of the righteous standard of God. It is going beyond or to one side or the other of the truth of God as revealed in His word. The place where the people of Israel and the Lord should have been able to meet together in peace and joy, as in the altar of His design had been replaced by the people with the despicable altar of idolatry. It was now the place of retribution, justice carried out and judgment for sin.

Amos was told to tell the people of the power of God over the elements in the heavens, the earth and the waters. He is the Creator and Sustainer of all things and there was not place where people could hide from Him. Even in the graves or in caves high on the mountains, those who has sinned against Him would not escape His all knowing, all seeing eye. What we might think is a place of inaccessibility will not allow one who has rejected the Lord to avoid Him who makes the earth melt with His touch, or makes the waters rise and flood the land when His righteous wrath is demonstrated.

Because of the senseless addiction of the people of Israel to idolatry and all its perversions, they had brought judgment to fall on the nation. Even though they claimed to be the children of Israel, because of their choice of the sin of rejecting the light of truth and God, and substituting sensual idolatry, they would no longer be identifiable as a chosen people among the nations. They would be sifted and blended among the nations of the world where they still are today for the most part. All the nations of earth owe their existence to God who loves them, "For God so loved the world...," but it is righteousness and not election that is important in times of judgment.
Even in judgment God remembers mercy and promises to not "utterly destroy" the house of Jacob. The nation will not become extinct. The same Lord who brings judgment on sinners because of their unfaithfulness and sin, will bring peace on earth which those who love God and have put their faith in Him will enjoy. God's justice is bad news to those who choose sin, and it is good news to people who have faith in God. Restoration and renewal will come from God when He raises up His people who have been purified by their suffering and will restore them as a nation. He will establish them again in the land of promise. Severe judgment is followed by an offer of redemption. Punishment for sin is inevitable and right, but the promise of recovery gives hope amidst the gloom.

Psalm 139 tells of the sovereign God from whom we cannot hide, but it is a great comfort to those who love and obey Him. Those who walk in disobedience and self-will are disturbed by God's presence, and when people try to play hide and seek with God they always lose. David's throne will be reestablished in a future day like a tent being raised again. There will be glory in Israel when Messiah comes to reign at the end of the age. Amos' prophecy concludes with the hope of a restored, rebuilt Israel where there is righteousness practiced as a normal way of living.

There will be spiritual prosperity again in Israel that will be linked with righteous living, holy worship, universal justice and peace on earth. Even though Israel had been a special people for God among the nations of earth, Amos said they would be no more than any other people because of their sin, but in the prophecy, there was a coming fulfillment as James quoted in Acts 15:16-18. Christ would be resurrected from among the dead and there would be a new kingdom of "people for His name." “Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world (eternity).” The kingdom to come would be universal, far beyond the borders of Israel today. We see a little of the fulfillment in our day as the State of Israel receives Jews from various parts of the world. Israel's future as a nation is on earth and will be a time of material blessing.

We should never lose sight of God's care and love for His own even when justice must be carried out. Israel has yet to face "the time of Jacob's trouble" and will still suffer the threat of annihilation from Russia and also the antichrist. After those dark days, Christ will plant them in such a way that nothing will uproot them.

Often people today want God like a relief pitcher in the bullpen, out of sight until we need Him. They want Him on the edge of their life like a waiter called to pour gravy or do the dishes rather than be the Center of everything in our lives. People want God when they feel like it but not to interfere with what they want to do. Amos spoke of that when he dealt with Israel's sin in the present, giving the principle that there is judgment for abused privilege. The second sermon dealt with Israel's sin in the past and recounted past chastening to remind them that God had been longsuffering toward them until when He was ignored let judgment fall. His third message was regarding Israel's sin in the future and the judgment that was going to fall if they did not repent. Finally, when they had gone so far, and done so much, descriptions are given as to what was coming. We likewise should never take for granted that God will tolerate our sin, compromises, disobedience and self-opinionated choices.

Believers today are in the church, both Jews and Gentiles, and are a heavenly people with our hopes there. When the kingdom is come for the Jews, abundance from the fullness of the earth will pour forth in blessing and what has been missing from the chosen tribe of the Hebrews, will finally come to stay under the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ. With all of that in mind, we who know the Lord as our personal Savior must practice what we believe in despite all that goes on around us. Knowing what the scriptures say inspires us to live in faith with enthusiasm and joy.

**Amos 9:13.** "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt."

**FINALLY, RELIEF.**

Lessons are hard to be learned by nations and men. We expect the learning process to work when teaching children. But we think as we mature, we know all that is known. We don't want others to interfere and we don't want to be shown places where we fail or what we have done that is wrong. We think we are invincible because our bodies are strong. But as the years pass by and our expectations are not reached there is regret that comes over us for the barriers we've breached.

Sin has wages that are definitely going to be paid. There are consequences to the choices we have willfully made.
When we get to the places there is no one to turn to but God.
And we stop to consider carefully what He has said in His Word.
We will find He has a plan for His sinful and willful people -
Those who thought themselves high will find they are equal
In God's sight to those who they thought were insignificant -
And in a day to come they'll learn differently from God who is omniscient.

He knows the end from the beginning because He is Alpha and Omega.
His plans include a time when the plowman overtakes the reaper.
The promises He has made will surely be fulfilled -
And the doubters' shrill voices will forever be stilled.
The Bible that men now for selfish reasons ignore -
Will be opened and people will read it once more.
At that time people will learn that what God had originally planned -
Will be accomplished as He wanted in spite of the willfulness of men.

"I look forward, O Lord God, to the day when Thy original plans are finally done here on earth. It will be a glorious day when the Lord Jesus Christ reigns and there will be peace on earth. The fullness of the earth will be able to be seen as earth releases its bounty and men stop exploiting it and each other for selfish gain. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

**OBADIAH**

"The Perils of Pride"

The antagonism began long before the present generation knew the reasons behind it. To Isaac and Rebekah twins were born, and right from the beginning it was plain that the elder would serve the younger. These twins were not at all alike. Esau had a lot of hair and the Jacob was smooth skinned. Isaac favored Esau and Rebekah favored Jacob. Esau had a killer instinct and Jacob was a keeper of the flock and seemed peaceful, although subtle. The older brother was sensual and acted on fleshly desires while Jacob, the younger was the spiritual one and had personal dealings with God. Esau loved the world; Jacob loved God.

When Jacob went away for over twenty years, he married into a family who had a certain degree of the knowledge of the truth. Esau married one who was a pagan and instead of becoming steadier, he become more wild and bold - more worldly. When they met after all the years apart, Jacob came home a born-again believer with a real consciousness of God and a promise from God. So. these two men who were joined by blood, were separated by everything else, and that separation continued down through the passing generations. Esau became the father of the Edomites who lived in the mountains southeast of the Dead Sea. Edom was a wild and godless nation and Israel was chosen by God and loved. The first capital of Edom was Sela and Petra, a remarkable city, was the last capital of Edom. There was a deep-seated hatred of Edom towards Jerusalem, the capital of Judah.

During the time of the kings of Judah there was always controversy and strife between the two nations. Even when the Israelites came from Egypt while Moses was yet alive, the Edomites would not let them pass through their territory. The Edomites assisted Israel's enemies when they could, and occasionally were overcome by kings like David and Solomon. They found pleasure in the misfortunes of Judah and even assisted the Babylonians in capturing fleeing Jews. Out of this in a much later day came two Herods - one who tried to kill Jesus when He was born, and another who mocked Him when He died.

Rivalry between brothers leads to enmity that may continue to negatively affect generations to come. Instead of opposing our brothers and sisters in Christ, those who have put their trust in Him personally as their Savior and Lord, we need to assist them. Each member in the body of Christ needs the support of others to give them strength and courage under the pressures of life in a godless world. There are gifts that have been given to the body for the nourishment and encouragement of others. Evangelist, pastors and teachers are not limited in their work to only those who gather in local assemblies. Some of God's people we may meet only once, but a "word in season" may be a factor in changing a person's life. God has placed in His people a divinely established sense of interdependence in which gifts given by divine Person's are given to meet human needs.
There are numbers of pairs of sons written about in the Old Testament. Cain and Abel are the first two, Abel brought an offering to God that was accepted and Cain's offering of the fruit of the ground was rejected. Cain was opposed to redemption in God's way. Ishmael and Isaac, the sons of Abraham were different in that Isaac was a man of the altar who brought sacrifices, and Ishmael was opposed to faith. Esau and Jacob were different in that Jacob was conscious aware of God to the extent God spoke to him, and Esau was opposed to that which was spiritual. He was a man of the flesh.

In may be said that "pride is the soul-damning sin." The root and essence of sin is pride. Lucifer started it when he was lifted up in pride and wanted to become like God. Pride is the condition of having self-esteem beyond what is appropriate and normal. It has to do with conceit concern one's ability, wealth, station in life and talents to the extent of being disdainful of others. In a way it is seeking to claim for ourselves the honor and glory that belongs to God. Pharisees during the time of Christ seemed to have an abundance of religious pride. Paul wrote, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Esau, those who inherited his attitude gloried in the natural man, the flesh, the self-life rather than in God. The results of pride are never good but evil. The wicked persecute the poor [Psalm 10:2]. Contention comes because of pride [Proverbs 13:10]. Haughtiness, scorn and wrath are a result of pride [Proverbs 21:24]. Pride stirs up strife [Proverbs 28:25]. Pride deceives us and God will bring down the prideful person [Jeremiah 49:16; James 4:6]. It was to the people of Edom an obscure man named Obadiah came in a sense out of nowhere (at least nowhere known that was written) and prophesied against them saying, "The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee."

Obadiah prophesied what he heard from God, not what he had seen. His name means, "servant of God," indicating he was not some free-lance prophet acting and speaking on his own. The invasion of Israel by the army of Babylon was either imminent or under way when he gave his message to this nation of people who was watching as bystanders and to a degree helping the Babylonians by capturing Jews who were fleeing. In times past they had even bought Jewish young people as slaves and now were glad to see the problems that came upon their national neighbors and ancient blood relatives. It should be a warning to all who read this prophecy that all who oppose the Jews and the people of Israel, then and now, will ultimately lose. You do not mess with the apple of God's eye and get away with it. On the other hand, those who favor the Jews will be blessed.

**Obadiah 17.** "But upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions."

**DELIVERANCE.**

It's not over till it's over. The evidence of failure and neglect: of fallen pride - no self-respect is on every hand. The mighty are fallen and all are afraid; the leaders are ashamed and all are dismayed - and Jacob weeps.

The stranger has come and he is thy brother; there is no joy, neither for child nor mother - and distress speaks.

Nothing stops calamity, there's no place to escape; the heathen come captives to take - and darkness falls.

It's not over till it's over. But the history is not all wrote; there's more to come for God has spoke - it's not here yet. Zion shall sing again when deliverance comes; the King will return; justice will be done - God is holy.

Holiness follows after the train; repentance is real when He comes again - mercy is shown. The failures of the people and all of their losses; will be in the past when each repossesses - all that was lost.

The voice of the Lord comes clear; the flames are all lit; the message is plain the Lord has spoken it - it is as good as done.

The new day will dawn when righteousness comes: and all that was lost returns to each one - captivity past. Up on mount Zion He in dignity ascends; the Savior has come and now makes amends - and knees all bend.

The King has come back and claims all that is His; the kingdom's intact and righteousness reigns - and peace returns.

Father God, I am thankful that Thou hast allowed us to see the end of the story as well as the beginning. The failures seem so large and real that they almost overwhelm our view of things. Even the little promises seem big when we keep them in the place that they hold in the unfolding history of Thy story. Our big issues seem
so small when looked at through the Father's eyes. I have great joy today in seeing past the wars and stresses of today, to the return of peace and righteousness tomorrow. I praise Thee now in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.”

Obadiah 1-4

A RUMOR FROM THE LORD

The message that came from this unknown prophet was not just a casual supposition as we know rumors often are, but this was a report with the authority of a revelation from the Lord. Perhaps there was a conspiracy against Edom from those around, but it certainly wasn't some vague consciousness without substantive information. This came from an "ambassador" with royal authority behind the message to the nations around Edom. This was no plaintive voice echoing in the cliffs of Edom, but was a battle-cry, likely heard even by the Jews who were going through the calamity of being taken captive by the Babylonians who the Edomites had assisted when they captured fleeing refugees. Jeremiah heard the same thing where he was.

A special declaration was made against Edom. "Arise ye, and let us rise up against her in battle," indicates that those who had been known for their malicious and callous attitude toward the Jews, were about to get their own "come-uppance." When bitterness is allowed to fester, and hatred without mercy is directed toward others, payday will come and the One who says, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay..." acts on behalf of those who have endured unrighteous persecution. The Edomites seemed to think they were impervious to invasion from the countries around them because of their mountainous country and the many cliffs and caves there. Even the famed city of Petra is difficult to get to.

The delusion of Edom was they magnified themselves to themselves. They were sure their strength, their location, their notable wise men like Eliphaz the Temanite we read about in the book of Job, would preserve them from all outside attacks. Their fundamental problem was, "The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee...," and in their self-confidence thought, "Who shall bring me down to the ground?" "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall," is a principle that cannot be avoided and should never be ignored. No arrogant, superior attitude can keep a person or a nation from being humbled when God deals with people in His own way.

God is never easy on pride. Pride is the original sin, "I will be as God." It is the father of other sins and the epitome of what sin is. It is an empty attempt to exalt man to where God is not much more than who we say He is or what we believe He is like in our own minds. To some people He is an idea, a concept, that has been made to help keep people civilized by establishing a certain amount of fear in them so they will behave like the majority of people want. To others, He is only "The Force" like an influence to give an explanation of the unexplainable. Others think of God as a grandfather figure on a rocking chair in the sky with a long flowing beard and lightning bolts in His hand to scare people into acceptable behavior.

The attitude that we are the people and when we go, wisdom goes with us, is a sure way to be brought down in humiliation, defeat and eternal death. The people of Edom trusted in themselves and the mountains where they lived to hide them from their enemies. For anyone to attempt to hide from God is foolish. He made the mountains and knows every cave in them, every valley between them, every mine that men have made to get His "fullness" from the earth. The rivers and oceans of the world are in the place He wants. To even think that we can escape the eye of God and the hand of His righteous punishment against sin, is a challenge similar to a dog howling at the moon to turn off its light. Such an attitude against God will surely lead to a person or a nation being lost.

God knows the heart of every person, and when it is lifted up in pride, it will not be too long before one is brought down and humbled in the dust, like Edom. Even the name, "Edom," is not known by many people in the world today, let alone where Edom was or a name to be respected or feared. Pride of heart deceives nations and individuals, and it can even deceive assemblies of God's people, when they start comparing the fellowship, they are a part of with others.

In the book of Obadiah, pride of place as in verse four was a reason Edom would be brought down by the hand of God Himself. Pride of wealth is an on-going problem when one has gained material success without spiritual humility and gratefulness [Ps.37:35-36]. There is always a responsibility associated with material gain and wealth that leads a spiritual person to recognize God has done this for me to be used with a good purpose for Him. There are always places, people and purposes that need the benefit of the material success we might have been given by our Lord. David wrote that the wicked prosper quickly, and yet before long there is no evidence that they have even been there. James also wrote in chapter 4 verses thirteen through seventeen, a reminder of how everything we have, including our lives, can be quickly taken away.
Pride of wisdom, even though it may truly be in some people like Eliphaz, one of Job's friends who came from Teman in Edom, can be lost very quickly [Job 5:12-13]. By its very nature pride deceives the heart [Jer.49:16] and hardens the mind [Dan.5:20]. It has the ability to bind a person like one bound in chains wrapped around him [Ps.73:6]. Pride ultimately brings shame to a proud person [Pro.11:2] and creates contention among people that is divisive [Pro.13:10].

God's view of pride is that it is a very serious sin. Leading the list of seven things that are an abomination to the Lord, is "a proud look." Then comes a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that are swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren [Pro.6:16-19]. Pride is an abomination to Him [Pro.16:5] and He will not tolerate pride [Ps.101:5]. There is no question at all that pride is sin [Pro.21:4]. God resists those who have pride [Jas.4:6] and He warns that a fall and destruction will come because of pride [Pro.16:18].

Really, human beings have nothing to be proud of because everything comes from God in the first place [1Cor.4:7]. It is God's intention that His people be clothed with humility, not pride [1Pe.5:5-7] and He will exalt the humble people in His own time and way for His own purposes.

DOWN WITH PRIDE!

What is it about pride that is offensive to us when:
Someone in pride speaks of their successes, family and then
Asks condescendingly, "What about you? Are you still the same;
As you were fifty years ago when from off the farm you came
To this place where I've been successful, and you got a position here?"
Usually we are very glad, knowing they are not still living near:

Pride thrives when there is a lot of self-admiration.
Usually it is cloaked in phrases that obscure a little adulation
They hope you will give, but the attitude is clear, "I think a lot about me,
And hope what I think of myself others can easily see -
So, they will Oh and Ah, and say, "You are such a success!
Compared to you, my life and what I do is such a mess!"

Then I read in the Bible about what God says about pride.
And my heart is condemned and I am ashamed inside
To think I could so easily deceive myself and even think -
That I could be proud of myself; when to God pride is a stink
That arises to heaven and He is determined to bring my pride down
To such a low place, I have to look up to see the ground.

"O Lord, have mercy on such a sinner as me.
Now looking through Thy eyes, nothing good can I see.
Wounds, bruises and putrefying sores to me are real -
Only mercy and grace from Thee is able to heal
Such a wretch as I, in humility now I seek
A place of forgiveness as I kneel at Thy feet."

"Father God, give me the wisdom to seek to hear Thy voice daily through Thy word, and the common sense to apply what I learn to the events of life in which I am involved. And if in any way You can trust me with some success of lasting benefit for others and for Thy glory, may I always realize it is Thy working through the tool of this clay vessel. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Obadiah 5-9

YOU ARE LOSERS

They were known all over the Middle East for their control of highways and harbors with imposed tariffs, taxes and treachery. The caves of Edom and the treasuries were filled with possessions they had taken from others in one way or another. They were like those today who believe because they "are rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing," they are successful and safe. The religion of materialism is as real as idolatry or any other form of counterfeit worship. This could well be the cause of the downfall of prosperous nations in our day in which the majority of the world's wealth is held by less than 10% of the population.

The word was out through the prophet Obadiah - the Edomites robbed and so will be robbed. They murdered and so will be murdered. They took advantage of others and others will do the same to them. In
fact the prophecy was that their country will be completely stripped of everything. They would have absolutely nothing when the invaders were finished with them. Even thieves only steal what they can carry away. Those who harvest crops always leave a few pieces of fruit behind which they have overlooked. But when those who conquer Edom are done, there will be nothing that will not be taken and nothing left of the Edomites.

Often there are things we keep hidden and think no one will ever know the full extent of what we think is our worth. But it is always wise to remember the words of our Lord, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Everything in life is expendable and nothing is hidden from the eyes of God. If we allow our lives to be governed by self-will and self-gratification, we are making the same mistake as those people of Edom. We will be losers - and actually are now but don't know it. By an attitude of latent covetousness, we have already limited the freedom and joy that is in an open fellowship with the Lord in which we know nothing is hidden.

All the possessions of the people of Edom would be devoured by those with whom they had made treaties. If they thought they had covered all their bases with the political arrangements they had made with other nations, they were seriously mistaken. They had become rich by looting or taxing those who passed over the major trade routes of the Middle East. They had used others to enrich themselves. Now they had to pay back, and not one thing would be left to them. They had gone too far; taken too much; left too little; too many times. They were cut off by violence and totally ruined as a people (Edom) and a nation (Seir). The treaties they had made with other nations were useless because of their own treachery and betrayal.

There are some principles in life that cannot be ignored and that do work in the lives of God's people. "Having food and raiment, let us therewith be content." "Whatever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over ..." The ways of the materialistic world are to get what you can, in any way you can, as much as you can, and as often as you can. If people get in your way, either use them if you can for your objective, walk over them or use their bent backs to get farther yourself. We learn lessons from the history of others and can see how serious a bent toward financial prosperity at the expense of others, will ultimately make us the losers.

There is a great difference between the wisdom of the world and divine wisdom. The wisdom of the world is earthly, sensual, devilish according to James. Divine wisdom, the wisdom from above is very different in that it is pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. The history of Edom is an example of the world's wisdom. It is possible to be wise in the ways of the world and foolish in the ways of God. Ignorance and mockery often come from those who are considered intellectually superior to most people. In the end, they are losers.

The hostility of Edom against Israel was so anti-Semitic, that God Himself was against Edom. The shrewd and wise men of Edom were not all that concerned with religion of any kind. There were a few gods of the Edomites but they were not taken seriously because those people were unprincipled, worldly-wise men who were without honor and ideals. To them, if idols seemed to help, go for it, or if there was any reason for you to think there is a living God, just don't take him too seriously. Carnal wisdom and political shrewdness, materialism and atheism, will be the downfall of those who follow the path of the Edomites. There is impending doom awaiting those who are overly concerned about material success and only casually interested in righteousness, truth, grace and justice. Neither politicians nor soldiers; professors or scientists are able to deliver people who are without principle from the consequences of their moral poverty. They are all losers.
“Father, there are many young people I am thinking about today, and I want them to know what a delight life can be, and how meaningful it can be when one lives for the Lord. If there are ways that I can help them to look beyond what the world considers success and see what it means to be ‘in the way the Lord leads,’ then please give me the wisdom to say and do the right things for their sake - and Thy sake. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Obadiah 10-14

BITTER RESENTMENT

The descendants of Esau started out under the governance of dukes and later were ruled by kings. They were probably at their strongest as a nation when the Hebrews left the bondage of Egypt. They were willing to refuse the children of Israel passage to the promised land seemingly because they still harbored the bitterness and resentment of Esau, only it had become a national attitude toward the family of Jacob. It seems like there was perpetual war with the seed of Israel. They would have rejoiced when the Israelites of the northern tribes were taken away. Now at the time of Obadiah the Babylonians captured Jerusalem they again rejoiced at the downfall of those in Judah.

Judgment because of pride and arrogance is one thing because people think themselves better than others and beyond the reach of enemies. Judgment because of cruelty and enmity against people goes a step farther. Joy over the downfall and defeat of those who are brothers and sisters is like considering your own flesh and blood as enemies. The attitude of the Edomites against the Jews of Jerusalem was like a cheering section urging the Babylonians to flatten Jerusalem and the temple to the ground according to Psalm 137:7. God had told the children of Israel to treat the people of Edom (Idumeans) with kindness and now they were repaying with wicked bitterness.

They had gone way to far. Not only were they delighted with the Babylonians destroying Jerusalem and the temple, they joined in “the violence against thy brother Jacob.” How terrible it is when a person joins in heaping vengeance on one who has had a fall. Like those people of Edom who refused to help the Jews and acted as conquerors themselves, the Lord takes notice of our attitude toward those who have a fall. When one falls in sin and discipline has to be applied for their recovery, we all should take notice, fear and learn lest we ourselves come under the judging hand of God.

Gloating over the defeat of Jerusalem, the people of Edom jeered at the fleeing Jews and shared in the looting and plundering that followed the defeat. Even more terrible, they hunted down those who fled and turned them over to the Babylonians as captive slaves. Likely many fled toward the mountains of Edom to hide from the army of Nebuchadnezzar, but instead of finding shelter and safety they met with bitterness, hatred and cruelty. It is incumbent on us to help people who are in need rather than refuse because they are not what we would like them to be. It is wrong for us to rejoice over the misfortune of others even though the thought might come from our sinful mind, "They deserve what they are getting." For us to betray those we know in times of need means we will not find mercy when we need it. The principles of sowing and reaping remain in all aspects of life.

The Jews never did all they should have towards the people of Edom. They were told they could accept the third generation of Edomites into the congregation of the Lord. Whether any did that or not is not really the point. That could have, and maybe some did. Even though someone may not treat us right or the way we think they should, it would be unwise to refuse for retaliation or standing by and gloating over the losses of another in times of trouble. In the assemblies of God's people there should be no schism, but the same care for each one, so that when one member suffers "all suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it." We are to "rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep."

A bitter spirit towards any person, and especially a brother or sister in Christ, "defiles many" and should never be allowed in our own spirit. Vengeance against others is not our privilege, even if we think it is justified. That belong to God, not to us. Edom learned later that even though God does not immediately carry our just judgments, they will come in His own time. The humiliation of Edom was given as a warning. The crimes of Edom are clearly defined through the words of Obadiah. The results of this came at a later time.

IT IS NOT OVER YET

One may think that because justice is not carried out immediately
We will escape the consequences of sin if we act expeditiously
And cover our attitudes and actions with open superfluity
That seems like the real thing if we only examine it insufficiently
Thinking it will be to our advantage when we claim it propitiously,
Not realizing that God sees every thing and event in its true reality,
And will carry out His just judgment on sin eventually
That will end in loss of life and soul perpetually
For a hopeless eternity.

"Father, may Thy servant never underestimate the value Thou dost have on Thy earthly people the Jews. To think that entire nations have been eliminated and are forgotten because of their sinful attitude towards them, is a warning to me to not forget who they are and the blessing that has come to me through that nation of despised people. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Obadiah 15-21

THE FINAL SCENE

"The day of the Lord" takes us beyond the past events in Edom during the time of Obadiah's prophecy, to the future. However, the things the people of Edom inflicted on the Jews were going to boomerang on them, because, as Obadiah said, "As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee." The principles of sowing and reaping do not change in nature nor do they change in human activities. A phrase like "What goes around, comes around," is similar to "Thy reward shall return on thine own head." the punishment is like the offense. Obadiah's prophecy extends into the future when all nations that are enemies of Israel, and make no attempt to hide their hostility, will find that God's justice will be carried out against them.

The people of Edom got involved in the punishment of God on the Jews in Jerusalem, and thought they would benefit from the plunder they took. The warning was given that the punishment will suit the offense. Even though they thought they had gained much at Israel's expense, not only would they lose it all, but the time was coming when the nation and people of Edom would be totally gone. Israel would survive and return to the land they had been given by God and even the land of the Edomites would be under the authority of the Jews they had so despised.

Cyrus who was willing to have the Jews restored to their land, overcame Edom and thousands of them died. Jeremiah had said they would be conquered and the prophet Malachi prophesied that Edom would be lost to even being known as a nation. When He deals in judgment God allows for repentance. But when that was not forthcoming from Edom, they were defeated totally by the Jews under the leadership of the Maccabees and forced to become Jewish proselytes. That didn't change their character as with the cruel Herods, and eventually they disappeared entirely when they were exterminated during the destruction of Jerusalem around AD 70.

Israel on the other hand, will possess the land promised Abraham in a day yet to come. Obadiah looked ahead to that time when there will be deliverance upon mount Zion. In the millennium when Christ rules in power universally, the promised land will be resettled by "the house of Jacob." "The house of Esau" will not be an entity at all. There will be holiness in the nation when our Lord Jesus Christ reigns. The laws of the kingdom that He taught in the sermon on the mount when He was here will be the laws of the land, including the whole world when Christ is the supreme authority.

All the nations that opposed Israel in the past, and even today, will lose everything because Israel is the nation God chose to represent Him and carry out His laws on earth. The land promised will be secured by God for Israel and there will be peace. The "saviors" are likely judges who will administrate the authority of our Lord's kingdom, and they will come to Jerusalem to report on the activities of the area of their responsibility. During the one thousand years of peace and prosperity known to us as "the millennium," Israel will know the promises of God are "Yea and Amen." The temporary victories of the enemies of the Jews will not last. The Lord is coming. Obadiah's last words are a testimony to our Lord Jesus Christ.

People today have many Edomite characteristics like dishonesty, arrogance, envy and pride, but the story is not over yet. God is still in control and He will bring righteousness and holiness again to earth under divine authority. There will be, and there still is now, punishment for sin. There is hope for the future. God is still on the throne, and He will remember His own. There will be peace on earth when "the kingdom shall be the Lord's" as Obadiah prophesied and was promised at the birth of Christ.

We must not let our prosperity and all the privileges we have, blind us to the fact that sin's consequences must be paid. How grateful believers in Christ are for the fact that we have been brought to the place of repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and have accepted the payment He made on our behalf. There are some lessons for us to remember from Obadiah's prophecy that are important. We should not refuse to help those we know who are in their times of need. We should never rejoice at the downfall or failure of others, but rather pray for their recovery and seek to learn from their misfortune lest we think we
are immune from the same thing. If we betray and/or gloat over those we know who are suffering the consequences of their sin, we will not find mercy when we need it.

**Obadiah 17.** “But upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.”

**POSSESS THEIR POSSESSIONS.**
There is an unavoidable principle from which there is no place to hide. God has determined that the result of selfish pride will be that such will inevitably be humbled. When pride rises in a person or nation, their days are numbered.

All we are and have come to us as a divine favor. Contentment and blessings are given, not just to savor - but to share with those who have needs they cannot meet - and to help us to enjoy God and His glories repeat.

For many centuries that nation their possessions could not claim. They have dispersed world-wide, even used different names. Someday this will change when the Sovereign Lord is their King - back to Zion they will come and their possessions will finally bring.

A lesson to be learned from this brief little book - Is God teaching us by showing the way others took, who delighted in seeing God’s people brought down - that His justice will prevail wherever man is found.

We who are in God’s kingdom have been given spiritual possessions - and it is our privilege to use them now to learn the lessons. God wants to teach us today that we might worship in Spirit and in truth. Knowing that these possessions He gave us are of matchless worth.

We have eternal life as a gift that enables us to be in fellowship with God. The Holy Spirit is within us, giving guidance through God’s Word. God’s love is in our hearts that we may see people as He does. He has given us His Gospel so others eternal life will choose.

“Father, for some reason I am not able to express myself very well this morning. But I do want to thank Thee for all Thou hast given me through Christ. I am at peace. I experience daily grace. Faith really does enable me to go forward in confidence in Thee. I do have abundant life with abundant spiritual possessions - and I am truly grateful. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”
It is not uncommon for preachers who have had dealings with God to pass on a life-changing experience for the benefit of others. Jonah was such a person. He was a legitimate, proven prophet who lived in the time of Elisha when the second Jeroboam was the king of Israel. He had established His credibility as a spokesperson for the Lord, but not as a person of grace who had learned that God has no respect of persons.

He wrote this account of a historical event in his own life that reveals how God looks at all mankind, and how the Hebrews as a people, looked at themselves and others. The abrupt ending makes one wonder if he was still learning the lessons relating to other people that he thought he had not really made his own. It is possible for us to know who we are as those who the Lord has set apart as "a kingdom of priests," and yet forget those for whom we are to carry on a priestly work. In a general sense the Jewish people were conscious of who they were in God's eyes, but in their ardent patriotism for their own nation, ignored the fact that every human being is of more value to God than "the whole world."

For us as the children of God to look on the world and all the wickedness going on with a dispassionate, jaundiced and prejudiced eye, is to deny the reason we are still here. The Holy Spirit of God in His people and working through His people, is able to "save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him (Christ)." We may think we have very little effect on what is going on around us, and that may be a fact. However, the results of our lives, walk and work in the world are not up to us. We have been given a commission to fulfill. The results of all our efforts are up to God who has "no respect of persons," in spite of what we may think of the people and events around us.

Jonah's writing was an account of events that our Lord Jesus Christ referred to when He was here, and He never condemned the man even though the book ends with Jonah still being angry at the grace of God to a very wicked and sinful city. Jonah must have realized as the Spirit of God moved him to write this account of one important event in his life, that he was being used to show that God has more concern for His prophet, than for his prophecy - for people than for their politics. The Lord had more concern for the souls of the people of Nineveh and the spiritual well-being of His servant than for the comfort and contentment of the Israelis. The message of warning Jonah gave did produce repentance to a whole city temporarily, and gave the people the opportunity to turn to the One True God.

The long-term outcome of Jonah's preaching was that some may have truly trusted in the Living God and were saved, but this we do know, there was at least a temporary reprieve from the judgment of God giving them a last call of mercy. The cruelty and the atrocities committed by the Assyrians against their neighboring nations was continued at a later time, but for that period of grace, there was a real change of the people in that great city. It was the biggest revival of all-time. We can be reminded that the Lord is willing to be gracious to great sinners if they are willing to listen, hearken, tremble at His word and repent of their sin toward God. Saving faith then has fertile ground to find a place for the seed to germinate and bring forth fruit.

Sometimes the words, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish but have everlasting life," has a greater affect on us than at other times. Love toward a newborn baby is real and important. Love toward those who love us is real as well, and is welcomed as it effects our emotions. Love for a wayward adult child who is in his or her sins has an even greater effect on us because in our sorrow, we love them for who they are, not for their lost potential and unresponsive attitude toward us.

The book of Jonah gives us some insight into God's heart, His love for the nation of Israel in their present condition and position, and in His infinite love for every man, woman and child. "How deep the Father's love for us. How vast beyond all measure." The beauty of the book of Jonah is not because of the disobedient
patriot who loved his country and was passionately opposed to those who wanted to harm it, but of a
graceful, kind, benevolent God who in grace shows mercy to those who do not deserve it.

God's love and compassion for the lost is so deep and wide, that He has commissioned millions of people to
take His Gospel into all the world for many generations and tell the people of "a full redemption flowing from
the sacrifice He made." When we pray for the people of the world, they become part of our concern. When
we take time to prepare ourselves to reach out to them "in Christ's stead" and urge them to be reconciled to
God, then we are fulfilling our role and calling as ambassadors for Christ.

Jonah knew God. "I know that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness,
and repentest of the evil." It is possible for a true believer to harbor deep resentment and animosity against
other. The problem is that such a person is usually unhappy with themselves and often other people - and
sometimes even with God. It is the negative attitude of such a person that affects their testimony and reveals
what a believer should not be like. Yet our sovereign God who can even make an ass to speak, can use a
disobedient, grumpy, angry person to bring the news of grace and salvation to those who are in their sins.

There are lessons to learn from this man Jonah, and this important event in his life that we can apply to
ourselves. Let us never allow prejudice in our lives lest we become hard and unusable by God to reach out
to those who are in the darkness of their own sinful nature. May people around us be able to see in us even
a small glimmer of the light of God's grace, love and mercy shining out to them that they may repent and
come to Christ.

**MADE OF ONE BLOOD**

What is it that makes us think we're better than others?

In the human race there is a sense we're all sisters and brothers

To our contemporaries, we're siblings, to the younger fathers and mothers -

But all are made in the image of God.

God made all races of people of just one blood
But people began to separate soon after the flood
And prejudice settled over nations like a dark cloud -

In spite of the impartiality of God.

Now in the world there are separations of race
We are all sinners by nature, but different in face
And have an inclination for each kind to settle in one place -

Even though there's no respect of persons with God.

For us who are God's children we must take to heart
The fact that by grace a new life in each does start
And faith in Christ joins us - no longer apart -

We are one in Christ as the children of God.

"O God of all grace, our loving Father, may all of us who are united in Christ, never let barriers come between us because of race, nationality or degrees of intellect. May we never ignore the needs of those who are in their sins and not aware of the consequences that are ahead of them. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

**Jonah 1:1-2**

"ARISE...GO"

When one gets a word from the Lord, that is a message from the highest possible source. The message
Jonah was to give was a warning from the greatest possible authority - "The Self-Existing One." The
consequence of the warning was of the greatest possible impact. It was an ultimatum to "shape up or ship
out!" This was not a casual suggestion to change their politics or to change their lifestyle. It was a warning
that meant life or death to thousands of people, and it had a deadline attached to it. When God gives
warnings ahead of time it is because of His grace and love for mankind in spite of the evil associated with
the life of those who live without any interest in God. Instead of dropping the full power of His might on an
unsuspecting people, His forewarnings are so that "the prudent foreseeth the evil and hideth himself; but the
simple pass on and are punished."

In God's sovereign plan of things, He chose a tried and proven prophet from a village near Nazareth in the
area of Galilee in Israel, who likely had heard the prophecies of Isaiah, Hosea and Amos who warned the
Israelis of the future plans of Assyria. The Hebrews were already paying tribute money to them to keep them
off their back which likely made Jonah mad at them. Even though his name means "dove," and his father's
name meant "true to God," he was not like his name implied. He was a passionate patriot. He was ardent in
his love for his country and people, and was a farsighted and discerning fanatic when it came to their enemies. He knew the power of the Assyrians under the brilliant and powerful leadership of the ruler who had not long died. The Israelites along with all the other tribute paying countries likely hoped that after thirty years of subservience they would finally get relief because Assyria was in a present downturn.

And then in a short sudden message from the Lord, he was told to go to Nineveh and warn them of coming judgment because of their wickedness. Jonah was smart enough to know that Israel wasn't doing well themselves as far as God was concerned. He could see what was going to happen to them because of their sin if there wasn't some change in their hearts, their worship and their politics. Even though they had some political successes, Jonah knew that the nation had been living without acknowledging God, and judgment would come likely from Assyria. Even though he was fully aware of the idolatry and sins of his own people, the order from God with a message to Nineveh was not a welcome one, and was given to him without any encouragement. God knew His servant.

God's servant also knew his God. He knew God well enough that if the Assyrians in Nineveh repented in sincerity to God, He would show them mercy and forgiveness, and withhold judgment. Jonah did not want this. He would have been delighted if the people of Nineveh were destroyed. The wickedness of the people there was well known, at least to the prophet Nahum. They plotted evil against God. They exploited helpless people and were well-known for their cruelty in warfare. They worshipped idols, practiced prostitution and were involved in witchcraft. Jonah was more than willing to die himself rather than give a warning to the enemy of Israel that they were in danger of the judgment of God upon them. He wanted them gone. In no way was he going to compromise what he though was right in regard to the people of Nineveh.

By our normal human nature, we have our standards of justice that we want carried out against those who are opposed to us. Usually there is no place for mercy in our hearts toward those who have shown hatred toward us, deceived us, hurt us and humiliated us. We want full justice to be carried out against them. In our new nature there is love and mercy. If we admit it, grace shown to us is the only way we could survive the justice of God, but it is common for us to not want what we have received to be given to others, unless we can see people through the eyes of God. An honest person who has experienced personally the saving grace of God, knows he/she deserved to be in hell because of their sinful nature and practices. When the message of the Gospel brought hope to us, we gratefully listened, repented of our sin and turned to Christ alone for mercy and salvation. "Be ye are saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast."

Jonah knew the Assyrians moved people they conquered to other locations scattered throughout their empire so that people of the same nationality would be separated, be assimilated into the local society and culture, and lose their own national identity. In that way they would not be inclined to unite in rebellion against their captors. As a world-power Assyria could not be stopped by ordinary means, so it would have been likely if the people of Nineveh were destroyed. It was in a willing act of self-sacrifice that he went the other way in order to try to save Israel. It was his, like Paul's, "heart's desire and prayer to God that Israel might be saved."

The word of the Lord to go on a five hundred miles journey to warn 600,000 people who were enemies of his people, would be scary and intimidating. A Gentile city with 120,000 children, great palaces, city parks, full of luxury, noted for hardness and brutality, pride and licentious living and pleasure would not normally like someone who came and warned them. To upset the people would be like putting one's hand in a hive of bees. But it was "the word of the Lord" he heard. To oppose wide-spread sin and preach out in the open a public message of coming judgment is not easy to do. But it was "the word of the Lord" he heard.

For us today to be go to foreign countries where idolatry and wickedness is out in the open is a daunting challenge. But it is the word of our Lord who said, "Go ye into all the world..." To leave the security of a family, a warm assembly fellowship and a safe country and go where it is either extremely cold or extremely hot and proclaim the Gospel may not be a welcomed call. But it is the word of our Lord who said, "Go ye into all the world..." For a person to leave the quiet calmness of country living and the daily quiet of a rural setting to go into the middle of a big city full of noise twenty-four hours a day, and wild, ungodly living, is very unwelcome. But it is the word of our Lord who said, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel."

Jonah knew his God was gracious and plenteous in mercy, even to Gentiles who were enemies of God's people. He also knew that if the gracious God did spare the city, it would look bad for him in the eyes of his own people. Patriotism is not a bad thing when it is based on a proper foundation of justice, righteousness - and the upholding of the law. But to base that on our own interpretation of these things is just a hard-hearted action of false patriotism that does not have a good reason or result in mind. That is not according to God's
will. It is right for us to stand for the truth of God and righteousness in people. But grace and truth go together. Mercy and peace also go together when we have the divine nature of God within us. How good it was of God to reveal His truth to us - and how condemning it was! The blessings of grace bringing to us that which we in no way deserved made it possible for us to be saved.

**Jonah 1:1-2.** "Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, and go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me."

**COMMISSION.**
There is a work for each of God's children to do.
We do not have the right to quit before we are through.
The task we are called to we may not even like.
But learn this lesson from the prophet who took his flight,
And found out that God takes your work very seriously -
He is not concerned whether you are timid or work fearlessly.
His objective is that you and I do what He says -

We are not called upon to know every reason for God's action.
It doesn't matter if we like the work, we are to do it to His satisfaction -
God sees things clearly that we are unable to see -
In His grace He allows His work to advance through a person like me.
"I look around me and see how unrighteous people are,
And I figure the wickedness in this world has already gone too far.
But God hasn't changed the commission He gave -
There still must be people He is yet going to save."

I haven't been involved in new work for quite some time -
I thank the Lord. He has allowed me to share with brothers of mine.
Some principles I have learned that will help each day.
To deal with the events in their service they will face on the way.
If this is now my work, I dare not resist or refuse -
God is able to take this clay vessel, and wash it, and use
It to put truth in and mix it with some good common sense -
And then send me to help a new work, or mend some fence.

This much I know, I don't want to run away.
I am older it's true, but I don't want to call it a day.
When I hear of the work some are doing in other places -
I can pray for their labor, and when blessings come, see joy on their faces.
I too get joy when the reports from afar come back -
And we pray God will help us to supply what they lack.
The Lord prepared a fish to get Jonah back to his mission.
May I never avoid my duty to fulfill His great commission.

"O Lord God of the great harvest field: give to Thy servants this day who are out giving the Gospel message to the world the needed strength and tenacity to fulfill the work to which they have been called. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

**Jonah 1:3-10**

**YOU CAN RUN, BUT YOU CAN'T HIDE**

It is hard to stop once one begins running away from God. The decision to go west instead of east; to go fishing rather than stay waiting on shore; to take an action instead of patiently and calmly taking time to get the orders from above - these are evidence of self-will and latent disobedience. When the thoughts become deeds, disobedience is full-blown and one has crossed the line from temptation to sin. Paul wanted to go to Mysia and then Bithynia, but was willing to wait for God to make His plans plain to him. When he got the vision of a man of saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us," he was assured and the confluence of circumstances opened the door for him to go where God wanted him to go.

Peter was challenged with the question, "Should I go with these Gentile men?" but knew ahead of time what the answer was because he had been in communion with God. So, when the matter came up, he heard God say, "Arise... go with them...", and he could do what no one had done before him and could does so confident that he was in the current of the will of God. He went "doubting nothing" although there would be criticism from others about his action.

So when does "exercise" become self-will? An action begins with the word of the Lord. It may not be a particular phrase or verse of scripture, but an understanding of God's will in a general sense, and applying it
in a specific sense. We need to learn to listen. To meditate on the meaningful. To measure the manageable. To consider the consequences. To articulate the action. To be specific about scriptural objectives. To speak to God personally about stated goals, methods, people, places and things. We need to watch for open doors, short and long-term opportunities. To wait in patience, expectation and faith.

The book of Jonah is a life-example of what to do and not do. Of an attitude that is acceptable and one that is not. Of how not to respond to God as well as how to. We are taught the consequences of our choices and the reasons for our responsibilities. Human lives are at stake all around us and eternal destinies are influenced by the way we react to the revealed will of God. Jonah likely knew the scriptures well enough that he had learned what the psalmist wrote in Psalm 139. He would have been aware of the fact there was no place he could truly hide from the Lord even though he was wanting to get away from the place where he was conscious of the presence of the Lord.

When we are among God's people in the place of His choosing and the place of His name, we are more conscious of spiritual things than when we mix with unbelievers. The very fact of being with them keeps us accountable to them in our actions in assembly life and in the daily conduct of life. There is safety among the people of God that we lose when we go off on our own to do our own thing. Even in the short term of a vacation without the commitment to be at an assembly even in the far parts of the world, leaves us vulnerable to the attractions of people and things around us that are "of the world."

The Lord let Jonah go unhindered to Joppa from Gath-hepher. He had a lot of time to think and remember while walking, about the work of the prophet Elisha, as he passed through Shunamen. Then when he went through Jezreel he likely thought about Elijah running all the way from Mt. Carmel. Passing by Dothan he perhaps would think about God protecting Elisha by making the enemy soldiers blind. Amos prophesied against the injustice of the people of Samaria, which he would think about as he went through there, and yet in the blindness of bitterness and false patriotism, when he got to Joppa, "he found a ship..." and "paid the fare..." to go to the last stop in the Mediterranean Sea.

When we start on a journey away from God, after awhile, if there is nothing that happens to interfere with our plans, and we seem to be getting away with what we know deep down is wrong, we can get a false sense of security. Jonah even was able to sleep in a storm, lulled to sleep by his seared conscience and the enemy of souls rocking him into complacency. Even then when the wind started to blow there was no repentance for his disobedience, no evidence of guilt that brought about change. Self-will can form reasons and excuses for doing what is wrong, and if continued in long enough, we may even be able to convince ourselves that it is right.

The Lord let Jonah taste the financial cost of disobedience, "he paid the fare." There is a "fare" to pay the world when we pursue the sin of resistance against the word of the Lord. The Lord let Jonah go far enough to feel the effects of complacency before He arranged for a "great wind" and a "mighty tempest," that was so bad even sailors used to ocean travel, were panicked. Unbelievers can discern when things that happen are way past the normal bounds of nature. There is a time when people who say they don't believe in God, realize this is so far beyond what has been known to happen, that whether they admit it or not, they grudgingly acknowledge this bears the imprint of an Almighty Creator who has stepped into the area of world affairs with His judging power.

Believers who are away from God and are spiritually sleeping, often are unaware of the effect lethargy has on unbelievers who are expecting much more of him or her than they are of themselves. Some will even say, "I thought much better of him than this." Inaction or wrong actions, negligence and apathy have a serious effect on those around us whether we are willing to take responsibility for that or not. The absence of guilt is not the assurance of right. It can simply be the result of a seared conscience. Disobedience when continued in, may not bring immediate consequences upon us to the extent we become used to disobedience. It is possible if one continues in disobedience, they can become used to it and don't even know why punishment for sin has come when its consequences comes on us and others whom we have influenced in the wrong way.

Jonah's run from the will of God for him is very convicting to us who have tried to do our own thing without God's direction, or to do His work in our own way. We are often fearful of being embarrassed. By being self-centered, angry, spiteful and proud - and when called upon to do what we don't want to do, we try to avoid the Lord's will by making excuses, convincing ourselves we are suffering on behalf of other's failures, by open disobedience, and end up running away from the revealed will of God through His word.
The mighty hand of God's correction on His servant had a terrifying effect on those who were, in a sense, innocent bystanders to what was happening, but were involved in it even though they didn't know the reason. The mariners in their fear turned to false gods, to anxious words, to their own resolutions as a way to not die. They were afraid of dying, and God's servant was the cause of it all. What a sin it is for one who knows to do good, to not do it. The anger of those men is as understandable as it would be from people today who would say to a child of God, "You knew all this and yet didn't tell us? What kind of person are you anyway?"

God even used those pagan sailors, and who made every effort to save Jonah in spite of his sin, to get him to confess who he was and what he believed. How humiliating it is when those who are unsaved people have to pry out of us a testimony to our faith in God. Jonah had to tell them he was running away from his God and the call of God. To tell one's testimony may make a good story, but if it is not lived out by faith, it can be more of a hindrance than a help to the unsaved. They might say, "Go on with you. I don't profess to be anything, let alone a Christian, but even I would never do that." How sad it is when a believer in Christ is so far away from the Lord that he is not even praying or listening to the word of God. The idol worshippers on the ship were praying to false gods, and the one believer on board was mute before his God - the one True God.

Even in our disobedience we can hear the voice of God, and yet not be on speaking terms with God. In stubbornness, even though we know we are wrong, we can be willing to die rather than repent, forsake our sin and turn to God for mercy. "Stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry," Jonah was in the same boat as those mariners in more ways than one. The reluctant testimony of Jonah made the mariners "exceedingly afraid." If they had known what was behind his journey when he boarded the boat in Joppa, they would likely have refused to give him passage. He brought with him peril and the fear of impending death on all those around him beside himself.

Self-will and disobedience are no small matters, because whether we like it or not, our children, grandchildren, brothers and sisters, neighbors and others we might not even know, are affected by us. Even standing there on the deck of the boat, soaked to the skin, after have been awakened by the captain, with frightened, angry men around him, Jonah did not repent. He acknowledged he was the cause of the storm. He confessed who he was and what he had done, he assumed responsibility for what was happening to others, but he was willing to die, rather than humble himself before the Lord and do what God wanted. His egocentric attitude was not dealt with at all. In fact, he apparently thought himself justified in dying as a sacrifice for the people of Israel, rather than for God to show mercy to the people of Nineveh. He was telling God in essence that He was wrong. Self-sacrifice is useless unless it is consistent with the will of God. It only makes a person think of himself as a hero rather than a disobedient servant of God.

STOP, JONAH, STOP!

How foolish it is to try to hide from God! How ignorant is pride when we think we better understand; What God meant and said best by our own design and plan Which usually is made because it suits our will best - And we turn a deaf ear and blind eye to its effect on the rest:

We may think our choices are fine when they please me But forget how others are affected by what they hear and see When we turn away from what we practiced and one time believed: Others were taught by us, and thought from us it was truth they received What we said was truth, they accepted, and their lives were changed - But now, because of my choices, God Himself is being blamed.

Darkness and idolatry are bad enough - but when Truth is abandoned, for self-will, the results will be then - Confusion and fear, blindness and awful doubt - Those who followed our lead, will stumble about And fail and then fall into the snares of the foe Instead of fruitful living, there will be hopelessness and woe.

Learn from Jonah who passed by the testimony of others Who were prophets like him, a real band of brothers - But unlike them, he ran, when the pressure got great. He ignored love, mercy and grace, and gave place to hate. The bitterness of his soul was against those not like him.
He is remembered the most for the consequences of his sin.

“I know Gracious Father, that it is possible to get away from Thee when I allow the things going on around me to fill my thoughts, or the politics of the country, or the sins of others to claim my mind and attention. I am asking for help from Thee to make me aware of the blessings Thou dost give to those who humble themselves in repentance, rather that the sinful things for which they are known. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Jonah 1:11-17

“NOW THE LORD”

It is an unfortunate fact that often in the affairs of life, especially if they are out of the ordinary, our attention is fixed on a person or persons who are affected in unusual ways by an event. Jonah was disobedient. He was a passionate patriot who wanted the best for his failing nation. He was a prophet who did not like the mission the Lord gave him and so went his own way. But behind all of this was the Lord whose will was being thwarted by a willful servant. A Lord who allowed his servant to try to do what he wanted and who did not want to be in “the presence of the Lord” where the Lord was dealing in grace and mercy with Nineveh, and with judgment and justice with Israel. We need to always consider in each situation of our lives, that what I do is under divine observation, and everything I do, whether large or small, whether easy or hard, has in view the will and glory of God. “Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.”

"The word of the Lord" is given to us for instruction as the Holy Spirit reveals to us truth for living and for learning. The wind of the Lord may come as a means of correction, warning and forcing us to change from our willful way to that which is God’s will. "The presence of the Lord" has to do with an area of work to which we have been called to apply ourselves in order to fulfill the commission which we have been given. Prayer to the Lord is a normal response when an emergency arises and, like in the mariners in the account of Jonah’s story who didn’t know the Lord. There is an inborn part of human nature that is conscious of our need of the Lord that finds a voice from our heart when we are desperately in need. The whale of the Lord was not a newly created creature to meet the need of Jonah when he was cast into the sea, but was an animal appointed by the Lord to be in the exact place at the exact time to do what only it could do. It did what God wanted as is the nature of all creation except for human beings who have been made with a mind that we might know God, emotions that we might love God, and a will that we might obey (or in the case of Jonah, disobey) God.

The reluctant prophet who found the mission he was given not to his liking, had to face the fact that God, not he was in control of things. We sometimes have to do what we do not like, or do not want to do. It is in times like that we have to face who we think we are in contrast to who we really are. For some reason Jonah thought he was able to do God’s work his own way, or he would not do it at all. That is like a servant telling his master he knows what is the right thing to do. Or an employee saying to his employer, "I know better than you. I will not do what you want or tell me to do. My way is right, not yours." He wouldn't last very long in that job.

Even when by our nature, we want to turn and run, it is better to obey God's word and act according to His will, trusting Him to bring the best possible outcome of a matter or an event. To not obey is to defy God. How kind and merciful it is of our Lord when we do such a thing, to show kindness and mercy to us, and give us another chance to serve Him when we stop, repent and turn again in humility and obedience to Him. When we obey God, we can better understand His purposes for all human beings, not just our own people who live in our own comfort zone, and with whom we have a happy relationship. We learn by Jonah being an example of Israel, that even though they have failed, through them there is a message to the world. Christ has come through that nation, and through Him there is hope to all mankind.

If we run away from, or ignore God’s will for us, our love for Him becomes questionable, and we lose our joy, our testimony, our effectiveness as a witness - even our sense of worth and purpose in life. All of the efforts and good things accomplished in the past, lose their effect when we deny what we once believed and taught. People who we have influenced lose the respect for the spiritual impact a life lived for God once had on them, and often will follow the lead of a failing leader down the slippery slope and unbelief. We are urged to be "looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the throne of God."

Sometimes the benevolence and compassion of people who by nature do what needs to be done, shames us who are believers. People by nature are concerned with the physical and emotional needs of others. Believers in our Lord Jesus Christ should not only show that kind of care, but we also know the spiritual
needs of people and are concerned for their spiritual well-being. In the storms of life, a believer who submits
to the Lord may be able to bring blessing to others, but it may be at the cost of him/herself. A surrendering
person who surrenders his will to God, will be willing to surrender his/her rights, possessions, hopes and
ambitions for the benefit of others - maybe even his or her right to live.

God let His servant do what he wanted for awhile - even to sacrificing his own life for his own people as he
was apparently willing to do. Now God lets him do that, as well as sacrifice his own life for pagan sailors. He
begins to learn the value of every person as he hears them pray to the covenant keeping God he was
supposed to serve, but he did not even pray to in that storm. When the captain of the ship awakened Jonah,
he urged him to call on the Creator God. Now the mariners had learned what it was like to break covenant
with a covenant keeping God, and they realized He is personally involved in human life. More than just
calling on the Lord for mercy, when they threw Jonah overboard and the calm came, they were “exceedingly
fearful” of the Lord and made a sacrifice of some sort to Him, and made vows that likely changed their lives.

Admitting to sin is costly, but it may be an example to those who do not know the Lord, that He is to be
feared - and obeyed. It is an act of divine mercy when God uses the failures of His people to help others
understand who He is to them. substitution of one man, Jonah, for the mariners on a ship, is an example of
the substitution of our Lord Jesus Christ for us when He paid the price of our sin. It is also an illustration of
the nation of Israel that has been the object of scorn and derision for many generations, but through who
peace on earth will come when the King comes to reign.

Any wrong impressions of God the people on that ship had because of the failure of Jonah, was quickly
swept away when the wind immediately stopped and the water was made calm by the power of God. No
wonder they sacrificed and made vows. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,” and a reverential
fear and well as the normal human response to the obvious hand of God doing a miracle, affected them all.
That would be a normal reaction. We do not know what those seamen did after, but we do know there was
at that time a total change in them because of God's dealings with one man who had been called to serve
Him. In spite of his failing, God used him to bless others.

The “three days and three nights” in the belly of the whale parallels the experience of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who said the sign of the prophet Jonah was the only sign that would be given to the Pharisees when He was
here. In that way Jonah's experience was an exact representation of our Lord's when for our sake He died,
and rose again, and lives to bring blessing to people all over the earth, not just His chosen earthly people,
the Jews. Some may think that Jonah did not die when he was in that fish, but was able to survive. The point
is, that as far as the truth of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ is concerned, Jesus truly did die. He
was buried in Joseph's new tomb which he had prepared. Our Lord did rise from the dead physically and
Jonah’s experience was what He used to declare Himself as the One come from God as the Savior of the
world. The power of new life for us comes from the fact that He was our sinless Substitute, and in Christ we
have died, been buried and live in the power of new and endless life. "Because the sinless Savior died, my
sinful soul is counted free. For God the Just is satisfied, to look on Him, and pardon me."

**INTERVENTION**

Divine intervention can always be expected
If the will and work of God by me is neglected.
God never demands more than I can do -
But it always is a blessing when the given task is through
And we can look back and marvel at God's grace
That enabled us to accomplish His will, acting in faith.
The benefits come when in obedience we act-
Trusting Him for results, and to supply what I lack.

Storms in life will come as long as we are in the world.
We may not know why, until history's banner's unfurled.
There is nothing to fear when we are engaged in His work.
But if we refuse Him, or to our commitment we shirk -
Then we can expect stormy times of a different kind.
They come upon us when we refuse or are willfully blind
To the needs we are to fill, but to avoid them, we choose -
And the testimony of a lifetime we can very quickly lose.

A believer is wise to not take a stand against God.
First, that's inconsistent to the will and life of our Lord.
Secondly there are consequences to sin that will come to pass -
And they may affect us severely as long as life on earth shall last.
Third, others may think that the Christian life is a sham - Because they formed their opinions by watching this man.
And fourth I will have to live with the conscience of guilt - Never to blossom or bloom, or produce any more fruit.

"Father, this is a beautiful day with all kinds of opportunities before me to learn of Thee, speak to Thee, talk to others about Thee, and then meet with other believers in fellowship with Thee. Help me not to waste time in thinking wrong thoughts or doing wrong things. May each activity in which I engage, have some lasting value behind it. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jonah 2

THE BELLY OF HELL

The all-knowing, all-powerful, all-present God was watching over the whole scene on that storm-tossed boat, and at just the right time and place, He had the great fish He had prepared, do exactly what He wanted. Our God is the God of the universe, and all creatures and all elements are subject to His sovereign will. Jonah had stood stoically on the deck of that ship and watched as the mariners prayed to their idols. He heard their entreaties to his Lord as he prepared himself to die as a martyr for his people - at least that is likely what he thought. He had heard the captain tell him to pray to God, but he was not willing to do that. But when he realized he was alive even though in the depths of the sea, finally the Lord had his personal attention and he prayed.

How often do we try everything we can, to deal with situations in life, whether it be personal, family, business or even assembly life, and wait until a time of desperation before calling on the name of the Lord. "The Lord is nigh unto them of a broken heart, and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit." The surrender of our will in one situation does not mean that we are immune from self-will at another time. However, there are times in the life of child of God when we are made to stop completely and consider who we are and who we serve. It is at a time like that when consecration becomes real and life-changing. We can be faithful in service, committed to the work for which we have been called, skilled in presenting the truth of God and still be self-willed and self-motivated. When we are brought to the place where we have been totally captured and held by our Lord as a parent holds a struggling disobedient child in his arms until he stops struggling, then we are willing to speak to our Lord from a surrendered heart and will. It is then we are able to hear the voice of the Lord through the word of God and know how and where to apply it.

Jonah had likely read the psalms often, or at least heard them read enough times to know what they said and prayed in a way similar to the psalmist. It was in the context of his immovability where all he could do was lie there, that he began to speak to the Lord. There was nothing else he could do. There was no place he could go. As he was preparing to die, he finally got back to God to the place where he was willing to call on the Lord. As far as he was concerned, he was in Sheol. He had graphic descriptions of the place where he was and what it was like. It was at the extremity of his condition his soul fainted as he "remembered the Lord." In the hot breath and heat of a mammal who had taken in air and now was diving deep into the sea, he waited for death to take him. He realized his death was not going to be instantaneous. He had been given time to die slowly - and must have been terrified. He was allowed to learn what it was like for a lost soul to be in hell. God alone is our hope in the time of trouble. Jonah was alone... in total darkness... not a voice to be heard except the high-pitched sound of a whale.

Sometimes we wonder what people are thinking about as they are about to leave their body. Jonah's prayer gives us some graphic, unforgettable descriptions of those moments. It was in his distress he cried to the Lord, and was assured the Lord heard him. It certainly was the right thing to do. The Lord is our only hope "in times of trouble." Calling on God was his desperate cry to the One who had been ignored, whose will had been refused and who had been rejected. Seventy-two hours without one hope of change, and yet in conscious awareness of what is happening in such a condition would have been so overwhelming that it is impossible to describe. It would have felt like eternal darkness and yet it was only the beginning.

Even more terrible would be the memory and sense of horror in considering the past. The scriptures he had heard were so much in his mind, he thought in biblical terms. The value of the blessings God has given us will not be forgotten. In the prayer of despair, Jonah remembered what it was like to go to the temple, the house of God. Lost souls will remember the times they heard the word of God in the Gospel and the songs of the saints in praise to God. He was experiencing difficulties over which he had absolutely no control and wanted them removed. The unsaved people will know what they had and considered of no importance so they rejected them, but now the things they didn't want to interfere with their lives would be seen for the blessings they truly were. He learned what the judgment of the people of Nineveh, those people he wanted dead, would be like. We may only be preaching unfelt truth until we get to the place where our soul "fainted
within me." Then, like Jonah, we "remember the Lord," and grasp for the covenant keeping God who is omnipresent and is willing to pay attention to the prayer of a contrite soul.

The "lying vanities" of others he had paid no attention to in his willful disobedience and desire for his own way. Now his own stubbornness was seen for what it was. Stubbornness and idolatry go close together. Self-worship in rebellion against the Lord, is just as wrong as bowing down to idols. Jonah had been the course he had set in his own mind. In his self-will and foolish sense of self-sacrifice for his nation, he allowed his patriotism to make him a hero in his own mind, who was willing to die so his nation would survive. Now he was finally brought to the place of sacrifice to the Lord. He had finally come to the point of death, the place where God could use him. He was as good as dead. When we reckon ourselves "dead indeed unto sin but alive unto God," then there is nowhere to go, no one to turn to but God.

Jonah was not praying for deliverance so much as getting things right with God as his own life was "ebbing away." Jonah considered his situation as that of being buried alive. Our Lord hears prayer from any place, at any time, in any predicament as long as I am "not regarding iniquity in my heart." Often when things are going well, we take things - and God - for granted. In times of desperation and loss we cry out to Him. Anything I cling to or worship in the place of God, shuts me off from the grace and mercy of the Lord because it is empty and foolish. That only is the response of an inconsistent spiritual life. When there is death to self, then God can say, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give the light." Consistent fellowship, daily commitment to God strengthens our faith and keeps our "hearts and minds" through Christ Jesus," and maintains a solid relationship with our Lord.

Surrender of self, thanksgiving to God, acknowledgement of our Lord as the only one to be praised, honored and obeyed - brings the blessing of a new life. Jonah was not bargaining with God. He was simply being thankful to Him, committing himself finally to what the Lord wanted from him, and acknowledging that anything and everything is of the Lord including salvation from the wrath to come. He knew where this new life would begin. With salvation. Then the Lord took over the whole thing and a new resurrected life began in a whale's vomit on a beach.

"SALVATION IS OF THE LORD"

What a place to learn how to pray!
In the dark, far from the light of day -
   No one but God to hear us say -
   Salvation is of the Lord"

Desperation in me, and all around -
   This does not seem like it is holy ground -
   My voice in the silence, God hears the sound -
   Salvation is of the Lord"

Everything is gone - even the bottom is up -
   No food or drink here from which to take a sup -
   Death lurks nearby, and it is a bitter cup -
   Salvation is of the Lord"

Up from the bottom, what a long way to go! -
   Death has surrendered its final blow -
   Lying in vomit - a man with nothing else to know -
   Salvation is of the Lord"

"Father God, what a lesson for those of us who preach the Gospel this prayer of Jonah is. He finally understood what it means to be lost and shut away from God. And yet, in a final prayer of desperation, he calls on the name of the Lord and is saved. It is when we really understand this, that we can tell lost souls from the depth of our own experience. Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord, shall be saved: May Thy servant learn this lesson well. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Jonah 2: 9. "But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that I have vowed, Salvation is of the Lord."

THE VOICE OF THANKSGIVING.

We do not have a problem giving thanks to God when we have received some wonderful benefit that makes our lives easier. We do not have a problem giving thanks to God each time we receive food at the table and acknowledge its source is God. We do not have a problem giving thanks when everyone else is giving thanks and our "Amen" is genuine and heart-felt. It is not a sham nor is it less than sincere. We are truly thankful. But is this a sacrifice?

We do not have an insurmountable problem giving thanks when something valuable is lost and we are still able to appreciate what we have left. We are thankful when the troubles we have are not worse than they
are. We are thankful when those who were injured in some way, were not hurt to a greater degree. Our thanks even then, is real and not put on. It comes in sincerity and truth. But is this a sacrifice?

When Jonah was in the depths of the sea in the belly of a fish; when he was in the darkness at the bottom of the mountains; when the bars of earth encompassed him all around – then he made thanksgiving a sacrifice. It was when there was nothing to be thankful for but God; when he felt he was cast out of God’s sight; when the waves and billows were passing over him – then he made thanksgiving a sacrifice. It was when his soul was fainting; when he was in the belly of hell – then he made thanksgiving a sacrifice. It was in the depths of his affliction he remembered the Lord – then he made thanksgiving a sacrifice.

Even in the sub-oceanic darkness, he looked toward the temple of the Lord and paid his vows with the sacrifice of thanksgiving. In the loneliness of knowing one is alive even though by all odds he should be dead, he paid his vows with the sacrifice of thanksgiving. When he took his eyes off others and there was only the Lord before him, and his own fear and guilt within him, he paid his vows with the sacrifice of thanksgiving. As he lifted his heart and voice to the Lord in holy fear, when thanksgiving is usually farthest from one’s mind, he paid his vows with the sacrifice of thanksgiving. The confession of his voice is clear – “Salvation is of the Lord.” The sacrifice of thanksgiving is heard in the temple of the Lord and by the ears of the omnipresent Master of the universe – “Salvation is of the Lord.” The heart-wrenching words; the heartfelt words; the voice of thanksgiving is like the sound of a trumpet and in the time and place one would least expect it – the sacrifice is made with the voice of thanksgiving and “The Lord spake unto the fish.”

What amazing things happen when we offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving! It surpasses nature’s power when the voice of thanksgiving is raised to the Ruler of all creation in clear assurance. When thanksgiving arises to Him who has “all power in heaven and in earth” and confidence is expressed that “Salvation is of the Lord;” in other words – “Thou art fully able to do the miraculous, the unexpected, the impossible” – in such a setting, Divine Authority answers with grace.

“O Holy God; I am at times overcome with a sense of shame at so many requests I have made and yet the sacrifice of thanksgiving has not been given from my heart. Is this why I feel so barren in soul-winning lately? Have these prayers not been given with the holiness of a sacrifice? Have they not been made from my heart in genuine inadequacy and yet genuine confidence in Thee? I preached and talked and testified a lot last night, but nothing happened. I comfort myself with the knowledge that “Salvation is of the Lord.” but does that result come only when one is in the belly of hell? If there are changes to be made that can make this voice of mine become the voice of thanksgiving followed by the voice of the Lord to some “fish”; then take me to the bottom of the mountains. Then please, take me to Nineveh with the word of salvation. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.”

Jonah 3

"THE PREACHING OF JONAS"

It was the same prophet the word of the Lord came to second time, but in many ways, Jonah was a different man. Instead of waiting or running the other way, "Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went." When a child of God has had correction from God, and in turn has faced themselves, repented and turned in faith to the Lord, then we get a whole new perspective on our service. No longer do we want to run from what we know God wants. No longer does one do what he wants, in his own way. No longer do we look on our commission with a jaundiced eye nor do we look on lost souls around us with distain because of their wickedness. Often a new attitude toward God and others becomes obvious - "There, but for the grace of God, go I."

When one has failed, knows he has failed and experiences guilt because of failure, he may think he is of no more use for the Lord, and is disqualified for any service because of past wrong-doing, or even mistakes. Our service for the Lord is not done because we are qualified or have earned the right to speak for Him or act on His behalf. "It is God which worketh in you both to will and do of His good pleasure." If God allows us to participate in any way in His work, even by giving us a second chance after failure, it calls for our unhesitating and full commitment to that work.

Jonah's recovery from three days and nights inside the fish had changed him in more ways than one. There was likely a physical change in that the initial stages of digestion would have altered the color of his skin to the extent that there may have been some scaring and wrinkling. There was a mental change in his response to the second commission of the Lord. This time he obeyed and went to Nineveh as a man under authority. Nineveh hadn't changed. God hadn't changed. The consequences of the wickedness of the Assyrians hadn't changed. But the prophet, the messenger, the man God chose to send to Nineveh again,
had changed. This time he "Arose and went." Instead of self-will and disobedience, there was submission to the Lord and obedience to the word of the Lord.

The five-hundred-mile journey from near Joppa to Nineveh would have taken quite some time, but there was no hesitation on Jonah's part to go. He had learned his lesson. Not every call from God is desirable, nor is going to make the messenger popular with the people who hear a warning message. Social pressures and the fear of man "bringeth a snare." commitment to the truth on the part of a prophet - or a preacher, usually awakens the consciences of the hearers. Some of them may refuse to listen to a Gospel message more than once, because it exposes the fact and result of sin.

Jonah had a very precise message from God which no one could misunderstand. There was nothing in it that explained the reason for the wickedness of the people. There was no message of repentance or even salvation. Eight words gave the whole warning of judgment as to when it would happen, and what would happen.

One wonders if there was such visible evidence on the face of Jonah that people would have reacted to him in fear and haste. The message in words was one part of the warning, and the urgency in Jonah's voice and the appearance of this one lone man who looked like a walking corpse, was another part of the warning. One the very first day Jonah arrived at Nineveh, he loudly preached the warning. The farther he moved into the city heralding the coming judgment, the more the Spirit of God moved these words like the wind into every street, alley and home. The farther he walked, the greater the stir.

When a believer understands what Paul did, "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His suffering, being made conformable unto His death," everything is changed in us. There will be no lightweight approach in a Gospel message. There will be the sound of passion and concern in the voice of one who cares for the eternal well-being of others. There will be body-language that will add weight to the spoken words.

People know when their behavior and words are wrong, but people have become so used to sin and no immediate punishment, they think they are getting away with it. In Nineveh their wickedness had gone up before the Lord, and then weeks after Jonah was first told to go to Nineveh, the work and word of God was working in the hearts of the people. "The people of Nineveh believed God."

The immediate humbling and repentance of the people was due to the prophet Jonah himself. He was the "sign to the Ninevites" the Lord Jesus Christ spoke of when He was here. As he walked through the streets and spoke, this "sign" did its work by the power of God. From the king to the animals, sackcloth covered them all. The king not only set aside his royal garments and put on sackcloth, he also sat down in ashes as evidence of real remorse and repentance. A fast of food and water would have caused a great noise from the animals and sincerity from all the people. An urgent demand to stop evil and violence, and cry to God for mercy, affected the whole population of the city of a half million people. The humiliation and reality of repentance brought a pitiful expression of hope from the king that perhaps God would have mercy on them.

Jonah's message never gave a word of grace and promised mercy, but of judgment and dark doom. The hope of the people of Nineveh was like the hope people have any where and any time when they know they have crossed the boundary of morality and righteousness. Normally people know when they have gone to far, but they deceive themselves by comparing themselves with others. When a person faces their guilt, all they can do is cast themselves on the mercy of the One they have offended.

It was remarkable when a whole city was stopped in its tracks and in broken-hearted humility turned to God. God saw the reality of their attitude and showed them mercy. We should never underestimate the effect of genuine repentance. God looks on the heart, and in love toward sinners, can justly forgive those who repent. Holiness demands punishment for sin. Grace demands that one who acknowledges personal guilt and forsakes, can be justly forgiven.

**Jonah 3:5.** "So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them."

**PEOPLE BELIEVED.**
It wasn't what they wanted to hear.
Warnings that God's judgment is near
Was enough to give the whole city great fear -
So they called an immediate halt.

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Sackcloth covered all, from the children to the king.  
The message from God, the prophet did bring.  
Brought to the whole city great humbling.  
Even to eating they called a full stop.

When God moves into our life to make serious changes,  
And it becomes clear to us that what He arranges  
That we might repent of the sin that blames us -  
We do well to stop and consider.

The things I have been doing - are they God's will?  
If not - will I repent of them, or continue on still?  
How long can I go on until I have had my fill -  
Of the weight that so easily besets me?

May every one who hears a warning message from God,  
Learn this lesson written on the pages of His Word -  
There is no way to escape the arm of the Lord -  
Stop, repent and believe.

Believe that God's grace extends farther than men  
Believe when people repent God wants to forgive their sin.  
Believe that His desire is to bring them to Him -  
Show evidence that you really believe.

“O Righteous, Holy God: the evidence was seen, then that the message was heard and believed. The messages being sounded forth now seem to have little effect. If there are some things that need to be changed in this messenger - please let me know what they are and what I must do to be effective in Thy service. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Jonah 4

"O YOU, POOR, POOR MAN!"

Every person who preaches the Gospel would have been thrilled at the response to the warning message of coming judgment by the people of Nineveh. The whole city stopped, covered everything that moved in sackcloth, did not eat or drink, groaned in earnest repentance - and waited. Waited for God to act. And He did - in grace, and judgment did not fall on the city of Nineveh. There has never been a revival like that since. The Israelites were to be a blessing to all the nations of the world as God had told Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But Jonah thought they had exclusive rights to the heart of God.

Some people today think there are those people who God loves and others who He hates. The scripture references they point to are referring to the contrast of two nations, not individuals. It does not refer to Esau's eternal destiny, but is a simple statement pointing out that through Jacob, the nation of Israel, Messiah would come. God is sovereign in what He does, but does not exclude people of any nation from believing on Him, repenting of sin to Him, turning to Him for salvation and loving Him "who first loved us." "In every nation, he that feareth [God] and worketh righteousness is accepted with Him."

We are often surprised when those we least expected to be saved, have repented of their sins, turned to Christ by faith and accepted Him alone as their personal Savior. We must not have a narrow vision of God's grace and mercy in His desire to save souls. "God our Savior, will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."

Poor Jonah, even after preaching and seeing an unprecedented response to his message, still hoped the Assyrians would be destroyed. He hadn't yet learned that God is "no respecter of persons," and was exceedingly angry that what he had prophesied did not happen. Perhaps it was because he cared for his reputation as a prophet, and now his prophecy didn't come to pass in the way he had hoped. He likely had hoped the people of Nineveh would have just laughed at him and would have been destroyed in forty days as his message stated. His anger may have been because he realized the Assyrians had done what the people of Israel had not done through the preaching of the prophets. Through the preaching of Jonah, Nineveh was changed, but in Israel the people of privilege continued on as if there were not consequences to their sin. The Israelites continued to worship idols and continued to rebel against God. Yet patriotic mind still made him bitter against the Gentiles.

When a person has been used by God in a remarkable way, they are often more vulnerable to the attacks of Satan than at other times. David learned that. Elijah experienced that. Peter also had to face his own
weakness when he felt himself to be strong in faith. It is a wonderful privilege to have God use clay vessels, mere failing mortal men, to do His work, but it is absolutely necessary when we see the hand of God in remarkable ways fulfilling His purposes through us, to GIVE GOD ALL THE GLORY!! An unfortunate thing happens sometimes in such wonderful occasions - people flatter the preacher, and he accepts the comments with an "Aw Shucks" attitude. But if he really keeps the flattery in his mind, it produces a sense of pride, and one starts to take credit rather than give all glory to God.

Jonah's confession and knowledge of God was good and right. He knew God is gracious, merciful, slow to anger and full of loving kindness - not only to the Hebrews tribe but to others also. The truth about God that he knew and confessed, instead of giving him joy, filled him with anger. An unforgiving spirit, bitterness and malice on in a believer have to be dealt with right away. The spiritual condition of the lost should move us to compassion, not anger; to concern for their salvation, not for their destruction. The patience of God with us reminds us that "It is of His mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not." Even though we have been given a new nature as believers in Christ, and the Holy Spirit dwells in us, some things He leaves to us to deal with. "Be ye angry and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath."

At first, we may find the attitude of Jonah to be very strange and inconsistent with one who is a servant of God. He fled from delivering God's message. He did not consider the mercy he had been shown when he was saved, and likely the happiness he had when he landed on the beach. It was true he had been saved but was angry when pagan sinners were saved. He wanted his people saved but not the Gentiles. He did not accept, and perhaps did not want to understand, the value and power of forgiveness. He was more concerned about himself, his reputation and a prophet, his status as an Israeli that God's love for lost souls. It seems like he would rather die, than be embarrassed by the blessing of God on others.

Every person and animal in Nineveh looked the same when covered in sackcloth. God is not concerned with a person's station in life as far as his offer of salvation. He is 'longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." The Lord can use whatever He chooses to bring the desired effect He wants. He is the sovereign God. To Jonah everything was going wrong. To God everything was going right - except for His servant. How pitiful is a disgruntled, dissatisfied Christian! The objective of the labor of a servant of the Lord is the glory of God, not the glory of the servant. God showed kindness to Jonah but he seemed to take that for granted.

God gave him a lesson in showing kindness by making a gourd grow quickly to give him shade. God showed him kindness in spite of his rebellion and self-will. He also had showed him the fact of judgment for rebellion. Now God showed him a lesson in grace and mercy, and when He had the worm kill the plant, He taught him the consequences of sin. He could look out and see the city of thousands and hear their groans and moans, and yet, be angrier over the death of a plant, than the salvation of thousands of people. The objective was to teach him how much more valuable people are than plants. How do I determine value? Are my values consistent with God's values? God value of people is they are worth more than the whole material world, so He shows mercy, compassion and forgiveness.

God saved the mariners when they cried out for mercy. God answered Jonah's prayer in the belly of the fish. God saved the people of Nineveh through the preaching of Jonah. "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved. " Obedience, repentance and faith moves God to act in grace, mercy, forgiveness and salvation. At the end of Jonah's narrative, he made it plain that God had the last word and he was silent. Likely he wrote the book later and looked back on that experience with a new view of things. He didn't leave out the bad parts and he didn't try to cover himself with glory. From his attitude, his behavior, his peevish ways, tot he outcome of the story - he did not try to make himself look good. He honored God in every way and contrasted his own stubborn, persistent rebellion, with God's grace, mercy and forgiveness. And then he stopped writing.

**Jonah 4:2.** "And he prayed unto the Lord, and said, 'I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore, I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.'"

**A GRACIOUS GOD.**
Favor bestowed that brings great delight -
Even though God is hidden from human sight -
There is evidence to be seen in every person -
God does not deal in judgment without a reason -
And even when sin has taken its toll -
God is still merciful to every soul -
And gives ample time for repentance to take place -
Wanting to show kindness by extending His grace.
His anger isn’t peevish, nor without just cause.
Even though in our willfulness we have broken His laws -
He gives time to repent of the evil we have done -
Desiring that sinners will repent and come
To Him in faith with humbleness of heart -
So that with great kindness, He allows us a brand-new start -
When He sees proof that there is reality when one turns to Him -
In His graciousness and mercy, He will forgive our sins.

How great is His grace. He who was rich became poor -
His mercy has held back the judgment we would have to endure.
His anger is righteous; He doesn’t act in haste -
Giving enough time for repentance to take place.
His kindness has no limit; we owe everything
To Him who in love to us from His fullness did bring
To us who were condemned by the evil we did -
Forgiveness and freedom by the great price He paid.

“I know Thee Father, to be of this and more. From Thy fullness I have received grace for grace needed; strength for the strength I lack, faith for the little faith I have. I thank Thee, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

MICAH
"What does God require?"

From a village near the border of Philistia came Micah during the time of Isaiah, sent by the Lord to warn the people of the cities, particularly Jerusalem and Samaria, that they had gone too far in their sin. Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah were kings during the time of Micah’s prophecy when he warned them of God’s hatred of injustice and ritualism. Yet before the book is finished, he also tells how God delights in pardoning the sinner. God hates sin but He loves sinners. His name means something like “Who is like Jehovah.” It appears by his writing that God meant everything to him. He understood God’s holiness and so was not able to overlook sin. He understood the fact that God is righteous in every way and in all His dealings with humanity, and in this book, with the people of Samaria and Jerusalem. He also understood God is full of compassion and the book concludes with the delight God has in being able to justly pardon sinners.

This man who concludes his book with, "Who is a God like unto Thee?" wrote much of this book in a poetic style perhaps to emphasize the value of what had to be said, and why it was so important for them to pay heed to it. He must have been a calm, unshakeable man who wasn’t easily rattled by all that was revealed to him, because he knew, and trusted God. His declarations are powerful and yet tender-hearted. His pronouncements are faithfully given and his judgments are quite logical. Materialism, injustice, greed and ritualism go together. His mission was to warn the cities of judgment that was coming and plead for their repentance. He also prophesied of future blessing for the nation in the future.

The first three chapters denounce the people and their leaders with God Himself being the witness against them. The next two chapters are a change in tone as the writer tells of the future glories when they would be re-gathered and delivered from their captivity. In the third message in which the words, "Hear" or listen to what he was saying was used, Micah pleads with nature (the mountains) listening; the Lord pleading with them and then Micah speaking as a representative of those who respond properly. The importance of 6:8 give us succinctly what God requires and has a right to expect of His people. He is a pardoning God who gives hope to the penitent sinner and will also bring His own people back to Himself.
Micah gives a true picture of God, not the God of mans' imagination. He hates sin and loves sinners. He judges, condemns and forgives. He requires of men, because He is God and is holy. He reveals Himself in the things He shows. He redeems, which is more fully explained in New Testament teaching. He rules, and that will be unmistakably evident all over the world in the future.

The transgressions of Jacob and the sins of Israel are not hidden from Him and because of that, He was bringing judgment on those people. Fraud, theft, greed and debauchery were all open before Him. Oppression, injustice, extortion of the common people were reasons for judgment to be carried out upon them. Hypocrisy, heresy and lying in religious practices heaped up condemnation on them that would be dealt with in righteousness. And yet, there was opportunity to repent, to turn back to the Lord in true worship and obedience. "What doth God require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." In righteous anger God dealt with sin in judgment and punishment. In love and grace, God offers eternal life and a meaningful life with those who love God and live according to His will.

We need to remember that selfish motives and faith do not mix. False religion makes God out to be not much more than a superhuman who is a mixture of humanity, nature and the gods of man's imagination. Those who know God and have eternal life know that He is above and separate from His creation and cannot be represented by any thing. He delights in faith that brings justice, and passes judgment on injustice in His own way and time. His love is demonstrated to us and when we love others, that is recognized by Him, and is an act of obedience to Him. Oppression of others is not unnoticed by Him and He will bring deliverance to the oppressed. Wrongs will be made right when Christ rules and reigns over all the nations of earth.

Micah lived in the generation following that of Jonah and knew the revival of the Assyrians under Jonah did not last. They had gone back to the old ways of the cruelty and brutality of their forefathers and their old ways. A revival does not pass from one generation to the next. Because our parents were believers does not mean our children will be. It is sad to know that our own flesh and blood can get so used to the grace, mercy and love of God, that it does not mean more to them than human decency in people. It wasn't only the Assyrians that were at fault. The transgressions of Judah and the sins of Israel were the reason the Assyrians would invade and take them captive. Samaria was already doomed to fall in the times of Micah. Judah would fall to the Babylonians at a later time.

Micah could see that for all his desire for God and reformations he brought about, Hezekiah was fighting a losing battle. The root of evil was so deep in the people that it flourished even under the reign of a righteous king. Proud, cruel, unscrupulous leaders were overlooking the plight of the common people. They were profiting at their expense. Israel was going down and Judah was getting ripe for coming judgment when Micah prophesied and wrote.

"HEAR, ALL YE PEOPLE"

They had opportunities, they were warned again and again.
But for some reason they ignored reason, and the warnings of faithful men.
So, the time had come and gone, for repentance to them to be real -
The moral sickness and decay were so deep, there was nothing to help them to heal.

It was plain from those who preached, God knew well what was going on.
People had so many opportunities and messages telling them of what's right and wrong.
Still, just living for the moment seemed to them so good and so full of pleasure -
That they could not believe justice would come and take from them its full measure.

If we are wise, we will learn from the past, that all is not done till it's done.
And those who reject divine mercy, will not escape judgment that is sure to come.
To live only for the moment, forgetting the future, and ignoring the past -
Will mean no place to go or hide when divine judgment unfolds at last.

-"The simple pass on and are punished, -" the wise stop. and take stock of their life.
Those who look around at the present, see hypocrisy, materialism and strife.
Perhaps there will be some who will wonder, repent and then will turn -
To our God who in longsuffering, waits, for those who His grace will not spurn.

There is light in the distance that glows, showing in the darkness a dawn of new day.
There will be a time of recovery, when sin and evil no longer hold sway.
Our Lord keeps the promises He makes, the kingdom is promised and Christ will reign.
All believers sin this age will be raptured, when our Lord Jesus will come again.
"Father, the messages of those in times past seem very relevant to these days in which I live. There are so many similarities that the events of the past seem like today's news. May Thy servant be able in the days ahead to express Thy message to the people today in a way that Thou art able to use to bring Thy people to take seriously the life they have been given to use for Thy glory. Amen."

Micah 1:1-9

**WHEN THE LORD COMES DOWN**

Judaism and Christianity are very different from the other religions of the Middle East. Judaism had some similar practices that involved animal sacrifices and feast days at certain times of the year, and there were temples erected to various gods. But these similarities were only superficial. God had chosen the insignificant Hebrews, "the seed of Abraham," to be His chosen earthly people. He is above and separate from His creation because all of creation is the work of His own power. He is singular. There is no other God, and any attempt on the part of man to represent Him was, and still is, absolutely forbidden. God is not to be represented by any created thing made by man, nor anything He created. He is greater than all that He made in the whole universe put together.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is "the fullness of the Godhead" in a body, veiled His Godhead glory when He was "found in fashion as a man" during His time here on earth. He embodied in His human form exactly what God had intended from mankind when He created man "in His own image." The perverted religions of the Middle East were Satan's attempt to turn human beings aside from what the Lord God intended.

The ancient Sumerians seemed to be the source of the variety of ancient religions in the Middle East because of their similarities. From Abraham to the church-age the basic concept of those religions is that nature, humans and their gods are basically one. The gods carved out of stone and wood had characteristics that are linked to natural life. Sex is necessary to natural life so they made poles that represented the propagation of life in humans. The sun, moon and stars that are needed to maintain order were worshipped and sacrifices (sometimes human) were made on altars to demonstrate their devotion to the gods represented in nature. Strangely there are people today who do the same thing in our country. They worship the creature instead of the Creator.

Conflict is common in the natural world where there is the hunted and the hunters. The good seed struggling to survive against the bad seed. Conflict was also a part of the religious life of the Middle Eastern people because there were so many different gods, each with some characteristic of nature. Nature has no ethics, no moral absolutes of morality, no standards of conduct. Survival is the concern of animal and plants - and to a real extent, unregenerate mankind. The natural man has no understanding of the seriousness of sin or of a just God who hates sin with a perfect hatred, yet loves sinners with a perfect love.

The ideas of those who make up their own gods are still in cults today and are characteristic of Oriental gods. Hinduism has millions of gods, because each living thing is considered a god of some degree. Buddhism has no defined god so it is the memory and ashes of ancestors that are important to them. Many of those characteristics are being incorporated into western nations who once revered, respected and worshiped God. But now they have substituted gods of their own imaginations, and have even brought some of those imaginations into the so-called Christian religions. Paganism and true Christianity cannot be mixed, but there is a pseudo-Christianity that appeals to the natural man that is becoming popular among many who are not true children of God. They may say, "Your truth is your truth, and my truth is my truth, and that is okay because truth is relative."

This is the attitude of those who have rejected the standards of morality and conduct that is taught in the scriptures, and is practiced by Christians who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. In the time of Micah, the Israelis had turned away from God and the absolute ethical system based on a relationship with God, to that which had no significance except to satisfy their own lusts and pleasures in the name of religion. There is no way the religions of man's devising, and faith in the One True God can ever coexist in peace. Balaam, the kings of the northern ten tribes of Israel and false prophets tried to mix the two but light has no fellowship with darkness.

Much of the Old Testament is given to tell us of the failures of such attempts by the tribes of the Jews. Over and over again we are given warnings of the failures of God's people to maintain fellowship with Him based on obedience to His word and faith in Him on the part of each person. Compromise with light and darkness, truth and superstitious lies, right and wrong is impossible. True worship, and even the nature of the universe requires us to understand and accept the divine command of "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me."
So when the prophecy of Micah begins concerning the two capital cities of the Jews, it is a statement that the Lord God had enough of their evil. Ahaz was one of the evilest kings of Israel who foolishly thought that by making alliances with godless nations, he could avoid coming judgment. He paid tribute to Assyria thinking that would be all that was needed to maintain his kingdom. Jotham tried to follow the Lord, but loved luxury and tried to make Jerusalem safe and glorious to the eyes, and strong because of his efforts, all done at the expense of the poor people. Hezekiah was a good king who wanted what was right, but the lust for money and power that led to injustice and intrigue drained away the moral and spiritual values of the people so that Hezekiah could not stop what was happening to the nation of Judah.

It was into all this decay, chaos and religious confusion that Micah came with his prophecy from the Lord. The had enough of the evil in Samaria and the northern tribes. They had turned away from the Lord and deliberately turned to idolatry. They had erect poles as sex symbols, taken young girls and made them prostitutes in idols temples, and had the audacity to call it worship. To mete out justice such sin demanded was not just the invasion of Assyria, but Micah wanted them to know in his message from the Lord, that the Lord God Himself was their enemy. He was going to arise "out of His place and come down" and deal with the "transgression of Jacob" and the "sins of the house of Israel." When the Lord God in holiness, righteousness and justice takes action, even the mountains and valleys become like flowing rivers before Him.

The cities of Samaria and Jerusalem were going to be the objects of divine wrath and judgment. Micah could see through prophetic insight that the time was coming when only the animals and creatures of nature would be the moving things where Samaria had once been. The sin of Samaria had extended to Jerusalem and their day of judgment was coming at a later time. Samaria was finished because they had passed the point of no return. The city of Jerusalem still had time to repent and turn to the Lord.

When the Assyrian hordes swept over Israel and Samaria in vicious barbarity, they went as far as the gate of Jerusalem where they were stopped by the Lord. Godly king Hezekiah went to the Lord for help rather than seeking the help of men. There is an attitude today that sin is not all that serious because everybody does it and seems to get away with it. But payday is coming. In Buddhism sin is thought of as a capital crime, not "all unrighteousness is sin." The consciousness of sin and its consequences is not really considered until they hear the Gospel and are awakened by the Holy Spirit. There must be the understanding of the fact there is a real and holy God whose hatred of sin is consuming, real, just and irresistible, and whose love for sinners is consuming, real, just and irresistible. But He does not force people to accept the benefits and blessings of that love.

God hates idolatry, pride, injustice and empty rituals that demean what is holy, true and pure into mere emotional responses that produce no repentance. He will pardon repentant sinners, and He will punish the guilty. To try to mix religion and selfish motives that we think are "our truth," is to pervert faith in God to being nothing more than our own personal opinion. These same practices of the ancient Jews are happening in our country today. The same Lord who carried out justice in the past and has told us about that in the prophetic writings of Micah and other prophets, will deal with us when His feet trample out the places, "where the grapes of wrath are stored."

**GOD CAME DOWN**

Piles of rubble long since hidden from human eyes,  
Are all reminders of what people once prized.  
And thought was well worth living for until all was lost -  
When God came down - then they learned sin's awful cost.  

The worship of human making was a sinful sad perversion.  
There was no reality, no faith, no holiness, no conversion.  
Only forms, licentious living and sensual emotional "highs."  
The God came down - and they learned, "the soul that sinneth" dies.

Injustice and greed, pleasure and prosperity paid for by the poor.  
Covetous clamor looking for satisfaction, always wanting more -  
And "the pleasures of sin for a season" from the life .fade -  
So, God came down, and trampled to ruins all they made.

When the Lord rises from His throne to deal with sin -  
When His feet tread on the mountains and they become a plain -  
When in justice and holiness, He deals with sin once for all -  
When God comes down, people cry to the mountains to on them fall.
“Holy Father, the spiritual condition of the ancients seems to be repeated today. Our society is becoming godless, perverted, unclean, unholy and proud of their sin. Have mercy on us as a nation, that we might once again seek the Lord and hear His voice through the Gospel. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Micah 1:10-16

MOURNING FOR CITIES

Micah was a man from the country-side who was called by God to take His prophecies to the cities. Mainly the two capital cities of Samaria (Israel) and Jerusalem (Judah), but in this poem, his message focuses on one city after another moving from a distance towards the center. To one city after another the prophet declares God's judgment that is coming because of the sins of the people. With a play on words, each town is denounced using a characteristic of the place or its name.

Micah's name means, "Who is like Jehovah?" and it shows what his character was like. He had a high and lofty conception of the holiness of God. He recognized the compassion of God and also His righteousness, so he could understand the reasons for the coming judgment on Samaria and ultimately Jerusalem and all of the land of Israel. He meant what he said when he exclaimed, "Who is a God like unto Thee?" He was a man who could declare truth in a sane, calm, reasonable and powerful way, yet he cared enough for the people to be faithful in his preaching. He never took credit for what he said but was careful to give God all the credit. His message was from the highest Source: "Hear..." what the Lord has to say.

Warning messages given in a reasonable, understandable way, yet with passion and a tone of voice that indicates the speaker cares for the hearers, will have an impact on them both. I cannot expect people to respond to what I say if I speak unfelt truth. A man who speaks for God must first hear God speaking to him. A message lacking the warmth of love for the people and the love of God, will be merely a speech by a professional. When it is accompanied with the emotion of a trembling voice and tears or near-tears, it is truly heard, and can be used by God to bring His desired results.

The grievously sick, sinful wound of Samaria and its consequences, would extend all the way to Jerusalem and would move from place to place overcoming all in its path. Gath was a place of national humiliation that was base beyond words and tears. Aphrah's grief would be that of brokenness even as the ancients would roll in the dust and throw dust and ashes over their heads in mourning. The beauty of Saphir would become a shame and embarrassment like a blight on that which could have been, and should have been beautiful.

Zaanan would hide in fear hoping the walls around it would preserve them from bondage, but there would be no more freedom for the people of Zaanan. Beth Ezel was left with no friends or neighbors to come to their aid. Maroth in bitterness would wait for good to come but evil would come instead bringing bitterness and tears. The forces of evil would come right to the gate of Jerusalem, the city of peace, but peace would be gone in the battle yet to come.

Lachish was the place where horses were kept that represented the power of men. Their power was gone because they were the first town to introduce idolatry to Judah. The Lord God had never intended His people to trust in horses and chariots that were tools of mere human power. It was the Lord Himself who had given power over their enemies. Even Moresheth-Gath where Micah came from would be turned over to the enemy by the nation in its sin. Achzib means deceit and falsehood. Where there is deceit, betrayal will follow and the disappointment associated with lies and falsehood will not be avoided. The heir that would come to Mareshah would be the enemy, not a relative. The enemy would leave no possessions to anyone - only bankruptcy and poverty as one who has lost everything. Adullam was the place of caves to which David came many generations before. Now those who were the leaders and nobility of the nation would flee to hide in the caves there. There would be no more testimony to the name and power of the nation when the Sovereign Lord steps down and turns His people over to the enemy.

The only thing left was public humiliation as when a person's head is shaved and the sign of slavery, bondage and defeat. This sign of disgrace and tragedy is like that of grieving parents who watch their children being taken away into slavery - which would not have been uncommon in the ancient Middle East.

Lessons to be learned are that our strong points can easily become our weakest when we step out of the path of obedience and faith in our Lord God. We may think we are in control of the events in our lives, but all that we depend on can be lost in a very short time. “Let him that standeth, take heed lest he fall.” Pride, self-will and arrogance will not keep us from the consequences of sin when God steps down to deal in justice and judgment. Forms, ritual and popularity are not what please the Lord. He requires justice and fairness in our public life. He requires the love of mercy to be shown towards those who fail or are in bondage from
which they cannot break loose by themselves in our interaction with other people. He requires humility in each of us in our walk before the Lord. "The Lord resists the proud, but giveth grace to the humble."

**Micah 1:13.** “O thou inhabitant of Lachish, bind the chariot to the swift beast: she is the beginning of the sin to the daughter of Zion: for the transgressions of Israel were found in thee.”

**WATCH OUT!**

It may seem okay, but it is not:
- Every activity they are involved in is fraught
- With latent danger, although at the moment it seems
- That course they are following fulfills dreams -
- But instead it will lead you to serious consequences -
- That inevitably follows unwise compromises.

Some things people insist are right -
- Lead unsuspecting people into darkness, not light
- To pay attention to strange misleading information -
  - Is to deny the reason for our sanctification.
  - When something seems too good to be true -
  - Almost always, it is not the right thing for you.

When someone unknown has a strange idea -
- Be careful because most of the time it's not real.
- But a scheme or a plan that may be a deception -
  - That will tempt you into a bad situation.
  - Be conscious of this fact, if a thing is of God -
  - It will carefully follow the truth of God's Word.

Watch out for those who will lead you astray
- Into some "Bypass Meadows" that are out of the way.
- The nature of the world we live in today -
  - Is not getting better, but farther and farther away
  - From the paths of righteousness that we once knew -
  - It is up to us - the real evidence of grace to show.

“Father God, we have been given so much - please keep me from following anything that is unbiblical or in any way dishonoring to Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

**Micah 2:1-5**

**GOD'S VIEW OF INJUSTICE**

It is not uncommon for people to think that what they do personally or in business is no one's else's business but their own. Let everyone remember that even "the thoughts and intents of the heart" are know by God. So whether it is an unspoken plan made when one is lying in bed at night, or an action carried out in the light of day, God is fully aware of both the plan and the action. Sinful thoughts lead to sinful deeds.

Micah warned the people of Israel of judgments that were going to come upon them and listed their sins and the reason for divine judgments in his prophecy. In chapter 2 he exposes their fraud, greed and debauchery. In the next chapter he exposes the oppression of those who prospered at the expense of others, and their hypocrisy, and their heresy, and their injustice. Later in the prophecy he makes it plain that extortion, lying, murder and other sins all will bring the strong foot of God upon them in judgment.

To many people the thoughts that enter our minds unbidden are something over which we have no control. But we are told of our responsibility to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. To allow unrestrained thinking can quickly lead a person to actions that bring them into the captivity of sin. As believers we need to remember sin has no dominion over us, but if we allow our thoughts to run wild, or even carelessly, we will find us acting irresponsibly and facing consequences which we had never thought of.

Micah declared a woe on those who planned evil when they were in bed at night, and got up in the early morning to carry out their evil thoughts by evil actions. There were people in the upper areas of society in Israel who used their position to take advantage of others. Whether they held mortgages on the property of others, or in some way had schemed to get houses and land, the people of Israel were to return the property in the year of Jubilee so the original inheritance would remain ultimately in the family to whom Joshua first designated it. But these scheming businessmen did not return the property. They kept it for themselves and ignored the divine instructions of God's law. This attitude and action will in the end destroy a nation from the
inside out. Injustice cannot continue forever without severe and lasting consequences that cannot be undone.

It is possible for us to think that the words of scripture in the Bible are not all that important because it was given at a different time and to different people who lived in a different culture. Bible principles and the moral law defined in scripture is the same for all people, of all ages, in every place. God has made of "one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth..." so that there is a common God-consciousness in every person. Even though it may be perverted by idolatry, social mores or even the geography of an area, the fact is that we are all "wired up" with an awareness of God placed in us when He "made man in His own image."

The oppression of the poor in Micah's day; the social injustice of Hebrews against Hebrews had been allowed to continue without the restraint of the law being carried out. So, the land that had been confiscated by the covetous and/or mortgaged was not returned and the inheritance of many was lost. God's plan was to maintain a balance in society in order for there to be sufficient resources of all. This would make it possible to maintain the quality of life that would leave the people with their dignity in tact and with their self-respect that linked them with their heritage.

Micah warned the people that God was planning to deal justly with those who defied His command. The had been "devising iniquity" on their beds at night. God was "devising an evil" against them that would bring disaster upon them from which they could not escape. This "evil time" would be able to be avoided nor would the consequences that they had brought upon themselves be diminished because they were a chosen people. "To whom much is given, much is required" should warn us that we need to live in the conscious awareness that we are "not our own, we have been bought with a price." Our "times" are in God's hands.

In the carrying out of divine justice, the punishment imposed fits the crimes committed. In our "justice system" often there are different consequence laid on different people, even though the crimes are the same. This may be due to who they are in society, or who they know in the justice system. With God, His justice is fair and reasonable. Those who lead the people are more responsible to be righteous because of the role in the society they have. A leader who leads people astray has misused his position and the negative effect is felt by many. Because the leadership of Israel had turned the whole nation astray, the whole nation would suffer. At the Year of Jubilee no one would be left to celebrate the return of the land to the original owners because they would all be taken away as captives. The whole nation would lose everything.

Israel is still suffering the consequences of the sins committed in those days many centuries ago. The prophets had warned and pleaded with the people but to no avail. Isaiah's main concern was for the leadership and the politics of the nation. Micah's concern was for the social injustice and the wrongs in every day life that was sapping the spiritual life out of all the people. There was really nothing for God coming from His people. The consequences of their failure is still felt in Israel today. People don't know what land is theirs by inheritance. Much of the prosperity of Israel has to do with their motivation as a secular people, not their identity as a spiritual nation. But there is a new day coming.

**Micah 2:2.** "And they covet fields, and take them by violence; and houses, and take them away: so they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage."

**HIS HERITAGE.**

Some become well known in public because of some feat or skill. Their reputation gives them influence that can inflate pride until It becomes clear to them and to those who will look on - This person's heritage is what he's built his life upon.

There may be some truth to the thought that genes make me what I am. But that is only part of the story, we need to go back to where it began. Sin entered the world by one man, but that was dealt with by Another. Only part of what makes us what we are was passed on by father and mother.

Other things come into play that affect what we are. and do. There is a history of family life that passes on from them to you. A certain attitude is observed and by the new generation emulated. The past of one's heritage passed on this way is never really outdated.

Possessions gathered through those who passed them on to me
Have a special place in my heart, my home and my family. These have the fingerprints that are indelibly impressed on these symbols of a heritage God has chosen to bless.

It may be lands and wealth; it may be even a book or a table. Each thing that has come to me as an inheritance is able to bring me to a stop that I might take time to consider. The influences of my heritage that thus has brought me hither.

There are those who desire to take this heritage away. Or treat that heritage only as a relic of some ancient day. But as I stop to take stock, and I then look around - I realize that my heritage is next door to God's holy ground.

“I pray this morning Father, for my family. I know they have made their own choices; their own decisions and have full right to do that. But maybe Father, if You would make them stop to consider today where their spiritual heritage came from, it would do them good. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Micah 2:6-13

JUSTICE AND RESTORATION

Truth telling is not very popular among any people who have become accustomed to do what they want without any immediate correction. When Micah prophesied against the influential people who were ripping the people off and getting rich at the expense of others, they quickly denounced him as a meddler in their affairs who was speaking foolishness. They were all quite sure that what he was warning them about would never happen to them because they were "the house of Jacob." People today seem to think that because they say they are "Christians," they are immune from any justice or judgment because of going their own way and doing their own thing. They are convinced that God will never bring judgment down on them because, "After all - we are Christians. God is merciful and loving. He would never send people to hell." They forget that the Lord said, "Your thoughts are not My thoughts, neither are your ways My ways."

Discipline for sins committed seems harsh and unfair to those who want to "feel good" about themselves and want to be comforted, not warned, when a preacher speaks the word of God. Some people have said, "I come to church to feel loved and comforted, not scared and guilty." When God speaks to us, we need to pay attention and listen to what He says whether it is for exhortation, correction and warning; edification, instruction and enlightenment, or comfort in times of difficulty and suffering.

Those Micah warned, would not pay attention to his attempt to reason with them. He made it plain that what was coming upon them was because of what they were doing, and there were consequences that they were going to have to face. God was not being unfair nor was He mistreating them. They were just going to reap what they had sown. Their behavior toward God was that of an enemy. They were willing to listen to the lies of those they paid to tell them what they wanted to hear, rather than listen to one who told the truth and spoke the word of God plainly.

Micah seriously denounced those who took everything from others for their own selves and for their own gain. They even had women (likely widows) and children thrown out of their own houses and took their property. They had twisted the law to such an extent that they made it suit themselves not the standards of righteousness. The false prophets they paid to tell them what they wanted to hear, were like drunkards who were rattling on with foolishness and deception.

Then, very suddenly, Micah’s prophecy goes beyond the disaster that was coming and the captivity to follow, to centuries in the future. Years that are ahead of us in our day were spoken of by Micah as he told of the future when Israel will be restored to what God wanted for them when He first chose them to be His earthly people. There will come a day when Judah and Israel will be one again under the leadership of Messiah. The Christ to come will lead them like a flock of sheep in Bozrah, a place noted for its flourishing flocks. Micah did not predict how it would happen, but rather the fact that it would happen in a coming day. Jews today are still looking for that day promised to them, when they will be like a peaceful flock following "The One who breaks open" the gate to their promised future.

A GLIMMER OF LIGHT

To some it is simply business when from others they seek to take, That which does not belong to them - to do that is a great mistake - Because God looks out for the widows, and He hears the orphan’s cry - And in righteous retribution, deals with those who cheat and lie.
Nothing is hidden from the Lord; He sees and knows each act. The deceit of false prophets and priests, doesn’t change what is really a fact. So those who seek to get rich or famous, at the loss and expense of others - Will find themselves the losers, instead of the Lord’s sisters and brothers.

Just because one says they’re a Christian, doesn’t mean that it is so. Reality in the life of a believer, quickly its truth does show. There is no question about it, when a truth-teller speaks openly God’s word - The words preached with passion and grace, well represent our living Lord.

Even though in this present-day world, there is a lot said that is not truth - Yet those who speak for the Lord, need to understand its value and worth. It is up to those who know Him, to shed in this present darkness some real light. Even though around us all seems hopeless, we look ahead to a future that’s bright.

“O Holy Father, I thank Thee today for giving Thy servant a sense of optimism that at times seems unrealistic even to me. But when we see positive changes in the lives and testimonies of Thy people as a result of the word of God preached, and we hear of the salvation of some souls, then I am made to realize Thy word and work is still doing that which Thou dost desire. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Micah 3

NO ANSWER FROM GOD

The first three chapters of Micah’s prophecy clearly show us that there is no one like God when it comes to witnessing. There is no question as to why God was not going to answer the cries of those who appeared to be startled by the warnings of Micah. The rich had stripped the poor of all they had and left them desolate. They thought because they were the heads of the house of Jacob they were above the law. Even though they were the rulers (the princes) of Israel they were publicly denounced by the preaching of the prophet. There was injustice socially by the rulers and injustice by the false prophets and priests who did what the rulers wanted, and said what they wanted to hear.

The leadership of the Jews: the rulers, priests and prophets who had the responsibility of leading the people, had set the law aside and took advantage of those people who they were supposed to lead. Such perverse leaders were the worst sinners of all. “Heads,” those who ruled, and false prophets were chanting, “Peace,” while their words were the poison of lies. They preached peace in spite of all of the laws of God they broke themselves and led others to break. They did not tell the truth that judgment follows the failure to obey the commandments of God. To ignore God’s word is to ignore God.

False prophets tell people what they want to hear. There are still lying prophets who "bite with their teeth" like a snake bite full of poison. They are those who are of the night with no vision, and consequently the people perish. They are darkness without divine light. There is no answer from God through those people, nor is there an answer to those who pay attention to their false message of a comfortable future without consequences for sin. When right and wrong are blurred, it is the responsibility of leaders to help other see what is right. They must teach Bible principles clearly and be examples of what they teach. They are to show what is right even though they cannot make people do what is right. Those kinds of leaders who lead without compassion and care, but use people to satisfy themselves, and false teachers.

Micah spoke for God in his day to “declare unto Jacob his transgression. He denounced sin by the power of the Spirit of the Lord who gives the power of justice and might to those who preach today in the name of the Lord. The Lord will not protect people from harm regardless of their behavior. Such bad moral behavior on the part of those who sin will bring the judgment God promised. When those leaders were in trouble, they called on God to get them out, and when they weren’t delivered, they blamed God for not rescuing them from the consequences of their own sin.

It is not uncommon today for people to have a wrong understanding of the seriousness of sin. It is not also uncommon for people to have a wrong understanding of God. Leaders today will often pass their judgment favorably or unfavorably depending on who bribes them. Priests and religious advisors teach what people want to hear when they are being paid for their "services rendered." There are "prophets" (preachers) who will give a false message as long as they are being paid to do so. We must never let money, bribes or any other manipulation scheme to control the messages we give to the Lord’s people or to those who are unsaved. It is our work to speak up for that which is right and warn against that which is wrong.
It is also as serious a sin and charge against those who try to manipulate the Lord's servants, as it is for them to speak a slanted message. Micah was true to God and His word in spite of what the others did. The power behind his ministry was the Spirit of God. It is by the power of the Spirit we can minister and serve God and His people.

When Jerusalem was being undermined by false prophets, priests and leaders in the day of Hezekiah, Jeremiah quoted Micah's words from a hundred years before when he predicted the fall of Jerusalem. Samaria was conquered during the times of Micah, but Jerusalem was spared from the Assyrians. Judah suffered the same fate later when Nebuchadnezzar took captive all of Judah including Jerusalem. Hezekiah was a good king but the judges, priests and prophets who were getting rich at the expense of the poor there, were ignoring God and His word. They were insulting Him by saying, "Is not the Lord among us? None evil can come upon us."

Even though we live under the authority of leaders, we cannot blame them for all of our problems. It is our choice as to whether we sin, or allow sin to continue in our sphere of influence and life. It is up to each person to repent and turn to God from idols. Each person has to commit his or herself to truth, justice and righteousness in spite of what others may choose to do. We have our own responsibility to live our lives in ways that are appropriate and consistent with the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ that we profess.

Micah 3:8. "But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin."

POWER.

There is abuse and oppression, injustice and deceit.
Eyes are looking in the wrong places; sin is done with hands and feet.
Minds are polluted with thoughts that are out of control,
Affecting not only actions, but also damming the soul.
The natural man is powerless to stop doing the evil he chooses.
The darkness of sin has descended as mankind looses
His way and follows the blind who lead the blind.
And moral decay controls the body, emotions and mind.

Yet, in this terrible malaise of evil and darkness -
There is power to overcome the pressure when one truly harkens
To the voice of God that in many ways can be heard,
And most clearly is known by giving heed to God's Word.
The Spirit of the Lord given at new birth and dwelling within,
Gives guidance through God's truth, and power over sin -
He makes plain the problem and the results it will have -
Then empowers us to deal with sin through the power He gave.

The powers in the world and all that they claim -
Have no power to control those who believe in His name.
The authority of the Lord Jesus Christ is greater than all -
And that power is available to me when I on Him call.
The Spirit of the Lord gives understanding and might.
When we walk with the Lord we walk in the light.
That light overcomes the darkness that covers the earth -
And One shining Light the bubble of darkness has burst.

"After all the years of spiritual darkness, O God: when the Light of Life shone in Bethlehem, it changed everything. I know it seems like darkness is winning again, but please, Lord God, let the light of Thy truth shine forth today. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Micah 4

AN UNCONDITIONAL PROMISE

There is no one like the Lord in witnessing and warning, and there is no one like Him in bringing consolation in desperate times. In chapter 4 there is a change of tone in Micah's prophecy as he tells of the future glories of the Jews in the first verses of this account. The prophet then speaks of the regathering of the children of Israel when the Lord will reign over them, and the nations of the world in the restored kingdom. He left no doubt that both Israel and Judah would be conquered even though his prediction was one hundred years before Nebuchadnezzar took Judah captive. In his prophecy he even named Babylon as the nation that would take them away, and as the place from which the remnant would come again to Jerusalem.

The reestablishing of Israel as a nation under the leadership of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Jewish Messiah, changed the predictions of doom that would shortly come to pass, to fulfilled promises in the future. Both
Isaiah and Micah were aware of the fact that there was a bright future for Israel. Far beyond their present departure and coming captivity, was a glorious future that was given by divine promise to Abraham. The "last days" refers to the kingdom reign of our Lord that is promised to take place. The time on the calendar is not given, but even in this passage of scripture there is reference given to the deliverance that will come when the antichrist and "many nations" will be defeated by the power of Israel's coming King.

Often the Lord's people get used to just living for the present when they get away from the reading of the scripture and "rightly dividing the word of truth." Leaders and nations are desperate for peace on their own terms without facing the consequences of sin. The righteousness of God demands justice and punishment for sin. The love of God has provided a way for sin to be dealt with in a just way that satisfies His holiness. The grace of God makes it available to any and all who will come to God through the Lord Jesus Christ. The mercy of God withholds punishment while opportunity is given to repent of sin and forsake it. The holiness of God establishes the place of acceptance in which a people made holy can live with Him in holiness.

Israel and Jerusalem, the geographical center of earth, will be the moral, spiritual and political center of the world when people and nations will declare their allegiance to the King of kings and Lord of lords. His rule will be world-wide and wars will cease. Even the war materials will be used for peaceful purposes. Jews that are scattered all over the earth will return to Israel and restored to their Lord. "In thee shall all nations of the earth be blessed" will be an actual fact. God promised peace and prosperity for the nation when they submit to Him as their Lord. He also promised judgment and punishment for sin on those who will not obey and follow Him.

Certain principles can be counted on that relate to the harmony and fellowship between the Lord and His people. For us today one such principle is clearly stated: "Wherefore come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." In every dispensation of God's dealings with humans there have been, and will continue to be, ways in which His people can live in the conscious enjoyment of "God with us," "God in us," and "God for us."

There was a time when the Jews complained that they had no king like other nations, and said they had no counselor. So, they fell into grievous sin under the influence of the "world" around them, and rebelled against God. That insulting attitude even led to them ignoring the Lord, His word, His commandments and His laws both moral and domestic. Because of that the promised captivity came. Assyria conquered Israel to the extent that there is no known tribal identity of those who survived the conquest and the people were dispersed throughout the Assyrian empire. When Babylon conquered Judah (which included Benjamin and some of Simeon) they were taken away as a group to the city of Babylon and were able to maintain much of their identity. Some of them returned as a remnant to Israel and were able to start over as a identifiable people.

By the captivity of the Jews the Lord allowed to take place, He dealt with their sin and wanted to purify unto Himself a people on earth that will be separated unto Him rather than be like all the other nations of earth. But even the returned exiles blended in again with the nations around them. The time is coming when the One who chose them will be their King, their Counselor and they will recognize and submit to the Lord who is their Redeemer. Through the ages the Jews have faced universal hatred and it will continue all the way to the reign of the antichrist. But then, in a very short time, "The Lord shall have them in derision" who have made His earthly people the object of their hatred, and He will triumph gloriously.

For us who have already come into His kingdom: we entered by the new birth. We have been born again into the kingdom of God. Those who belong to the Lord are glad to serve Him, and they love one another. We act on His counsel given to us in the Bible. We are motivated by love to follow Him no matter what other people do. He is already our Lord, our King, our Counselor.

Micah 4:2. "And many nations shall come, and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.'"

A LOOK AHEAD.

In days when things seem hopeless - look ahead
And by seeing more than these events - look ahead
When there is no one with solutions
And there are increasing moral pollutions
And one thing people have in common is confusion -
Look ahead!
There are consequences for all actions - look ahead
The choices we make will impact us - look ahead
Take time to seriously consider
When deciding whether both or either
Is God's will, or leave it all together -
Look ahead:

When asked to make a decision - look ahead
If you are not clear about a situation - look ahead
How will this action affect your tomorrow?
Can you afford it or will you borrow
From your future, and will it bring sorrow?
Look ahead:

This thing you are about to do - look ahead
Has God left it all up to you? - look ahead
What do you think the outcome will be?
Is there more to it than what you see?
How will it affect you eternally?
Look ahead:

There is a day of glory coming - look ahead
In view of that, take this warning - look ahead
Remember, whatever you sow you reap -
What you give is more important than what you keep -
Joy will come even though now you weep -
Look ahead:

"Lord God, I look for the Lord to come - at least I think I do. I know it is a fact, and I
want to be engaged in something meaningful when He calls. Please help me to be
wise in decision-making so I will not be ashamed in that day. In the name of the Lord
Jesus Christ, Amen."

Micah 5

THE PEACE

'Micah directs his prophecy toward Jerusalem and the time when "the judge of Israel," Zedekiah, was
publicly humiliated, his sons were killed before him and he was blinded, bound and taken away as a
common captive to Babylon. Judah had become obsessed with the position, wealth and power that was
centered in Jerusalem. The self-importance of the leadership was going to be brought to nothing. Jerusalem
was going to be besieged by the army of Nebuchadnezzar, destroyed and burned, and the people taken
away as captives. Jerusalem would be laid waste and their king could do nothing about it. He could not save
it.

When people get used to what they think is their own importance in the affairs of nations and the scheme of
things, they fall prey to that which is bound to bring their downfall - pride. When pride is accompanied with
idolatry and injustice, there is no escaping divine retribution. "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to
the humble." One well wrote...

"He that is down, need fear no fall,
He that is low, no pride.
He that is humble shall ever have,
God to be his guide."

Then in his prophecy, Micah speaks of a place that is "little among the thousands of Judah," and unfolds to
the people the real hope of the future. It would be in that place from which the Hope of Israel would come.
Bethlehem (house of bread) and Ephratah (fruitfulness) would be the place where "the Bread of God" would
come down from heaven to first dwell among men. He is the True Fruitful Vine that would be the Source of
all fruitfulness for God's glory. It would be from the Bethlehem that the One would come who would "save
His people from their sins." When the wise men from the east came to Jerusalem following His star, they
were told that this was the place where the long-expected Messiah would be born. The scholarly Jewish
rabbis read what Micah had said, and they knew what the prophecy meant.

It was from this "little" place the Ruler of Israel would come and associate Himself with the common people,
not the aristocracy of Jerusalem. He was born among the common people of Judah. He lived and worked
among the common men and women of His day. He identified Himself as a "man among men" and it was in
that deliberate condition, in that specific place, and at that "fullness of the time," when "The Word was made
flesh” and dwelt among His people “full of grace and truth.” He was the Shepherd of Israel, the Son of David, “the Ruler in Israel” whose goings forth have been “from of old, from everlasting.”

The promise of our Lord’s coming was made to Adam, and each believing person who looked forward to His coming by faith, recognized the One who would come from the “seed of the woman,” “from the seed of Abraham,” “from the seed of David,” as the Supreme Object of their faith. He had been alive forever, but would be born as a man into human history from the small nation of Israel. When “He came unto His own, His own received Him not. They will experience travail after His birth rather than the travail of birth, because of the unbelief of all of Israel. When they said, “His blood be on us and on our children,” the anguish of Israel was yet in the future. The great travail of the Tribulation is yet to come on the Jews, but the Lord will save them from annihilation when He will come in the glory of His kingdom.

More than that, “this man shall be the peace.” To us in this day of grace, “He is our peace.” “He made peace through the blood of His cross.” He said, “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give unto you.” We who have trusted Him as our Savior and Lord have experienced this and do so when we walk with Him in the light of His truth. This peace will come to the nation of Israel when the “Assyrian” from the north will come against Israel in the “time of Jacob’s trouble. The Assyrians came against Samaria in the time of the prophet, but there is yet to be another enemy from the north who will try to eliminate Israel completely.

At that time, the Assyria of the end times will be the kingdoms of the north that will oppose Israel, as well as those from the south and east. The coming King of Israel will defeat them by the word of His mouth and Israel will become strong under the Promised Ruler, our Lord Jesus Christ. "All thine enemies shall be cut off." Everything Israel had depended on will be destroyed. The heart of the people will be turned to Him who they had rejected. The “horses and chariots” on which they depended, the idols that had turned them away from the Lord their God, will be gone, and they will know Him as their Messiah. The enemies of the Lord’s people will be His enemies.

We need to be reminded of the fact that dependence on anything or other people instead of God, turns us away from faith. Self-dependence is deceptive and fails. Our strength is in the Lord alone. He is our strength today and any power to serve Him acceptably comes from Him. For those of us in the kingdom of God today, our confidence is in God alone for our present and future life.

There will be "seven shepherds" and "eight principal men," leaders, who will share with the Lord in the defeat of the enemies of Israel indicating there will be full and sufficient to deal with all that oppose. The "dew" of grace will be evident in the restored remnant as well as the "lion" of judgment. The strength of the coming kingdom will be the power of God, not military might. Every vestige of idolatry and false worship will be destroyed in the coming kingdom when the Lord Jesus Christ rules in equity, power and grace.

Micah 5:4. “And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.”

**THE MAJESTY OF THE NAME.**

**His priority**

Lord, means He is supreme, there is none so high as He. 
In all He asks of us, we willingly obey.
There is uniqueness in His Person; He stands in holy dignity - It is only right we act on what He will say.

**His nobility**

Son of the Highest, what a name, what condescending grace 
Brought Him to earth, here to live and die. 
He who is eternal in every way, became subject to time and space. 
In Him, the Eternal God in flesh drew nigh.

**His purity**

Holy One, spotless in character, in nature and in deed. 
The Sinless One in moral perfection, lived and walked with me. 
We must bow in reverence and to His Word give heed. 
The Lamb of God gave Himself, that through Him we are clean.

**His supremacy**

Christ the Lord: imagine, the Supreme Lord, on a mission. 
Sent by God to do what we could never do. 
From the fullness of His person, He paid for our redemption.
There is nothing more to add; the redemptive work is through.

His universality
Light of the Gentiles: His truth shines over all the world.
Into the dark there came a Light that lightens every man.
Grace and Truth are in His Person, like a banner forever unfurled.
And the righteousness of His Light, reaches to every land.

His mercy
Jesus, means ‘The Lord is Savior,’ there is no other name
Whereby any and all humanity ever can be saved.
To this majestic Person, the nobility of His family came.
And on the ‘palms of His hands,’ now our names are there engraved.

“O Lord, may I always give due reverence to Thy name. Never allow me to suggest in any way, a familiarity of human equals. At the same time, I praise Thee for the right to call Thee, ‘Abba Father,’ and to address Thee as ‘My Lord, my God, my Savior.’” In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen’

Micah 5:4. “And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.”

GOOD AND BAD.

Micah was quite a man! In the power and by the spirit of the Lord, he had to lay open the sins and transgressions of his own people. The warnings he had to give cut right to the quick of things. He had to say it the way it was, and no one was able to escape the meaning of what he said. No one could say they didn’t know what was coming.

His day was just like ours: any person with eyes in their head, surely knows that things are rapidly deteriorating and, for the most part, no one is paying any attention. But like Micah, we have to keep on warning, pleading, teaching, instructing and praying because this is what God has called us to do.

This man of God’s choosing, must have been very thankful that God let him know it would all change some day. He didn’t live to see it. The Ruler did come out of Bethlehem just like he predicted. The other prophecies will be fulfilled too. It will happen! He will stand and rule with divine strength and power. The majesty of the Lord will be declared with all the authority of heaven behind every pronouncement. What Micah prophesied will happen and peace and tranquility will descend upon the world when the Lord Jesus Christ rules and is great to the ends of the earth. The weapons will be laid down and the material put into other uses. There will be food close at hand for every man. The doors won’t have to be locked because of fear. The reign of the Lord will come. There is no question about that.

I wonder if I have the courage to keep at this task God has given me the privilege to have. Sometimes it seems hopeless. Other times there are glimmers of light. So much of what is being done in the name of the Lord, seems to be so foggy and fuzzy that I wonder if reality is even to be found. Yet I have confidence that the God who called Micah in his day, has called me. God does pardon iniquity. God does still delight in mercy. He will have compassion on us. He who casts sins into the depths of the sea, will perform the truth, the promises He made. I am content! By God’s help, I will continue!

“Thanks Lord for assuring me from this servant of a past generation, that what has been promised will happen. I need these reminders lest I look only on the effect of this day’s work and forget that this is only a part of a whole work of God. I appreciate how often these things are repeated in the scriptures, so that I only have to turn a page or two and the positive is there, even though the negative is there too. Amen.”

Micah 6

THE LORD’S CONTROVERSY

Micah had abruptly turned to a view of the future of Israel in the past chapter and now in this chapter he comes back to warns of the present situation the Jews were in. Their relationship with God was in jeopardy and the future was bleak. The first five verses are the Lord pleading with His people from His heart. The next three verses set clearly out what the Lord requires of his people. He requires spiritual worship and spiritual service. The remainder of the chapter denounces their sin and evil and judgment to come.

As the Lord God deals with His people, He lays out the reasons for the judgment that is coming upon them. His punishment for sin and the carrying out of divine justice by judgment was deserved. His grace that was
extended to them for generations and the redemption He provided for them by his own hand were acts of a righteous, caring and loving God. God was faithful to Judah throughout their history. Centuries had passed as He gave warnings and entreaties from prophets. He made His requirements simple and plain so they could not misunderstand His desire and the basis of their fellowship. But the people continued to oppress the poor and helpless, and they held to their idolatry.

We must learn that just because judgment doesn't fall speedily on those who sin against God, there are consequences to sin that are inescapable. God does not compromise His holiness and justice. He does, however, give opportunity for repentance and the forsaking of sin so that the guilty can return and find grace and mercy.

The Lord called creation to witness against His people that justice will be carried out. His creation remains intact without changing because of the fickle challenges made by mortal men. Those same hills of strength and consistency were the places where the idolatrous people of God erected their pagan altars to false gods. Now they were witnesses to the evil committed and the righteous acts of God. God had done nothing but good for them. He had redeemed from bondage, guided them through the wilderness and protected them from their enemies. He had made covenant with them, but they forsook Him and the covenant they had formed with Him. They had gladly taken and claimed all His benefits, but ignored Him and turned away from Him.

One wrote, "I will lift up my eyes unto the hills, From whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord which made heaven and earth." The creation of God stands as a testimony to who He is in power and authority. It is a display of His glory and beauty. His fullness is evident in the bounties contained in the work of creation which came from His word. But natural man cannot see what is evident to the eyes of those in whom God the Holy Spirit dwells. The willful blindness of those who live in the flesh makes them to worship the creature rather than the Creator. God continues to extend His kindness, providing that which we could not live without, and yet people do not consider the Lord God as the Source of all our blessings.

When we begin to take the Lord for granted and all His bountiful gifts for our daily needs seem to continue without ceasing, we are in danger of ignoring the provisions of God as something special and claim them as our right. The same is true when we count our spiritual blessings as what we deserve, rather than acts of divine grace. To devalue all the wonders and provisions of God puts us in danger of losing them all. Remembering past blessings and provisions of mercy and grace, will help us realize where we are, what we have and from whom it all came.

As the Lord dealt with His people Israel, He laid out the reasons for the judgment that was going to come upon them. The people went through the forms of making sacrifices to simply please Him and get Him to let them alone to do their own thing. But rituals and religion were not what God wanted then, nor does He want that now. They even sacrificed their firstborn at times, but that was only a form of following the acts of idolaters. They were doing just the opposite of what God wanted. They were deceptive and dishonest. They distorted righteous standards and demanded what was not theirs to have. They used lies and violence to get what was not theirs, and there was nothing good that would come from their covetous sinful acts. The evil practices of their daily life and personal life led to evil spiritual life in which they perverted their own honor, burned their firstborn, defiled themselves and their families by choosing wickedness, and they rejected the Lord their God.

God wants His people to be just and fair. He wants them to be humble in themselves and merciful to others. He wants them to be living sacrifices that are holy, unblameable and acceptable to Him as those who represent Him in this ungodly world. The heavenly Father pleads with His children so they will listen to His voice when He speaks and obey Him. He tells them why reprove and discipline for sin must come on them. Wise people do listen when they hear the word of the Lord. The wicked, on the other hand, change the standards of life and righteousness in order to get what they want but do not have the right to get.

In Micah's day, like today, wicked people manipulate the just standards, scales, measures and laws that have governed society to suit themselves. In spite of all that people think they will gain by deceit and unlawful actions; they will find no satisfaction nor fulfillment in such manipulation. Ordinary people, like their wicked leaders are a reproach and disgrace to a culture and society. Righteousness is the basic rightness of anything we do. That can bring the right results. All that God does is right and He expects that from His people. Justice has to do with maintaining order, dignity, equality and compassion that keeps a society from chaos. Sinful power, position and ill-gotten possessions defeat this order. The love of God that has been shed abroad in our hearts should be demonstrated by our love for God and other people.
The people of Israel followed the idolatry of Omri and his son Ahab who led them astray and away from God. Those who follow this kind of leadership in practice and belief will be punished by righteous judgment. People who neglect the Lord, ignore Him, and are disinterested when His name and authority are brought up are like Balaam and Balak, and natural mankind who brings down on his own head the results of his own devising. Truth is reliable, stable, dependable and faithful. It is a trustworthy way of acting. It is the corresponding of a statement with a fact. Loving-kindness is a fundamental character trait of God which includes grace, mercy and steadfast love. All of humanity must rely on this if there is to be any hope for a people to survive. Israel was in danger of becoming extinct as a people because of their lack of loving-kindness toward each other. God had to set them aside as captives that they might learn the knowledge of God. They had to learn how to live consistently and compatibly with the character of God and get a personal acquaintance with Him.

The holiness of God is moral perfection that is godly in its nature and Christ-like in its actions. The fear of the Lord is our accountability and responsibility to Him and the standards of His divine nature of which believers have been made partakers. Transparency and honesty; humility and mercy; grace and love in His people is essential for holy fellowship with our Lord.

Micah 6:8. "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

**WHAT DEFINES ME?**

God hasn’t left me without defining what He expects of me. It isn’t hard to understand these things when seen in a community. My neighbors and acquaintances form opinions by what they see. When they talk about me to others, what would their definition be?

I ask myself, do I fit the profile God would expect of His child?
Is there an impression of contentment; does my temperament seem mild?
When I go about my work, does it seem orderly or rather wild?
Do my words give a positive view of God; do they leave my character undefiled?

The first thing God expects of me relates to me in public places. To do justly, does not mean that I have a variety of public faces. It does mean I am fair and trustworthy, walking with steady paces. In business and in personal life, the public “me” God’s truth embraces.

When there are needs around me, do I stop, or walk on by?
If asked for help, do I take the time to find out the reason why
A person is in need; do I take enough time to try
To solve the fundamental problem rather that just give them money to buy?

Walking humbly doesn’t mean I walk with my head down low. It does mean I appreciate my Lord, and let that sentiment show. It also means when I walk with men, they in turn will know - I have and am nothing in myself, it is by God’s grace I live and grow.

The passing of time has not made changes in what God expects of men. It is as important that I represent God now, as others did way back then.

Amos said, “act justly,” Hosea taught, “love mercy,” God used both of them.

Isaiah told people to “walk humbly with God,” - in these ways I can honor Him.

“Gracious Father, I have enjoyed these last few days in many ways. Now I am reviewing my interaction with these people and family members, and am wondering if I have been defined in their minds the way I should be. I know I didn’t preach to them, but I did have opportunity to pass on a few thoughts that hopefully, reached beyond their hearing. Bless them and the words spoken, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Micah 7

**FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT**

The order of the book of Micah is that chapters one through three contain warnings of judgment coming soon. Chapters four and five tell of blessing promised to the Jews in the future. Chapters six and seven tell of repentance needed now. Because God is God, He requires His people to do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God. God reveals: “He showed thee O man...” God redeems: “pardoneth iniquity...” God rules: “the nations shall see and be confounded...” In the last two chapters of Micah's prophecy, the mountains
listen, the Lord pleads with His people, Micah speaks in a mourning voice, and finally Israel confesses their sins and turns to God in the coming day of restoration.

The gloom of the prophet was over the obvious deteriorating society in which the rulers wanted gifts from the poor; judges who were supposed to uphold the law wanted bribes, and moral corruption was everywhere among the people. No one could be found who was upright. Integrity was gone. There was no righteousness among the people. The nation was sinking lower and lower into selfishness until even natural affection was gone. Honor and decency were lacking. People didn't trust one another even in families. Deceit and dishonesty had ruined government and families which has always been the core of society. When families become dysfunctional and disintegrate because of self-centered people who care only for themselves, then judgment and punishment will come.

The watchman of the nation could see the army of the enemy would soon be coming, and could envision the confusion and chaos of the people when the inevitable would happen. Divine judgment is the only way to stop rampant evil and bring a nation down in humility and repentance for their sin. People have to be brought to the place where there is an inward change before there can be outward restoration that changes a society. The evil practices of a nation open them up to just punishment. Society today rationalizes sin so that integrity and honesty are hard to find. Even Christian principles are hard to find because of the willingness of professing Christians to compromise truth in order to be popular and get people to "attend their church." Standards of righteousness and honesty come from God and do not change even though society as a whole, changes.

The prophet Micah, in spite of all he saw and knew was going to happen to his people, had personal faith in God [v.7], and he also had faith that the time would come when Israel would again put their faith in the Lord [v.8-10]. He was willing to wait for God to do what was needed because he knew God hears the cry of the repentant sinner and saves those who call upon Him in humility and faith. God can, and does, punish sin and the sinner, because He is just. When justice is being served, God can, and does, bring repentant people through difficult times and events. When justice has been served, God will bring truly repentant people out of darkness into His light of life by His grace. He alone is faithful, and will bring His people back to Himself, and from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.

Trials and just punishment for sin is to bring about change and recovery on the part of the guilty, and to provide a warning for those who are tempted. Any discipline is to change behavior permanently, so the punishment from discipline is not to be lightened because of a false repentance. Punishment for sin is to deal with the problem consistently and permanently so that misbehavior will not happen again. Lessons that are learned well remain with us. Sin is no light matter to a holy God, and the justice sin demands must be endured with obedience and patience during the times of tribulation and trial that bring the appropriate correction.

In mercy God forgives, and offers acceptance to all who confess and forsake sin and come to Him. Micah could see from God's view to the time of revival that will come in the end-times when Israel will turn to the Lord in that coming day. Restoration will bring an end to "Jacob's troubles," and to Israel and Jerusalem, the kingdom of peace will really come. The prophet raises a song of praise for the faithfulness of God, even though he recognized there was a cost for sin that had to be paid. He had confidence that there would be restoration and a return to the land of promise.

He could look ahead by faith and see the time when the Lord will be the Shepherd of His people and will lead them and feed them. He could see that the former enemies will come to Israel seeking peace with the nation and the great "King of the Jews," who they had once rejected. He could see by faith those nations coming, admitting their guilt with their "hand over their mouth." Israel will once again prosper under the reign of the King and the nations of earth will be careful about what they say and do under the new order of peace and righteousness. The fear of the Lord will be real and universal. In mercy and grace God will bring in the time for which the Jews, and really the whole world, has longed.

There is praise to the Lord who "will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." The Lord God forgives sin, removes sin, and never remembers their sin when justice has been carried out. The sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf, brings relief and joy to our hearts when we realize justice has been served for us when He "suffered, the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God." Chapter seven begins in gloom and ends in hope. God gives truth to His people and keeps His promises to them.

God expects His people today to be just, love mercy and to walk humbly before His in spite of what others around us in the world do. Our Christian homes and families, and even our sphere of influence in society
should have a positive effect on others. When God’s people are living the way He intends, and are practicing righteousness in a way that can be seen, we do have an influence on the actions and attitudes of those who know us. We should never allow the practices of the ungodly society to make us adapt to all that is popular and acceptable by those who do not know the Lord. It is not possible to win people to the Savior by being like them, but by being an example to them of that which is right. There is a cost to righteousness. Godliness does bring pressures and persecutions of one kind or another that have to be endured by those who love the Lord. We are to be lights shining in a dark night as we represent Him who “Is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all.”

**Micah 7:18.** “Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy.”

**THE HIGH VIEW.**

We cannot deceive ourselves into thinking that God does not know Everything about us, whether it is real or only for show.

So, it should not be surprising when God moves in to correct - That stubborn disobedience will not forever harden our neck.

Even though we may be in His children, He is not going to overlook The attitude of indifference or the way of the world we took. He gives us time to stop and consider, and hopefully, repent - Then we will know the reason, for the corrective measures He sent.

When finally, there is a change of mind, and we return to Him Then He is willing to pardon and forgive, and real life begins again. It is only reasonable to expect that discipline will bring change - And when habits that hurt us are gone, our whole view of things is rearranged.

God has the right to correct our wrongs; we are His children after all. But in His marvelous grace and mercy, He picks us up after we fall. His purpose is that we learn that sin has consequences we cannot avoid. He is acting in love when He chastises us, for He is our Sovereign Lord.

His anger is not without reason, and is never out of control. The reason for holy wrath against sin is ultimately for the saving of our soul. God will do whatever is necessary that we then dangers of sin eschew When that actually becomes real to us, then He gives us the higher view.

God delights in showing mercy; He waits for the penitent’s cry. When that comes from our heart, He will not pass us by. What joy and delight there is when Father and children are in fellowship again! What lasting blessings will be our portion as the rest of our life begins!

“O Pardoning God, how much it means to me that Thy plans are going to be fulfilled in spite of my behavior. I will praise Thee forever for not letting sin go unpunished, and for making it possible for me to be forgiven and accepted in Christ. From this high plain I look a long way into the future - and the past, and see Thy glory revealed. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”
NAHUM
Payday someday!

Boundaries and rules for living are established by God. To cross these boundaries and/or deliberately break them is sin. Willful disobedience and rebellion against God's authority, or an apathetic attitude toward evil will be settled by God in His own time and way. In Nahum's prophecy against Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, he describes the Person and Nature of God as the Supreme Judge of the universe, and then describes the judgment of God on those who were warned by God and acted in faith on His warnings, but later deliberately turned away from Him. After the introduction to God is made plain, the rest of the book tells of the doom of apostates, those who know the truth and deliberately turn away from God and reject the truth.

Without laws and moral boundaries in nations, chaos and confusion results. When people begin to rebel against moral authority, a deterioration sets in that once it starts, cannot really be stopped. It may be slowed down on occasions like happened in Nineveh under the preaching of Jonah, but when that generation had passed on, the people went back to what they were like before and even went farther than those before them. God will not allow sin to go unchecked forever. No one can safely defy God and get away with it. The kind of relationship we have with God is up to us.

It was during the time of Jeremiah and the other prophets, Habakkuk and Zephaniah, before the invasion and capture of Judah, that Nahum came from Galilee to give the prophecy God gave him to comfort the Jews who had been harassed and had paid tribute to Assyria for years, and to warn Nineveh that they were finished. An apostate nation and people cannot survive the wrath of a just and holy God. Even though the Assyrian empire had dominated the Middle East for years by cruel military might unleashed on all the nations around it, payday had finally come. Over one hundred years before, another prophet had come out of Galilee, sent by God to Nineveh. Jonah preached a simple message, and the people from the king to the poorest, humbled themselves under the preaching of Jonah and were spared from destruction by God's mercy.
Revivals do not last. The hearts of human beings are so deceitful and desperately wicked that without a "new nature" implanted by the "new birth," even sincere repentance does not change the desire of people for the independence of self-will, self-exaltation and selfishness. When the moral laws of God that have been placed in every person are ignored, broken and rejected, then it is inevitable that justice and judgment for sin will come upon that person, those persons, or that nation, because "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all nations that forget God."

Because God is longsuffering and full of mercy, does not mean that He overlooks sin and the just judgments that sin brings to those who do not consider it serious. God's character and His unchanging standards do not allow for the opinions of men to interfere with divine authority. Evil again took control of Nineveh, "the city of blood," and cruelty, arrogance and treachery led the Assyrians into social injustice, implacable cruelty and idolatry that produced lies and murder. That brought about the downfall of the city of Nineveh and the empire of Assyria by the Scythians and Babylonians, even to the extent of annihilation of the city.

Evil may seem like it takes control of people and nations, and is seemingly unstoppable, but God has the final word and the final action is in His control. His righteousness and justice will prevail over all obstacles. The one theme of the book of Nahum is the destruction of Nineveh. Nahum was chosen by God to predict the final and complete overthrow of the empire that had been built up by violence and cruel oppression of conquered people. The end of the empire was going to be violent and beyond the normal way of just retribution. The Assyrians had conquered the northern tribes of Israel and had come to the gates of Jerusalem, and in 185,000 people in the Assyrian army perished in one night when God intervened. Nahum may have left Galilee when the invaders came and went to Judah, which was likely where he was when this prophecy was written.

Nahum's mission was to pronounce judgment on the Assyrians because they had deliberately rejected God even after they had humbled themselves before Him years earlier even to accepting His word and worshiping Him. Then over 80 years later they perished. The prophet's message was also a warning to the people of Judah who wanted to be like the Assyrians in power and possessions. The last part of chapter 1 is a declaration of Nineveh's doom. Chapter 2 describes that doom and chapter 3 tells why that doom was deserved. After the first two verses of introduction, Nahum writes the book as a very dramatic Hebrew poem.

Hebrew poetry uses imagery and lofty words to give force and beauty to the thoughts expressed in the writing. Our imagination and the verbal expressions, makes the message almost visual to one who reads it, especially if it is read out loud. The descriptions of the Lord in the first verses are an acrostic. God's power is described as a warning to the Assyrians and as a comfort to the Jews. Justice carried out seems to be good news when we read it as it relates to the enemies of God, but we need to remember that "God is no respecter of persons." Justice and holiness will triumph over all foes of righteousness. The authority and power of the Lord surpasses all other power of man's devising. The Great Almighty God, the Creator of the universe controls all and His judgments will prevail. The verdict given against Nineveh is a warning to the Jews, and any who will deliberately turn away from Him, that they will fail and fall. The Victor will vanquish all His foes beneath His feet, and eternal death is certain for those who will not learn from those before us who were apostates.

What can be taught to those who will not learn?
What can be done for those who from truth have turned?
What can we say to those who God's great grace have spurned?
Simply warn, and say, "Pay day, some day!"

When we watch those who listen, but will not hear -
When we see those who once came, but no longer are willing to come near -
When we look beyond the present choices, to the coming days of their fear -
All we can say is, "Pay day, some day!"

When truth once held is now deliberately neglected -
When the Savior who was once honored, is now rejected -
When those who once were preserved, will no longer be protected -
Then all we can say is, "Pay day some day!"

It is inevitable that the denial of God's truth will fail -
To yield to the will of men instead, means that evil will prevail -
And apostasy continued in, brings judgment and all that entails -
When just judgment comes we know now is "Pay day some day!"
"Father, Thy mercy has certainly been shown to us as a nation. Thy grace has been demonstrated to our family for generations. Thy compassion and longsuffering has been experienced personally by Thy servant. But I fear those of us who have been so blessed have been ignoring Thee, and are forgetting that pay day is coming. Hear my unwritten request I pray, O Gracious Father, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Nahum 1:1-8

THE PASSION, POWER AND GRANDEUR OF GOD

A "burden" is a weighty saying, a weight to be carried, an oracle or a message from God. A prophetic message can be a serious warning or it can be a comfort depending on the relationship a person, or a people, have with God. Nahum's message was both a warning for the people of Nineveh and a comfort for the people of Judah. The prophetic message Nahum had already written in a book before he delivered it, was a carefully crafted work telling of the power, justice and grandeur of a righteous, holy God. It speaks to the conflict and contrast of God and the cruel, evil Assyrian empire and its defiance of normal human decency.

It is not uncommon for people today to have a totally unrealistic and unreasonable concept of God. To many He is no more that some cosmic force of nature that is without order. Some call on "mother nature" and consider that to be God. Others visualize Him as a grandfather figure dressed in white with a flowing beard sitting in a rocking chair with lightning bolts in His hand, throwing them at earth on a capricious whim. Other think He is angry, vindictive and needs to be placated by people "doing the best they can" and hoping that He will in some way be bribed into accepting them the way they are without any real form of justice being carried out. A God of order, righteousness, justice and holiness seems foreign to people who are used to manipulating or being manipulated by stronger powers. Love, mercy and grace, does not fit in the minds of sinful people with the righteous hatred, unchanging moral laws, punishment to the full extent of a righteous standard that are consistent with the character of God.

As Nahum writes his book and then delivers his message of God's judgment on Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, he presents the character of God in contrast to the arrogance, cruelty, pride and insolence of the Assyrians. The Assyrians had defeated, destroyed and decimated the northern tribes of Israel and tried to conquer Judah. The truth of God was proclaimed by His chosen prophet as to the subject matter - the judgment of Nineveh. The majesty of God is presented in opening statements so that there is no misunderstanding as to what is going to happen, to whom, and why. The power of God in creation and His control of nature, and as a means of executing righteous judgment, is a demonstration of His might and who the enemies of God are up against. The goodness of God towards those who trust in Him when there is trouble coming, is a comfort to them, even though the judgment of God cannot be thwarted. God character and principles are consistent in every nation, situation and action. He lives and acts in an eternal "now" so that what may seem to us as an overlooking of wrong, is not. His mercy endures forever, but to despise His mercy will definitely bring just judgment because of one's own actions.

The word "jealous" is a title for God that does not have the petty concept people usually associate with the word. Rather it means there are no rivals that can compare with His love for His people, His character, His honor, His holiness and His glory. His zeal is a fervency for that which is true, just and holy. It includes affirming what is right and condemning that which is wrong. The Assyrians who had been allowed by God to bring judgment on Israel, tried to intimidate the Jews in Jerusalem but that didn't work. When they scorned God Himself with blasphemous boasting, the Lord smote 185,000 right at the gate of the city. For some reason wicked people think that when God is silent, He forgets. But He is "slow to anger" for a reason. His patient waiting for repentance does not mean His justice will not be carried out.

Holy anger is righteous and appropriate. Self-restraint, love and mercy go together. Hasty retribution even when we are provoked is not an action of the Holy Spirit but of the flesh. Longsuffering really means a long temper. The contrast of God's patience and justice, with the cruel, defiant Assyrians is really the theme of the book of Nahum. This whole theme is in the third verse of chapter one. "Jealous... vengeance... furious... acquit" are all words we use to express emotions and behavior. God is not unaware of human activities nor is He removed from the suffering of His people at the hands of those who hate them and God. When we trust God, He is good and preserves us from being troubled in spite of all that is going on around us. If we reject Him, we will experience the overflowing flood of divine justice that was used in the destruction of Nineveh.

The power of God is great and majestic, not petty and vindictive. His power is irresistible and when unleashed against evil is dreadful, fierce, consuming and overwhelming. Like a tornado it sweeps all before
it as the power of natural forces is used by the Creator to dry up rivers and even a sea, withhold rain and allow floods of water. The effect of God's authority over His creation is felt when the earth quakes beneath our feet, when the hills and mountains melt and molten rocks flow like red water. Even though Nineveh was surrounded by walls 30 feet high and 30 feet wide, the floodwaters were used by God to destroy the city and remove it completely from the sight of men. Even the remains were hidden from human eyes for generations.

God alone has the right of vengeance because only He knows the thoughts and intents of human hearts. Human revenge is basically an act of the selfishness and self-will of one person or nation against another's selfish interests. God has the right to our true allegiance, and He has the right to punish those who reject Him and will not repent of their evil. His objective in executing vengeance is to justly remove sin and bring about a just peace that does not merely cover sin for a short time. The effect of the presence of God on His enemies is like the "earth being burned," or being lifted up like fire and smoke. We need to understand that it is a righteous act of God to stop sin from going on forever by dealing with it in justice and righteousness. The punishment of sin is to remove it and its effects forever. To be tolerant of wickedness only can be allowed until repentance is genuine. No one can defy God and win. Assyria was a mere empire on the earth, but the earth itself is "the Lord's and the fullness thereof." His peace will come on earth in righteousness, not compromising with evil.

God's goodness and grace are open to all and evident to all who call upon Him out of a pure heart. His goodness is seen in creation. His goodness is seen in providing places and ways of safety for those who love him. His goodness is seen in the fullness of His provisions to meet our physical and spiritual needs. His goodness is evident in the kind and benevolent acts He does. His goodness is seen in the provision for our salvation through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. His goodness provides security for us in times and places of trouble. His goodness provides refuge for His people from coming judgment. Nahum's book begins with giving a clear picture of who God is and what He does. The Majesty and glory of God in the face of the evil and cruelty of Assyria is like that of a great storm - like a whirlwind of holy justice.

**THE LORD IS GOOD. Nahum 1:7.** “The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.”

Often, we have heard the words, “The Lord is good,” when some great benefit comes our way. The problem with that is, it sounds like we are passing a judgment on God's character, implying that He is good only when good things happen. It is wrong to even think like that, for “The Lord is good” at all times, in every situation and in every place, for “good” is His character. Nahum knew of the evil in Nineveh; he knew what was coming as a prophet should. He also knew his God and his comments about God are worthy of review.

- “He is slow to anger:” God waits as long as possible to carry out justice and judgment giving time to repent.
- “Great in power:” All power in heaven and earth is His, yet He uses that power with supreme meekness.
- “Will not acquit the wicked:” It may seem like the wicked win, but God does not allow evil to triumph.
- “Hath His way in the whirlwind:” When things seem out of control, rest assured; His plans will work.
- “And in the storm:” What we cannot control in any way, He is able to use for divine purposes.
- “The clouds are the dust of His feet:” One move of His feet can send rain or withhold blessing as He chooses.
- “He rebuketh the sea:” When the force of the waves threaten life itself; He can speak “Peace, be still.”
- “And maketh it dry:” The greatest covering of earth’s surface can be withdrawn from land at His word.
- “Drieth up the rivers:” When it is needed, dry riverbeds are seen as God seeks to get the attention of men.
- “Mountains quake at Him:” His presence and His voice make to tremble the mountains, as His law is given.
- “And the hills to melt:” Solid rock becomes flowing rivers as God’s power is displayed in the red hot flow.
- “The earth is burned at His presence:” Solid rock becomes gravel; dark stones glow as sapphire at the heat of His presence.

Yet for all of the evidence of His greatness, comes the assuring words:

- “The Lord is good:” There is no question as to the character of God. The acts of God are always consistent with His character.
"A strong hold in the day of trouble:" There is no question as to the care of God. His strength is there at all times to meet the needs of all who trust in Him.

"He knoweth them that trust in Him:" There is no question as to the concern of God. He knows each of His own intimately.

"O Holy God, at this moment I am kind of overwhelmed with the absolute awesomeness of the One I so often call 'Father.' And yet I do not feel it is presumptuous on my part to draw near and pray, because I know by experience Thy interest and concern for Thine own children. I would certainly hate to be on the other side of Thy dealings with men. They really don't know who they are up against. I find Thee a great comfort, even though the storms of divine wrath are going to fall. I know by experience that Thou art good. Amen."

Nahum 1:7. "The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him."

"I WARNED YOU."

It seemed so long ago when that preacher came to town. According to the story I heard, the whole city was turned upside down.
From the king to the children, everyone put on sackcloth and prayed. And so the story goes, the destruction of our city was stayed.

So why should we worry now because this new man has come to preach. He is like that other man: he says he has come here to teach Us about God and to warn us again that God is upset with us.
Nothing happened when that other man left, so why should we worry or fuss.‡

So many people have a wrong perception, their understanding of God is wrong.
They think that God is just an invention; if He is real, He is not strong To punish the evil doers nor is able to bring a nation to its knees.
This attitude of indifference about God, has the soul of our nation seized.

The Lord is good of that there is no doubt, but goodness doesn't mean He's weak.
He is long-suffering and willing to pardon a person or nation that seeks His face in repentance and from their sin will turn away -
Such will find God is gracious and loving; willing to pardon today.

But never make the mistake those Assyrians did, thinking God forgot their sin.
They did not believe God judges sin just as sure as sun follows rain.
God did give them time to repent and turn before that judgment did fall.
The repentance of their fathers didn't reach them; no longer would He hear their call.

To deliberately turn away from what one knows is right, is called apostasy.
When that happens by people like Cain and Korah, there is no way of liberty.
The sin they chose when they refused God's grace, was one that damns the soul.
There is no place for the apostate to hide; no Savior for them to know.

"I feel like I am not effective. Father God, when it comes to warning our people and nation. Am I spending time speaking in public when I should be praying in private? Should I stop what I have been doing and change my ministry to one of intercession? I can't seem to get past the need to preach, but is that just an urge or am I still called to warn the people? O God, hear Thy servant and move me to make whatever changes are necessary. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Nahum 1:9-15

THE VERDICT

Over the years God had observed all that the Assyrians had done and the cruel, vicious way the armies of the Assyrians had treated, abused and murdered those whom they had conquered. God had heard the boastful, arrogant, vain words spoken against Him by Rabshakeh when he ridiculed Hezekiah and his religion, He mocked the allies of Hezekiah and then he mocked God. Nahum speaks directly to the people of Nineveh and says, "What do you imagine (conspire) against the Lord?" Assyria was condemned to total annihilation, complete extinction. To an "utter end." "He is utterly cut off."

God had spared Nineveh when they repented under the preaching of Jonah, but only those at that time were the repentant people. Never again would the people of Nineveh be spared. They had returned to the wickedness that seemed to be inherent in them as a nation. The judgment of God would bring a total and final end to the Assyrian empire. It is true that God will not allow sin to go unchecked forever. It is true no
one can safely defy God. A lesson we can learn from those past events is the kind of relationship we have with the Lord is up to us. Everything we do, our attitude, our manner of life, our commitments reflect on how we look at our relationship with God and to what extent we want to live in fellowship with Him.

There are a lot of attractions in the world today that are similar to those that affected those ancient people. To want the luxuries that come with riches at the expense of the innocent is sin. There are those who will even destroy the life of their unborn children so that their chosen lifestyle will not be affected by the restrictions of parenthood. There are other people who will impose financial burdens on others so they can have excessive wealth and fame. But there is a point when sin and its consequences have gone so far that there is no turning back. It is then God steps in and can quickly change everything.

The Assyrians who had conquered Israel to the north and had destroyed Samaria and taken captive the people, had scattered them throughout the empire so they would not be able to unite in any way and rise in rebellion. Then they came against Judah. Nahum was there to prophecy against them when they laid siege to Jerusalem. In the Assyrian attacks against Judah they were like those tangled up in thorns; like drunkards and like dry brittle stubble. But in one night all that changed when the prophecy of Nahum was fulfilled. Nahum encouraged the Jews by telling them Assyria would no longer "afflict" them and the yoke of tribute that had been laid on them long before would be broken.

His message would have been a comfort to the Jews at that time, and when the news of the defeat of the city of Nineveh and the fact that their enemy was no more, there would have been great delight. The good news the messengers brought when Nineveh was flooded out and washed away to the extent they were eliminated; would have made them all rejoice that peace had come. With the overthrow of Nineveh, the people of Israel could travel safely to Jerusalem to keep the feasts and pay their vows. Whoever the "wicked counselor" was, and whoever the "wicked one" refers to is not really clear except they have the same characteristics of the devil. The final word, "he shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off," will truly take place when the Lord reigns and the millennium of peace is one the earth.

WHAT’S THE NEWS?

We hear of wars, and of those who conspire
To oppose divine plans and what God does inspire
In the hearts of His children that they might go forth
With the Gospel of God’s grace, and His word of truth -
Telling the world of Jesus, and His power to save
To the uttermost those who believe His life He gave
That they might have eternal life, now and forever -
And nothing or no one can from our Savior us sever.

Implacable foes will attack us again and again
Flattery from the world: the flesh: the devil - tempt us to sin.
But our God who sees everything has the final control -
And He knows who we are and the state of our soul -
So when we have come to that place where we can take no more,
His all-sufficient grace fills our need from its bountiful store
To strengthen and encourage us to keep at the task
To which He has assigned us until it is finished at last.

His strength and His authority are unlimited in scope.
He gave us His Spirit and has given us sure hope -
That He will be with us each day and enable us to do
What is His intention, fulfilling each task, till it’s through.
Then when we are done with our life and labors down here -
He will take us to heaven to be with Him there -
Where we will be with Him and will be learning to be
Skilled at our privileged service for Him for eternity.

“O Father, may I never look too closely at the world events going on, lest I think these consequences are interfering with Thy eternal plans. Help Thy servant to move through this day, and each day, with the confidence that Thou dost know the way that I take, and that all of these world events are only temporary. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Nahum 2

A TARGET OF WRATH
Graphic descriptions of the devastation of war cannot really give the sense of terror and total fear that overtakes people who are right in the middle of a terrible battle. Nahum gave in his prophetic message against Nineveh, such a terrifying vision of what was going to happen, that one would think the people would stop and consider if such things would possibly take place. But it is in the heart of man to think he is control of things and "that could never happen here."

The walls of Nineveh were huge and surrounded the city inside a wide moat of water outside of the walls. The army of the Assyrians had been feared for generations by all the countries around. The city lived off the treasures of others that had been plundered and those same countries paid tribute to the Assyrians. Smug complacency can overcome the minds of people to the extent they are convinced that nothing will happen to me, or to us, that we are not able to easily deal with. That same attitude can paralyze a work of God in an assembly, or the work of a servant of God who chooses to settle back and take it easy. There is an urgency in divine things that cannot be ignored. We are only one incident away from failure and defeat.

The message of Nahum is like a taunt as he addresses Nineveh. He challenges them to hold the fort and watch the roads. Look out to each flank and strengthen themselves in every direction, because the Lord is going to step in and restore what had been taken away from His people. The Babylonians and Medes joined together and they were coming for Nineveh. What had happened to Israel when they were conquered by the Assyrians was not permanent, but what was going to happen to Nineveh and the Assyrians would be total and permanent.

In the prophecy the armies were described as well-armed with chariots that had metal. Perhaps it was swords, mounted on the axles that flashed in the sunlight as they spun around and cut down anyone close to the chariot. They would have long spears that when lifted up and down would be like a forest of trees that is shaking. The soldiers that could be seen coming had blood stains already on them from those who had been cut down as the great army advanced toward Nineveh. There will be so many that it will be like a traffic jam as they speed down the roads toward the doomed city. Even though the invading army was surrounding Nineveh and was able to be seen, the well fortified city seemed to be a safe place.

Then God stepped in! The Tigris River which flowed by the city, and the River Khasr which flowed through the city, flooded the city and did what armies cannot do. Because of heavy rains that came as divine intervention, God did what human beings could not do. Nahum warned that the gates of the rivers shall be opened, which likely fell on deaf ears of arrogant defenders who thought they had greater power than those who might come against them. When the flood waters came against the mud brick walls, the walls lost their foundation and likely became soft and then gradually disintegrated until there was no evidence of them left. With the walls breaking down, the citizens and defenders were powerless to stop the invaders and were brought into submission. The idol-queen was taken and the women mourned like doves. That on which they had depended melted away. Leaders would try to rally them by saying, "Stand, stand," ("Stop, stop") but no one would listen to them as they fled.

The wealth of Nineveh was the treasures they had taken from those who they had conquered, and now that was all taken by the Babylonians and Medes. Everything they had was gone and the city fell powerless before those who conquered them. The prophetic pronouncement of Nahum to Nineveh is a lesson to us. Not only must we realize that when sin goes so far, there is no turning back. Also, we need to learn that an attractive facade that seduces people to lowering standards and/or moral principles, will fail. Power is seductive. It has a tendency to captivate the soul, and those who lust for it will ultimately be brought down. Let us learn from history rather than insist on learning personally what history has already taught.

Nineveh is only a word now as far as the capital of Assyria is concerned. The site of the city was not known for centuries because it had been so completely destroyed and buried under sand. All that Assyria was famous for is long gone, even as Nahum prophesied. A historical account someone made said that the armies of Alexander the Great marched right over Nineveh and didn't even know the ruins of that city were beneath their feet. When God is set against a people because of their defiance, they are hopelessly lost.

Nahum 2:13. "Behold, I am against thee, saith the Lord of host, and I will burn her chariots in the smoke, and the sword shall devour thy young lions: and I will cut off thy prey from the earth, and the voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard."

**SACKED!**
They had plundered and destroyed other nations -
Now they were the people to fall. They had prospered by other people's misery -
Now they are the ones to call
For mercy and some kind of relief
From the destruction that had come to them.
But there was no one who came to help -
God will bring just judgment on those who reject Him.

They had nothing at all they could cling to -
Their armies and might had failed.
None could stand against tide of vengeance -
They are experiencing what defeat entailed.
The cities were sacked by invaders -
Both nature and God had spurned
The appeals they piteously made -
As heaven and earth away from them turned.

We need to learn this important lesson -
God sees beyond our facade.
It is not enough to hear a warning message -
We must turn in repentance and seek the Lord.
There comes a time in each life
Of individuals and the life of a nation -
When because of willful rejection -
They no longer can find God's salvation.

God will not overlook sin forever -
Although some seem to think He will.
He is the God of love and mercy -
And He is a God of justice still.
There comes a point, and He knows just when it is.
After grace and mercy are rejected -
That judgment will fall from which there is no escape -
God's salvation had too long been neglected.

"Lord God, again I pray for mercy upon us. We do not deserve it I know. But if it is possible for there to be some recovery of the nation, the church and the people - move upon us to bring genuine repentance. I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Nahum 3

"I AM AGAINST YOU"

In the reading of the prophecy and knowing what the Assyrians were like when they conquered the nations around them, we would say not only is Nineveh's doom declared and described as in the first two chapters, but it is deserved by the descriptions in chapter 3. The certainty of the judgment was in the prophecy Nahum was given to tell the people of Judah. Samaria and the northern tribes of Israel had been taken. Judah was under tribute to Nineveh, but now they heard the rest of the story. The Babylonians and Medes would be victorious over the vanquished Assyrians. The fierce cruelty that they had imposed on other people would come on Nineveh until it became the place of the dead.

Nahum pronounces a "woe" because of the cruelty, treachery, deceit, truce-breaking self-centered people of Nineveh at the beginning of this final chapter. He looks at, and describes the actual battle. Then he writes of the downfall, the defeat, of the city in the next few verses. Then he gives a look at the city's preparation for defense and siege, and at the conclusion he gives a look back at the final defeat and how others will respond to that.

When moral principles are abandoned, and the scriptural practices as taught in the word of God are ignored, then a just retribution is to be expected. It is foolish for people to think that they can do their own things in their own way even though it is contrary to the moral standards that are implanted in human beings by God who created us in "His own image." And even more precise, the law was given in writing so that there are simple, precise statements that can be read and re-read and are easily understood. Every person is without excuse when it comes to the reality of God who speaks to us in our own consciences, in creation, in the goodness that we receive, in the observation of righteous believers, and in our observation of past history.

There were two specific things that caused the overthrow and demise of Nineveh. One was that they formed false friendships with other nations by which they seduced them into thinking they lasting relationship. Nineveh was beautiful and impressive outwardly, but vicious and deceitful inside. Beneath that facade was death. That was the second thing that brought Assyria down. Unrestrained cruelty fiercely destroyed and

In contrast to that which Nineveh represents in our world, is that which God has a right to expect from His people. Colossians chapter three lists fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, concupiscence, and covetousness as idolatry. Of opposite characteristics to these sensual sins and the social sins listed in Col.3:8-9, are "Bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another" and putting on love. There are many around us today who want us to compromise our moral principles and practices to suit that which is accepted by modern society. This must not be done by true Christians.

As Nahum writes his book of the vision God gave him, he views the city of Nineveh as an eyewitness describing the siege, war chariots and the noise of battle. He sees horsemen on running horses, foot-soldiers with spears and swords, and dead bodies in the streets stumbling those advancing invaders, and hindering the defenders. He uses the metaphor of a harlot exposing herself in public to describe Nineveh as those who committed atrocities on others, now being violated themselves. The place that once looked beautiful outwardly was exposed for what it real was.

"Man, looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart," should keep believers from trying to pretend to be faithful Christians in public but are compromising apostates in reality. For those who know and one time professed to believe the truth, and then to turn away from it deliberately as apostates do, there is no recovery, but they will be exposed and judged by God Himself. God allowed the invaders of Nineveh to go forward in carrying out justice, but the final defeat was brought by the mighty power of God unleashed on a moral and spiritually defiled people.

The people of Nineveh had prepared “strongholds.” They had water and food stockpiled in view of a siege against the city. They had gates and strong people guarding the gates and had thickened the walls with bricks. But in Nahum's vision he saw the "strongholds" fall like ripe figs fall of a tree. The guards at the gates were like weak women who could not protect anyone. The thick walls and the water supply would fail when God stepped in and sent a heavy rainfall. The whole city would be like a drunkard staggering and falling.

An illustration of the capital city of Egypt when it was in its glory was seen by the prophet. The Nile River could not protect it, nor would the Tigris River, the canals, moat, and the river through Nineveh protect it. The mighty Egyptian empire was strong and "infinite," but idolatry was rampant in Egypt and it fell to the Assyrians. In presumption and pride, and even with friendly allies who were loyal to Egypt, Egypt fell. Now it was time for Nineveh go fall and it didn't have a friend in the world.

Like locusts when they lose their protective covering, they are as weak as butterflies and scatter powerless in the light of day, and are lost, and die alone. They had swarmed like locusts over others. Now they will melt away helpless. With scorn, Nahum predicts the final fall of Nineveh even while it was in its power. There is no cure for apostasy - only final judgment. A funeral chant is made over the city because their “shepherds” and "nobles" are dead. Relief spreads over other nations at the defeat and demise of Nineveh.

God will not allow evil to continue forever. No one can defy God safely. Power and those who lust for it will be brought down. We should listen and learn from what happened to others in the past so that we do not go through the same things ourselves. It is foolish to let an attractive facade of popularity and acceptance seduce us into lowering unchangeable standards and moral principles that are tried and proven, and come from God. No substitute or person can hide one from the righteous wrath of God when His offer of salvation is ignored and rejected. There is a point when the attractions of pleasure at any cost, and sin and its consequences have gone too far. Let us realize that the kind of relationship we have with God is up to us. He is faithful and unchanging. We will find it our greatest joy and best satisfaction to keep the covenant we made with Him when we “Confessed with our mouth, Jesus as Lord, and believed in our heart that God hath raised Him from the dead,” and He saved us.

Nahum 3:19. "There is no healing of thy bruise; thy wound is grievous: all that hear the bruit of thee shall clap the hands over thee: for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?"

**THE SEDUCTION OF POWER.**

Power is never intended to be an end in itself. But that leadership and authority can be used for a profitable end. Some who have succeeded in power are those God did send.
Power in itself is dangerous, because its influence is very far reaching. It has to be kept under control, lest it fails to hear the beseeching Cry of those who are weak and need the power of others for relief. Power has a tendency to hold itself as the source and end of belief.

When power is under control it is meekness, a positive character trait. Meekness is a wonderful attribute: what a difference it can make! That kind of power shows kindness and mercy as it goes about its tasks. It brings joy and blessing to many without ever having to be asked.

Personal ambition opens doors to do what is right or wrong. Power, with its seductive overtones, insists that it must be strong. It forgets that there is a Greater Power who is always at one’s disposal. That Power is made perfect in weakness, and it is given with God’s approval.

The power that most men covet, is the power that is obvious in others. They don’t want it used against them, but would use it against their brothers. Who don’t always have the same opinion, so want power to get back at them. And secretly rejoice when we think justice is finally served against him.

It is wise for us to stop and learn what God says about the misuse of power. He has left on the pages of the Bible warnings about others, for our Learning and admonition, that we might not do what they did. But quiet, peaceful, godly and honest lives that in our Lord Jesus are hid.

“Father, may I never demand a place or harbor the thought that I deserve or need some great role to be what is Thy intention for me. Keep me from wanting to see the downfall of others. Help me to pray for their preservation and well-being. Those that lead our nation need Thy salvation. Save them - and us as a people I pray, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”
It is a common complaint among those who do not know God, or those who are new believers, to say, "Why does God allow this wickedness to go on? Why doesn't He do something about it if He is so powerful?" Doubts, questions and fears are not uncommon in Christians because we live in a time of human history when it seems like wickedness, unrestraint of evil, and the worst kinds of atrocities are taking place all over the world. It seems so unfair that Christians who are trying to bless others with the good news of the Gospel are being imprisoned and some are being killed. In our minds we think that people should be able to live without fear and in comfort. We should be able to do God's work in a way that is convenient to us and not too uncomfortable or restricting. We think God is blessing us if things are going fairly smoothly, the Lord's people are able to gather without fear, we can preach the Gospel where we want, we are getting a fair number of people to come into our meeting places, and then we wait for God to "bless His word."

Historically however, the work of the Lord prospers and souls are saved in times of adversity and when the church is suffering. The Gospel becomes real to people with problems. It is then when they want to know if there is a God, and is He really interested in all the bad things that are happening. Complacency and apathy go along with success and materialism. It is in the times of fear and trepidation, of sickness and suffering, of despair and hopelessness that the light of truth in the scriptures becomes a beacon of hope to those who doubt.

It was during the time of Jeremiah's prophecy that the things he warned the people of Judah about were backed up by Zephaniah, Habakkuk and Ezekiel. The difference in Habakkuk's book is that he is speaking to God about people rather than to the people about God like the other prophets. Jeremiah gave a running account of what was going to happen to the nation and what happened to him personally because of what he preached. Habakkuk writing tells how present and coming events affected him as an individual. Individuals reading what he wrote could likely identify easily with what Habakkuk said. "Why does God allow evil people to prosper and the godly to suffer?" "Why doesn't God do something about all the bad stuff that is going on?"

In reading this book I have to ask myself, "Have I ever felt about God the same way as Habakkuk did, but was afraid to tell Him?" "How do I deal with my thoughts and emotions that are affected by all that is going on?" "How do I handle the doubts that come up in my mind?" "Why doesn't God make things clear to me instead of leaving me to have all these questions?" It is a wonderful benefit to us that God gave the words of this beautifully written book for us to read and find out where the answers to our questions are, and those answers raised other questions. Finally, at the end of the whole reading we find that the real solution to our limited understanding is simply, "The just shall live by faith," and when that is true, we have hope, assurance and can sing in praise to our Lord.

There is a unique literary beauty in the way this book is written that has made it stand out for centuries. It has been said that when Benjamin Franklin was in France as the ambassador of the new United States of America, he read the book of Habakkuk to a literary society that used to meet in Paris to read aloud books that impressed them. When he read this book out loud, he received unanimous admiration for the author who none of them had heard about before. It is possible to read the Bible in silence and miss much of the impact of the words and truths expressed in the text and context. This book reads like a psalm which makes some readers think Habakkuk may have been a temple servant from the tribe of Levi, who may have been engaged in the singing of the psalms. The book begins with two conversations and then there is a hymn and a doxology.

Habakkuk identifies himself as "the prophet" and then asks God to explain what He is doing by allowing the wicked of the people of God to prosper, and the godly to suffer. Why does He allow the wicked to triumph over the righteous? The problems, difficulties and perplexities that were going on around him brought great concern. We too may wonder why God is silent and forbearing when so much evil is continuing and seems to be escalating. When that happens, we need to do what the prophet did - go directly to the right Person, our heavenly Father, and ask Him specifically for the answers we need. To be consciously living in the presence of God and being aware that we are engaged in divine service, keeps us from thinking we are intruders when we come to the throne of grace.
The time Habakkuk spent in communication with God gave him a whole new understanding of the work and purposes of God. He was able to go from perplexity to praise. He could see how in the eyes of the Lord the people of God would go from prevailing evil to promised blessing. For him personally he went from asking questions to getting answers, and from the uncertainty because of his surroundings to confidence in the word of God. So, he went to God in prayer, by faith expecting answers, and the book concludes with praise and confidence in God.

The Lord's answers to Habakkuk's first questions were that He was going to send the Babylonians to deal with the wickedness of the people of Judah who refused to respond to the warnings of Jeremiah to the extent that the king cut up the message the Lord instructed Jeremiah to write. He had Baruch read it in the temple and it may have been there Habakkuk heard what was going to happen. Some of the people were afraid, but the leadership were angry and rejected the warnings out of hand. The people of Judah for the most part had turned again to idolatry and evil after the reign of good king Josiah. The prophet could see the end was near. His questions of "Why," indicated his real concern. Even the answers he got produced more questions. Two thirds of the book is dialogue between Habakkuk and God.

After asking why God hasn't done anything yet to intervene on behalf of the godly who were suffering at the hands of those who seemed to prosper in Judah, God tells him that the Chaldeans were coming. That raised another question in the mind of the Lord's servant because those who were going to execute judgment for the Lord were morally, spiritually and physically more evil; than those they were going to punish. Then God reveals His righteous judgment on all and the way of salvation for all. He is righteous in all He does because He is sovereign and what He has planned will be done in His way and time.

"The just shall live by faith" is expected of those who obey God and love Him. They recognized the goodness of God is of far great power than the evil of men. His power and sovereignty are unlimited. Those who live by faith know God is in control in spite of present conditions. They see things as God sees them and their faith develops and becomes real and vital in their lives. God's moral demands do not ever change. He will accomplish good results in His sovereign way. They may not come quickly enough in our eyes, but His just judgments will come. When we look at the long view of the whole matter, it becomes clear that everything is under control in spite of the present circumstance. God will deal with other nations as well as His own people. When we get a vision of the glory of God, then the present darkness prompts an enduring faith.

The prophecy of Habakkuk begins with questions and ends with confidence. It begins in uncertainty and ends in affirmation. When we are in doubt about what we see around us, do not despair or question God's knowledge of events. Wait in patience. Remain loyal to God and His truth. By faith in God, live justly and confidently before Him in spite of the suffering and injustice that goes on around us. Let the people of God today be assured that God can be trusted to do right in spite of what we see and experience. Circumstances can change very quickly. Be encouraged that "Our times are in Thy (God's) hands." Questions that are precisely asked and are answered give us new understanding of God, His love and power. God is at work in the world today, and He is at work in the lives of His people.

There are things which we will never know,  
Because God is sovereignty doesn't always show  
The reasons behind actions and current events  
Until the obvious conclusions to us will make sense.

He knows our capacities and finite limitations.  
There are realities and some foolish exaggerations -  
That make us jump to accept *too quick* explanations -  
Instead of waiting for reasonable and sensible conclusions.

There are things that to us are not right -  
And we think we should stand up against them and fight  
Those things and people who are living in the night -  
But what they really need are those who are truly *light*.

Don't panic - be patient and just quietly wait.  
God doesn't need a calendar, a clock or a specific date -  
He is always good and right. He doesn't browbeat or berate.  
But be assured, His love, grace, power and judgments are great.

"Righteous Father, in faith I watch and wait as days, months and years pass, for Thee to step in and stop the increasing wickedness of our nation. And then I read, 'I exhort,
therefore, that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; and I am rebuked, humbled and moved again to pray, preach and praise — in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Habakkuk 1:1-4

O LORD, HOW LONG!
A common occurrence in the normal course of life is when an event or person places a "burden" on one's soul and/or life. Some burdens are not seen outwardly. Those inner burdens are often the heaviest to bear. A weight may be laid upon us to be carried and there is no way to transfer it to another person. Sometimes a burden is a responsibility to be borne, and it is then we can "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Burdens may be imposed on people by those in places of power, and those are possible to share as in the sense of paying taxes, or in intercessory prayer. And then there is the burden of sin that comes on an individual whose mind and conscience has been awakened by the Holy Spirit to its inherent awfulness. There is a certain inborn sense of guilt when sin is committed, but when one sees sin for what it is in the eyes of God, then it becomes a burden too hard to bear. Thankfully we can tell a "sin-burdened-soul" who is conscious of that burden, that Jesus, "His own self, bare our sins in His own body on the tree..."

The burden Habakkuk had was because of the sin and departure into idolatry that the leadership and people of Judah were practicing. He could see that there were those who were righteous who were in difficulty, and on the other hand, the wicked were prospering. That same burden is upon those today who seek to please God and walk in the ways of righteousness, and yet "evil men and seducers, wax worse and worse." Even governments pass laws that support the evil propensities of vile, perverted people. The standards of the law that supported righteous living and preserved society from confusion and chaos, have been ignored. Laws have been passed that support the evil, immoral lifestyle of licentious people. To oppose those laws and point to the outcome that is to be expected, is to be "intolerant," "uncaring," "offensive" toward those who live a deviant lifestyle.

Habakkuk identified himself as "the prophet," which meant that he knew he had been given the responsibility to speak to the people for God. However, he felt he could not do this until he had some questions of his own cleared up and answered. So, much of what he wrote in this book has to do with his conversations with God. Before he wrote "the vision," he needed clarification as to what was going to happen, and why. People need to know the seriousness of sin and the consequences that follow. That is the work of those who speak for God. We dare not cover up sin. But when it is defined, exposed and faced, we do have a clear Gospel message to pass on. There is a remedy for sin. There is a way back to God before just judgment falls on unrepentant sinners.

When a child of God looks on the moral corruption and the open sin and violence that comes with it, and the on-going strife that follows it, we wonder, like Habakkuk, how long it will be until God acts in judgment. We can understand though, that "God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Our God of grace and mercy, truly "So loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son..."
He will not compromise His justice and character, but He does not ignore each person as if they have no value.

There is much about our God that is way above our ability to comprehend, or right to know. In His wisdom, He does not tell us all about His plans for us and other people. In His grace he provides what we need for our present circumstances, and in faith we trust Him. His sovereign authority should not be questioned, but in our humanity, we cannot help but wonder what is going to happen next - especially when we "see the handwriting on the wall." Those things and events give warnings to thinking people. We know things on earth cannot continue as they are going. The deterioration of morals in individuals, the dysfunction in families, the departure in churches, the dissatisfaction in with governments and the distress between nations can make us uneasy if we have not learned, and committed ourselves to living by faith.

Habakkuk 1:2-3. “O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! Even cry out to thee of violence, and thou wilt not save! Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? For spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention.”

QUESTIONS.

For reasons that are unknown to me I see the wicked prosper. Violence and avarice seem to be winning the day. for this I have no answer.

Unless I take my questions to God who knows what causes the confusion.

He sees the past and present as one, and knows the final solution.

Evil seems to go unpunished why is this wickedness allowed?
Instead of people repenting of sin, it seems like sin makes them proud.
God has designed a way to deal with sin, and give men space to repent.
If they refuse this period of grace, they will know why judgment is sent.

So there are waiting in God's planned out way, tools that He will use.
Judgment does follow sin, it is true, and God is the One who will choose
The means and the time to bring to an end the evil that no doubt He sees.
He will do what He knows needs to be done in whatever way He will please.

Why do the wicked seem to be winning? Is there no justice at all?
Unfairness is practiced as a matter of business; the righteous seem to be the ones that fall.
Each person is precious in the eyes of the Lord. He gives time to repent of their deeds.
If after mercy has been shown and grace revealed, God deals with those who don't heed.

God is Eternal, and God is Holy: of His might there can be no doubt.
His schedule of working is not based only on time before He turns things about.
So, when I have questions, I need to remember, it is God with whom I have to do.
In faith I believe Him and perhaps will understand when these events are through.

Until I have the answers, I think I need, and perhaps I don't need to know.
I will rest my soul, so it no longer troubled, in Him who is waiting to show
To me lessons of grace, and how He expects me to avoid looking on iniquity.
God is all-knowing; God is all-powerful, a God of absolute purity.

"Father, my questions, as I look at the unbridled expressions of sin around us, are
really not worth asking. I should keep my eyes fixed on Thee rather than be upset
over what I see going on. So this morning I am focusing my attention on what I know
of Thee and what Thy Word reveals to me. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,
Amen."

Habakkuk 1:5-11

THE LORD'S ANSWER
Our mental, moral and spiritual limitations often keep us from understanding the rights acts of the sovereign
God. We put our requests and/or concerns in the time frame we live in, thinking God's answers to our
prayers should come in that period of our choosing. Also, we may have preconceived notions as to how God
will answer our requests, and if they are not what we had expected, we are in danger of doubting God or
wondering what is wrong with us. But we need to remember we do not have the wisdom to grasp all that is
involved in the "righteous acts of God." God is never indifferent to the suffering of the righteous nor the sin of
the ungodly.

In the dealings of God with humans and nations, there is much that we do not know. He knows the thoughts
and intents of the heart. We do not. He knows the end from the beginning. We do not. He knows what is just
judgment. We do not. So, in faith, we must learn that by "supplications, prayers, intercessions and giving of
thanks" for all men is our part in what He is doing. It is then our souls can rest in faith, knowing that God our
Savior "who will have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth..." has everything under
control. He will do what is needed "in His time."

God told Habakkuk that He was going to "do a work in your days," that was beyond his comprehension. The
people of Judah and Jerusalem had ignored the messages of the prophets. They would see unfold before
them events that would astound them and over which they would have no control. Prosperous Judah would
quickly become a slave state with only a few poor people left to farm the land. All the rest of the people
would be taken as captives to Babylon. More than that, Egypt which had been a major world power for
centuries would be crushed quickly. Nineveh, the capital of Assyria was annihilated quickly and the
Babylonians would become the world power in the Middle East instead of Assyria. The generation of people
to which Habakkuk was to prophesy would see all of this happen.

The Chaldeans were the chosen instrument of God to bring about His planned judgment on His people in
Judah. God was not indifferent to what was happening in the nations and to His own people the Jews. The
people of Judah were the greatest offenders because they had known God, and had been led by Him for
centuries, but they had rejected Him and turned to idolatry with all its accompanying evil. In spite of all that
history teaches us, people still do not learn that God is real and involved in the affairs of men on earth. He
will by no means clear the guilty. Sin has unavoidable consequences, and just judgment will come on all
who forget God, His will, His ways and His word.
The Chaldeans were as evil as any other people, even though they were God chosen instrument to carry out His will at that time. They were arrogant in their own right, and assumed that their ability to conquer came from themselves and the gods they made to suit themselves. They were like wolves among helpless sheep. Instead of chariots, they were using mounted horsemen which made them very flexible as an attacking force that could spread out a long way or come together as a close unit. The cavalry was a powerful military unit for many hundreds of years. Like a strong east wind across the desert the Chaldeans were going to come against the people of Judah as an unstoppable force. The whole nation would be taken captive before their sweeping conquest.

When God moves against a people or nation, there is no stopping the power that carries out divine justice. He does not always use supernatural phenomena to produce the desired results He has in mind. He can use men or nations to fulfill the counsels of His own will. In our prayers and questions to God, we should remember that His ways are not our ways, nor are His thoughts our thoughts. What he has planned will be accomplished - of that we can be sure.

Any opposition to the Chaldeans seemed like a joke to them as they claimed every conquest as an act of their own power. Ramps of dirt were piled up against walled cities as a means of gaining entrance to the doomed city. At first the Chaldeans claimed the victory was because of their own power and skill. But even they recognized that their victories were beyond the ordinary, so attributed their success to their god. This was a worse offense than to claim the victories for themselves, because they did not acknowledge the One True God who was using them to work out the counsels of His will.

We may not understand all God does, and why, but we must always acknowledge that God is in control and allows men to go a long way in willful sin before bring righteous retribution. Believers know what is happening today and this should keep us humble and obedient to our Lord in view of who we are and why we are still here. God is going to deal with sin, but He is still showing grace to the guilty and the lost. When the days of recompense come and His justice and judgment come, it will come quickly and events will happen in rapid succession as His prophetic plans are carried out.

Even though there doesn't seem to be any divine intervention at the present time, at least to the eyes of unbelievers, we know that the future has already been charted. In a day to come, judgments will fall on God's wayward people, the Jews, who have rejected the Lord Jesus Christ as their Messiah. Judgment will fall on nations for their treatment and persecution of the Jews. Judgment will come from God on all who have rejected the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and consequently, have rejected Him. Christian believers need to be found faithful to our Lord each day in spite of what is happening around us. We know our Lord is coming and will fulfill all righteousness. Our commitment to Him in these dark days, should be without reservation, and with enthusiasm.

Look around you and then take time to compare.
What happened to others, who for God did not care.
The mind that thinks "up with man, and down with God."
Will bring judgment upon themselves that is just and hard -
On those who thought things would stay the same,
Even though God and His name they did profane -
Blindly assuring themselves that even though they sin -
God's mercy and grace would finally excuse them.

To misunderstand God who is longsuffering in His grace -
Is a big mistake, because justice and judgment will take place.
The fact that it hasn't fallen on sinful nations till now -
Does not mean that God will continually allow -
Sin to go unjudged and injustice unrequited -
Divine mercy and divine holiness are closely united -
Making it inevitable that the day of recompense will come.
Then we will know without question - justice has been done.

"Holy Father, too many people have a great misunderstanding of Thy holiness and justice. They seem to think mercy and grace mean that they will get away with sin and not have any consequences to suffer. May Thy servant never give the impression to people that sin will be overlooked, but that grace has provided a way for sin to be dealt with in a just way that fully satisfies Thee. I ask this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen."

Habakkuk 1:12-17

I DON'T UNDERSTAND
Faith grappling with a problem is not uncommon in the Christian life. We all have "whys" because of our limitations as humans. The infinite and eternal character of God is way above our capacity to grasp. So, we will have times of perplexity and anxiety in which we struggle with understanding what God is doing or allowing to be done. Habakkuk had a double problem. He couldn’t understand why God allowed His people to continue in their arrogant idolatry and evil ways, and then he couldn’t believe that God would use a people worse than the Jews to bring punishment and correction upon them. But we must give the prophet credit for an unwavering faith in God.

Habakkuk knew that God is different from man in His existence, because God is eternal, and transcends time. He is not limited by time, space and matter. He is not locked into a frame of events following one after another. God lives in and eternal "now." The prophet also knew that God is different from men in His being. He is holy. That is the essence of His character. It is for that reason he could not understand God using a sinful nation, worse than the Jews, to punish the people of Judah. He also knew that God is consistent, and would not walk away from the covenant He had made with the Jews. He is consistent in His character and in His conduct.

Our confidence in God personally and our faith in God to do what is right in every circumstance, does not mean that we will not have questions. There will always be things that perplex us that happen in nations, in assemblies, in families and to us personally to which we will not get answers. Our questions may be great to us, and the lack of answer frustrate us to a degree, but our faith in God to do what is right is never in question. God has the right to do whatever is His sovereign will, and He does not owe us any explanation.

The prophet knew that God was going to correct His people because of their idolatry and willful rejection of Him, and he knew that was the right thing for a righteous God to do. He knew that God does correct His people to change their behavior by discipline that is appropriate to the problem. The people of Judah had gone to the extreme in their sin. They had turned away from God and gone after other gods, and were practicing the evil associated with such idolatry. He also knew that God was not going to cast them off forever. But why did He choose such evil people as the Chaldeans to carry out His discipline? They were eviler than the people of Judah!

When and/or if God's people reject His correction, refuse to obey Him, and are indifferent toward Him, He will bring punishment that will ultimately be for our benefit. "Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth..." The purity of God is not based on rituals or things He does, but on character and who He is. That is expected of His people. Our acceptance with God is not based on what we do, or what we might endure in life, but on who we are - sinners saved by the grace of God. Believers are "accepted in the Beloved," not in moral or spiritual worth, because we have "all sinned and come short of the glory of God." The Jews had rejected the God they knew. The Chaldeans weren’t grateful to God for their victory over those they conquered. They didn’t know God at all as a personal Being. So, their guilt wasn’t as great as that of the Jews, even though the things they did, were crueler and inhumane.

The Chaldeans thought of those they conquered as fish to be caught. They caught them as with a hook and line. Others they caught like in a net. Still others were taken like a drag net that takes everything in its path. Nothing or nobody escapes the drag net. They did not know they were being used by God to ultimately bring the nations of the Jews back to Himself. Their pride in the victories they won was in themselves, and would bring them down later. They were not in any way thankful for their victories, but rather thought themselves as successful by their own efforts and worshipped themselves as the greatest people around. Evil by its very nature, is self-destructive. Evil may seem out of control, but we know God is in control. He will have the final word in any matter.

The troubled prophet was concerned that because the Babylonians were used by God, this judgment would go on forever. When punishment is for correction takes place, God has the right to do what He wants to bring about the desired results in the best possible way. Correction is not an end in itself but is the means to bring about change of mind, change in behavior, change in attitude and change in conduct. We cannot find lasting comfort in a short-term fix for a problem. The root cause of the problem has to be defined and dealt with in a just way that brings about a righteous result. Our standing with God is what is important, not our standing in the world.

Prosperity and materialism can actually turn into the things we worship if we allow them to control our actions and affections. Any success we might have we owe to the mercy, goodness and grace of God. We need to remember that in spite of all that is wrong that we see today, God is still in control of the affairs of men. He is the final authority in every activity. The principle of sowing and reaping never changes. To sow does not take long. Reaping come after a much longer period of time. The fruits of goodness, or
wickedness, develop into their fullness and then payday comes. When the time is ripe for reaping, it comes swiftly and with finality. The first chapter of Habakkuk ends with the prophet deeply concerned with what God was going to do to bring His people back to Himself. He still wonders, how God could use such wicked people, as the Chaldeans to bring about the recovery of His people.

Does God really know, does God really care? What happens to His people, or will He forebear: To take steps to change them - what if they don't repent? It was to people like this that the prophet was sent.

He knew God is different than man in His age. Man is limited by nature. God's story is one eternal page. God is holy. His divine essence is pure. Man is sinful, and for sin man has no cure.

God is consistent in His care and all of His ways. His word is unchanging. He always does what He says. When He corrects us, it is for a good purpose. He wants us to be holy so that He can use us.

We will never fully know what is behind each action. We, on the other hand, know personally sin's attraction. At times He allows sin to go on longer than we expect. So, we will pay attentions ourselves lest sin goes unchecked.

“I am conscious Father, of all that can happen to me and through me if I am not in fellowship with Thee and doing Thy will from an open mind and heart. Help Thy servant worship in spirit and in truth. Help me to use words careful and wisely for the right reasons. Help me to understand, at least in a measure, what some of my brothers and sisters are going through with an eye to helping them through difficult times. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Habakkuk 2

"NOW I UNDERSTAND!"

Habakkuk was willing to wait on God's answer in spite of his eagerness, so he went to the watchtower to watch for what was going to be done and/or said. The watchtower is the place for revelation and illumination. He may have been expecting to be rebuked for being bold to ask for the reason why God would use the Chaldeans to punish the Jews. Likely it was with some trepidation he quietly waited, but when the answer came it was entirely different from what he had expected. When one of God's servants wants to hear the voice of God in an unmistakable way, the best place is to be is in private when there are no distractions and we are clearly focused on what is His will. When our “minds are stayed on Thee (God),” we are at peace in spite of all the tumult around us. When evil and injustice seem to be taking over events and people, the best thing we can do is quietly and patiently wait for the Lord to act. We choose to trust Him even when we do not know the reasons behind the happenings.

When the Lord answered Habakkuk, it was not a rebuke but was more like He was glad to give a response to the prophet's questions, not only to be heard, but recorded for all to hear and read. It was to be posted in public places. The writing was to be a record for the future so that people will always know that God's word will be carried out. The Lord revealed to His servant, His intention to deal in justice and punishment on Babylon rather than give a specific answer his "why" questions. By having Habakkuk write out the message, it was not easily forgotten. It was plain then and it is now, that God will settle all accounts in His own time, not ours. Even though the Lord may use the wicked to carry out His will, this does not mean that he causes the wickedness, nor does He condone it.

Christians must trust God in difficult times even when things and times seem hopeless because we know God is in control of events. Our knowledge of the future affects our conduct, courage and commitment in the present. Living "by faith" is the essence of the Christian life. It identifies those who know the Lord and have put their unreserved trust in Him. The fact that they are "the just" has to do with the moral, ethical and spiritual standards by which we live. Pride and ambition are opposite to the Christian principles of humility and meekness that characterize the people of God.

The Lord gave to Habakkuk a double pledge in His message. He said, "The just shall live by faith." This is an inward solution to the lives of the Lord's people dealing with their spiritual life, future usefulness, ultimate
and eternal existence with the Lord. Paul learned this and linked this statement with justification. He learned this from Habakkuk, and Martin Luther and others learned this truth from Paul. The second pledge was, "For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord." This looks into the future when the Lord Jesus Christ rules in justice and peace and Israel will no longer resist Jesus and the Messiah. Israel will have a whole new heart and spirit. "The end" refers to the time when our Lord Jesus Christ reigns. The Lord was fully aware of the wickedness of the Chaldeans, and would not overlook their sin.

When Habakkuk was enlightened regarding the truth and timing of God's plans, He had no difficulty in trusting in the living God, and understood the fact, "The just shall live by faith. He learned God was opposed to the arrogant brutality of the Chaldeans [4-7]; their covetousness [9-10]; their enslavement of others [12-14]; exploitation [15-17] and idolatry [18-20]. A day of reckoning was coming when the practice of those sins will be judged and punished. Five "woes" were pronounced on them from which they would not be to escape. Babylon depended on riches taken at the expense of others. In their pride they deluded themselves into thinking they could oppress others and get away with it. They exploited other nations like a person getting another person drunk in order to take advantage of him. But sooner or later that same practice turned against them with like violence.

The first woe against the Babylonians was because of their pride and aggression. The treasures they took were the price of the blood of those they conquered. They in turn will be plundered and oppressed. The proud man deludes himself if he thinks he can oppress others to enrich himself at their expense and lives. The second woe was punishment for covetousness, self-exaltation and materialism. The consequence of this was that they would be killed by others like they did to become rich. They took from other like a bird of prey. The third woe was pronounced on the Babylonians because of their violent, merciless brutality. Vengeance would fall on them because of their cruelty. Built into the inherent moral principles of humanity that is common to all is the fact that to eliminate others is sin against one's own soul as well as against them. This is completely opposite to the Christian character of God's people. The fourth woe was because of the drunkenness and immorality that removed all restraint leading to atrocities including brutality and terrible cruelty that is beyond excessive. When payday comes to them, they will be stripped of everything in the same way they did to other nations. The fifth woe of idolatry and spiritual wickedness spread from Babylon to other parts of the world, including Rome and from there is even today incorporated into the church of Rome.

In God's plans for people and nations, He does not intend them to labor for evil objectives. To cast off others for our own selfish objectives is to "sin against thy soul." The eternal values of God's kingdom will last forever, while the kingdoms of earth are very temporary. The time is coming when "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord." Our response to our God is to worship Him in reverence, godly fear, great respect and awe. Often silence is the best way to listen to the voice of God in our soul and spirit. What relief the prophet must have experienced when he learned God was in control in spite of that was going to happen to the Jews.

The foolishness of idolatry is obvious when one worships the creation of his own hands. The idol stands silent and powerless in contrast to the living God who gives life, maintains life, character, power and gives salvation to His own people. It is only right to worship the "Lord (who) is in His holy temple" with reverence and respect, and let all the earth be silent before His holiness.

**Habakkuk 2:1, 20.** "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and I will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved... But the Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him."

**ANSWERS.**

Go higher than where you are at this moment, And you will be able to see - Things from that vantage point are more prominent Then what down here they appear to be. God has a time-table that He alone knows, At times He restrains His hand. On occasion in some people repentance shows, And people appear to understand.

Because judgment isn't as speedy as we wish. There is a tendency to be impatient with God. But suppose God judged me as quick as this - Would I have believed His Word? God is longsuffering, but God is not dead -

111
Never think that judgment won’t come.
He waits patiently for His Gospel to spread.
Out of the many He intends to save some.

Let us quietly wait for God to do in His way,
Whatever is needed true justice to bring.
God is in His temple and at His appointed day,
Justice and judgment will spring.
I am grateful for His mercy and patience;
He looks at things differently than men.
When the time comes to carry out His sentence;
The day of grace will be over then.

“I pray Father, that I will wait in patience and faith for the day when the Lord Jesus Christ comes and divine justice has its day. I am afraid of myself sometimes, lest I jump to conclusions without carefully considering events and issues through Thy eyes. I have to write an answer to a difficult problem now. Please guide me, I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Habakkuk 2:1. “I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.”

**MY WATCH.**

It looks bad: the injustice, the violence, the robbery, the strife – and it seems to just keep going on and getting worse. It’s not just here but everywhere.

It looks bad: the wickedness of nations that rise up and oppress their own people. There are those willing to blow themselves up to kill their own countrymen and they keep on coming.

It looks bad: God is allowing the more evil ones, to be used to punish the ones that seem to be less evil. And yet, who can say which is worse – the ones who are so hopeless they are willing to kill themselves, or the ones who are smugly satisfied to live without a thought or care for God?

It looks bad: from the place of my watch, I can see much of what is going on and wonder what is going to happen next. I come down from my tower at times and move among the events going on around me and try to put my hand to some work that will stem the tide – but it only seems to help a few.

It looks bad: when we see the desire to conquer; the dishonesty of pride; the determination to be rich; the delight in savaging others morally; the degradation of idolatry – all gaining momentum and seeming to win the battle for the souls of men.

It looks bad: but there are those who live by faith in spite of what everyone else is doing. “By his faith, the just shall live”, so there still is faith on the earth.

It looks bad: but from my watch, I can see ahead and see the time coming when “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord.” Justice and righteousness will win in the end.

It looks bad: but from my watch I join with Habakkuk in praying “revive Thy work.” His mercy that endures forever is now forgotten, even in the middle of the departure all around.

It looks bad: if we only look down and around, it would seem like there can never be a recovery. But from my watch, glory and brightness can be seen in heaven and, amazingly, on earth. Evidence of God’s power is seen over the rivers, the seas and the mountains. His ways are everlasting.

It looks bad: the crops are failing, for all the work done there is no return, the animals are not to be found because of all the warfare and troubles with accompanying disasters. But from my watch I can see God at work. And like the prophet, I can jump for joy and delight like a deer in the spring, because all I see around assures me that the God of my salvation has not changed. His truth is marching on!

“O God of all the nations: I want You to know I appreciate the watchtower, where I can see above and beyond the fuss and fighting of nations that are as a drop in a bucket to You. I rejoice in the events around because, even though they seem bad at the moment. I know behind it all is the controlling hand that directs, and the great voice that has the last word. I know victory is coming! In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”
“GOD CAME”

Habakkuk 3

The divine explanation of what, why and how God is going to do to those who oppose the Jews was given in chapter two. In chapter three there is prayer, praise and promise that bring relief and joy in the Lord to the prophet as he responds to the Lord, and is given a vision into the future. The coming of the Lord to execute judgment and vengeance on the enemies of God's people is described, bring salvation to them as the final objective. The Lord will show mercy to Israel. "The prayer of Habakkuk" is both one of supplication and one of praise and worship.

There is a message of the triumph of faith during times of affliction and adversity. Faith glories in assurance of divine sovereignty fulfilling the mighty works of the Lord. Evil will not triumph forever. God will vindicate those who trust Him and are faithful to Him, but in faith, we must wait in patience. When we do so, the peace of God fills the soul and, like the prophet, there are hymns to be sung, psalms of praise and prayers of confidence in God that lifts our hearts heavenward.

Habakkuk wrote a worship hymn giving praise to God for His unconditional sovereignty over the earth, and then prayers for God to show His power in redemption for the Jews as He did in the past. He prays for a revival of delivering grace at the same time as remembering mercy even in times of wrath. Praise, thanksgiving, supplication and intercession are all linked when we pray. He spoke of the majesty of the Lord that brought rest to his soul, and assured him of confidence in God. The outpouring of one's soul stirs our spirit as we learn what is going to happen in the future. Habakkuk opened his heart to the Lord as he heard Him speak, and then the Spirit of God unfolds a remarkable, and terrifying view into what is ahead. What God was doing and going to do, is beyond his comprehension, but was right - and the prophet was filled with awe.

Revival brings joy in the people of God. Revival brings glory to God. Revival brings evidence of the power of God over sin. Revival brings action that deals with present difficulties. The submission of faith can give us joy in times of trial. "In the midst of the years" is an acknowledgment of the sins of the past and the promises of the future. "Revive Thy work" has to do with the present when one is aware of the history of a people who were blessed, but failed. Ruin has accompanied evil. The Lord's coming is the future hope of Israel. Redemption is coming for the Jews when the Lord "comes to execute judgment upon all." Revival is what is needed in the people of God now.

In faith Habakkuk sees how God was with His people through good and bad times. He looks ahead and sees what is yet to come when the presence of the Lord is revealed in power. He also looks back at the history of Israel which gives light as to the future of the nation. Israel is still God's chosen people and He has kept them, and will keep them as His earthly people. He "has chosen the foolish things to confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty." The description of historical events in Israel's past at Mt. Sinai where God gave His word to guide the conduct of His people, and the fact that disaster and pestilence is under God's control, parallels events in the future which will be far greater in impact. Israel was divided to each of the twelve tribes, and there was divine deliverance from enemies in the time of the judges. From Exodus through Canaan under the judges, God revealed His sovereignty. Eve the sun and moon obeyed Him for the benefit of His people. Israel was aware they were His chosen nation.

Enemies of Israel are increasing in antagonism to the end that some want "to drive Israel into the sea." When all seems hopeless for Israel, God's wrath against their enemies at Armageddon will deliver them. Any nation or people who join together to annihilate Israel will lose. Nations and even nature will tremble in fear when God unleashes His power in justice and judgment. The forces of nature will be used against the nations. Nations will fear when the Lord appears with the hosts of heaven to defeat the antichrist and all who oppose Israel. It is like history repeats itself, only it will be worldwide in impact, not just affecting the nations of the Middle East as in the past history of the Jews.

The prophet accepted God's will that the Jews were going to be disciplined in a very unpleasant way for a long time. He did not ask God for them to escape punishment because he knew they needed to learn as a nation that discipline is an act of love by a concerned Father to bring His children back to right behavior. There would be failure of crops, animals would die, pestilence would come bringing starvation and loss - but Habakkuk still rejoiced in the Lord. His feelings were not controlled by events. He was shaken to the core. When the vision of the future was passed his stomach was hurting; he had trouble speaking; his bones ached and his emotions were all out in the open.
He knew Judah would be overrun. He knew the farms, fields and vineyards along with the livestock would be destroyed or taken. God gives strength and confidence in trials to those who live by faith. God's people need to live in the Spirit and trust God to deal with evil in His time. The wicked do not prosper in the long run. He is God, and He does what is right. Yet in spite of all that was revealed to him, Habakkuk's understanding of God was solidly established and in faith he chose to rejoice in God, not in his heritage, his nation nor circumstances. His question of "why" was answered, and he was able to praise the Lord in spite of everything. The glory of God covers heaven and earth reflecting in them His personal splendor that is beyond human description. His light radiates with brilliance casting no shadows.

Darkness was in Israel's past. Light is in its future when the Lord comes. Judgment is coming on the world because of sin that has never been repented of. Judgment will also prepare the world of its future. The shaking of mountains, earthquakes worldwide - all reveal the coming of the Lord will be earth-changing. The power of God and the purposes of God's judgment were evidence to Habakkuk of God's concern in the age to come. Overwhelming terror will come on the people of the world when the Lord comes and earth beneath their feet will be moved and changed.

The revelation of God in His Person, Power and Purposes is of such description as to impress Habakkuk with the fact that God in His sovereignty will triumph. Evil seems powerful, but the Eternal God has "all power" and is unchanging and the final victory is His. The Almighty God is in control of all people, events and final outcomes. God was, and is still doing right! The Light of the prophet's salvation had not changed! The Lord God was his strength for the difficult days ahead! The future was guaranteed and he could see a brighter day when God will bring an end to evil and righteousness will be normal. So this was a hymn to be sung publicly and praise to God was in order.

Our confidence in God makes the difficulties and uncertainties of earth only seem like a passing matter that is not so important in the long view of things. Faith takes a person beyond where they are and who they are to where trust in God and His word is complete. Sin does deserve punishment, and even though we do not like to see judgment happen, we place our confidence in the sovereignty of God and rest there. That is when submission to God's will is real. Joy in the Lord is a real thing and it is in God's salvation that makes this possible. We see beyond obstacles and fears to the reality of faith being "the substance of things hoped for." Trials and difficulties pale under the light of God's glory that will light the world in a day to come.

Habakkuk 3:2. "O Lord, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy."

REVILLE THY WORK.

There hasn't been blossoms on our trees, O God;  
The season seems to have come and gone. 
Few will pay attention to Thy Word, O God;  
Are we to continue or are we done? 
Age is catching up on all of us -  
We all agree in Thee alone is our trust -  
Please make it plain if there is something, we must  
Change or do to see the work revived, O God.

The vines are there but no fruit is on them, O God,  
And they have been pruned way back.  
The laborers are tired and old and weak, O God,  
We can't seem to make up for what we lack. 
Is it enough that we gather together to watch and pray? 
We read and study the Bible to see what Thou dost say -  
Have we failed Thee or is there a coming a brighter day.  
Ahead of us here when we have been revived, O God?

The sowing of seed still goes on in faith, O God,  
But lately we haven't seen new life.  
To the best of their ability the saints show grace, O God,  
But the future this work doesn't seem bright. 
Though others look on and laugh at such a few -  
We still commit what we are and have to You -  
And will pray for revival until we are through -  
We joy in Thee, in Thy strength and place our hope in Thee alone, O God.

"Father God, the year is ending today and we haven't seen the additions we prayed for. Our weakness is obvious and the numbers that attend are fewer because of our age and infirmities. Yet we rejoice in Thee and walk on these high places - maybe not
The prophet Zephaniah, who was likely of the line of royalty, was conscious that all was not well in Judah. The people did not seem to realize that "The just Lord" [was in their] midst, and He "is mighty." Manasseh, the ungodly son of godly Hezekiah, led the people down the path of idolatry, and Amon followed him. The boy-king, Josiah brought in reforms that were impressive but were outward. What was needed was inward revival of the people which cannot be organized by the government or an edict. The Jews had settled back on "their lees," the dregs of past successes, and were saying to themselves, "The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil." Complacency makes people not concerned nor willing to listen to warnings. Even though there were seeming benefits during the time of revival under Josiah, the evil influences of idolatry under the reigns of Manasseh and Amon remained.

In the first chapter of Zephaniah there is a warning to the people to look within their own nation. They had been repeatedly warned, so his mission wasn't to reform the nation. It was to warn them that they had passed the point of no return. Habakkuk had a problem as to what was going to happen to the Jews.
Zephaniah proclaimed punishment was certain to come. Chapter two warns of the righteous wrath of God on all nations. In chapter three, we read that after wrath comes mercy and healing. The "Day of the Lord" does predict the defeat of Judah, and also in the tribulation yet to come, but it also includes the times of restoration and hope. The second aspect of the Day of the Lord is an event yet in the future.

Behind this just judgment is the key word of the book of Zephaniah, "jealousy." - "I the Lord, thy God, am a jealous God." There is a jealousy that is never associated with God, and must never be used in regards to Him. That is suspicion of being unfaithful, and is looking for evidence of unfaithfulness. That kind of jealousy ruins homes, friendships, assemblies and nations. But jealousy as used in relation to God, is an earnest outcome of love for another person's well-being, blessing, and benefits. That is the nature of true love. An anxiety for the good of another person or persons with whole-hearted devotion for that person. Anyone or anything that undermines the safety or wellness of one who is loved is going to feel the wrath of one who cares. That is why Zephaniah came with his message. Nahum prophesied about the fall of Nineveh. Habakkuk warned of the Chaldeans who were going to come. Zephaniah's message was a warning of the inevitable for the people of Judah and for all nations. It was the truth because it came right from God and was not vague speculation but terrible truth.

In the book of Zephaniah, God is the One who judges, both His people and the nations. It is not just the Chaldeans. They are not even mentioned in the book. The serious departure from God and His truth, and the increase of evil already taking place was a foreshadowing of what was coming. The faithful needed to be encouraged to remain faithful. The sinful were warned. Moral and spiritual depravity will not be ignored. Justice and judgment go together. Peace, stability and righteousness can only come when human beings submit to divine authority. When God sent judgment on Judah, nothing was going to escape - not people nor animals. Guilt brought doom, distress, ruin, darkness and gloom - and the blackness of despair.

But there is hope when the people "Seek the Lord" - the humble, the obedient, the righteous could be sheltered on "the day of the Lord's anger." The last part of Zephaniah's prophecy gives definition to that hope, as God's salvation and deliverance for those who are faithful to Him. True hope is based on the knowledge that God's justice is right, and God's love for His people is unchanging. "Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth." God does not take sin lightly and will definitely punish sin, but He does deliver those who know and love Him, and will preserve them who humbly worship and obey Him as their Lord.

Judgment was coming because Judah had forsaken the Lord and worshipped idols, the stars and mixed paganism with temple worship. The people of Judah were indifferent toward God, they had no sorrow for sin. They were prosperous so no longer felt their need of God, nor did they care for Him to be involved in their lives. The fire of justice would be consuming and cleansing. The cause of justice being carried out was immorality, insincerity, cruelty, apostasy, infidelity and astrology. The people who were the objects of justice were rebels against God, lovers of pleasure, idolaters, and wealthy people who loved sin. Wealth and security make people smugly complacent. The lesson is that God does judge sin because He is the just Lord, and God does restore those who belong to Him and gives them hope.

The judgment was near and real. It was to fulfill the word of God, to punish the sinful; and to purge the nations. Lessons for us are to look within ourselves to make sure we allow nothing to come between us and God personally. We should also look around us and see what is happening to our society, nation and the nations of the world as they go farther and farther from righteousness and the standards of God's unchanging law. We need to look beyond us to the future when wrath and just punishment do their work, and restoration and hope comes. What are idols we should avoid today? Prosperity and indifference to God affects our lives every day as Christians.

Things are not looking good - the horizon is dark.
Sin is rampant, from going beyond, to missing the mark.
The idolatry of materialism; pleasure seeking and self-exaltation
Goes beyond that which is personal, to affecting a nation.

Things are not looking good - because lessons from the past
Are ignored and belittled by the revisionist cast
Of teachers and preachers who have told this generation -
That we are getting stronger and wiser as an agnostic nation.

Things are not looking good - because most people don't care -
Of justice and punishment for sin, they are not aware -
Because when year after year grace has been shown.
They likely will remain complacent until judgment does come.
Things are not looking good - because those who give warning
Are considered intolerant to the mass of people who are yawning
In indifference to sin, and to what is said, thinking all stays the same -
Until the warnings come true, and then God they will blame.

Father, the pattern of indifference in society is so well established, people have no
respect or fear of justice being carried out. I never want to leave unsaid any warnings
I should give, nor do I want to make the Lord’s people afraid of the righteous
judgment Thou dost said. I thank You for the safety and security of Thy people who
wait patiently for our Lord to come. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ Amen.

Zephaniah 1

WHEN GOD SAYS, "I WILL"

Zephaniah was asking the people of the Lord to listen to his message but they refused. He wanted them to
know the purpose of the Lord to judge His people. He also wanted them to know that the "day of the Lord is
at hand." Even though they were warned by the man whose name means, "The Lord Hides," apparently,
they doubted God would do what he says, or even doubted God Himself. The Lord does judge sin whether
we believe it or not. Adam and Eve were put out of the garden of Eden. The world was judged by the flood in
Noah’s time. Zephaniah pointed out that God is going to judge the nation, and that judgment was a
foreshadowing of coming world judgment.

Josiah had earlier tried to clean up Jerusalem but it was only outward, and God had determined to bring just
punishment on Judah. That reformation did not last. Neither sinner or believers can escape punishment for
sin. For us to refuse what God says in His word, the Bible, is to refuse God. Punishment follows deliberate
blindness.

The threat in the warning given to the people of Judah was real. It was not speculation when time after time,
God stated "I will." God wrath was real against religious leaders who were idolaters. It was real against the
rulers. It was real against the business people who insincere. It was real against the cynics. The day of the
Lord would bring judgment on man and beast and on the stumbling blocks - idolaters. They would all be cut
off completely and forever. These were not empty threats, nor are the warnings of things yet to come. These
judgments were eminent and intense, but only a shadow of what is going to happen in the future.

The influence of religious leaders can help a nation to become aware of the power and authority of our God,
and perhaps bring them to call on the name of the Lord - or bring down destruction on the nation. The
priests of the Jews were from the tribe of Levi and limited to the house of Aaron. Kings were restricted to the
tribe of Judah and the house of David. Those leaders failed in their trust and responsibility. The idols in the
promised land had not been destroyed and people were attracted to the cults of Baal worship. The
priesthood had allowed the mixture of the worship of God and the worship of idols. Immorality had become
an accepted practice in the name of religion. The practice of astrology - the worship of the sun, moon and
stars was also being practiced in Judah. It still is a strong influence in the Middle East today, even to the
symbols used.

Other religious practices included mixing the practice of child sacrifice with Judaism by people who wanted a
foot in both camps - was totally insincere. Even more than that - there were those who deliberately "turned
back" and were apostates. They turn away from what they once believed was the truth, but for some reason
or advantage walk away from God, His word and His will. The "Lord's sacrifice" was Judah itself.

Infidelity on the part of many of the people revealed they wanted nothing to do with God in any way. The
king's children felt themselves a dynasty wearing strange foreign clothes, acting like foreigners and looking
like foreigners. They plundered the people to get what they wanted. Business people in the market (fish
gate), those in the lower valley - "the second," and the complacent, cynical, lazy people were all guilty and
payday was coming. The cynics were like the dregs (lees) that settle to the bottom of a container in their
indifference to what was happening to them and their nation. They had no faith in God being involved in
human life and society - if there was a God. They had no place for God in their plans or lives. They wanted
nothing to do with God, and didn't think God would do anything to them.

Idol worship today is prevalent when people trust in themselves, power and money, but deny God the place
of worship and honor in their lives. All idolatry is temporary and ultimately worthless. Spiritual depravity and
immorality are as common today as they were in Judah. Indifference to the Gospel and eternal things, moral
and social denigration has permeated our whole country. Stumbling blocks are everywhere. Anything that
turns people away from God, even Christians who compromise truth and/or live inconsistent with that which
is expected of a believer in Christ, is a stumbling block. Wickedness in life and rebellion against God will
bring sure and severe judgment. Judgment and punishment for sin can open the way to restoration and blessing in times to come. The Lord Jesus Christ endured judgment on the cross that was due to those who believe in Him, and that brings blessing to us and glory to God.

The Day of the Lord was near for the Jews in Judah, and is coming in fullness in a coming day. Life is worthless when there is no divine protection for those who sinned against the Lord. That judgment is going to come to an end, but make no mistake, it will be real, it will be comprehensive. The prophesy of Zephaniah regarding the end times were obviously yet in the future. It will be a double fulfillment when the Babylonians conquered Judah in the past, and the Tribulation and events following after happen after the rapture of the church. No silver and gold paid can deliver from judgment that will definitely happen.

The people who led the rank and file citizens, instead of being good example to the people, showed contempt for the Lord by ignoring His commands and His servants who spoke for Him. God does not let those who deserve punishment for their sin, escape His justice. When we do not search our hearts and commit ourselves to God's ways, we can become content with the confusion and chaos around us and become indifferent to our Lord. "Be sure your sin will find you out." God is not an indulgent grandfather-like person who is nice to everyone and is nice to have around. He shapes events. He controls nations. He is active in human affairs. He is absolute in holiness and will judge sin and punish sinners who are indifferent to Him. God is not indifferent to us, and the "great day of the Lord" will reveal that. Judgment came on the Jews from Babylon. Judgment will come on the world from the Lord Himself. God is still willing and able to save repentant sinners, but nothing else can. Only the work of Christ on our behalf matters. It is His blood alone that cleanses from all sin.

Zephaniah 1:7. "Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord God: for the day of the Lord is at hand: for the Lord hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests."

HOLD THY PEACE.

There is no way to avoid, the righteous justice of the Lord.
To try to stop judgment after it starts is to oppose the Sovereign Lord.
Long years and generations have passed when warning have been given.
Sin left unchecked and unrepented of spread through the land like leaven.

The fire of jealousy that God releases in no resentful or unfair.
It is the holy jealousy one has when love is reigning there.
For God to allow unstopped the spread of rampant sin -
Would bring increasing lawlessness that maybe would not end.

So, warnings are given well in advance to turn and seek the Lord.
Prophets in the past and preachers now give to man God's holy Word.
To act in haste and turn to God is the highest wisdom one can have.
God is ready to forgive and the unrepentant sinner save.

Lest anyone think there is no reckoning, remember. God is holy.
Don't fool yourself into thinking these warnings are threats only.
There is a payday for sin ignored, its coming is ordained.
Those who turn away from God, won't be warned again.

"Father God, I learn from reading of those past days, that Thou dost say is going to come to pass. Give me the needed compassion to care for those to whom I speak today. At the same time, help me to be faithful in warning the people of the truth of Thy Word and the consequences of ignoring those truths. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Zephaniah 2

LOOK AROUND!

It is consistent when one has a message of warning, to give opportunity to get people to do what is right. God is willing to withhold judgment when people turn from their sins and humble themselves before Him. Reality is evident when they are willing and ready to obey God's word to seek the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior, put personal faith in Him and follow Him.

Zephaniah called out an urgent plea to the people of Judah to "Gather together and ... seek the Lord ..., seek righteousness, seek meekness." Even though they were surrounded by enemies, they were self-satisfied and self-righteous, seeing no need to repent of their sin and turn to the Lord. Most people today see no need of turning to the Lord alone for salvation, because they either think they are alright as they are, or can earn salvation in their own way.
The time for repentance does not last forever. When there is an offer to "escape to the mountain," judgment can be turned away. When people turn to the Lord in sincerity, "it may be" the sovereign God will spare the sinner to "repent and believe the Gospel." Opportunity comes, and opportunity goes. "Now is the accepted time" for the sincere, repentant sinner to "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." Sincere repentance is beyond pretension and insincerity. There is meekness and lowliness in heart when one has a true desire for God.

Just because God uses sinful people to carry out His just punishment does not mean those people will escape judgment for their own sin. Pride and self-sufficiency accompany prosperity, and people become indifferent to God and the needs of others. Judgment was coming, Zephaniah warned, both on Judah, and on their enemies to the west and east, to the south and north. This indicates to us that there will come a time of universal judgment in all four directions from Jerusalem.

Judgment is coming, not on those of the past, but far greater, in the future when it goes beyond Israel's local enemies to judgment on their world-wide enemies at the time of the Tribulation. That warning should make people today realize the need for true repentance now. From Zephaniah, went the warning to those people west of Judah, Philistia and its cities; then to the east to Moab and Amon. The warning also went to Ethiopia to the south and Assyria to the north. It will be from those four quarters those armies will come toward Israel at the end of the times of coming tribulation.

The Philistine cities to the west would experience divine justice for their past treatment of the Jews. Today the antagonism of the Arab nations still is a danger to them, but in the future Philistia will become part of Israel. God was going to preserve a "remnant" then, a small group of people who were faithful to Him, who He would bring back to the promised land. He will bring the whole nation together in the future. He will keep His covenant to Abraham, and will preserve his descendants to continue as a recognizable people. God is holy and cannot allow sin to go unpunished. God is also faithful, and what He has promised, he will do.

Moab and Amon to the east, are what is known as Jordan today. They openly opposed the children of Israel right from the time of the exodus, and that opposition continued. Disaster would come on them when they did not expect it. The "gods of the earth" they worshipped were powerless to protect them or deliver them. The Arab states still hate the Jews and the God of the Jews because, in spite of their superiority in number and riches, they cannot defeat Israel.

To the south, Ethiopia (and Egypt in the past) would not escape the coming defeat. To the north, Assyria and its capital, Nineveh would be destroyed, eliminated and actually forgotten even as to where it was. That destruction would be so complete that people could even find the ruins of the city for centuries. In time to come, those to the south will be allies of the king of the north, Russia, which is a God-hating, atheistic, anti-Semitic power that will be determined to end the existence of the nation of Israel once for all.

But all that has seemingly been covered, God already knows. He knows the thoughts and intents of the hearts of men. That is where he looks to see what is sincere and real, and what is mere form and convenience. Motives are not obscure or hidden to God. Abuse, reproach, rejection and resentment are to be expected by those who live godly in Christ Jesus. Pride, arrogance and self-exaltation will bring the downfall of men and nations. At this present time, the whole world lies in the darkness of sin and it will take severe punishment to bring about universal justice in the coming kingdom. When that happens there will be peace on earth and good will to men.

Worship is given to God from every nation today by those who know and love the Lord. In the future day, every nation will worship the Lord. They will recognize Him universally as the one and only, true God. He will be exalted among the nations, but pride, arrogance, self-sufficiency and indifference to God will bring the downfall of people before God in the future, in the same way it did in the past on a smaller scale.

**Zephaniah 2:3.** "Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger."

**THE MEEK.**

Without a doubt times are increasingly bad like back in history. When that happens people often choose only what they want to see. Most don't realize that when standards change, inevitably they go down.
And what would have embarrassed a generation past, now doesn't bring a frown.

Still, among the multitudes that try to conform to the new man-made standards, Are people here and there who don't make much of a stir; but when spoken to are candid. Pointing out the fact that the Lord doesn't change, and neither do His holy laws. The strength of the meek is there, power is under control, and they will maintain God's cause.

If you follow them a day you would find they wisely take time to read the Bible and pray. When they are asked opinions during the course of their work, you can depend on what they say. They are committed to standards that do not change for either time or place. Their consistency depends on their confidence in God; through their life God's guidance you can trace.

Things that are right, don't just happen, they are a reward of those who seek Guidance from God for righteous living, they are not weaklings, just truly meek. When all is said and done, and the final battle is over, what is the greater worth?

The answer was given by the Lord Himself, "The meek shall inherit the earth."

"Father, help me to be willing to stand up for what is right without being obnoxious; to apply the needed pressure for change when it is needed without being obvious; to guide others in ways that are right without being devious. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Zephaniah 3:1-7

"THE JUST LORD"

Zephaniah had prophesied in chapter two regarding the judgment coming on nations around Judah. The Lord was in "the midst" of His people in carrying out justice on their enemies. In chapter three He is "the just Lord" in "the midst" of His people for salvation. But then he returns to the problems of sin rampant in Jerusalem. The city of God had become defiled by sin. They pretended to worship God and claimed they served Him, but really had rejected Him and downplayed their sin. They didn't seem to even care about the problem of sin and its consequences. God showed grace in warning the Jews ahead of time about judgment that was coming.

When people reject and depart from the principles of the Bible, God pronounces woes on them. The things we see in churches and governments now, should never be found among believers in assemblies of the Lord's people gathered to His name alone. To set aside fundamental moral standards as taught in the scriptures, destroys the structure of society. Obedience among God's people contrasts with those who claim to be Christians but are disobedient to the word of God, and are at a distance from His revealed will. Defiance and distrust toward God have all the earmarks of apostasy.

Judgment had been pronounced on Judah and the nations surrounding them, which should have brought the Jews to consider who they were and the dangerous position they were in. But they refused to listen to those who warned them because they would not agree with their opinions. They had become indifferent to God because of prosperity. Pride and self-sufficiency follow prosperity. One of the sins of Judah was rebellion because they "have not trusted in the Lord." The righteous Lord in the midst is always righteous in His character, in His actions in the eternal past, the present and will be in the future. The desire of God in bringing the troubles on Judah was to bring them to their senses and repentance before they ran into the final disaster. But instead they "rose early and corrupted" themselves even further.

False prophets, unscrupulous rulers, and people-pleasing priests led those who followed them down the path to judgment falling on them. In spite of the evil in the city, there were some who stayed true to the Lord. Out of all that was wrong, the Lord was preserving a remnant in accordance with the covenant He made with Abraham and his seed. The revival under Josiah's rule had an effect for awhile, but the Jews had gone too far in moral and spiritual decadence. Zephaniah's focus turned to the antichrist who will reveal himself as an evil enemy of the Jews. The Lord will make the counsels of "the man of sin" come to nothing when the Lord Jesus returns to carry out the final act of judgment and set up His kingdom.

Genuine obedience to God, and the practice of following God's word among God's people, contrasts with those who claim to be Christians but choose to be disobedient to the word of God. They want to remain at a distance from His revealed will in order to please themselves or others. When an attitude like that is among professing Christians, there is no reason to think they are really children of God. Pride leads to this attitude. An inflated sense of importance and self-worth makes people think they do not need to listen to what God
says in the Bible. Even the counsel of godly people who have had experiences with God are rejected as irrelevant and out of date.

The example of the rulers and priests in that day and/or leaders in any day, should be that of men who gladly submit to the revealed will of God. When neglect and lack of responsible leadership is characteristic of those who teach and preach, that cancels out anything they might say. "Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful." Inconsistent and unfaithful leadership has serious consequences, both on them and those whom they lead. What we say, what we do and our normal conduct in life, should be in purity, honor and respect before God and man. The impact and value on those who follow such a person is of great worth. If these are missing, as in the time of Zephaniah, people not only consider the message he gives valueless, but if there is a true servant who speaks for God, he is more or less lumped in with all the rest and his warnings are demeaned and ignored.

In difficult times each believer needs to be concerned as to what God wants us to commit ourselves to in His service. Why do people ignore urgent warnings and refuse to consider the "signs of the times?" Why is there so little interest in spiritual matters? Disobedience to God on the part of those who claim to be God's people, makes people who are not believers lose interest in spiritual things and divine Persons, and consider them irrelevant to their lives. Even when danger is on the horizon, disillusioned people will harden themselves so that they no longer consider God even matters.

But justice will be done no matter how people try to explain away evil. Evil-doers will be punished, and that gives us real concern. Many do not realize the serious consequences of their sin. Those who love God and obey Him, will be blessed. It is true that we cannot stop the downward course of humanity in general because the times and people will continue to decline and go farther away from righteousness and God. So, we can only do what we can, to try to "have compassion on some making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." We need to patiently wait for our righteous God to do what He knows needs to be done to bring about the "righteousness that exalts a nation."

It seems so hopeless when we preach -
That people are becoming so hard to reach
With the good news of God's great salvation -
While darkness settles rapidly over our nation.

For some strange reason leaders only care
For the office they hold, not the responsibility they bear.
They are indifferent to the concerns of those they lead -
Willing to ignore what is right and what people need.

How bad it is when those who claim to speak for God -
Only pass on opinions unsupported by God's word.
People are led astray, because very few bother to read
For themselves what God says; truth they do not heed.

Punishment is inevitable, of that there's no doubt.
But most people think it is only capital crimes that count.
They have been deceived into thinking they are in control
Of events and outcomes that affects their own soul.

Looking ahead, how fearful is the coming day -
When all the deceit and denial has been cast away -
And holy Light shines on the evil of this world -
As the Day of the Lord comes and prophecy is unfurled.

"Father, may I this day look far enough ahead to be ready to speak Thy word faithfully to those who will listen. In a few days we will be speaking to the Lord's people we have known for more than a half-century. Their children and grandchildren for the most part are not saved. May Thy servant have the privilege of being "the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Zephaniah 3:8-20

HOPE FOR THE HOPELESS

We normally view things through our own eyes as it relates to the world and even things in the future that have been prophesied for our learning. Even when reading the New Testament, the picture we get of things to come upon the Jews as judgment on them for the rejection of their Messiah, is that of nations gathering in
mutual antagonism against God's chosen earthly people and gathering together in defiance against God.
But in this prophecy, we view all of these events as God acting in divine justice. This is what He will do.
Anything done to recover His people, is His work being done through wicked men and nations. It is the Lord
who is initiating the actions of the nations.

It is God who will judge the nations using whatever means He chooses. Justice will prevail on earth. Those
who chose to do evil will be punished. The righteous and those who are obedient to the Lord will be blessed
by the Lord. The godly remnant is "the prey" who will find the Lord bringing to conclusion the whole matter of
preserving His covenant people. They will just have to patiently wait for God to do His work.

Jews, the remnant of Israel, who have been scattered allover the world, will return to worship the Lord and
serve Him. Not only Jews will be preserved when the righteous wrath of God is unleashed on the ungodly
nations that oppose Him, but all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved. They will "with one
consent," or shoulder to shoulder, unite in the service of the Lord. Their words and worship will be pure.

That principle of unity in those who are united in the bonds of divine grace, and who live by faith, is to be the
practice of God's people today. "How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity," is
still the unifying practice in assemblies of God's people today as they bear public testimony to the name and
Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is strength in unity. There is the ability to have joy in the sharing of
our responsibilities when we are joined in fellowship with the Lord and each other. There is confidence when
our trust is in God, and when in lowliness of mind we each esteem others better than ourselves. When our
dependence is on our God, we find united joy and satisfaction. The redemption in Christ Jesus that we share
unites us across the barriers of age, culture, location and even language. A single word like "Hallelujah," or
"Maranatha," crosses language barriers to shared joy.

The Lord will remove the proud and haughty, leave in place an "afflicted and poor people" who are looked
down on by the world, but they trust in the Lord and will be rewarded. Their confidence will be in God. Their
trust in Him will be without reservation. In lowliness of mind and dependence on Him, they will find their
redemption, their joy and their satisfaction. When people are willing to humble themselves before the Lord,
they are in the strongest possible position to be blessed "with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in
Christ."

Morality and integrity will characterize those who return to the Lord as a restored remnant of the Jewish
people. Those same characteristics are to be in the persons and practices of God's people today. The
reason behind the blessings for the Jews in the future and for the church of God today is the Shepherd, our
Lord Jesus Christ. The One who is the Chief Shepherd of His people today, will be the Messiah of the Jews.
Their King will be their Shepherd. This indicates all that we are in need of is found in Him who provides us
with "every good and perfect gift."

A time to rejoice is coming when God's people are back in full fellowship with Him and will have enthusiastic,
contagious joy "with all the heart." That has been, will be, and is now the experience of those who
appreciate God's love, mercy, grace and salvation. This kind of joy is not temporary, ecstatic, emotional
exuberance because of someone's stirring words, but is a deep intelligent response of gratitude,
appreciation and worship for God Himself.

Gladness is a result of God being with us and we obeying Him and doing His revealed will. God can then
rejoice over His people, and will rejoice over them in restoration "with singing." Our true happiness is a result
of His happiness. What joy we have when He rejoices! No longer will God have to deal in judgment with His
people. He will be able to express His love for His own with joy and singing like a bridegroom rejoices over
His bride.

The restoration of Israel will happen according to the terms of the covenant God made with them. Ten times
the Lord says, "I will," when He judges and when He brings blessing. The Lord will judge those who oppress
His people and reject Him. He will save those who "call upon the name of the Lord." They will not longer be
despised and dishonored. He will bring Israel home to where they belong and will be restored to be His
earthly people as He intends them to be. In this coming new day, God will be with His people and will bless
them in spite of past failures. They will be blessed as God's people on earth, and those saved and in the
church are His heavenly people.

Such prophecies as Zephaniah's warn us against carelessness toward God and His word. They remind us
that judgment does come on those who sin. Justice will be done in God's way and time. In these dark days
of departure from truth and, in some, deliberate apostasy, God allows us a glimpse of the future when
blessings will come on His people. The God's salvation will be able to bring blessings on earth as they are in heaven. Then there will come a new heavens and new earth where the righteous will live in peace under the benevolent reign of our Gracious Lord and King.

**Zephaniah 3:17.** “The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy: he will rest in his love; he will joy over thee with singing.”

**HE IS NOT DONE.**

In the midst is the place where He belongs.
In the midst when He gathers with His own.
In the midst even when He died.
   In the midst as proof that He’s alive:
   The Lord thy God is in the midst.

He is mighty as the Creator should be.
He is mighty to calm even wind and sea.
   He is mighty and willing to forgive.
   He is mighty and ever ready to save.
   The Lord thy God - is mighty.

He will save, and this He’s promised to do.
He will save, all that come to Him in truth
   He will save, to the uttermost, and then
   He will save, from sin and death - for heaven.
   The Lord thy God - He will save.

He will rejoice over thee, and all will hear His great joy.
He will rejoice over thee, angels in heaven all know.
   He will rejoice over thee; repentance and faith are both real.
   He will rejoice over thee, when we all in joy to Him kneel.
   The Lord thy God will rejoice.

He will rest in love that’s without limit and free.
He will rest in love displayed clearly at Calvary.
   He will rest in love way beyond human compare.
   He will rest in love which He will forever share.
   The Lord thy God will rest in His love.

He will joy over thee: let all hear His voice singing.
He will joy over thee, with hymns saints and angels bringing.
   He will joy over thee, how wonderful to bring Him pleasure.
   He will joy over thee, His might, love and joy without measure.
   The Lord thy God will rejoice over thee.

“Father God: to be able to bring anything of value to Thee is such an awesome privilege. To bring joy to the Lord God of heaven and earth is humbling to any nation of people, let alone an individual who is so insignificant. I am moved to praise Thee for letting us know so clearly some of the depths of Thy emotion. Amen.”
HAGGAI
The Immediate, or the Important?

After the return of the remnant from Babylon when Cyrus told the Jews any who wanted to could return to Judah, there were three prophets, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, sent by God to speak for Him to the returned exiles. Haggai and Zechariah were there at the same time and urged the people to finish the temple that had been started and then left unfinished. Instead of hundreds of thousands, only 50,000 Jews had returned after the nation had been carried away to Babylon seventy years before. Likely most of those had been born in Babylon and only knew about the history of their nation though conversations with the old people who grieved for what had been in their past. The old people even found it hard to sing hymns or songs to the Lord in Babylon, likely because they would start to cry thinking about their past history. Most of the Jews who had been taken captive got used to living in Babylon. Some became important business people. Others were brought into government positions, and comparatively few had any interest in going back to the promised land and their unique identity as the people of God. So as a result, Jews have been dispersed all over the world today. Even though they maintain their identity as Jews, and a few their spiritual identity, not many today go back to Israel. The children would have wondered at the emotion and asked about Jerusalem and the temple. What they learned made them want to have their identity as a people established again as God's people in the land promised to Abraham.

Zerubbabel and Joshua led them back across the desert to the right place, but instead of glory, there were ruins. Reality sets in when the dreams of the ancient people become the hard facts of the present. An altar was set up and sacrifices were made, and the rubble was cleared away so the temple could be built in the same place Solomon had built the first temple. The young people who had never seen the first temple were enthusiastic and joyful when they started, so they sang with joy. But the old people who had come back and likely some who had remained to care for the land, wept in sadness for what had once been but was lost. Then the opposition started and the rebuilding work stopped because of the pressure against them.

There will always be some opposition to the work of God because the world, the flesh and the devil are implacable enemies of God and His people. When because of lack of faith, we yield to pressure, soon we will get involved in other things that seem to need immediate attention. There will always be people and things in our lives that insist they are of utmost importance. It is much easier to accommodate to the things everyone else does and thinks are important, than to go against the tide of public opinion. Things that are popular to the majority of people do have an attraction for the people of God. Unless we realize "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you," is a divine principle under which we are to live, we will soon become like the world system around us. The world, the flesh and the devil are all enemies of the people of God, and unite to keep us from that which is important.

Twelve to fifteen years had passed after the foundation had been laid and work on the temple had begun, but instead of the temple of the Lord being completed, people made fine homes for themselves and had settled in complacency into a lifestyle that suited them. They had become used to the ways of the people around them and ignored the fact that what God wanted done was left undone. They made a start and then quit. It was then the Lord called Haggai to challenge the people to finish building the Lord's house.

If we commit ourselves to that which is expedient rather than that which is important, we won't do what is important. There will always be things that call for our immediate attention claiming to be more important than our primary commitment to the work of the Lord. It may be the weather is favorable to doing something we want, so we do not attend an assembly gathering lest we miss the opportunity to do what we want. If we start to yield to things of lesser purpose and do them first, then other "urgent" matters will clamor for our attention. Before we know it, time has passed and our primary objective and responsibility to the things of God is left undone, and possibly forgotten.
The people of Judah in Haggai's day who had returned from Babylon, put their own interests first, as is normal to the natural man. Those same things can become the focus of attention to a carnal man. The spiritual person knows when there is a command from the Lord, that must come first, and that commitment becomes a conviction. They are willing to "Seek first the kingdom of God." By continuing in that practice of obedience to the word of the Lord, it becomes a conviction, and that makes it a reality in one's life by which they make decisions, and by which they choose to live.

In order for God to get the attention of the Jews and get them to put first things first, He shut off the rain and dew so they were not getting results from all their farming efforts. The crops failed and they were in danger of famine. The new generation had to learn for themselves that God is not to be ignored, nor should His word be considered unimportant. They had not learned from their own history, so God sent Haggai to put into words what they should have done but left undone. In a series of four messages, Haggai told Zerubbabel and Joshua who were leaders of the people what needed to be done first. Ezra was also there but perhaps was busy in his writing, or maybe did not have the needed influence to get the people to drop what they were doing for themselves and build for God.

Haggai was truly "the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message." There was no second guessing as to what he meant and the pertinent questions he asked. His urgent call to action was plain and clear. It may take a burning in the soul, a strong tone of voice, and a degree of impetuosity to get the attention of the people. Then is when a warning message is to be sounded loud and clear. A casual approach to an urgent message usually means what is said is not perceived to be important. The messages of Haggai are filled with challenges and promises. When a word from God is given in the right way, it is usually received in the right way. That is when people become aware again of the claims of God on our lives, and we are impressed with the importance of establishing an order of priority in all we do.

The condition of God's people was clearly defined and the reason for the famine was given. They knew then the famine was given with the objective of bringing them back to the Lord. This would have been a new experience to most of the returnees who had only lived in Babylon. In the "world" everything that happens is given a manmade idea as to why this problem has come, or why that disaster has happened. An exercised believer understands that "bad luck" or some other explanation made by people is not the answer. "It is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." "We are not our own," and need to keep in our minds who we are and why we are here.

Haggai went to the leaders first, and then the people faced the problem and their own condition before God. The force of Haggai's message made them drop everything and immediately go to work to do what should have been done long before. In spite of the opposition from those around them, the people worked on building the temple until it was completed. The strongly worded questions from the prophet made the Lord's people "Consider your ways!"

Sometimes earnest, honest questions make people come awake to their spiritual condition before God. The Lord Jesus Christ asked questions of people who only thought about what was temporary and immediate, to seriously consider what was eternal and important. "What think ye of Christ?" was a personal and powerful question. It produced a clear, precise statement of faith as a result. If we are not careful, we can forget the goodness of God to us and become complacent, apathetic Christians who have no real impact on anyone. When we neglect the word of God, our consciences can be seared to the extent we may harden ourselves against that which is God's will. When we know what God wants, we must obey Him first and put other temporary things aside until the important things are done.

GET IT BACK

Get it back, that early enthusiasm that made you think and act in faith.
It was that invitation, that urgent call that took you to a far and distant place.
Adventure - it was waiting, but once there you found the work so hard.
But you knew it was right to be there, to do the work you were called to by God.

However, things were very different: the culture, the people and the place.
Those who lived there were strangers to you, to God and to His great grace.
Instead of moving forward showing a different way - the path of light,
You were inclined to accommodate, to blend in and acquiesce - not fight.

But a voice from God. A Bible verse, a conversation and/or a prayer -
That once again brought you to remember why you came to work right there.
To stop and review past choices, past steps and the first call to commitment,
And you realize that in all the pressures, all the things that happened - God is in it.
Get it back, that vision of the value of a soul of dying men and women.
Get it back, the assurance that there is great value in reaching out to children.
Get it back, that fellowship with God that makes the light of truth so clear.
Get it back, and then as you review your life and work, you’ll know why you are here.

“Father in heaven, here I am where you called me many years ago to live and stay until the new believers were able to stand and go forward on their own. I am touched by the faithful few still here after nearly sixty years. However, Father, I am concerned about what may happen if there are no additions to the work. Help Thy servant to be ready to do and say that which is Thy mind and will. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Haggai 1:1-7

CONSIDER YOUR WAYS

Seventy years had passed and the restoration of the Jews to the promised land of Israel began when Zerubbabel as the ruler and Joshua as priest led 50,000 Jews back to Judah. Some time later Ezra led another group to Jerusalem and later still Nehemiah led the third group back to Judah. These three groups were the promised remnant of that day. Haggai and Zechariah were both from Babylon and both were at Jerusalem at the same time bringing the word of the Lord to the people with the purpose of meeting the spiritual needs of the people.

After the first enthusiastic start of the temple when the foundation was laid amidst the rejoicing of those who never seen a temple of the Lord, and tears of those who had seen the glory of the temple years before, the glow of spiritual enthusiasm waned. The people spent more time building their own houses and then adding to them the extent of making them luxurious. It was then the Lord spoke to those people through Haggai. He began by going to the leaders, Zerubbabel and Joshua, and letting them know the Lord had something to say about the state of things. With both reason and rebuke, the prophet, with a voice of contempt addressed “this people” and stated clearly that God knew their excuse for not building the temple.

"The time is not yet come,” meant in essence, "It is not convenient for us to be doing this work for God." The indifference of the people reflected their spiritual condition and lack of interest in spiritual things. Lethargy and materialism by both the leaders of God's people and those who follow, is as much a sin of omission as a sin of commission can be. Each has a far-reaching effect and needs to be considered for what it is in the eyes of God. When we neglect God's work, we are neglecting God.

The One who addressed His people through Haggai was "the Lord of hosts (Jehovah)," the faithful unchanging God. He was the one doing the speaking through the voice of His prophet. When God challenges and charges His people with worldliness and materialism, it is a very serious matter that we dare not take lightly. When it is the Lord who says, "Consider your ways!” then we must consider our ways! Nothing is hidden from Him. He looks beyond the external to the motivations behind one's activities and to the intents of the heart of each one of us.

Leadership responsibility includes setting the direction for the best benefit of the Lord's people. This means spiritual direction as well as the order of things among the people. Leaders raised up by the Holy Spirit have a personal concern for the welfare of the people they lead, in the same way a shepherd has for the sheep of his flock. Responsibilities and example carried out in the fear of God, and done faithfully for the Lord, will be rewarded by the Chief Shepherd in a day yet to come.

Even thought the foundation of the temple was laid, the failure of the people to continue the work had consequences. Ideas and an actual start of a work or service for God is not acceptable if it stops, because it suggests the fault of not completing the work is someone else's fault, not mine. There was opposition to rebuilding it is true, but there will always be opposition to any work of God by the powers of darkness. An invasion into Satan's territory will never be easy. If we allow fear of opposition to hinder a work for the Lord, that is indicative of lack of our faith in the Lord. Those people used the fear of those who opposed the building of the temple to cover their own spiritual condition and to justify not finishing the temple by putting the blame on the unbelievers.

When we become self-centered, we quickly become indifferent to what God wants and has a right to expect from us. When our priorities are a mixture of our work, our family and our leisure with God's will and His work, we have lost fellowship with the Lord. Church attendance, personal testimony and the weight of our words are all lost when we do not "Seek first the kingdom of God." When God challenges and charges His
people with worldliness and materialism, that is a very serious matter. If we only care for ourselves and our physical needs, our relationship with the Lord as it relates to our state as a Christian, can lead us to ruin.

In contrast, when God is first in our lives, He meets our needs. The assembly of God's people is usually the focal point of our public testimony. His grace, mercy and love is demonstrated when His people "dwell together in unity." But if we spend time and money beautifying our own homes like those returned exiles did, we exalt ourselves in the eyes of those who look on, and that is not a positive Christian testimony. Excessive luxury actually deprives us of those things that are lasting and important. That can happen quickly if we are not careful. Those things that seems so important to unbelievers, if they become overly important to us, leave us unfruitful and unproductive in our Christian commitment and unsatisfied with life.

God has the right to give or withhold blessing. When it is withheld, we need to consider why this has happened. When the Lord of hosts says, "Consider your ways..." that is a major wakeup call. We need to consider our ways in every aspect of life. As an individual I need to consider what I read, watch, say and do as to what the result will be in the course I choose to follow. In family life we must face the fact that what I do as a parent or grandparent is likely to be imitated by the generations that follow me. The assembly of which I am a part is influenced by my participation or lack of it, so I must consider how each thing I do affects my brothers and sisters. It the community in which I live, my life, words and work influence other brothers and sisters in Christ.

For several years that attitude of self-centeredness continued among the people who returned from Babylon. So God stopped providing rain and dew. Their crops were poor, and then failures. Everything they put their hand to, failed, as God sought to get their attention. Worldliness claims our usefulness for God and soon others also. Fruitfulness is lacking in those who live for themselves. Happiness evades those who look for satisfaction in all the wrong places.

PRIORITIES

You know what God wants, why do you wait?
Some work is normal, His work is great -
And that is what God wants us to do first of all
How can you linger or ignore His divine call?

True, it's not your house - it is the house of the Lord.
The command is plain - seek now the kingdom of God.
When God comes first, and we do now what is right -
We can expect His approval, and He'll give us more light.

We have a shelter from the wind, storm and heat.
God's people have an altar, but no place to meet.
The foundation was laid, and then everyone quit -
We need God's house built; it is time to finish it.

When we let our interests and worldly things take first place -
We have acted as self-centered, not those saved by grace.
Never lose sight of God's interests, or substitute our own.
Build His house first, and then make your own home.

"I know Father, that often we get really concerned and committed to those things that please us or are for our own comfort. Help me to remember that Thy work and Thy interests last forever and are of far more importance than anything else that I may do, or think I cannot do without. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Haggai 1:8-15

"THE LORD STIRRED UP ...

Have you every asked yourself, "What is really all important in what I do?" If we are careful; we have great expectations that lead to wasted years. We anticipate great results but only get very little out of a lot of effort. Lots of hard work for the wrong things brings a sense of frustration when nothing comes out of so much work. Many people look for much and get little back in investments, appreciation, thankfulness, and gratitude for time spent on some project of personal interest, or people we try to help. Something we thought would be wonderful ends up being nothing.

This was happening to the remnant that returned to the promised land. They planted crops and the harvest was miniscule. Perhaps they thought it was just a poor growing season and next year would be better. But as years passed and failure came every year, and even the little they got out of it was lost, it became obvious this was caused by something beyond natural causes. It is bad enough to get little out of great
effort, but to lose what you get on top of that, is more than just a crop failure. When the children start asking for something to eat and there is nothing to give them, one begins to ask themselves, "What is wrong here?"

It is as serious a matter to be guilty of not doing what God wants done, as it is to do what He does not want. It may have been that those people who had been subservient to the Babylonians had never had personal dealings with God, or had never understood that the interaction of God's children is a life-or-death matter. When called awake spiritually to face the fact of the seriousness of sin, it is not uncommon for a new believer to not know what to do. That is when mature believers need to come alongside and explain 1st John 1 to a new Christian and guide them through the confession and forsaking of sin in the Christian life. Before people are saved, they are generally quite careless, even indifferent toward sin. They have never looked at sin through God's eyes. But then the new nature within responds to sin with an awareness of guilt and the conviction that something is wrong, and they are brought up short.

Chastisement is a testimony of love that is ultimately for our benefit when we change our behavior. "Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth..." That will be for our good when we accept it, and the results are usually lasting when it is taken right. A casual attitude toward obedience is changed when disobedience brings serious consequences. There are tests in the life of a believer that determine the degree of spirituality and reality in one's life. There are times in life, and things that happen to us, that make us very conscious of the reality and personal interest of "The Lord [our] God."

Haggai's message made it plain that nature had responded to the command of the Lord to withhold rain and dew, and consequently restrained the bounty of God's "fullness" from the earth. In contrast to nature, the people did not respond at all to the call and will of God. The things the people of Judah needed to sustain life were limited to the extent that death from famine loomed ahead. It wasn't God's fault that it happened. It was their own lack of obedience that brought the problem on them. This whole experience would have taken on a new dimension when Haggai preached the Lord's message.

Fear of God, and confidence in God are closely linked with obedience to God. Respect for Him sometimes is lacking until something happens beyond our control. Then we begin to really appreciate who our heavenly Father is and what He does for us. We will better understand what it means to be in the family of God when He does what we do not expect. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

Zerubbabel and Joshua, the two main leaders, quickly heeded the words of God's prophet, and when they did, so did all the people. That response was immediate and positive. How it was given and what was said was clearly understood and acted upon because they knew it was the Lord's message through His messenger. The assuring word, "I am with you," would have motivated them to come together and go to work on "the house of the Lord of hosts, their God." A brief word from the Lord got their attention and produced the desire to act on what God wanted immediately. In twenty-three days after Haggai's first message, the people began building the temple.

When we hear a message preached in the power of God, it may produce a sense of unity among the Lord's people and bring them together in fellowship. How encouraging it is to be involved in a work in which all of us can be sure the Lord can say to us, "I am with you." He gives the direction to go, he gives the power that is needed. He gives the ability to do what is right. He provides all that is needed to accomplish the tasks He gives us. He has promised to be with us to the end of the age when we go out with the Gospel and make disciples. Then we baptize them and teach them to observe "all things" He commanded. We are not on our own without divine authority and guidance.

Obstacles then become less daunting. Trials can be faced with faith. Problems seem less significant when we are assured that the Lord is with us all through these events. When we go forward in faith and spiritual strength, "the things of earth grow strangely dim." When leaders are moved by the preaching of those who the Holy Spirit has given a word from the Lord, that has far-reaching effects on those who follow their lead. The awakened spirit of Zerubbabel and the spirit of Joshua was such a work of the Lord, that it was obvious to the people that they too should get involved in building the temple.

When God's people act on His word to fulfill His will, then the opposition of others that is bound to come, and the hard, dirty work that has to be done, does not really slow us down or stop us. It may be a message from a preacher, or a private word from a godly believer, but when the "Lord's messenger" is in "the Lord's message," we know it, and are motivated to go forward in the work of the Lord with enthusiasm.

Haggai 1: 12b-13. “And the people did fear before the Lord. Then spake Haggai the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the Lord.”
I AM WITH YOU.

When the Lord’s people forget who we are and who has called us to Himself, we are wise to “consider our ways.” When we have sown much and brought in little; when we eat and are not satisfied; when we drink and are still thirsty; when we dress but are still cold; when we work and have nothing to show for it – we are wise to “consider our ways.”

When we spend all of our efforts on our own homes and personal interests; when there is no rain or dew to give water to the thirsty; when those around are not being nourished in any way from our storehouse because it is empty – we are wise to “consider our ways.”

To read the signs and listen to the call to repentance; to heed the voice of the Lord our God; to obey His words that come unmistakably to us – is an action of wisdom on the part of each of us. In Haggai’s day when all that happened, the people feared before the Lord; they woke up. It is the same today: hear, obey and fear before the Lord. He knows all we are doing and need to do. When we act, He has a promise for us – “I am with you.”

“I am with you” when there is fear because of failure [Hag.1:13].
“I am with you” when there is work to do for God [Hag.2:4].
“I am with you” when we pass through the waters that threaten to overwhelm us [Isa.43:2].
“I am with you” when we go through the valley of the shadow of death [Ps.23:4].
“I am with you” when we are committed to carrying out the Great Commission [Mat.28:20].

“So, shall we ever be with the Lord” at the Rapture and through eternal ages [1Thes.4:17]. This is the great hope of the Lord’s people. He is with us now and we will be with Him forever.

Between then and now, is the time about which we need to be serious. The Lord’s messenger in the Lord’s message tells us, this is the time to be reminded of our purpose in the world. The people in Haggai’s day forgot their purpose and got turned aside to their personal things. They ignored the things God said were priorities. Opposition and apathy can seriously slow down a work for God.

We need to be reminded of what God values, and come back to getting first things first. He will be with us in all of the work to which He calls us. When we seek His things first, all the others things will be added to by Him in His own time and way. We need to be strong and work now – while it is day. God provides the resources, and has chosen to use our hands. And in all the work He has for us, He has given us a promise – “I am with you!”

“O heavenly Father, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ I ask that I might be a messenger with something real and important to say. I sometimes have preached a sermon without a message and for this I confess my sin. It is with a sense of fear that I approach the holy matters that need to be impressed on the Lord’s people. Give us all, the willingness to move forward in the work with diligence, vigor and enthusiasm, knowing all the time that we are not alone in the tasks that Thou dost entrust to us. Amen.”

Fear is a legitimate emotion that comes on us for many reasons. It may come in stormy weather, but often there is in every season Reasonsto look about and wonder why is this trouble coming by - It is then the words, “I am with you,” reminds me God is very nigh.

The work seems heavy, and stretches ahead looking like it is without end. We wonder why we’re so small, and why there are no more that God does send. Then we think, “This is my work. My Master gave this work to me.” And it’s then I hear, “I am with you,” and through His eyes, I can see.

A bed of pain and weakness makes me want to look way ahead. The big gate open before me, that in the past I used to dread - But now the waters that I going through don’t seen quite so deep. The Lord says, “I am with you,” and in His hand my soul He keeps.

Farther down lifes road I can see deaths dark shadow - But its dim darkness holds no fear, for the One I now follow Has promised to me even when this life is through - “There’s no need to worry,” faith claims the words, “I am with you.”

So, day by day under the call of His great commission, I press forward in faith with the Gospel, and the clearer vision -
That when I am engaged in this work, I must see all the way through.
He gave me the promise, 'I am with you, in all that for Me you do.'

"Father, it seems like a lot of years have gone by while I've been doing this work. I am very grateful that there is fruit from that past that still remains. But Father, I am anxious to see some new fruit come from this old branch. Can I be trusted to carry the weight of new, fresh fruit on these old shoulders? I ask this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Haggai 2:1-5

BE STRONG...WORK

The second message the Lord gave to Haggai was given during the feast of the Tabernacles a few weeks after the rebuilding work was restarted. The old people may have remembered what the original temple looked like over sixty years before, and now as the second one began to take shape they were discouraged because the new building looked so much less of a building than the one built during the reign of Solomon. How sensitive and kind is God to have His servant, the prophet Haggai, give this first of three final messages to encourage them that the glory of the new temple would be greater than that of the old because God's presence would be there. The original temple had become a place for idolatry and apostasy. The outward appearance did not bring real glory.

Outward appearances can deceive people into thinking that is what is important. That happens when people forget that man looks on the outward appearance. "God looks on the heart." "The things which are seen are temporal; the things which are not seen are eternal." We may not see the glory of God in a physical way, but we know when God is glorified in His people. There are divine attributes seen in His children when they glorify God in their bodies and spirits which are God's. There are life changing results in those God saves by His grace that become obvious to those who knew them when they were in their sins.

In the difficulties and frustrations that we may have in the work of the Lord in which we are involved, the Holy Spirit of God is with us and empowers us to do what is needed. We do not need to feel frustrated when we live in the good of the assurance of the Lord with us. It is very assuring when the presence of God is real to us as we serve Him in fellowship with Him and in obedience to His word. By putting our confidence in Him without reservation, we keep the goal of our lives before us rather that the obstacles between here and the goal. "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His suffering, being made conformable unto His death." That was Paul's goal, and it is a good one for us.

The people of Judah who had returned from Babylon, had returned to the worship of God but not the work of God. There is great value in prayer, worship and the study of the scriptures, but God also has work for us to do. We have been given a commission to carry out to bring the Gospel to the world. The world is the field in which we are to labor for the Lord. The message the Jews heard from the Lord through the prophet was not only to "be strong," but also to "work." When we are assured of the presence of the Lord in our midst as an assembly of God's people, obstacles do not seem so big, and our work is not so discouraging when it seems slow. We are not daunted to such a degree that we will stop doing what we know is right before the Lord.

The Israelites had been led and guided by the Lord all the way from captivity in Egypt to the promised land. Now they had been brought from captivity in Babylon to the same land again. But they had experienced several years in succession of poor harvests, and it became obvious this was not just a weather problem or a natural pattern of things. This was a spiritual problem that affected the people morally, physically and spiritually. It was to those who had responded and were working on the building, who were reassured by the words of Haggai.

For us, our field is the world to which we are to preach the Gospel, make disciples, baptize believers and teach them to observe all the Lord commanded. Our work in the assemblies of God's people is to be done for the Lord. Our labor of employment is to be done for the Lord. Our home and family life are to be done for the Lord. None of God's people needs to think, "There's is no work that I can do for the Lord." "Whatever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." Comparisons and complaints between the present days and the past days are not always good. We live in the present and we live for the future. We can do nothing about the past except to learn from the victories and failures of history, so we do, or not do, those same things.

A work for God can only be maintained by the enthusiasm of those who are involved, not by comparisons or criticisms. We need to be realistic about our strengths and weaknesses, rather than delusional as to what we envision we will accomplish. "It is God who worketh in you..." Words of encouragement bring stability and confidence when we are actively doing what we know is right even when it is hard to keep going. Like in that
past day when Haggai gave the message from God, we may be the one God uses to say a right thing, in a right way, at the right time.

Our strength at best is not in what we say we will do and start to do, but in our assurance and joy in the Lord. It is divine power, not man-power that is needed to accomplish the purposes of God. God's strength is "made perfect" in our weakness. That simply means, when we recognize and admit to our limitations in the work, we will turn to God for effectiveness, depending on Him rather than on our energy, skill and self-efforts.

Other things as well happen in these crisis times that can be for our eternal good. Our character is developed when we are honest in our self-evaluation. Our worship is deeper and more meaningful when we understand our God better and our need of Him. "They that worship the Father, must worship Him in spirit and in truth." Our awareness of our weakness is one way we affirm God's strength.

God in His understanding of human suffering and sin,
Allows human freedom to act, in order to bring repentance to men.
When men sin willfully and selfishly of their own volition,
He does not react immediately in judgment and just intervention -
Because if there were no consequences when suffering innocents call -
The wicked would not be punished and there would be no justice at all.

God punishes the wicked in His own time and His own way.
He may overrule natural processes, or use divine miracles so men will pay For the crimes they committed against God, nature and men -
Even nations will face punishment when sin's debts are called in To be paid by those who thought to escape final retribution -
But God who permits, also punishes with eternal condemnation.

God perfects. He finishes what at the first He had begun.
The only real perfection is found in Christ, God's perfect Son He began with a plan, and through sovereignty, His divine purpose Is being brought to completion through Christ, who came to bless us. All His promises will come to fulfillment, each one will come to pass -
We will live in the good of those promises as long as eternity lasts.

“I am very conscious today Father, of my need of Thee in every thing that I do. Each fresh thought that comes is from the Holy Spirit of God. Each sound of praise finds its origin in Thee. Each mention of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, has a unique impression that fixes itself in my mind as a reason for worship, and I thank Thee, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Haggai 2:6-9

IN A LITTLE WHILE

God controls history and can do what He wants in His time. For the purpose of our learning He often moves the subject from the past to the future, or from the present to the past as it suits His sovereign plans. For His own reason, “the Lord of hosts” directs the attention of the builders who were laboring, and the older people who were comparing and criticizing, to a future temple into which the Lord Jesus Christ, “the desire of all nations,” shall enter. That desire for all nations is that there will be peace, and to this the prophet directs attention. A time is coming when peace and glory will be evident when the Kings of kings is revealed. It is to this time Haggai suddenly directs his prophecy.

The shaking of heaven, earth, sea and dry land has accompanied the appearance and intervention of God in human activities on earth down through the ages. It happened at the time of the flood in Noah's day when the wickedness of man was exceeding great on all the earth. When God came down and gave the law to Moses on Mt. Sinai, the earth shook and quaked and the children of Israel were stirred to obey God's revealed word. There was a great earthquake in the time when Uzziah was king. When our Lord Jesus died on the cross the earthquake was so great that the rocks broke. The morning of His resurrection from among the dead there was a great earthquake. God was here and men needed to fear the presence of the Lord God of hosts. It will happen again when the Lord returns and the quotation in Hebrews refers to this time spoke of by Haggai. It will again be on earth in visible glory among His people.

By having the Jews who returned to Judah look ahead to the future when Messiah is on earth, they would be motivated to see beyond their own interests and perceived needs, to that which was important to God. When God moves among the people of earth, His footstool (the earth) adjusts itself to accommodate to His divine
presence. The Spirit of God wanted those old people who remembered the past and it visible but temporal glory with nostalgia, to look ahead to Israel’s glorious future by faith. That would encourage them, and those building the temple, to press ahead with their present work for God. As far as the material for building the temple, God has all the silver and gold because He made it. Any and all wood needed came from Him. But even though He has all the resources, He desires human beings who love and obey the Lord, and who have a heart to work and willing hands, to put those resources in order, and form what He wanted - the temple.

In our labor in this present day, we can be heartened or disheartened by the things that are happening around us. That usually depends on circumstances and how we choose to look at them. When we look into the future and the glory that will come, then we recognize that what we are and do is a link in the chain of divine purposes of which we are a part. It is important for believers today to live in, and practice, the presence of God. It may seem to us that the glory is slowly dimming because of the evil of those who are not children of God, and the compromising of truth by the attitudes and actions of those who are. But God remains the same and His standards of truth and righteousness do not move, even though the laws of men seek to circumvent the laws of God. Truth is in no way diminished. It is people who turn away from pure unvarnished truth who are being diminished. Honor and integrity, purity and respect - all the attributes that are intended to make people who are made in the image of God, function in God ways, are considered unreal by those who know not God.

The glory that will come in the future when our Lord Jesus Christ is revealed will not slowly get brighter, but will be seen in a startling blaze of holy glory that will strike terror into the heart of the ungodly and unspeakable joy to those who look for His appearing and glory. When the Lord goes into the temple that will be when "the glory of this latter house shall be greater than the former." It will be lit by the glory of His person which is a far greater glory than anything made by men's hands. That glory will come from Himself - from His own inherent glory. Then there will be peace on earth that radiates from him. That peace will be between humans, animals, nations and between God and man.

How it motivates us to do our "building" in the way God wants now, knowing that in the future His glory will make our feeble efforts into something that shines in glory. The best is yet to come. But until that time, we are to build the house of God. Local assemblies are called "the house of God." The temple was to be rebuilt with man's effort using the materials God provided. We use the material God gives us and through the Gospel message, and the souls God saves, we preach, baptize and teach, and "the Lord adds to the church" those He saves. The church is being built, and it is a glorious church. In the future, the Lord’s church will become what God intended it to be when He made it.

What is glory? Can it be seen? How does it to us appear?
Is it wave in the distance, or is there evidence of it right here?
The creation declares the glory of God -
That is plain for us to see.
We see glory in every form of life -
In animals, mountains and trees.

What makes glory real to me? In what forms does it take place?
Is glory not just a certain vagueness? Can we see it in a human face?
When we meet a person who knows the Lord,
There is evidence of the glory of God.
One who has placed in Him personal faith -
Is a visible form of the glory of grace.

How can glory be demonstrated? What others actually See?
Is there some special way for me to express what God really means to me?
When the Lord’s people come together to praise and preach and pray,
There is a united glory that shows much more that what we do or say.
To see obedience in a child of God is a glory to observe.
There is observable glory when a saint goes home, to be with Him they serve.

“Father, I have been impressed with the on-going dignity of the Lord’s people who through the years since Thou didst save them have maintained a spirit and heart that reflects Thy glory. I thank Thee for visible evidences of Thy grace in their lives, and the faithfulness of their testimony to Thee. This to me is a testimony of Thy glory reflected in Thy children. I praise Thee for this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Haggai 2:10-19

TWO QUESTIONS
There are moral standards we are to live by that God has established for the welfare of people. When people step in and substitute their own opinions as to what is right and wrong, with a substandard morality that is really immorality, then society rapidly deteriorates into chaos and moral disorder. The low moral state of people is why they choose to ignore God and His will revealed in His word. The third message of the Lord to the people through Haggai was to deal with this problem. The crux of the matter went beyond the building of the temple to what was to be done in the temple, and why reality in a person is far more important than what they do.

Holiness does not come from being in the temple or any religious building, nor does it come from association with other people, or even from a priest or being a priest. Just by being involved with things that are right does not deal with the matter of sin. Only repentance toward God, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and obedience to the Lord will make things right before God. Wrong actions lead to wrong relationships with sinful people who defile God's people. Only the work of the ungrieved, unquenched Holy Spirit will make it possible for us to live as God intends and to do His will faithfully.

The timing of the message Haggai passed on to the priests was significant because sowing time had just past and he was exhorting them to continue the building of the temple. They perhaps were worrying if the needed rain would come that for a number of years had been withheld by the Lord. The half-crops they had been getting were to awaken the Israelis to what was wrong, and God used His control over nature to get their attention. It often takes something out of the ordinary to make people think about what they are doing or not doing. The spiritual advisors, the priests, should have known what to do and say to the people when they all realized they had a serious problem.

The priests were responsible to know and practice the law, and it was to them Haggai addressed this message. It seems like they had not acted on what they knew the law said regarding holiness, so the two questions from the prophet who spoke for the Lord was to awaken their consciences to do what was clean and deal with that which was unclean. What they knew they had not passed on to the people. Likely when they were in Babylon the law of God didn't seem important, but now they were in the place where God had chosen to establish His people and His name. In the land of promise they had no excuse for not carrying out the word of the Lord. Holiness is expected of those who know the Lord. Uncleanliness on the other hand, rubs off on us when we associate with people and things, we know are not acceptable to the Lord.

Sin and self stains everything they touch. One can do a good work with a wrong attitude and motive, and it is sin-stained. Cleansing from sin is a work of God when true confession and forsaking of sin takes place. It is not uncommon for people of the world, and even some Christians, to pick and choose what they will do with the teaching of the Bible. Some will say certain things were only for the Jews, or for a past day. But the principles of scripture do not change and are to be practiced in appropriate ways by those who are holy - set apart for God.

Sacrifices made by people may be right, but they only are meaningful if they are done in accordance with the whole truth of God. Ceremonial sacrifices, or those done to be seen by others have no value. These two questions and the answers were important in Haggai's message because the nation was unclean. They had left the things of God undone. Their sacrifices did not make them accepted because they were disobedient in life and consequently were unclean just like the example Haggai made in the questions. Disobedience negates anything that seems to be right because the form is not what is important. It is what in the heart of the offeror and the motivation behind the sacrifice that counts. Outward expressions of worship, sacrificial giving and impressive sermons do not cover the sins of disobedience, apathy and neglect.

When the foundation was laid and the people of Judah began building the temple, God immediately assured them of His satisfaction and blessing to follow. By learning from their past mistakes and acting right away on what the Lord told them, the had a whole new beginning and a new day for them lay ahead. They were still without very much food and supplies because the harvest hadn't come as yet, and may have been quite worried about the coming harvest that needed rain. Through His servant, Haggai, the Lord gave them encouragement with His promise to bless them with a good harvest because they obeyed Him. So even though the harvest time had not yet come, they could confidently keep at the work of the Lord and be free of anxiety when they put their faith in Him. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen."

Often we have proved the words of the Lord in our lives when He said, “Them that honor Me, I will honor; and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.” Obedience to the word and will of God results in the blessing of fellowship with God and positive results in our labors. When God promises blessings to His
people, there is joy in the souls of those who put their faith in Him, and there is often fruitfulness in their
service. Energy expended in the furtherance of the kingdom of God is well spent and is very satisfying to the
believers who find their strength and source of joy in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Haggai 2:1. “In the seventh month, in the one and twentieth day of the month, came the word of the Lord by the prophet Haggai,
saying.”

MESSAGES FROM GOD.

1:1-11
When a ‘thus saith the Lord’ comes to a servant of God,
That servant must quickly obey.
The ‘word of the Lord’ is not merely man’s word,
The all-wise God has something to say.
When it is a message of rebuke to pass on to others,
No excuses should weaken this rebuke.
Stop and review before you go any farther.
Consider your ways and how you attend to God’s work.

There are times when a message is given for comfort,
The rebuke has the desired effect.
The message of forgiveness, though it may be short,
Is one of the most significant ones you will ever get.
When God gives assurance and comfort to you,
It promotes work with the highest motivation.
Those who receive this comfort now usually do
What they do with sincere consideration.

2:1-23
It may be true that the present is inferior to the past,
But the Lord is moving forward with His plan.
We live here and now this is where our die is cast,
God is still showing His grace to sinful man.
Perilous times have come before and now they have come back,
Even during times like this there can be real blessing.
The Lord values and cares for us providing what we lack.
The messages God sends gives the hope we are possessing.

“Father God, may I always be found steadfast, unmoving, always abounding in the
work of the Lord. There are times I confess, when I wonder if my work is in vain. May
the things before me this week be useful and profitable. In the name of the Lord
Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Haggai 2:20-23

THE LAST MESSAGE

The fifth and final message was a personal one from the Lord to Zerubbabel, the government leader of the
Jews in Judah. They affirmed his authority with the words, “I have chosen thee.” The Highest Authority in the
universe authenticates the leadership of one of His servants. How assuring this is! “Whatsoever is bound on
earth is bound in heaven, and whatsoever is loosed on earth is loosed in heaven.” The affairs of people and
events happening on this small speck of dust in the universe is important to God. And further, one man or
woman who is willing to do God’s will is affirmed by Him.

Even though this message was given the same day as the previous one, this was for the encouragement of
one man who had the responsibility to guide other people in the right way. He had the burden of leadership
and was responsible for the well-being of the people he led. It was to him the Lord gave a sight of the
Coming One who would be the greatest leader of all, and to whose authority all nations would submit. God is
the One who "shakes," overthrows," and destroys" those who oppose Him. Nations will fall before His divine
judgment. The whole world, not just the Jews, will be affected by the carrying out of justice by "the Lord of
hosts."

The scriptural descriptions of that time of tribulation yet in the future, let us see through the eyes of the
prophets the results of sin and how it will be dealt with. The march of history will lead to a new day and time
when another "Zerubbabel," our Lord Jesus, will carry on the line of David that the ancient Zerubbabel
carried on, and the covenant promises God made with Israel will be accomplished. The Messiah of the Jews
who will come in the future will leave His imprint, His signet, on the whole world. Our Lord Jesus Christ will
bring to fullness and completion the promises of God made so long ago.
The leadership of Zerubbabel in Haggai’s day, was important because he was the chosen one for that time. He would carry on the line of David. He was the chosen link in the prophetic chain. The responsibility, and privilege he was given, would have impressed on his soul the seriousness of his place and role in divine plans. Likely from then on, he would never have slacked in exercising his leadership appropriately, knowing he was the one chosen by “the Lord of hosts” for that time.

The Lord’s messages through Haggai straightened out the dysfunction of the Lord’s people in a comparatively short time. He didn’t say a whole lot in the five messages from the Lord he passed on to the exiles who returned, but what he said produced results. The people went to work on the temple, and in less than a year it was finished and in use for the Lord.

When we get our priorities right and are motivated to do what is right, a whole lot of worry is gone. By given God our allegiance and loyalty, we submit to His control over events, work and ourselves. When God has first place in our lives, we will love to serve Him in whatever capacity He gives us. Our worship will be real and heartfelt because it is in truth and from our spirits. He will give us the needed guidance from day to day as to what is the appropriate use of our time and energy. He will give us the needed strength to live for Him and find our joy in Him each day.

Haggai 2:23. “In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the Lord, and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the Lord of hosts.”

I HAVE CHOSEN THEE
Someone superior to us in authority and position.
Knows who we are and our spiritual condition.
Without any mistake, or leaving us with vain supposition -
Says, “I have chosen you.”

Even long before the foundation of the earth was laid.
Before the oceans and mountains - even the stars were made -
Before light was spoken; before the sun - before even grass had a blade -
He said, “I have chosen you.”

“Chosen to do what,” one is inclined to say -
“Chosen to go where,” to walk the narrow way -
Chosen to serve the Lord each and every day -
The Lord said, “I have chosen you.”

Empowered to accomplish whatever He chose us to do.
Given words to express to other people that which is true -
Strengthened by our Lord to continue until our work is through -
He commissioned us, “I have chosen you.”

“Father, messages from Thee I know are never to be taken lightly. It is my earnest desire to fulfill the work to which I have been called. I am so grateful for the strength and power of God given to enable me to accomplish Thy call to me to serve Thee. May I never take for granted the privilege and responsibility of serving Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

ZECHARIAH
A look into the future.

Prophets were messengers from God whose work was to give to the people the word of the Lord. Whether describing coming events, or explaining the reasons for past events or present problems, their main responsibility was to point out to people the problems of sin and its consequences. Then they were to call for them to give heed to the warnings, repent of, and forsake, their sin and turn to the Lord in faith and obedience.

Often, they were ridiculed and persecuted. Many who heard their messages, rejected the message and the messengers. In spite of how they were treated by the people to whom they prophesied, and their response to the message, the prophets were under the commission of the Highest Authority in the universe - the Lord of hosts. They could no be silent, no matter what the consequences might be to themselves nor what people would do with their message.
The same principles apply today. When a person is called to speak for God, that commission overrides all other considerations that may be presented. There is an obligation to be obedient to the call of God, and when "the vows of God" are upon us, we must never waste time "playing with shadows" or matters of insignificance. Even thought it is more convenient and attractive to us to wait or do things a different way, that is not an alternative. We cannot determine how people will take what we say and do. That is not our responsibility. Ours is to pass on what God tells us and leave the results with Him. He is in control of events and the affairs of people.

Zerubbabel and Joshua the priest, had led 50,000 people from Babylon to Judah at the time of Cyrus' leadership. But the temple was not rebuilt then. Around fifty years later Ezra the scribe brought a few thousand people with him back to the promised land, and the rebuilding of the temple started slowly. People got sidetracked building their own homes until Haggai stirred them up with his message from the Lord. A few months later Zechariah prophesied with a larger and longer view of the reason for which the people should commit themselves to the Lord and His work. Haggai challenged and stirred the people. Zechariah encouraged and instructed them by the prophesies God gave him of the future. His message was that they would look ahead to see what God has in store for His people when the Messiah comes.

But Zechariah didn't just sit back. He saw the needs of the present and joined in the work to be done. However, his heart and soul were in the time to come when the promised glory of the nation would come. His call was to reach the hearts of the people with hope for the future, and in that way motivate them to be seriously engaged in the present needs. His message gave the people details of the time when the Lord Jesus Christ reigns over all the nations of the world, and Jerusalem will be the capital city of the kingdom. Our Lord is the coming King and the Great Deliverer, the Messiah, of Israel.

There are details in the book of Zechariah of the life of Christ that were written five hundred years before the events happened. Fulfilled prophecies are proofs of the authenticity of the message of the prophet, and the fact that he was a true prophet, not a false prophet. God kept His promises that were made when the Lord Jesus Christ came here in the flesh the first time. "God was manifest in the flesh."

We know that He will do the same in relation to His future reign, "and of His kingdom there will be no end." God controls every event in the past and present, and He also controls the future. We place our faith and confidence in Him without reservation. He is our hope. He is our security. God's plans and purposes will be fulfilled. That is one reason the book of Zechariah is important to us. We see our Lord Jesus as the Savior, the Great High Priest, the coming King, the promised Messiah. There are twelve specific references to our Lord Jesus Christ in the prophecy of Zechariah.

Matthew's Gospel and John's Gospel have specific reference to the words of Zechariah. There is reference to the two olives trees Zechariah saw by the candlestick that is seen in the book of Revelation. Paul made word for word reference to a quote in Zechariah when he said to the Ephesians that they were to "speak every man truth with his neighbor." The future of Jerusalem and the judgments to come on those who oppress the Jews are the theme of the first six chapters. The moral condition of the Jews and the Gentiles surrounding Israel in the future is the overall theme of the rest of the book.

Lessons for us to learn are that even though we can only see where we are in ourselves, by faith we can read these prophecies and look ahead with confidence. God is in control of the future. He knows what is going to happen to us personally as well as to the nations and to all of His people wherever they are. Our hope and confidence are in Him.

WISHFUL THINKING
Time and again we hope against hope
That there will be a good change to come.
But realistically it is a slippery slope
That sin is taking humanity down.

However, when we take time to look far ahead.
Then the place in which we are found right now -
We are able to consider without fear or dread,
That God is going to triumph somehow.

We won't likely know from our limited view,
That the future is not dark but is bright.
The time is yet coming when sin we eschew -
And instead of darkness on earth, there'll be light.
Instead of pessimism we look forward in faith.
To the promised days when Messiah will reign.
This is not wishful thinking, but prophetic truth we trace.
That will be a reality when our Lord comes again.

"By faith, Gracious Father, I look into the future when the 'former things will have passed away' and there will be a new heaven and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.' Thanks so much for giving us prophetic views of the future that gives us great hope. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

**Zechariah 1:1-6**

**A WARNING FROM THE PAST**

Zechariah was likely born in Babylon, and came to Jerusalem when he was a young man. God is able to use those who are available to Him and willing to be used by Him no matter where they come from or even how old they are. Haggai also would have been a contemporary and for God's own purposes, He had them both in Jerusalem at the same time. Haggai's major point of preaching was regarding the house of God and why it was so important. Zechariah's message had to do with the God of the house and the future beyond the view of those who were only concerned with the present. Both subjects are important to us today because the God of the house and the house of God are closely tied together. Fellowship with God and behavior in the house of God are dependent on each other. Some people say they have close fellowship with God, and so don't need to go to the house of God where they would have fellowship with the Lord's people. They really fool no one but themselves.

In the early part of this prophecy Zechariah gives a warning call to return to the Lord. Then he gives account of eight different visions that God gave him, each one following closely after the one before. There are messages given about the coming rule of Joshua (our Lord); some answers to questions about feasts and fasting as well as encouragements to keep at the building of the temple until it was finished. It is important to be faithful to God in every aspect of life in our day, and not look back to glory-days of the past. The temple maybe smaller and not so remarkable as the one Solomon built, but it is the God of the house that makes it important, not the kind of house it is.

Apathy in people is very hard to combat unless we can get them to view themselves, the people around them and events through God's eyes. It is easy to not think any further than things that affect us personally and not consider how others and our Lord is affected by what is happening. The call from the "Lord of hosts" through His servant Zechariah was to turn from the "evil ways and evil doings" of their forefathers, to the Lord. His charge was to not follow the backsliding forefathers who disobeyed and scorned the call of God to them, and suffered the serious consequences that they are still experiencing today. We are responsible for what we do now, not for what others did before us or what people around us might do. We cannot use them as an excuse for our actions or lack of action. We make our own choices as individuals and must return to God and follow Him personally.

Zechariah's ministry gave incentive and guidance to the work of the Lord in times of difficulty discouragement and apathy. We are well to learn lessons from the past mistakes and failure of those who went before us, as well as to apply what they did that was right to our commitments. Both positive and negative practices can be helpful when we learn what others practiced in response to the word of God. "Do's and don'ts" are given for our benefit. We need to read the scriptures, study the text and context, and then apply what God teaches us in His word to the situations in life in which we are found. We can avoid the mistakes of others if we stay true to the scriptures.

The "times of the Gentiles" began when the last of the leaders of the Jews were taken to Babylon. Then the Gentile empires controlled the land of Israel, and it has been fought over since. Even now, since Israel became a recognized nation in 1948, there is still controversy over that land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Both Zechariah and Haggai were concerned with the complacency of those people who returned from exile. They were mainly concerned with their own interests and were in danger of doing the same thing the earlier generations had done or neglected to do. It is very easy to get sidetracked on to our own interests and expect others to do the work of the Lord on our behalf instead of energetically getting involved in our daily life and walk with the Lord.

Zechariah was urging God's people to turn to the Lord and get involved in His work. He gave warnings that discipline and judgment follow disobedience and failure to act on what God says. Of real interest is that his message speaks of the glory that will come at the house of God rather than comparing the present with the past. Looking ahead with confidence and assurance is characteristic of those who are the Lord's messenger in the Lord's message. Five times in the early verses of the book of Zechariah, he speaks of "the Lord of
hosts." Nearly fifty times that phrase is used in this book indicating the highest possible authority is behind all that he wrote.

For people who are weak, discouraged and lethargic, the name of our Lord and the supremacy of His word, should arouse us and give incentive to them to go forward. That designation establishes in the minds of God's people who it is that we serve, and why it is incumbent on us not to be complaining or dragging about as if what we do has no significant purpose. The Lord of hosts is in charge and has the authority over all the hosts of heaven. He is the One we serve. He is the One who calls us to faithful service. He is the One who is wanting to bless His people here and now. He has blessed others, and He wants to do the same for us.

However, if God's people are not willing to turn from "evil ways" and "evil doings," He will not turn to us any more than He would not turn to those in the past. The relationship we have with our Lord is dependent on our willingness to be right with Him in deeds as well as in thoughts and words. Warnings from the past are for our "learning and admonition." We should never disregard what history teaches us about sowing and reaping.

Repentance toward God is not merely a suggestion, but is essential for meaningful fellowship with God to be established. Recovery and restoration can be real when sin is confessed and forsaken. Then all barriers are lifted and the joy of the Lord can be not just words but the response of a grateful heart to the grace of God. The visions Zechariah received from the Lord were warnings relating to the future, but we also lessons given relating to the blessings and comforts of the future.

HEAR AND HARKEN
To hear something said and to know it is right,
Can be a benefit when to the message we heed.
The contents may be true and the outcome so bright
If we listen and learn things that we need.
But to know what is right, and the truth to ignore,
Is to face consequences with a high price to pay.
Judgment or blessing, both are in store -
It depends on what you choose or might say.

Listening and learning is always the best choice -
Warnings or blessings come to us from God.
By accepting and acting on God's word as His voice
Makes good sense when we submit to our Lord.
Many a danger can be avoided by men -
When we act in faith on what we know to be true.
Read and understand, meditate and then,
Practice what we preach all life through.

"Father, may my mind and heart always be in tune with Thy word so that I can apply what I know to be true to the greatest possible advantage. keep Thy servant from imposing my own will on that which is so plainly Thy will to be done 'On earth as it is in heaven.' In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Zechariah 1:7-21

THE LORD IS HERE
In this world of great nations and over 7 billion people, we are inclined to think that things are out of divine control in the governments. Also, because there are so many people, we may think that God does not know what is happening in the small events of life and in the lives of individuals. But when we read the messages of the prophets and pay attention to what they had to say about the past, present and future, then we realize our God has everything under control and is working out His sovereign will in His time and His way.

The visions of Zechariah one night let him understand that God is involved in the government of nations. Whether it is in war or peacetime, God knows, and allows nations as well as people to act without interference until they go to the extreme. Nations have gone too far when they try to exterminate Jews. Those chosen people have divine protection and have a future before them even though they have forsaken the God of their fathers. Our God set His love upon them, and through them came the blessing of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, into the world to save sinners. Through Him when He comes to reign as the Messiah-King, there will be finally brought peace on earth. Nations and empires have gone too far in their opposition to the Jews and are no longer even remembered.
There will yet be dark times in which the Jews, and other nations who ignore God or even deny that He exists will suffer the consequences of unbelief. The struggles and grief of such nations and the results of their denial of a just and righteous God, is the result of their own making. "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord." Nations that have supported Israel have experienced the blessing of God. When they withhold that favor towards the Jews or seek to oppose the divine plans God has for them, they are bound to lose.

Some visions God gives in the scriptures are serious warnings, and others are to give hope and encouragement. The eight visions in Zechariah must have come in rapid succession to assure the returned exiles that there is hope in the future in spite of their smallness and weakness. There are reasons behind all events, good and bad, for which only God knows the real purpose. In His grace He sometimes gives such visions as a means to encourage and comfort those who suffer and live with a sense of failure.

The visions of the Lord riding on a red horse in front of horses of various colors, indicated to Zechariah that He knew what was happening in Israel and is involved there as well as in all the nations of earth. The returnees likely felt very insignificant in numbers compared with what the nation was before the captivity. So few of them returned in comparison to the number who were taken away, that they would have felt very vulnerable and weak among the nations around them. But in this vision, they were assured that God was there.

As the Angel of the Lord, like in other passages of scripture, the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ was with His people to lead and guide them, and to comfort and give them power to act for God in the midst of all nations. It was assuring to them, the same as it is to us. "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world (age)." It was the Lord Himself who led His people out of Egypt to the promised land. The same Lord leads His people today. His interest and presence were obvious as He rode that red horse, in spite of all the "nations" that were behind Him. He chose to associate Himself with His people, even though they were lowly compared with all the others around Him.

The myrtle trees in the valley were not dramatic like the firs, cedar or other tall tree. They were low and at first glance would not draw attention like the other tall stately trees. The myrtle is only appreciated when you get close and then the fragrance of the flowers and the deep green of the leaves can be recognized for its beauty. The value of the myrtle is not in what it looks like, but what it is in itself and that which comes from it. Israel may seem of very little value and of low estimation compared to the great nations of the world until one investigates the worth of its people and their contribution to the people of the world, and the impact of the intellect of its people.

Israel may have seemed then, and now, to be a place of humiliation and a weakened state, but God is not finished with them. He will bring them through all their troubles, even through the tribulation, to a time of peace and comfort when the Messiah reigns. God will not forsake His own forever. There will be wars (red horses) and there will be temporary peace in nations, but there will not be real lasting peace until Christ brings peace.

The explanation of the vision was from the Lord who is both the Intercessor on behalf of His own people and is the Answerer of their prayers. He knows what is best for His people and so answers accordingly. His answer to those in the past was with "good words and comfortable words." It was a good thing to get those people to look forward to the finish of the rebuilding of the temple and the city of Jerusalem. It was a good thing they could know the Lord cared deeply for all that was happening to them.

A message of hope is a good motivator when people are discouraged. Whether it is a discouraged nation, assembly or individual, to know God is for us, gives a measure of enthusiasm and confidence in everything in which we are involved. It was a serious thing for the Israelites to ignore the Lord and sin against Him. It was a serious thing when those who conquered Israel and Judah went to the extreme in their cruelty toward the Jews. In the future the nations that persecuted the Jews will realize how wrong they were. All the rulers of the nations of earth will come in submission to Jerusalem in a coming day and will bow before the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

Israel's future is assured. Peace and prosperity will come to God's earthly people because God keeps His promises and fulfills the terms of His covenants. Israel had been taken captive because they did not keep the terms of the covenant, and as a result of their failure, have been dispersed to all parts of the world where they are still persecuted and scorned. In the past the four empires (four horns) - Egypt, Assyria, Babylon and Mede-Persia conquered and controlled Israel. The time will come when their enemies will be dealt with once for all. God will deal with all the forces that oppose the children of Israel down through the centuries in His own way and time.
The four carpenters remind us that sometimes carpenters have to remove that which is bad before they can build that which is good. When the returned exiles were being challenged to build the temple, the imagery of the four carpenters would have had special significance to those who were called upon to look beyond the present to the future. There was building going on at the temple site and the vision showed them that was going to happen in the future when there would be no more oppression from the nations.

To look back over the centuries when the Israelis are in the millennial kingdom, they will realize they are in a secure place under the Authority of their Almighty King, because He had His hand on them even when they ignored, denied, disobeyed, and dishonored Him. The bad things that happened was because of their choices, not His lack of love toward them. Then they will be able to live in peace and happiness. Opposition to believers today is only temporary. God doesn't forsake His people. They forsake Him. We are secure in our Lord and are "accepted in the Beloved," as those who are children of God by faith in Jesus Christ.

**LOOKING AHEAD**

We are not often inclined to look far ahead,
When by nature we usually look back,
Perhaps fear of the future is what we dread,
Or we are conscious of what we lack.
But when we look way beyond
Our life and its appointed end-
We will find a sure hope promised there,
And covenant blessings God will send.

Everything we usually see around,
Is fleeting and temporary.
Eternal things we think about - abound,
Even though we cannot see them clearly.
God has in store amazing things
Our minds cannot comprehend.
When Christ returns, with Him He'll bring,
Full proofs of a kingdom without end.

His grace will be seen that is exceedingly rich,
In those who He will bring with Him.
Love beyond expression will be evident,
In His wounds where He suffered for sin.
His truth will be obvious to everyone,
As it shines in unsullied light.
And faith's Object will be there for all to see
As He shine in His glory so bright.

“I am looking forward Father, to the day when I will see the Lord Jesus Christ. I will be wonderful to see Him and be like Him at the rapture and in His glory. How wonderful it will be when we see Him coming forth from heaven with His people in splendor and triumph to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. What honors He deserves; What glory will be displayed to the whole earth in the place where once He was rejected, despised and slain? Amen.”

Zechariah 1:13. "And the Lord answered the angel that talked with me with good words and comfortable words."

**COMFORTABLE WORDS.**

There was light at the end of the tunnel back then;
The sound of rebuilding could be heard.
The sins and failures that had caught up with them,
Now gave way to the Word of the Lord.
Even though they thought all was lost,
God opened up a way to return.
The wages of sin, does have an awful cost;
But God made a way for dead to be reborn.

Often hopes are dashed and we are disappointed;
We wonder if there is any hope.
What was once effective and used, now is so disjointed;
And spirits which were high now have dropped.
Our attention may be drawn to what went wrong;
But now we should turn and look ahead.
Our weakness is obvious, but our God is strong; So, we will fix our eyes on Him instead.

He has promised to never forsake us; And when we seek Him, He will be found.
The faithful words He spoke we will trust; And lift our eyes to higher ground.
Amidst all the sounds making noise in the world; There is comfort in the words God speaks.
The gracious words that His truth unfolds, Brings quietness to my soul and peace.

"Father, I thank Thee this morning when so many are clamoring for attention, that the words of scripture still have a calming and assuring effect on me. I am disappointed in the failures of men, but confident in the promises of God. And so I go ahead in faith, and trust Thee to bring some good out of the efforts of this day. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Zechariah 2

PRESENT NEED - FUTURE GLORY

It is not uncommon for us to be so concerned with our present needs and our unfulfilled expectations, that we forget the promises of God and His plans for the future which include those who know and love Him. Believers are important to God because they are His children, and children often are inclined to live only for the present. But inspite of the failures and less than sterling examples of faith and grace the children of God may be, they are still precious to God and the future belong to them, not those who have "no fear of God before their eyes."

The vision of the measuring line related to the city of Jerusalem in the past as well as the future. The marking of larger boundaries was a testimony of greater things to come that would be even of more importance than in Israel's glorious past. The measuring line would be a symbol of hope for the future when a restored people and a rebuilt city of peace and safety would be the home of the Jews. They won't need a wall around it because the Lord Himself will be "a wall of fire" to protect them and give them light. He will dwell there with His people and other nations will be blessed because of Him being there.

Not only does the vision involved the city but also the people in the past and future as they relate to the city. The Lord is the One who does the measuring as the surveyor who measures motives and conditions. He assesses and plans what is and what will yet be. He is the same today in the assemblies of God's people where motives and conditions are well known to Him. He knows what is behind our plans and it is incumbent on us to be sure that what we plan to do is what wants done. As He was in the past with Israel, He is in the present with us.

He knew what was needed then and He knows what is needed in each place where His people today represent Him in this present age. His promise to be with us to the end of the age is directly affected by our willingness to fulfill the terms of the great commission He gave to His disciples. He knows our limitations and capabilities. He knows what we desire and our willingness to us our abilities for Him - or for ourselves. Everything is known and assessed under His penetrating gaze.

A warning was given to those living in Babylon to move away from there because there was trouble coming to the city. The warning was given to them that those who remained would ultimately be spread northward because of coming judgment on Babylon. However, instead of returning to Jerusalem, they did not heed the warning and were dispersed far and wide. Those Jews in Babylon had found a lifestyle of wealth and worldly satisfaction that they liked, so most stayed there instead of returning to the land promised to their forefathers. They had no interest in the revival of the nation and starting life over from a scratch. Today there are found in all parts of the world, Jews who retain a certain identity with their past heritage. Those nations that have received the Jews have been blessed by God because of that. Most do not have any interest in the Lord God of Israel, and many say they are atheists. To most Jews today, the nation of Israel is what is important to them more that the God of the nation.

Yet, in spite of the rejection of our Lord as their Messiah, He who is "the Servant of Jehovah," is committed to the terms of the covenant because He is the covenant-keeping God. The Lord's people are very precious to Him. To persecute them is to persecute Him. They belong to Him. They are His earthly children and the way they are treated is considered the way the Lord is treated. To help them is to help Him. To neglect them is to neglect Him. To touch "the apple of His eye" is a danger to those who dare to do such a thing.
It is possible for the Lord's people to be very content and happy in the wrong place, with the wrong people, doing the wrong things. That happens to us when we forget who we are as "the people of God," and why we are still left here in the world. God is taking out of the world "a people for His name." We should be living for the future, not the present. If we are not willing to be a separate, "peculiar people," before long we live in the world among unsaved people and they won't even know we are Christians in the proper sense of the word. Business interests, success, fame and pleasure can claim the soul of a child of God if we allow the affairs of this life to claim us.

Nehemiah came after the time of Zechariah's prophecy and rebuilt the walls when he came later. When the Lord comes to dwell there the city will be larger and secured by the Lord Himself. "This young man," was Zechariah and he was told of a future day when the city will be larger and so it was viewed in the condition it will be in the millennium. When God's people are conscious of the presence of God with them, there is calm assurance in difficult times. There is a sense of purpose and meaning in what they do. They will not be easily moved from the path of obedience and testimony. Worship and service will be a privilege and joy.

The Messiah (our Lord Jesus Christ) will dwell with His people and judge those who oppress them. The Jews as a people, do not accept the Lord Jesus Christ, because they cannot conceive of a suffering Messiah. They look only for a conquering Messiah. At that time nations will come to Him and through Him, as promised to Abraham, will be blessed. To a certain measure, this is happening today through the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ being preached throughout the world.

In the prophecy of Zechariah, God is sending Himself to set up His kingdom and reign in the new city of Jerusalem. He will come to the Mount of Olives and then into the city in His glory. The "apple of His eye" will be preserved. No ships of war will come against the Lord nor will nations dare attack Him and His earthly people. Israel is important and valuable to Him simply because He chose them out of the nations to set His love upon them in a special way, so that through them He would bless all mankind.

When God's people are conscious of the presence of God with them, there is calm assurance in difficult times. There is a sense of purpose and meaning in what they do. They will not easily be moved from the path of obedience and testimony to Him. Service and worship will be to them a privilege and a joy. In the future day, Israel will be the central nation to which all other nations will come. Through the governance of Christ, all nations will want to be linked to Israel in some way. When the Lord is in the midst, there will be spiritual blessing as well as prosperity.

As believers in Christ in this day of grace, we are His bride - even closer than His earthly people, the Jews. How this should motivate us to be faithful to Him in spite of what others say about Him or do against Him. Our loyalty and allegiance to Him is that of a bride for her husband. When He comes to dwell in the midst of His own people, He will share their joy and peace. He will hear their songs of deliverance and contentment. Their joy will be in great contrast to the trials Israel will experience from the antichrist and Gentile nations during the tribulation.

Our enjoyment of the Lord in the midst of His people today is our greatest attraction to people around us. The difference between living for the Lord and living for the world is obvious to those who have "tried the broken cisterns" and found them to fail to bring any lasting pleasure and satisfaction. During the millennium the Gospel of the kingdom will have a great attraction to the Gentiles and they will enjoy kingdom blessings. They will know the Lord and appreciate who He is and what He has done. The covenant blessings that go back to the days of Abraham when it was first formed, will actually include land. The boundaries described will be the "land of Israel," and Jerusalem will be the capital city of the nation and the world.

There will not be bloodshed and violence allowed nor needed to maintain authority in the millennial kingdom. Righteousness will be the ruling power under the righteous reign of our Lord when He is the King of kings. At the time of His choosing, God will begin to act, beginning with the rapture. Then will come the seven years of tribulation which is also known as "the time of Jacob's trouble." As the kingdoms of earth gather at Megiddo, the Lord will appear in glory and then the millennium will begin. World conflict will stop, and there will be peace.

Zechariah 2:5. "For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and I will be the glory in the midst of her."

A WALL OF FIRE.

We could worry, I suppose, and think that all is lost,
If we did not read the Bible and see that at the most
There will be attempts made again and again to bring God's people down.

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All these will fail and there will come a day when they will Messiah crown.

It may not be seen by the natural eyes of men but there is a wall of fire God has placed around His chosen people that does our faith inspire,
To give God praise and glory for what He is yet to do -
And the whole world will marvel at them when testing times are through.

I wait and watch with interest at what is happening there;
And then stop to consider similar things are happening here.
A small weak company of believers in the middle of thousands around,
Is able still to maintain testimony and hope, as we meet on holy ground.

There is not visible to the naked eyes the wall of fire to show,
That God is preserving us as yet, how long we do not know.
But we know what we can do is trust and not be afraid.
For the Lord who established this testimony is still the church's Head.

There have been, and probably will be yet, tests that seem too hard
For us to take in our own strength, so our hope is in the Lord.
He called us to be in this town without walls,
for His fire our wall will be.
The weakness that is visible to men is real; His strength we wait to see.

There were those in the past who sought God's people to destroy,
Not realizing when you touch an eye, the Head is who you annoy.
The Head feels every pain and weakness, and it is His desire
To protect and defend His own people safely behind that wall of fire.

"Gracious God, we really need Thee to preserve us. We are so weak that at times we are wondering whether to close the door and turn out the lights for the last time. Draw near to us, I pray, and send us help from Thyself. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Zechariah 3

ISRAEL CLEANSED

For seventy years Israel had been without a functioning priesthood, so when Zerubbabel led the remnant back to the promised land, Joshua the priest also came to represent the people before God and God to the people. In this vision of Zechariah, Joshua is a type of condition of the nation of Israel before God's representative, the angel of the Lord. The filthy garments he wore revealed the sinfulness of the people that was not hid from the Lord nor from Satan, the adversary, who is also the accuser. He was the accuser of the Jews then and he is "the accuser of the brethren (the Jews)" now. It is his nature to be leveling accusations against anyone who do not belong to his kingdom of darkness, and so he also accusers those who believe in Jesus when they fail. We too, as well as the Jews, have an implacable enemy who is determined to oppose to the last, anything that is of God.

It is true for the nation of Israel, as it is for people today, that sinners standing in the light of divine holiness, are revealed for what they really are - unclean, defiled by sin, and unfit to be in the presence of a Holy God. In this vision there is a clear presentation of the doctrine of salvation. Cleansing from sin is not done by the priest, any more that people are saved from the consequences of sin by their own works. Even though Satan stands there beside that angel accusing the sinner of failure and defilement, with his likely charge that they are unfit to ever serve God, and implying that God would not do right by not rejecting them completely, The Lord Himself rebuked him.

When the Lord in sovereign grace acts of behalf of sinners, "in vain do earth and hell oppose, for God is stronger than His foes." The Lord made it plain to Satan, and we can find great comfort in this ourselves, that when God sets His love upon a person, it is not because we deserve it. Like His choice of Jerusalem, and Israel as His earthly people, He has chosen us in Christ from "before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." He will deliver the Jews like "a brand plucked out of the fire," and He has delivered us who have been saved by His grace through faith in a similar way. It may be the reference in Zechariah's prophecy is to those who were delivered from captivity, but the final deliverance of Israel will be when the King comes to reign. The relief and blessing of those who are delivered from "the power of Satan to God," we have experienced personally, and can understand what it will be like for the Jews when Christ causes "thine iniquity to pass from thee."
Satan is silenced by the fact that God's love and care for His people is unmistakable. God pardons and cleanses those who sinned by His sovereign will, not because of who they were or whatever rights they might think they have. None of is "worthy of the least of His mercies." In mercy God makes His gracious, sovereign choice, He pardons us, He forgives us of our sins, He cleanses us by the virtue and value of the precious blood of Christ, and He saves us from the consequences of our sins and for heaven. Our acceptance by our Righteous, Holy God is based on His work of redemption, not our worth of efforts.

The "filthy garments" that defiled Israel, and sinners today, are taken away by God's divine work of cleansing by the "precious blood of Christ." This whole vision is a scene of redemption. It is a wonderful picture of the work of salvation by grace. Sin and the god of this world are dealt with by the grace of God on behalf of the sinner. It is God who takes away the sin. "Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh (beareth) away the sin of the world." "The blood of Jesus Christ, His (God's) Son, cleanseth us from all sin." "When I see the blood, I will pass over you."

God does not ignore sin, nor does He tolerate sin. He justly dealt with it in a way consistent with His law and the demands of justice. He pardons sinners, not by pretending it didn't happen or by an act of mere benevolence on His part, but by choosing and sending an absolutely perfect Person to be our substitute and pay the sin-price completely, and forever. In that way there can never be a charge from the accuser or any other source, including the forgiven sinner who may doubt the completeness of his/her salvation because of failure. His forgiveness of the Jews as a nation will be a full forgiveness when they are made righteous. We "have been made the righteousness of God in Him." Our righteousness and righteous standing before God are because "His righteousness" has been "imputed" to us. What an unspeakable blessing!

The mitre Zechariah asked about was of concern to him because it is evidence of an inward change of the mind, not just an outward change. A visible outward change may be temporary because of a present need or some pressure applied. The mitre was evidence of a changed mind (repentance) that only God can see but can be made evident when thoughts, words and attitudes that come from within indicate purity within. A radical change in a person that is real and lasting comes from "bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

When cleansing takes place, there is a fitness to serve our Lord in true obedience. To represent people to God, and God to people, is a great privilege and serious responsibility. No longer can a person act independently. We should be conscious of all who a holy priesthood represents. This is not a personal matter nor a way of life suitable to me. I cannot live as a cleansed person without accountability to God and other people who I represent. The Lord expects His people to live in the way He chooses, and to do what He wants us to do. His ways are according to His laws. His expectation is that we remain consistent for our lifetime to the things of God. This obedience gives joy to us as His sons and daughters - and also to spiritual fathers. "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."

In the future, Israel will have a spiritual role to fill in God's earthly house and among the people of earth. As believers in Christ today, we already have the privilege of representing the interests of our Lord and His kingdom. We can draw near to Him on behalf of people in intercessory prayer, and draw people to our Lord in presenting the truth of the Gospel to them on His behalf. The cleansing power of Christ blood has done a work for us that is forever satisfying to our Righteous God.

Israel will be brought back to the fulfilling of God's promises as a cleansed nation because of Jehovah's Servant, "the Branch." God will bless that nation in the millennium because He will "bring forth My Servant" in open glory by which Israel will be saved and restored to their covenant-keeping God. Then they will see the One they despised when "He came unto His own," is "The Branch" prophesied long before He came forth "found in fashion as a man," and when He "humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." The Branch they despised will be the supreme Ruler and Authority in the whole world. Even the earth itself will be changed when He reigns. He will be the cause of the increased fruitfulness of the earth.

As the Stone with seven eyes, this "Precious Cornerstone" that was a stumbling block to the Jews in the past, will bring about the completion of the restoration project of the nation. Daniel wrote about the Stone. The Lord Jesus spoke about the Stone. When that Stone is in place, Israel's glorious future will be a reality. That millennium in the future is referred to in the last verse of this chapter as a wonderful hope for God's people when "He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied." How glorious and anticipated is that coming day to the Jews.
How much more hopeful and anticipated it is to us who each day expect our Lord to come for His bride at the rapture. We will see Him and be like Him, "for we shall see His as He is." It will be unforgettable moment when we see Him in His glory revealed to the world in the place of His rejection. How much more it must be anticipated by Him, and it will be to Him, when all He has suffered for accomplishes its purpose. His suffering will bring peace and prosperity to the body, soul and spirit of each one who loves Him supremely.

What blessing we who are in Christ have now. It is a foretaste of all that is ahead when we will share openly all the blessings that are ours because of the Servant, the Branch, and the Chief Cornerstone - our Lord Jesus Christ.

Zechariah 3:2. "And the Lord said unto Satan, the Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?"

A BRAND.

It looked like it was going to be completely burned -
Gone forever from the face of the earth.
But God in His grace made His chosen people turn -
And seek those things that are of higher worth
Then idols of gold and silver
They had coveted and for them sought
They are not cast off for ever -
For they are a testimony to what God has wrought.

Every soul God saved by His grace,
Is like a brand from the burning plucked.
Whenever a lost soul turns in faith,
And realizes what God for them has done,
There is a new life that immediately begins
When one has been pulled from the fire.
Life that was wasted starts over again -
A life that by love is inspired.

Instead of being clothed in garments of sin,
The righteousness of Christ is given.
The perfect righteousness that was found in Him,
Now makes us ready for heaven.
Satan has to stand back because greater is He
That is in us than he that is in the world.
In the family and the presence of God we will be;
Satan will into the fire be hurled.

"O Righteous God. I was in the place of death and the flames of hell awaited me. How grateful I am that Thou didst pluck me as a brand from the fire. The righteousness of Christ has made me accepted. I thank Thee from the bottom of my heart. May I show that thankfulness this day in all I do. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Zechariah 4

A MESSAGE OF HOPE

The fifth vision Zechariah had from the Lord must have been during the night as often happens when God speaks to people. He was a young man stepping out into the field of prophetic service, and may have been so impacted by all he heard and saw from the Lord, he was almost overwhelmed by what he was called to do. So, like a man awakened out of sleep, he was challenged again by the angel of the Lord. When one has been called by the Lord to speak to God's people, that is no light or insignificant matter. It can be very daunting to have a message to deliver, because we fear lest we make a mistake, or fail in some way to effectively communicate what our Lord wants told to the people. We know anything God intends for us to do, is of great importance so we must be careful to get right what is to be said, and be sure to communicate the message in a way that is clearly understood.

The lampstand with the bowl on top and many branches leading to the seven lamps, was obviously a unique light with a significant and lasting purpose. The two olive trees beside it seemed important but hard to discern as to what they were there for and how they fit the prophetic picture. The lampstand was obviously for light, and because there were seven lamps, each receiving oil from a common source, it was clear that this was not some brief message. The testimony of light in a dark world, and an on-going supply of the Holy Spirit indicates this light was not some work of man to put his hand to light the lampstand in the tabernacle. This had far reaching consequences.
The cleansing of the nation that was prophesied in the chapter before led to the light of testimony of God's people Israel that would be of lasting duration by the power of the Holy Spirit of God. A clean vessel can be trusted with holy service. In assemblies of God's people today, a public testimony by those who lead God's people in prayer publicly, must be with "holy hands" lifted up in prayer, intercession and thanksgiving, in order to be effective and used by God. There are times when we are engaged in a work for the Lord when the importance and potential impact of what we are doing can actually make us physically and emotionally tired because we are overwhelmed by the thought that God is using us for His own purposes.

All Zechariah had seen of Israel up to the time of this vision was a captive nation in Babylon, and then a comparatively few brave people who were willing to return to the promised land and start all over again. The obstacles and opposition from those around had stopped the building of the temple sixteen years before with only the foundation being laid. Then apathy and complacency settled in on the Lord's people and they got used to things as they were, rather than retaining their vision of the future that they once had. Haggai and Zechariah were there to give incentive to the people, and remind them of the importance of God needing to be in their midst. It was by looking at Israel through the eyes of divine illumination, that Zechariah could see the feeble remnant being God's testimony to light and truth in that day and in the future millennium. They had to give them moral and spiritual motivation to get back to work doing God's things first by seeking "first the kingdom of God." They weren't there to scold, berate or bully the people, but to give them spiritual insight as to what they should be doing regarding the building of the temple. He defines the value of a work and enables it to be done effectively and in a timely fashion. It is the Spirit of God who empowers His people when they are discouraged by the way things are going - or are not going.

When we are living for God and seeking to serve Him in a reverent and godly way, the Spirit in us accomplishes a lot that can be for God's glory. We should never despise and work, event, or opportunity simply because it seems small and insignificant compared to things done in the past or that will be done in the future. We live here and now, and just because something may seem small to us, does not mean that God cannot get joy and glory from it. Bigger and beautiful is not always best. It is our privilege to do what we can, where we are, and leave the outcome to God.

The lampstand in the vision is not inside a building or the tabernacle but is out in the open with an olive tree on each side. The full effect of this testimony will be in the future, but this prophetic vision give form to the fact that God is not done with His people. Zerubbabel and Joshua as political and spiritual leaders were out in the open in the public. Israel was still without a gathering center for God to dwell in the midst of His people. The temple must be finished. Of even more impacting in the vision was that in the millennium, the promised coming of Christ to the nation will bring a real and lasting light of testimony to the world through a cleansed Israel. The Lord Jesus Christ, the King and Priest, will be the "Faithful and True Witness." God has had His witness on earth through the ages even though at times it is small and weak. Today we are "witnesses unto Him."

The power behind the public witness of His people is not armies or human efforts, but the Holy Spirit working through those who represent Him in the world. There is no limit to the power of the Holy Spirit that is available when God's people, in holy fellowship with Him, are engaged in divine service. In modern Israel, the symbol of the nation used to represent the rebirth of the nation and its hope for the future, is the lampstand with olive branches on each side.

When there is a work to be done for the Lord and we know we have been called to do that work, at times it may seem to be overwhelming. There are going to be difficulties to overcome and we need to be reminded of the promise of the power and the presence of the Spirit in and with us. Often little seems to be done in the outreach of the Gospel, but the ungrieved and unquenched Holy Spirit is not limited by our lack of expertise. He is the One who gives power to the work of evangelism. He is also the One who makes the word of God effective when it is ministered to God's people with a view of building up the saints in "their most holy faith." He takes truth beyond mere words to be effective in bringing holiness, righteousness and godliness as a reality in His people. Cleansing comes first, and then availability as the Holy Spirit changes destinies and lives.

There was encouragement given to Zerubbabel to remove the obstacles that may have overgrown the foundation of the temple that had been laid sixteen years before, and to keep at building the temple until the "headstone", the very top piece, the last one was put in its proper place. When that happened there would be shouts of "Grace, grace unto it!" It was like a refrain, "God bless it, God bless it!" which are words of praise that accompany any work accomplished for the Lord done by clean hands and pure hearts. For souls saved, and saints restored to a vital faith, we can truly say, "Grace, grace," and ask God's blessing without any reservation.
When we have been given a task to do for our Lord, if our hearts are in it, we will commit ourselves to it until it is completed because we are doing it for Him. We may think it is small in comparison to what others do, but whatever our God has given us to do for Him is important, and deserves our best efforts, whether it is small or large in the eyes of men.

From one man, Abram, who obeyed God and moved away from his native home, a nation still exists as an entity of influence in the world today. A small boy's lunch became an abundant meal for thousands when he gave it to the Lord. From a little girl's confidence in God, a king, a general, a prophet and God Himself were involved in a remarkable miracle of healing. From a young boy's faith learned from his grandmother and mother, has come instruction for the effective living and testimony for believers and assemblies for nearly 2000 years.

God is going to see that His work is done, even though at the moment it may seem small. In the future the whole world will be at peace because of His divine purposes carried out in His way. Whoever the two olive trees represent in the future during the millennium, there will be the clear light of open testimony to the world that comes from the restored and established kingdom of Israel. Perhaps they refer to the two aspects of our Lord Himself as King and Priest. Or there may be two men who have governmental and spiritual roles to fill at that time as they witness to the covenant God keeps with His chosen earthly people. Whoever they are or whatever they represent in the millennium, it is the Holy Spirit who empowers any effective service for God. Zerubbabel and Joshua in the past; two witnesses or forms of witness in the future - they will be standing by the Lord and the restored nation of Israel fulfilling the covenant promises of God.

Zechariah 4:6. “Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.”

NOT BY MIGHT.

Armies are large and are getting larger still. They think their might will conquer all, until God takes actions that are stronger than men. And by the forces of His nature, brings a stop to them.

Some will use money; others, the force of words. Science has unleashed forms of might beyond what we have heard. ‘Might makes right’ is a mantra many have often used. But far too often, the use of might and power has been abused.

No matter what we think is might, there is a power that’s greater. The Holy Spirit of God is supreme, He is the Great Creator. His power was used when He moved on the face of the water. The Triune God, with intelligence and a plan, all work together.

Not just physical objects or things that we can see, Are evidences of the Spirit’s might and His reality. There are regenerated people who the Holy Spirit changed. Not just their life-style, but from within by the power of Jesus’ name.

Most people are impressed with loud noise and a great ‘to do.’ But the Spirit of the Lord changes human beings too. It is not a ‘day of small things’ when lives are turned around. Nor when praise and worship to God is given where before none was found.

My attention is often drawn to the real changes in some people. I see a whole new life unfold, and I know the Spirit is real. It is not just a resolution but the power and might of grace. That takes what seems like a ‘small thing’ and turns it to a life of faith.

‘Gracious God, I thank Thee for the Holy Spirit dwelling within. He makes understandable what was hidden; real the mysterious; valuable what seems small. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Zechariah 5

GOD DEALS WITH SIN

In the first visions of Zechariah were given to encourage the exiles who had returned but for some reason had not been able to deal with the difficulties and discouragements of making a new start for the nation in the promised land. Restoration is never an easy matter because things have to be faced that either have
been ignored or considered of less importance that immediate matters. In the next visions of Zechariah sin and wickedness in individuals and in the nation is dealt with by judgment. Before blessing comes purging and cleansing. God deals with righteous justice and judgment comes as a result of sin.

The flying scroll relates to sin in individuals. In this vision it is against those who steal, thieves and those who lie by taking and oath and not meaning what they say. The scroll itself is obviously the word of God and in this case, it is a large scroll unrolled. That means that its message is out in the open in its warning of judgment rather than merely a threat of what will happen if a change does not come. That which was done in the dark by thieves, or out in the open as one who deceives and lies by taking a false oath, already has judgment passed on it.

Many today consider the word of God not much more than a guide book for living or a help to give us some direction in the lifestyle we choose. Rather, the word of God is that of an infinitely holy God who is omniscient in His knowledge of what people think is hidden. He does not clear the guilty. In other words, He does not overlook that which people think is trivial or of not serious consequence in their eyes. The word of God with unchanging standards, principles and practices has not changed in any way to adapt to modern human edicts that suit the wicked lifestyle that people consider acceptable. The application of divine standards, remain as relevant as ever in preventing chaos and promoting righteousness. God still has interest and concern in the welfare of humanity.

One has made the observation that the size of the flying scroll is the same as that of the Holy Place in the Tabernacle in which the lampstand, table of showbread and golden altar were. All of those pieces of furniture, the oil in the lamps, the bread on the table and the incense on the altar had to do with some area of testimony which had to be done “according to the pattern God gave Moses.” In Zechariah’s vision this evil had to be dealt with. The Jews needed to know that in spite of who they were and what they had done, God does not change. He does not compromise to adapt to the circumstances in which people find themselves. Everything about God’s word is open and above board. There is nothing sinister, devious or deceptive about God and His holy word. It can be trusted, relied on and applied to every situation.

The word of God condemns sin in every individual, in every place and plainly declares there are consequences to sin that cannot be avoided. It is active, “quick and powerful.” It exposes that which people seek to hide. It searches out those things that bother the conscience and exposes the motives behind the actions of people. The fact of it being a flying scroll, makes plain to us that there is no way or place any person can escape from its truth. Whatever we do and wherever it is done cannot be hidden from the impact of the word of God.

This vision makes clear that in judgment there is equal justice done when the light of testimony is dimmed because of sin. It is the same when the spiritual bread and life that should nurture a person is polluted or there is sin in the acts of worship. When the teaching of the word of God is ignored or dismissed as irrelevant, and sin affects the testimony, teaching and worship of God’s people - than that same word of God brings just judgment according to God’s standards, not mans opinions or ideas.

The word of God applied to the remnant after they returned to the land, as much as it had before, they were taken captive. Fundamental laws are written in the commandments and they were broken. Zechariah learned that the word of God and its condemnation of sin, does not leave anything standing when its truth is applied to the sinner and his sin. "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee."

The next vision of the woman in a basket that would contain an ephah, deals with sin in the nation. Idolatry and wickedness will be punished and banished of whatever nature it is. This basket affects “all the earth.” There is that which connects the whole world and its effects are felt everywhere. It is the "religion of materialism.” It is the commercial enterprises of the nations that join them, not the religions, languages and cultures that essential divide them. Money and the insatiable desire for more permeates all of humanity. It is rampant today but it has always been a source of greed in people. No one ever thinks they have enough goods, funds, pleasures or things. Materialism is the idol of the world today. Even professed Christians are not immune from its attractions and demands.

Jews had been basically an agriculture society as a whole before their captivity. When the cities started getting larger, buying and selling at unfair profits happened when the rich took advantage of the poor. In Babylon as captives they were free to practice business and became very proficient in commercialism, to the extent they we noted for being very good at buying, selling, bargaining and all forms or commercial enterprise. Today all over the world they have that reputation.
The woman in the basket was a symbol of that kind of wickedness that they had learn in Babylon and practiced as a people. They became addicted to being successful in business, and making profit their new god. They are not known today for their spirituality or for their religion, or even for their governmental leadership. Many are involved in governments, but most found their way into political positions because of their financial success. The lead lid on the basket was to keep the evil of commercialism under control. We use the phrase, "keep a lid on it," when it comes to the tendency to go to excess in some matter. There is no question that dishonesty in business is typified by this woman, but by adhering to the pressure of the lead weight, it indicates there is still a measure of fairness in the commercial world. This will be all exposed for what it really is when the antichrist and the Babylon of the future is unrestricted for a time during the tribulation.

Even though there was the desire to escape from the basket, the iniquity was held in check by the just weight. The world system and world-view today is measured in dollars and cents. That is what most people today live for. Righteousness, justice and integrity are not really popular in the halls of government or in the places of business. People are not really too concerned with their reputation as long as they are making a good profit from their businesses. Honor, trust, fairness, reliability and reputation are sacrificed in the pursuit of "the almighty dollar," pleasure, material success, fame and the satisfying of lusts.

Two unclean women are pictured in this vision being allowed to take that which typifies greed and covetousness, and takes it back to Babylon to the place where it began with the Jews. It will be there as a source of ungodly power until the righteous rule of our Lord Jesus Christ removes all that mankind had trusted in for himself. World-wide currency; world-wide trade agreements; world-wide commercial power will be eliminated when God intervenes in the affairs of men in the coming kingdom. Everything that the world system says will satisfy, but really only promotes dissatisfaction, will be removed. Peace, prosperity and righteousness will come to the Jews when Messiah reigns.

**Zechariah 5:6.** "And I said, 'What is it?' And he said, 'This is an ephah that goeth forth.' He said moreover, 'This their resemblance through all the earth.'"

**WOMAN IN A BASKET.**

Wickedness is still here but it won't be forever.
The time is coming when God from it shall sever
His people by removing it completely from earth,
And all that dwell here will know moral worth.

The curse that overshadows the face of the earth,
Will then no longer maintain a spiritual death.
The power that sin now has over so many,
Will then be taken away and there'll be righteousness finally.

Like a woman in a basket being carried away.
Idolatry and wickedness will have had their day.
God's people will live in peace in their land.
And God Himself will keep them by His powerful hand.

We don't need to dwell on what we see going on.
The day is soon coming when we will be gone.
No sin will taint the place where we will live.
And we will rejoice forever in the new life God gives.

At present we will have to stand up against sin:
Making sure we overcome by the Spirit's power within.
Then when Christ comes, sin is removed like a woman in a basket,
And Israel will live safely for judgment has finally passed it.

"I know O God, there are yet times of judgment and righteous retribution to come on this sinful world. I thank Thee for letting me see beyond all the tribulation that will come, to the time when all these prophetic promised blessing will come to pass. Help me keep my eyes on the glory that shall be revealed. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

**Zechariah 6**

**THE LAST VISION**

One is impressed when reading the book of Zechariah with how many times the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ were written about 500 years before He came to earth. Much of what is written about Him in this book has yet to be fulfilled when the day of the reign of our Lord comes. God controls events in the
present and we usually are not conscious of much more than a few days in ahead of us, until we read these prophesies and realize that God controls the future as well as the present. He already knows what is going to happen and gives us a measure of understanding of the ages to come through the writings of "holy men of old" who wrote as the Holy Spirit gave them prophetic insight.

In the previous visions of Zechariah, he saw how God would deal with the sins of individuals by His cleansing power. Then he learned that God would deal with the sins of Israel like the woman in the ephah basket who was carried back to Babylon where the modern religion of materialism and commercialism really first hit its stride among the Jews who had taken there as captives. In this last vision God is dealing with the sins of all nations. The varied colored horses indicate different ways in which divine judgment will be carried out: Bloodshed, war, famine, false peace, natural disasters worldwide - all are represented in the four chariots. There are no riders on the horses in this vision and they come from between two brass mountains as a reminder that the source of the judgment is God. But in this vision Israel is being defended by God as an answer to the first one. "The Branch" is the Lord Jesus Christ who will be crowned and will then govern the nations of earth.

As the King, He will rule the political life with justice and righteous authority. As the Priest, He will rule the religious life of the nations. This unusual combination, the mixture of gold and silver in the crown He wears will take place when He returns in His glory. The four chariots representing the justice of God will be sent to all parts of the world bring judgment on all those who oppressed Israel. From the "mountains of brass" that indicate the unchanging character of God's truth, with two mountains being a representative of the absolute affirmation of truth by testimony, God carries out righteous judgment. Those "four spirits" (winds, angels) go as representatives of God to serve Him and overcome all obstacles that might be in the way of the coming Messiah.

From all sides of Israel there have been invasions and armies come against them in judgment. In the future God will bring final judgment, and then the kingdom age will be the time of fulfilled promises and hope. For Zechariah and the people of Israel in his day, it would have given them hope and motivation to put their hands to the work of the Lord they had been given. There were conditional promises which require obedience to receive them. They were to build the temple and God would protect the people while they were doing the work. Diligent obedience is very different from inconsistent obedience. The character of God includes both love and righteousness, mercy and justice, grace and truth, peace and holiness. Not everything God does in righteousness, justice, truth and holiness will make people comfortable or avoid hurtful consequences. God has the right to expect diligent obedience from us.

At the end of Zechariah's visions, the word of the Lord instructed him to receive those who came from Babylon with silver and gold, and to use those precious metals to make a crown of recognition for the priest, Joshua. That would have been very unusual because crowns were for kings. This one was to be unique as an identifying crown of "The Branch" who would be the King who was deity, and the Priest who was the Redeemer. The King and Priest who was coming would be the same unique Person - both Ruler and Savior. Joshua who was given that crown was symbolic of our Lord who is both God and man. "The Branch" is full of life that extends out to the whole world. He will dwell in the temple with His people as the Messiah of Israel.

There is a glory that is as unusual as the crown that will surpass all glory that has ever been seen on earth. He will sit on the throne that used to be David's, but is now far greater in that it is "His throne." As the priest who links man to God, He sits on the throne of holy rule that maintains peace. Because we are "accepted in the Beloved," there is an on-going condition of fellowship between the holy God and His people. "The Branch" that had been despised and reject in the past, is revealed as to who He really is - the Almighty Son of God. He will no longer be looked down upon, but will be high and lifted up before the sight of the whole world.

In the temple He will build, the building will be huge as far as size, but simply as to ornamentation and the material used. The Lord Himself will be the glory of the future temple. The beauty of the house of God is not in outward visual aspects, but in the inward beauty of holiness. That is the character of the house of God (the assembly) today. It will be like that in the millennium. The Lord Himself is the glory and beauty that attracts God's people.

When our Lord came to earth at His incarnation and birth, the glory angels spoke of was not obvious to the world. When He comes again to Israel and enters the city of Jerusalem, He will wear His own glory, and the honor and majesty of His Person will be evident glory. The crown of the King and the unusual crown of the
priest will be His. Joshua, the priest, was foreshadowing that future glory that will be on display when there will be “peace on earth and goodwill to men.” Our Lord will be the Counselor who will bring peace.

Israel will be restored to the land. The Messiah will be King. The Priest will be holding His office, and all that Zechariah had learned prophetically, will be entirely a fact. Those Gentiles from “far off” will come with their gifts and be involved in the building of the future temple. All Zechariah prophesied in these early chapters of this book, will find its completion when our Lord Jesus Christ comes.

Zechariah 6:13, “Even he shall build the temple of the Lord: and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne: and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.”

THE KING-PRIEST.

There is no escaping the righteous judgment that will come. Sin left unpunished is not justice at all. God will have the right thing always to be done. The carrying out of just judgment inevitably will fall.

But One is coming, who once bore the cross [Jn.19].
To a place called Calvary [Lu.23] to die in my place.
There for judgment, Christ paid the cost.
Now we are blessed by the results of His grace.

He bore reproach [Ps.69]: it should have fallen on us. What they spoke against Him, should have been said about me.
Now in that Person and work, we place our trust;
Free from sin’s power we forever will be.

He bore all our grief and sorrows too [Isa.53]: The suffering of soul, He experienced personally.
When the time of His suffering finally was through,
The One who was the King-Priest, declared, “Finished,” eternally.

The King-Priest lives again, His day is coming. When all of earth’s billions will own Him as Lord.
He will “bear the glory,” to everyone showing.
He is both King and Priest when He sits on His throne.

“Lord God, in view of the day of revelation of the Lord Jesus as the King-Priest, may I, this day, show my allegiance to Him in my life, conduct and conversation. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Zechariah 7

WHY DID YOU DO THIS?

Two years after the visions Zechariah had been given, and the delegated angel communicated the message from the Lord to him, the word of the Lord Himself came personally to Zechariah. The visions of the night had passed. Now there were direct instructions and responses to act upon. When the Lord’s people understand what God has for them to do, or there are corrections to be made and they have obeyed, then we are able to move forward to deal with other matters. To remain stuck in one area of our Christian life and not move forward in faith, is a hindrance to personal growth and the advancement of the work of the Lord.

The building of the temple had been going forward after the prophets Haggai and Zechariah had challenged the people to get to work on the building project. What had been almost a false start sixteen years before, was now progressing to where the house for the Lord to dwell with His people, was becoming a visible reality. When restoration is a real fact, there is evidence that can be seen. It is not mere words of restoration spoken, but the change is obvious when there is a new attitude, a new commitment and a new ambition to do the work of the Lord in the way He has called us.

There were fast-days that had arisen among those who were taken captive to Babylon, and that commemorated the destruction of Jerusalem over seventy years before. Now that fast had become a tradition that they had become used to. As the temple was being built and their houses were built, times had changed. Some of the people who had returned to Bethel (house of God) likely were those who had mourned the departure of the nation from God, and had lived with sadness of heart in Babylon, so had fasted and mourned for seventy years. It is possible for us to get so used to doing our own thing over and
over enough times, that the practice becomes a mere habit or tradition, rather than something that focuses our mind and heart on God.

It was for that reason the delegation from Bethel came to the priests and prophets with the question as to whether they should continue carrying on this man-made tradition now that the temple was taking shape. Scriptural practices are one thing that we are to continue. "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is." If the purpose of an event is to glorify God and to promote the interests of the kingdom of God, that also is a good thing. But to promote man's personal glory and to exalt human endeavor as if it is a holy thing, has no spiritual benefit.

Assemblies of God's people may have annual conferences for the edification, exhortation and comfort of the Lord's people. The objective behind such gatherings is for the glory of God and the honor of Christ. There are also times that outreaches for the Gospel are done to seek to further the kingdom of God. This can be a very useful time when year after year those who are not saved know the assembly of God's people are providing a time and place to hear, night after night, the Gospel message. But if such times become a point of pride or promotion of our own so-called spirituality, the same event that was once useful can become a stumbling block and a hindrance.

The purpose, practice and methods of worship and service among the people of God should be consistent with the scriptures and the public testimony of the assembly. To honor our Lord and to glorify God is always right. It is possible for an event that began with a holy purpose, to deteriorate into a time of entertainment that serves no spiritual purpose. Even though it becomes a tradition does not make it right. Some things we do have a good beginning with a righteous reason behind it, but may need to be discontinued before it goes astray from biblical truth and practice.

One of the problems of the fasts of man's making, was that it turned into feasts and social times and activities that were inconsistent with mourning over the sins of departure, failure and apostasy. Fasting today is self-imposed restriction of normal eating and drinking, or normal daily activity for some spiritual purpose. Our Lord said when He was here that no one should be able to discern when a person is fasting because it is to be between an individual and God. It is to be an act of faith for the purpose of intercession, guidance, contrition or confession that is between one's own soul and God. In itself it has no real spiritual meaning because one may fast simply to lose weight, to seek to feel better or for some medical reason. When it is for the purpose of an individual drawing nearer to the Lord without distraction, and without the restrictions of meeting normal human needs, then it may be uplifting to the human spirit.

The Lord made it plain to Zechariah that their fasts were self-imposed ceremonies which they did for their own sake, rather than sincere repentance for sins before the holy God. They were mourning for what they had lost, not for what they had done. That there are consequences for sin is an undeniable fact. Our response to sin committed is to be confession to God for sin, and a genuine forsaking of that sin against divine holiness. Genuineness in repentance may lead to fasting of one's own state of mind and peace of mind as evidence of restoration. All we need for assurance that things are put right is the word of God applied and submitted to. We do not need some ceremony of our own making or design.

The Lord of hosts could see right through the whole thing and made it clear as to what they should have done and was still in effect. The people should have listened to the instructions and warnings of the prophets. They should have paid attention to what people like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos and others had said. The "touchy-feely" kind of activity was not even real in a spiritual sense because it had no divine sanction. That kind of religious activity practiced today has no real value because it is really a means to avoid offending people rather than telling them the truth. Tolerance of evil and compromise with that which is not right, may make people feel good about themselves and you, but is does not bring about repentance and faith.

Much of what is done by men who think they are engaging in holy service in our day, has a sentimental, feel-good, emotional bent to it that appeals to human flesh. It is possible for us to do something that is neither good nor bad in its essence, but the purpose for which it is done determines whether it is acceptable or not. The motivation, objective and final outcome is what makes a service for the Lord of value. Something done for the praise of men is condemned, but if it is done for the glory of God alone, it is of value. Even though those before us may have had the wrong motive for the actions they took, we are not excused from the consequences, because each generation, and each person is responsible before God to do what is right and scriptural.
Relationships between believers are expected to be for the benefit of one who needs mercy and compassion. To profit from the loss of a brother is wrong. God's standards of righteous behavior remain unchanged and impartial. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me." It is up to me to conduct my life and work in ways that are consistent with God's righteous standards. The "law of the Lord of hosts" was clearly spoken, and at the same time mercy and compassion can be shown without any reserve. Mercy, availability, sympathy and conduct consistent with Christian commitment are never out of order.

In the past most people refused to listen to, and obey, the voice of God through the prophets. They "pulled away the shoulder," they would not assist the needy nor would they obey, but "stopped their ears." Even their emotions were not moved by the word of the Lord and their hearts were like stone. "Stubbornness is iniquity and idolatry." The seventy years of discipline in Babylon should have brought real repentance. Their forefathers did not listen to corrective ministry and warnings, so the land was desolate. Israel has not yet been restored to what it will be someday. There are some signs that the "desolate" land is starting to be a "pleasant land."

What the outcome of Zechariah's message was is not given. The men of Bethel knew what the prophet said when he told them what was wrong and the consequences. Confession and forsaking of sin allows for no short-cuts or partial response. Good motives and sincerity bring about good results. A casual attitude to the word of God and ignoring warnings from God will bring bad results. When the Lord people obey God from the heart, and demonstrate the reality of their faith, then there is fellowship among the Lord's people and there is joy in the privilege of service for God.

Zechariah 7:9-11a. "Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother; and oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart. But they refused to hearken...

**THEY SHOULD - BUT DIDN'T.**

- True judgment involves making responsible decisions.
- Do what is right, no matter what others may do.
- Put your ears to those appeals and petitions.
- Puts you in a place where the same can happen to you.

- Showing mercy and compassion is reasonable to expect.
- After all, both of them have been shown to me.
- But to refuse to listen and harden my neck.
- Makes my position of stubbornness a bad place to be.

- When other people in need do not move me to compassion.
- Then my hardness of heart will catch up to me someday.
- There are women and children - the victims of oppression.
- That call out for help - from them don't turn away.

- Wanting evil to fall on others is always wrong.
- No matter what they have done, we are here to bless.
- It is only reasonable that the weak need the strong.
- To lend them assistance when they are under duress.

- Lord God, I call on Thee in this place this morning.
- Give me a heart to love people in Thy name.
- Give me eyes to see; ears that take warning.
- Lest I miss the opportunity that to me this day has come.

"O God, I hear the warning from Thy Word. As Thou hast shown me mercy, may I be merciful to others. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Zechariah 8

**FROM FASTING TO FEASTING**

For some reason the Jews had decided to hold several "fasts" to remember all they had lost when Judah was defeated, and Jerusalem, and the temple, was destroyed. These self-imposed fasts would likely have begun with mourning and perhaps remorse by those who had been carried away captive. But by the time the
second and third generation that followed them had been in Babylon for decades, the point of the fasts would have been lost and likely they became more feast days for partying and pleasure, than times of repentance and recovery.

Self-imposed rituals are usually mere sentimental times that soon fade in importance and lose any significance they first had to those who started them. The children may dutifully maintain them, but by the time grandchildren and succeeding generations come on the scene, those rituals are a boring chore, rather than a time of enthusiasm and benefit.

God did not initiate those fasts the children of Israel had organized and carried on. He was more concerned about them obeying His word instead of ignoring it as they had in the past. They had brought judgment on themselves, so that was no reason to have special days of commemoration of their failure. Those were of no value to the people at all. They had ignored God's word and the carrying out of the feasts of the Lord had no value to them. Instead they had substituted idolatry which had led to their captivity. Israel was a desolate place because they had not done what the Lord said. There are serious consequences to not paying attention to what the Lord says.

So, Zechariah ten times said, "Thus saith the Lord," as he was instructed. Those fasts that were held to remember when Jerusalem was under siege before it fell [Jer.52] and the destruction of the temple, had nothing to do with the plans of God to bless His people. He wanted and still wants, "all men everywhere to repent," and wanted those Jews to press ahead with the rebuilding of the temple. He intended blessing to come to them instead of a curse because of compromising with sin. Jerusalem was important to Him even though they had been unfaithful to Him.

Though Zechariah's message, He has them look ahead to when Jerusalem will become the center from which the Lord will reign in truth and holiness. It was unlikely there were many old people there at that time. Not many would have been able to return from Babylon, and families with young children would have been few. Those in Jerusalem would have been made conscious of that fact when in Zechariah's prophecy he speaks of a time when there will be a lot of old people living to a very old age in Jerusalem, and when young children will be able to play safely in the streets. In this country about as many children are aborted as are being born. It is not safe for a child even to be in the womb in millions of cases. Old people are often ignored when it comes to health care, and some are euthanized. This evil attitude will not be in the millennium when life again will have great value and old and young will not be a burden but be recognized for who they are and why they are so valuable to the Lord.

The message from the Lord told of a time to come when instead of unemployment and poverty, there would be great prosperity. This will be yet in the future and it was this view of the future the Lord used to motivate His people to be actively engaged in His work in the present. That should move us in this present day to move forward in the work of the Lord with enthusiasm now. Believers do not live only for the present but have a new view of life now and forever, because we already have eternal life. This enables us to see things through the eyes of our Lord, whether it be history, prophecy, or the worth and purpose of human beings.

Not all of the dispersed Jews who are away from their homeland have been a good influence on this world. Atheistic philosophy and psychology have been initiated by very intelligent Jews who have no fear of God, or even a belief in God. Political ideology such as Marxism, and some in Nazi Germany found its origin in those who were intended to be the children of God but turned out to be the cause of millions of violent deaths. On the other hand, great good and wonderful inventions have come from Jews of the dispersion. Jewish scientists, doctors, teachers, industrial giants, engineers have produced wonders in medicine, science and even space exploration.

Those people who were once "a curse" will be "a blessing." Zechariah urged those people in his day to be good neighbors because the Lord intends to "do well unto Jerusalem and the house of Judah." God didn't really care whether the Jews kept those fast days or not. His concern for His people then, and for His people today, is that they keep His word, obey it from their hearts, and act upon it. The bad things that happened to them was because they did not keep His word. They did not obey His laws, nor did they give heed to the warnings and instructions from the prophets.

The feast days are what will last. The feast of Jehovah had a positive purpose in the past and they will again. Fasts commemorated failure. Feasts lift the hearts and spirits of the people to consider the Lord God of hosts, who He is and what He has done for His people. When Israel is returned to their homeland, and faith in the Lord is real, those feasts in the millennium will remind them of the ways of the Lord with them. The people of the world will go to Jerusalem to seek the Lord who is the King ruling among His people in
that city. Jews will be held in high esteem then, and all the people of the world will be conscious of the fact that God is with them. Instead of being despised and persecuted around the world, they will be a strong nation and the center of the world's attention.

**Zechariah 8:16-17.** “These are the things that ye shall do: speak every man truth to his neighbor; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: and let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbor; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the Lord.”

**TRUTH AND PEACE.**

There are some things that do go together:

Ham and eggs, and birds of a feather,
But other things may seem to be quite different,
When put together, they're not quite compliant.

Just the same, when these two things meet,
We can see the reason each one does complete
The whole great picture that God chooses to paint,
Of a life that's sanctified, that of a saint.

A man and his neighbor may share a fence,
And from time to time, some small expense.
But what really counts when you are face to face,
Is - can he trust my word and see my faith?

Are the comments made when passing by;
Words of truth on which he can rely?
I want my neighbor to know I'm real;
My words are true, my word - my seal.

When it comes to home, to my children, my wife;
The choices that affect me, all of my life.
Will affect them too, so I must wisely make;
Judgments of truth and of peace for their sake.

My grandchildren, brothers and sisters and all:
Have a right to expect for “truth-peace” to not fail.
There’s Another as well who knows why I must hold,
My commitment to truth and to peace - I must show.

Also, inside of this person I am,
Is a heart that is evil and controlled by my mind.
It maybe imagines wrong things about men;
It also can plan bad mischief against them.

All this I must view through the eyes of my Lord.
He hates it and expects my righteousness - bold.
The heart holds the man, and directs it aright.
So that from deep within me comes sanctified light.

Now out in the public, where everyone hears,
Are spoken the words that truth and peace bears.
They must be words plain - all understood;
A false word can undermine a life full of good.

To say something wrong when so much is at stake,
Brings fear to my soul, when my vows I do make.
Let truth and peace rule over each role I do fill.
For my Lord and my God, to fulfill His good will.

“I am glad Father, that Thou dost never try to smooth-talk important things. The truth that I hold, I believe is Thy truth. The peace that I have, is Thy peace imparted to me by the blessed Lord Himself. The requirements I read of in these verses impress me with the necessity of being consistent in every area of my life and person. My neighbors, my family, myself and my Lord, are all to see living evidence of truth and peace in me. My trust is in Thee to work this out in this fail-prone person. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

**Zechariah 9**

**THE COMING KING**

The two prophecies in this chapter initiate a series of prophecies from Zechariah that focus on the future. This would likely have been an encouragement and motivation for those who saw the temple finally
completed and were looking forward with hope to the future. These two prophecies were given quite some time after the messages in the first chapters of this book. One had to do with the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ when He came first "found in fashion as a man." The second prophecy is about the time when He returns in glory to reign as the King of Israel on the throne of David. Then He will be King of kings and all nations of earth will recognize His leadership.

This prophecy is called a "burden" (oracle) which is a message from God. These messages directed the attention of the Jews to the promised Messiah. The fulfillment of prophecies in the past, assure us of the fulfillment of prophecies relating to the future. They would have given Zechariah and those of his time and place a real motivation to not turn away from the Lord but to continue faithful to Him. That applies to us as well because we have a "more sure word of prophecy," the whole word of God. All that God has promised for us will come to pass. We do not live in some kind of fantasy as so many unbelievers think, but in the full assurance that our God who lives in an eternal "now" has given us enough understanding of the future to motivate us to press ahead in the things of God.

The first verses tell of the influence of the Greeks that will spread over the lands they conquer bringing their language and culture to all areas. Even in Israel the Greek language became the language of the intellectuals and philosophers. Philip of Macedonia was the leader of the Greeks in the campaigns against Darius and then Xerxes (Artaxerxes). But he died comparatively young and Alexander (the great) became the leader who in a period of ten years took over countries all the way to India. In the Middle East he even conquered Tyre by building a causeway out to the island on which Tyre was built and leveled the city to where there is nothing there. But when he came to Jerusalem, priests and leaders came out to escort him into the city and it became a place favored by him. The acceptance of Alexander by the Jews did not only preserve the city and fulfill prophecy, but it prepared the way for the Roman empire when Rome dominated the Middle East and Europe.

The prophecy then briefly looks into the future beyond the dark times of empires and their conquering power, to focus attention on the real King who will rule over not just a part of the world but all of it. He begins this part of the prophecy by describing the Lord Jesus Christ coming into Jerusalem riding on an untamed donkey on what we call now, Palm Sunday. But even in those dark times of oppression, Israel was not ready for Him, and "His own received Him not." By rejecting Him they lost the great joy that was prophesied. In contrast to the other conquerors, Israel's King was "just." He is "just" in His leadership of the people. He is also "just" in His nature and character. He had "salvation" for His people from their enemies unlike Alexander and the Greeks, and Caesar and the Romans. He is "lowliness," not arrogant or domineering like Alexander who died at the age of 32. In contrast, our Lord died at 33, a young age, but he rose again and is establishing His kingdom that will last and will be universal.

The "meekness" and "lowliness" of our Lord is such that millions already own their allegiance to Him even before He takes the throne. His meekness and lowliness were demonstrated in the way He entered Jerusalem. A brief glimpse of the glory of Israel's future was seen when joy was evident in Jerusalem as the just King bringing salvation to His people came in a lowly manner bringing peace to a suffering world in the time between the two covenants.

It was in that time the Maccabees, the "prisoners of hope," revolted and sought to deliver Israel, but failed. Even though those who oppressed Israel would be defeated and destroyed because of their evil and idolatry, Israelis would not escape the consequences of their own sin. Some of those who survived the defeat of other nations who were conquered, were absorbed into the citizenry of the Jews as a "mixed race." In spite of all the Jews have gone through as a people, and will yet go through, God will keep His covenant with them and deliver them eventually from their enemies.

After describing the entrance of the Lord Jesus Christ into Jerusalem, the prophecy goes way into the future beyond the church age to the time the Lord takes up His dealing with Israel as a nation again. At this present time God is not dealing with Jews or Gentiles, but with the church of God. Both Jews and Gentiles compose this fertile valley of divine purposes between the two views of Israel at the coming of the Savior-King that has happened, and the coming of the Ruler-King. A people for His name, the bride of Christ, is being gathered now. Zechariah told what was going to happen before those future events. Israel would suffer. The prisoners of hope (Maccabees) would resist but would be unable to overcome the Greeks (Seleucids) and the Romans would be coming after that. Bloodshed and the weapons described was a preview of that which is to come in the "time of Jacob's trouble."

All of the terrible things that will happen to Israel yet, will quickly come to a halt when the Lord comes in glory. After the long rejection of our Lord Jesus as the Messiah, when they accept Him, Israel will finally
become unified as a nation again. The tribulation that so terribly and adversely affected the world will end in times of refreshing when our Lord comes. The antichrist will be quickly defeated and cast into the lake of fire and all fear of him will be over in a very short time. The Jews from all over the world where they are in a "dry pit," will come back en masse to the promised land. Messiah will bring victory and reign from "sea-to-sea," and from the "River" (Euphrates), the center of the earth, in all directions from there to the "ends of the earth."

The present age is not seen in this prophecy although it lies between the two prophetic views of the coming of the Lord "to seek and to save that which was lost," and His coming to receive His kingdom. The promised Messiah will be the King and Deliverer of Israel. He will be their Protector and Savior, and all praise from that restored people will go to Him who they had rejected. We who are saved now sometimes sing,

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Our Lord is now rejected,
And by the world disowned,
By the many now neglected
And by the few enthroned;
But soon He'll come in glory!
The hour is drawing nigh,
For the crowning day is coming
By and by."
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The last two verses of this chapter give the rest of the story. Blessing will eventually come to Israel. There will be prosperity, plenty and joy in the future. The goodness of God and the beauty of the Lord will bring a whole new day for the chosen people of God.

Zechariah 9:9. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: Behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation: lowly, and riding on an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass."

**PRISONERS OF HOPE.**

It happened, they watched, the whole city was moved -
The King came just as prophesied, and the voice of joy was in the streets.
The prisoners of hope lifted up their eyes to see their King -
They saw Him - and watched Him die!

Years have passed: then generations, centuries - now two millennia.
And prisoners of hope watch, and pray, and read promises -
And wait for the Light in the eastern sky - for their King -
There is no sight - but God does not lie!

Prophecies are true when they come from God.
Trustworthy, real, no confusion - just no revelation
Of the time given to time-bound men who try to box in
Eternity - but fail when they try!

The prisoners of hope learn from divine Persons -
And settle back with a smile in the soul -
The promise still stands - the King has come -
He did conquer death - now He's alive!

He's not done; there is more to do in His plan -
He is not limited by time and space like mortal man.
The King has come - will come again as promised -
And to the Eternal King - we will fly!

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O God of promise. I look for Him to come again in my day. And yet, I understand I am bound by a calendar of time, so I watch, and wait, and work with an eye on the sky. In name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."
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Zechariah 10

**THE RESTORATION OF THE FLOCK**

The immediate concern of Zechariah's prophecy in this chapter relates to those who were involved in restoring the land and rebuilding the temple after their return from Babylon. They were reminded of why the "trouble" came on them in the first place. They had no reliable or true shepherds. Indifference to the Lord and idolatry was their great sin, and it still is today. The leaders of Israel were not true shepherds because they had no real concern for the flock. It is possible to get so concerned with our own projects and personal
interests, that the things of God that last forever are ignored or simply put off until a "more convenient season."

Haggai and Zechariah, the two prophets, were really concerned for the lethargy of the people in the present condition, including Zerubbabel, the governor and Joshua, the priest. It was to this matter Zechariah addressed the people to get back to doing what God wanted. We can learn from them that it is possible for us to get so complacent that we are comfortable the way we are, without considering what God wants. The idols we can make of money, success, fame and power will never bring happiness nor provide security for our souls. Our trust must be in the Lord alone because He is the One who controls the future.

The sheep of Israel were helpless under their past leaders, but when they will be restored to the Lord, they are transformed into war-horses who will conquer other "riders on horses" that will be put to shame. Presently Israel is like sheep without a shepherd and seed sown in the world, but they will finally be brought back to their own land. They will be strong like horses in a battle, and they will be victors over their enemies.

The first part of this chapter begins with a prayer for rain. They had to be reminded that it is God who gives and withholds the rain, not diviners who delude the people into praying to rain-gods they devised in their own sinful minds. God answers their prayer in ways far more abundantly than they asked. The Lord will strengthen, save and mercy on all of Israel, both the northern tribes and the south to become one again. Those of Israel will be gathered from among the nations, and Judah, and will both be returned to the land of promise.

At the time of restoration, God's chosen, earthly people will be united as one. The northern tribes were assimilated into other cultures and nations after their captivity, so the only Person who knows who they are is the Lord. He will be the One who re-gathers them. They have had many struggles under the Gentile leaders. Germany, Russia, the Arab states, the nations of the Middle East and other world nations have given the Jews terrible times of persecution, deception, murder and the Holocaust itself is a testimony to the evil that has come upon the Jews.

Israel has become an astonishment to the world in these last 50 years because they have not only survived, but have become a nation to be reckoned with. This is a foreshadowing of what will happen in the future. Israel has other hard times coming, particularly in the tribulation when the antichrist reveals himself for who he is - an enemy of the Jews, even though he is one himself. In the future, under the leadership of Messiah, Israel will no longer be moved. There will be victory instead of defeat. There will be unity in the nation instead of division. There will be national security instead of being dispersed among the nations.

All of this will be done because the Lord will care for His people Himself. He will not only be the Shepherd but He will be the King. He is the "cornerstone," a prophetic statement identifying our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the "tent peg" of stability. He is the "bow" that conquers. He is the "ruler" who leads in righteousness. The "cornerstone" is the stone from which the whole foundation is laid, and upon which the whole building depends for form, strength and stability. Our Lord is today the "chief cornerstone" of the church, and He will be the cornerstone of Israel as a nation under His rule and reign.

As the "tent peg" He is the One who "upholds all things by the word of His power." He will be the One who establishes and supports Israel. If it wasn't for Him, Israel would not exist in the present, and it would never be able to escape annihilation during the tribulation. he will support them, preserve them, and in the kingdom will rule over them in righteousness and holiness. His government will last and His kingdom will not fail the people like Jewish leaders did in the past. As the "battle-bow" the Lord is the One who assures the victory of Israel over all its enemies. He is the King of glory and will be acknowledged as the Lord of lords. He is the Mighty Ruler who will take authority over all the nations, as well as be the King of the Jews. The promised messiah will fulfill all of the promises God made to His people. The Israelis will no longer be captives to any nation, but citizens of Israel and representatives of the King of kings. They will move as emissaries, acting in "His name," around the world, and will be blessed and be a blessing to the nations.

We too have many obstacles to overcome in our day and age, which we can by the power and name of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we encounter obstacles in the work to which we are called, we need the guidance of the Holy Spirit to know how to deal with obstacles and to overcome them. The Lord will be to us as He was, and yet be, to Israel. He delivered them from the bondage of Egypt, and will recover them from the scattering of Assyria. Not only are we, and they gathered from among the nations of earth, but are protected by the power of God. This great King - Ruler - Deliverer - Victor is our Lord and Savior who has called us with a holy calling and given us the privilege of association with Him personally

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Judah came back from Babylon and formed a nucleus of the nation again. Joseph (Ephraim) will be gathered from the nations after long centuries of assimilation, and division, defeat and dispersion will finally be passed. In the future God will make them to be like mighty warriors who return victorious from the battle. They will be brought to the Lord like sheep drawn to the caring Shepherd when He whistles for them to come to Him. They will be like a fruitful harvest brought in long after the seed had been sown in distant fields.

What God did for His people in the past when He delivered them from bondage, He will do in the future when they are re-gathered to the promised land, no longer slaves, but a strong nation. Their God is, and will be, the Lord, and they will do all in the name of the Lord. For us, that is the intention of our Lord now. We are not a nation of earth as the people of God today, but a kingdom of priests with a higher calling, we serve Him in holy things. Our worship, service and conduct is that of those who are a heavenly people. However, much of what is our Lord's intention from His earthly people is consistent with what he wants from us as His people serving Him today.

Zechariah 10:1. "Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain; so the Lord shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field."

WONDERFUL RELIEF.

It has been so long since the troubles came.
There seemed no end to them - we were to blame.
Because the idols of the world had such attraction.
That they tried them all seeking some kind of satisfaction.
None of them worked - every one of them false.
But they had to lose all before they called a halt.
And turned in repentance to the God of their salvation.
Miraculously they were accepted again as a favored nation.

I am not quite sure what has gone wrong today.
As a nation and a people, we have gone astray.
Perhaps we did not teach as plain as we did in the beginning.
Maybe we have allowed things as okay, but really it was sinning.
Whatever the causes, it is time for us to stop and consider.
If God will draw near again to us and re-gather what we did scatter.
I ask myself, “Am I ready and willing
To commit myself again to God’s Word and His work fulfilling.

It happened before, maybe God will allow it again;
When we as His people repent, will He send us some rain?
We need rain to germinate the seed we’ve long planted.
There will be songs of joy and praise if our petitions He granted -
To send showers of blessing, and souls that He saved.
Even though we are older, our are hearts still filled with praise.
We certainly do praise God for what He has done bringing us as peace.
How much greater our praise would be when He gives us relief.

“O God, I am not complaining, for Thy mercy and grace has been abundantly poured on me and mine, and our assembly. It is just that, Father, there are so few of us and we are getting fewer in our assembly gatherings. If there are things we need to do, please help us do them. If we have a wrong spirit within, renew in us a right spirit. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Zechariah 11

THE GOOD SHEPHERD vs. EVIL SHEPHERDS

The "burden of the word of the Lord" regarding the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and His rejection by Israel, began in chapter 9 and concludes in this chapter. From the restoration of Israel as a nation to share the glory of the King in a future day that was mentioned in the last verses of chapter 10, Zechariah's prophecy now goes to what was in the immediate future of Israel.

In the form of a poem, the description of an invasion from the north that breaks through the "doors" (mountain passes) of Lebanon, is that of a storm that breaks down trees and sweeps across the land as far as the Jordan and into Bashan. This describes the army of Roman conquerors that will totally subjugate the land of Israel into "the hand of his king," which is Caesar.
The "shepherds" who should have been caring for the people, were actually evil men. Shortly after Zechariah's prophecy the Jews began dividing into groups from which came the Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, Essenes and then later the Herodians. These opinionated leaders divided the people into discordant cliques, rather than unify the people. So, Zechariah was to act out the part of a good shepherd who was to care for the sheep and tend for them in the right way.

A divided leadership among God's people is a danger to everyone. It does not take too long and all the "sheep" sense the tension and begin to take an "us vs. them" position. There is the possibility that some who lead do so for their own sense of importance and worth rather than the well-being and growth of the Lord's people. How important it is for those who guide the saints and feed the "flock of God over which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers," to spend time in the scriptures for their own learning, and then to communicate openly and kindly with fellowship shepherds.

The owners of the sheep in Zechariah's story (parable), didn't care for the sheep and were even satisfied if they were slaughtered as long as they themselves got rich. This was the kind of leadership in Israel when our Lord Jesus Christ came the first time to earth. The Pharisees and Sadducees were both hypocritical and covetous. It was because of them and those who followed their leadership that the Lord said, "I will no longer pity the inhabitants of the land."

Zechariah's role in the parable was that of depicting a good shepherd. It was a prophetic picture to the people of his day and those who read his prophecy, of the condition of Israel when our Lord Jesus came to earth in the flesh, found in fashion as a man, "full of grace and truth." He had two staffs: one for defense and one for drawing the sheep to the shepherd. "Beauty" and "Bonds" (bands) were the names of the staffs and they were very important purposes. Grace (beauty) and Unity (bands) were needed to protect and instruct the people of Israel and that was what our Lord came to do. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not."

The three evil shepherds, the Pharisees, Sadducees and Herodians, "abhorred" the Lord Jesus Christ when He was here. The warning was given that they would fall swiftly and certainly under judgment. When the Romans laid siege to Jerusalem under the leadership of Titus. During that siege, food was so scarce that people ate bits of grass, anything they could get their hands on including "each other's flesh." It was a time of terrible trouble for those who had said, "We have no king but Caesar." They rejected the Shepherd-King and got what they asked for when they said, "His blood be on us and on our children."

When the Lord Jesus Christ was here, He was "full of grace and truth." Grace and unity were evident among those who followed Him and responded to Him and His teaching with faith in Him. The poor, maimed, halt and blind, as well as the publicans and sinners knew He was a caring shepherd. But then, apart from the faithful few who knew Him and loved Him, the majority of the people followed the lead of the evil shepherds. He broke the staff when He pronounced woe on the Jewish people who "would not" come to Him.

A few believed the message of the prophet, and a few believed on our Lord Jesus Christ. Those who believed on Him became the foundation of the church that is being built from the day of Pentecost to this day. This building will continue until the Lord comes to the air to rapture His church. Of great interest is the fact that persecution of the believers on our Lord Jesus that came from the Jews themselves, led many if not most of them to leave Jerusalem and to "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel." So they survived when those who followed the evil shepherds died. When Israel refused the "Good Shepherd who giveth His life for the sheep," He committed Himself to other sheep that were not of that flock, and resigned His role as the shepherd of the Jews. This is where we find ourselves in this wonderful story. The shepherd Zechariah was portraying asked for his pay, and as an insult, they gave him thirty pieces of silver, the price of a wounded animal.

That is what the evil Jewish shepherds thought of the ministry and teaching of our Lord when He was here. The "princely price" (a sarcasm) was a deliberate insult to demean the value of the Lord Jesus Christ as far as they were concerned. To use the money to buy the useless potter's field was another derogatory statement of what they thought of the Good Shepherd. The field was only usable as a garbage dump or a cemetery for those nobody knew. When we read these prophecies, it is a reminder to us of how important the scriptures are as we read of their fulfillment several hundred years later. The reliability of the word of God even to small things like "thirty" pieces of silver, assures us that "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do."

The staff of "Beauty" was broken when the Lord was deliberately rejected, and the staff "Bonds" was broken telling of the dissolving of the unity of Jewish life that was about to come upon them under the iron boot of
Rome. Without God's grace to protect them, and the bands of unity in the nation between Israel and Judah, the nation was no longer an entity. For nearly 2000 years Israel has been a non-entity until 1948, when it became a nation foreshadowing a coming day. Most people didn't think Israel would survive at all under the onslaught of the Arab nations that surrounded them. But God intervened on their behalf with a number of miracles that allowed them to be victorious over their enemies up until this time. Now Israel is reckoned among the nations, and in some places - feared.

We are allowed in quite a number of ways, to see prophecy fulfilled in our times. Some prophecies are positive and good. Others predict evil and the increase of violence, social unrest and chaos, including the breakdown of families and undermining of established social structure. The books of 2nd Peter and Jude, as well as portions of 2nd Timothy and other places are reminders of prophetic statements that have an effect on us today.

Another evil shepherd is yet to arise in Israel's future. Zechariah's prophecy again takes on the form of a parable portraying a foolish shepherd who has no care for the sheep but only uses them for his nefarious purposes. This terrible shepherd will actually turn on the sheep that trust him and he will devour them. The antichrist will pretend to be a friend of Israel for a period of time during the first part of the tribulation. This will give the Jews a false sense of security to the extent that some will consider him their Messiah.

In the middle of the tribulation he will show himself for what he really is after the new temple is built and he desecrates it and uses it for his own place of rule. He will seek to totally annihilate the Jews when he shows his true colors as an evil shepherd. He will promise protection from others but will have no care for them himself because his own interest is being the world ruler under satanic dominion. The antichrist will be a master of deception and will be used by Satan in whatever way he can to defeat the purposes of God for Israel as well as all the people of God. This worthless shepherd, this evil person who is controlled by the devil, will have great power for a brief period of time.

Then the Good Shepherd who gave His life for His sheep, will appear, and everything will be quickly changed. This section of the book of Zechariah from chapter 9 through chapter 11, is a message regarding the first coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and His rejection by the Jews when He was here. It impresses us with the fact that God's plans will be carried out by His sovereign will, and nothing that mankind does will change His plans of the ages.

Zechariah 11:12. "And I said unto them, 'If you think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear.' So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver."

AN INSULT.
Is that all you think that shepherd is worth,
When He has given His life for the sheep;
From the very beginning - even the nation's birth,
He has sacrificed Himself to keep
Them from going astray, and yet they went
Their own way afar from the fold,
Now His longsuffering patience is finally spent,
No longer will He from danger, them hold.

They offered for Him the price of a broken-down slave,
Who had nothing more of himself to give.
To despise and reject One who Himself for them gave,
Is a serious insult for any to give Him.

For generations to follow, the results they would taste;
Many of them they are tasting still.
To act nonchalantly in mockery and haste,
Will result in swallowing a very bitter pill.

Those who lead must remember the value of their labor
Expended for the benefit of others.
God has placed shepherds in positions of favor,
That they might tend to their sisters and brothers.

If you think someone is worthless, not worthy of your time:
Take awhile to consider what you were.
The One, men thought was worthless, makes heaven's glory shine;
He's the Chief Shepherd whose judgments are always pure.
"I am remembering this morning, O God, that awful act when those splintered groups of leaders gave Judas those 30 pieces of silver. What an insult! What humiliation - and He knew it would happen before it took place. O Gracious God, I ask Thee for some special understanding of the worth of my Lord; the value of a soul; the promise of one of Thy children. May I never underestimate what Thou hast called me to do - even when it seems to me to be insignificant. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Zechariah 12

A TIME OF WAR AND MOURNING

The second burden of which Zechariah writes is from chapter 12 through chapter 14. It mainly relates to the future beginning with the tribulation and ends with Armageddon and Israel's deliverance when the Lord come in glory and the millennium reign of our Lord begins. Instead of Israel's King being rejected like happened at His first coming, the King will take the throne and reign in righteousness and peace.

The Creator speaks and makes plain for all who hear the prophecy of Zechariah, that the events that will take place "In that day" of the siege of Jerusalem will be controlled by the Highest Authority in the universe. The Creator of heaven and earth will step in to the affairs of the nations of the world, and will make Jerusalem "a cup of trembling." Divine, righteous, wrath against the enemy nations will have them reeling like drunk men who have no power of control over themselves or any who they seek to overcome.

The nations of earth who ally themselves against the Jews, will consider Jerusalem easy for the taking, but will find themselves and all the armies of the north, east and south powerless and reeling from this "burdensome stone" over which they cannot protect themselves from being "cut in pieces." All the nations that oppose Israel will find themselves with absolutely no capacity to stand against the immovable rock of "the Lord of hosts," the God of His people. Israel will have had a time of suffering and would have been totally wiped out except for the covenant God had made with them.

Opposition against the Jews has been going on all over the world for generations. Because of that covenant God made with Abraham first, and then has been renewed even to the time of David, the king of Israel, the chosen people have not been able to be destroyed. God has His own plans which the antichrist and all the nations of earth together cannot defeat.

It would seem like the little nation of Israel would not be able to stand up against, let alone survive, the onslaught of united nations against them. But in that coming day the leaders of the people of Jerusalem and all Israelis will acknowledge "the Lord of hosts" in their hearts as their true Messiah. It will not be with skepticism but with faith in Him that they will acknowledge His as their only strength. This is the same One who is our Lord, our Strength, our Life, our Savior, and in whom our life is hid. He does for us what we could never do. We trust Him, lean on Him and know Him personally, so to believers in Him today we can understand that all power to live for Him and serve Him in this present ungodly world, comes from Him.

Against a blazing fire that cannot be quenched, even the strongest foes have to flee or be consumed. That is how the preservation of Jerusalem from the enemies is described. That is the analogy used when the Jews are preserved by a fire that is not able to be out. We often see examples of such a thing when a fire breaks out and cannot be stopped either in forests or in buildings. Men are powerless to stop it. How much more so when "our God is a consuming fire." The area around Jerusalem will experience deliverance and then the city itself when God intervenes without any kind of manmade deliverance.

The suffering of Israel during the tribulation will be great. Their deliverance will result in them awakening to the awful mistake of rejecting the Lord Jesus Christ when He came the first time to bless them. The fear and mourning of the Jews will be real when they see the sign ("the Jews require a sign") of the Lord's coming in the heavens like it was described in the book of Ezekiel chapter one. Also, there are descriptions in Revelation 1, Habakkuk 3 and other glimpses of the coming of the Lord in glory and power in various places through the scriptures. The Holy Spirit, beautifully described here as the Spirit of grace and supplications, will move upon them to look on the One "whom they pierced."

When that happens, they will realize that the One they had rejected and crucified, was their Messiah, and they will mourn in desperation like a parent would grieve over the death of a firstborn child. Their spiritual and physical eyes will be opened to see the Lord Jesus as their Messiah, for who He is, and they will repent with great mourning and real grief. How it will humble them when they realize what happened to the Lord Jesus Christ when He came to them the first time and "they received Him not."

The Holy Spirit will convict not only the nation as a whole, but each family, each individual, will repent and accept the Lord Jesus Christ as their Messiah. The families of David, the royal line, and the families of the
priesthood, from the highest to the lowest will truly repent. Women and men as individual will humble themselves in genuine sorrow and contrition before the Lord. Like Saul of Tarsus, they will fear the victorious Messiah ("I am Jesus...") and realize this was the suffering Messiah. The same Person who came as the suffering Messiah will be among His people as the victorious Messiah. The stupidity of the experts will be no longer of any count among God's people when "the stone which the builders rejected" becomes the Head of the corner.

Zechariah 12:2. "Behold, I will make a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem."

A CUP OF TREMBLING.

It is going to come in a future day - a day of recompense.

When all will gather to bring them down against all common sense -
Because the end of the story is already written, but people don't stop to read;
Jerusalem will send those who surround her reeling, because the Word they did not heed.

Gathered against them will be armies so large, the land will be full of them.
God will unleash righteous judgment, there will be no hiding then.
Jerusalem will remain; God's promises He will keep - they will be fulfilled.
The cup of trembling will not cease until God has done what He will.

Then they will look upon the One whose hands, feet and side they pierced.
The Mighty One who will deliver them, is the One whose righteous wrath is fierce.
Their tears will flow and the bitterness they imposed on Him will come on them.
The sounds of their mourning will be heard everywhere as they look on Him.

God's grace is so great. He will show to them the same grace He showed to me.
When they repent and they are humbled and make supplication on bended knee -
He will speak peace and forgiveness to them, though in bitterness they cry.
His love does not change or weaken towards them, in the same way it did not pass me by.

Though there is reason to fear as we look around and see even nations tremble.
I know my Lord, and by faith I am sure He draws very near to the humble.
So, I will not fear evil even in the valley of death that seems to stalk the land.
My trust is in Him who holds the cup of trembling - and me, in His pierced hands.

"O Lord God, this day of judgment seems to be coming near. I looked at that map of the Middle East and saw what even unbelievers can see. Thy people, the Jews, are in a place of great peril. Yet I am sure the outcome of all the discontent will be exactly what is in Thy plans. So, I rest in Thee this morning - and thank Thee that I am safe in the hollow of His hands. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Zechariah 12

IN THAT DAY

All down through the centuries there has been a never-ending supply of God's mercy, grace, forgiveness and cleansing power for sin. In that sense the fountain of the cleansing power of Christ's blood has never been limited to those of faith who "come(th) to God (and) must believe that he is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

It was the deliberate blindness of Israel that kept them from the blessings of God's grace in cleansing them from all sin. Sadly, that blindness still continues, not only in Jews who reject Jesus our Lord as their Messiah, but also in people who have been confronted with the Person and work of Christ who "suffered, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God," and personally reject Him as their own Savior. It is "in that day" yet to come that Jews who survive the tribulation, that they will find that they can be pardoned from their guilt.

That fountain is open to people today because "the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin." It is the "Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." People all over the world today are coming into the good of the cleansing power of Christ's blood as individuals who repent of their sin and put their trust in Christ alone for salvation. "In that day" yet to come, Israel will join the glorified saints of God in praising God for the "wonder-working power" of the blood of Christ.

The fountain that is opened is not only for sin, but also for uncleanness. This is the sense of cleansing from the defilement of sin. The moral cleansing needed is what our Lord said was "living water." This comes to us from the word of God today which tells us that the defiling filth of the flesh and sin in the life of a believer, is dealt with when we "confess our sins." When that happens, He is "faithful and just to forgive us our sins."
The on-going results of the sacrifice of Christ provides for our daily cleansing by the "washing of water by the word."

"In that day" even the names of idols will be banished. The image of the antichrist he will make of himself, will be gone and forgotten, along with all other idols, mankind has made. False prophets who have deceived the people will be abolished. Evil spirits which are behind the false teaching will no longer be able to defile and deceive. Even those young Jews who have the world-view of the antichrist and globalism based on human ideas, will be done away with.

This attitude and teaching have become popular today, so that instead of facing and dealing with sin, there are those who promote tolerance in place of righteousness. Indecency instead of modesty is well accepted. Sexual license instead of honor and morality is even legislated by governments in the world. In the millennium there will be restoration to morality, justice, truth and integrity. If all forms of evil are so prevalent today, how much more will it be in the tribulation when the church is gone with its measure of restraint that is still here.

False prophets inflicted wounds on themselves between their hands in the time of Elijah as a sign of their sincerity and desperation to the gods in which they believed. When asked what was the cause of those wounds, they will say they received them in the "house of their friends." Our Lord Jesus received wounds from His enemies not His friends when He was here. He never denied who He was. He made it plain He was sent from the Father to seek and to save the lost. He was not a slave of anyone, let alone mankind. He was God's Obedient Servant.

The sword was released against our Lord on Calvary. It was there when He was on the cross that He was wounded for our transgressions. Before our Lord was taken the night before His crucifixion, He quoted some of these poetic words as He identified Himself as the Shepherd. The sheep that would be scattered was Israel when the Romans would come and kill over a million Jews under the armies of Titus. Normally there would be none left so they would not even be a recognizable people, but the Lord preserved them as an identifiable people unto this day.

He would also preserve for Himself a people for His name throughout the world, that would include both Jews and Gentiles. They would become “the church of God,” of which believers in Christ are a part of today whether they are Jews or Gentiles. Those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ are today those who belong to Christ - Christians. This is not a national identification such as will happen when Israel is restored to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Looking ahead into the future when the enemies of the Jewish nation will seek to exterminate them all by "driving them into the sea," there will be another holocaust in which millions of Jews will be killed by their enemies under the influence of the antichrist and enemies that surround the small nation of Israel. One third of the population will survive because our Lord Jesus Christ will appear after the refining time of the nation takes place. Unbelief, skepticism, atheism, agnosticism, secularism, materialism and all that pollutes the Jews today will be dealt with. They will suffer the consequences of sin and rejection of Christ the same as will every individual who does the same thing.

God will purify His people and from the remnant will come those from who He will make Israel a great nation. At that time all nations of the world will recognize Israel as the kingdom from which all other nations will be blessed. The Jews will call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and He will hear them. God will call them His people, and they will say, "The Lord is my God." How important it is today for people as individuals to call upon the name of the Lord now. He promises He will save them.

Zechariah 13:1. "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness."

A FOUNTAIN OPENED.

From whence comes this water that arises to make us clean?
Deep in the heart of God there is a full supply.
Is it possible that all has been forgiven - is that what this does mean?
The only way such cleansing comes is if the Sinless One dies.
And that He did, when He came to His own,
But Him they would not receive.
Now that fountain is opened for all to come -
And the life given us is life indeed.

This wasn't provided by a whim of God -
His justice must be maintained.
The wounds in the hands of our blessed Lord -
Were made when He redemption for us obtained.
The sword awoke; the Shepherd was smitten -
The sheep all turned and fled.
All the blessing that came when that fountain was opened
Came from the blood Christ shed.

It may be that there are trying times
From which we cannot flee.
The testing of the refining fire -
Is that we more like our Lord will be.
Now when in joy or sorrow,
We call upon His name -
From no one else will we borrow -
This opened fountain has made us clean.

"Thy grace, O God, has reached all the world. There is no one who can claim to have been ignored. So many will not come to the fountain of Thy forgiveness, that it seems the supply must soon be stopped. I am so glad that I can truly say, 'The Lord is my God.'" In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

Zechariah 14

THE DAY OF THE LORD

In coming to the end of the prophecy of Zechariah, it seems appropriate to recall that his name means, "Jehovah remembers." The meaning of his father's name, Berachiah, is "Jehovah blesses, and the meaning of his grandfather's name is "The appointed time." Putting them together gives an overview of the messages of these prophesies and visions in this book. In this last chapter we find a wonderful conclusion of a book that began in despair.

The last conflict of the nation of Israel is described when Jerusalem is surrounded by armies of many different nations, besieged and taken. Then the Lord intervenes and makes a way of escape for those left in the city. Two rivers of "living water" flow in two directions from the city to bless, and the enemies of the Jews are punished. But then the remnant and those of other nations become worshippers in the city of Jerusalem and live their lives in that way in that place where holiness is seen in every aspect of life.

There are a number of different "days" in scripture that are significant. "The Lord's day" is a day of resurrection, remembrance, revelation and responsibility. "The day of Christ" comes when the church enters into its full blessings in Christ. "The day of God" refers to the eternal state in which God is all and in all. "The day of the Lord" commences after the church is raptured and the Holy Spirit no longer restrains evil as He has during this day of grace. The antichrist will be revealed and the judgments of the tribulation will take place culminating in Christ coming power to "execute judgment upon all..."

In this last chapter of Zechariah, man's day is past. The tribulation is near the end. Jerusalem is besieged and then taken. The armies that will gather to overcome Jerusalem will be from many nations. Anti-Semitism has been rampant all over the world for a long time and the nations that will gather there will try to do what God has not allowed to be done for centuries - annihilate the Jews. At the absolute extremity of hope of the Jews, the Lord will intervene as we read about in Matthew 24 and 2Thessalonians 1 and 2. He will conquer all who oppose Jerusalem and the Israelis by the word of His power.

When He comes, He will come "with ten thousands of His saints." The overwhelming sight of our Lord and all the saints, and the holy angels, will strike terror and death into those who oppose the remnant of the Jews. His step onto the Mount of Olives will be accompanied with earth quakes and the mountain will divide into two parts with a valley opening between them making a way for those Jews inside the city to escape.

That day will be a day of darkness, gloominess and twilight that ends in a great burst of light as the Lord is revealed as the Mighty Conqueror. Two rivers of "living waters" will flow from Jerusalem bringing blessing to the west and east. Whether the waters are literal, spiritual or both is not the major concern because there will come from it blessing which the Holy Spirit will bring to the world.

The Lord Jesus Christ will be the King who establishes a true form of government that will ensure righteousness rules on earth under His benevolent authority. The city of Jerusalem during the millennium will be a glorious and safe place to live. There will be peace and prosperity. Joy, worship and praise to the Lord will be there and continue as common-place.
Those who oppose the King and His people will face real punishment that will be terrible to behold and experience. It will be a plague, the effects of which will evident on individuals, communities, cities, nations and even on the animals of those in opposition to the Sovereign Ruler.

The nations of earth will still have an identity and will be required to have representation at the annual Feast of Tabernacles at Jerusalem. The other feasts the Jews kept will have no reason to be continued. The Passover was fulfilled when Christ our Passover Lamb was sacrificed for us. The day of Atonement does not need to be kept because "He made peace through the blood of His cross." Salvation is accepted and real to each one who trusts His as their own personal Savior. The feast of First-fruits was a foreshadowing of the resurrection of Christ which has past when he rose from among the dead in the power of endless life. The feast of Pentecost has already been fulfilled when the Holy Spirit came. The Feast of Tabernacles was a feast of thanksgiving that celebrates all the blessings the people of God have in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Not everyone who lives during the millennium will willingly inwardly submit to the authority of the Lord. There will be millions born during that time who will not have experienced the tribulation and the consequences of self-will and rejection of Christ. There will be those who will experience the punishment of rebellion and stubbornness. Some will actually go to war against the Lord after Satan is released for a time from the pit. The battle of Gog and Magog reminds us that the hearts of those who are not believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are still deceitful and desperately wicked. They will resent the imposition of the rule of peace. Everything at that time will be permeated by holiness even to pots and pans in the temple or the bells on horses. Those who love darkness rather than light, will be forever consigned to everlasting darkness in the lake of fire.

At the conclusion of the millennium there will be a "new heavens and new earth." In that eternal state the "new Jerusalem" coming down out of heaven will be a suitable place to dwell on earth. God's plans and purposes will continue to be carried out in ways that are far beyond our capacity to grasp. We do know that in "the ages to come. He will show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

Zechariah's prophesy does bring a stirring message of the end times with hope and assurance that in spite of all that is bad and getting worse, our King is coming and will reign in righteousness forever and ever. God knows the future and he controls events according to His sovereign will. We find our hope and trust in Him and rest securely in the facts that these prophetic glimpses of the future give us. This challenges us to not give way to that which is wrong all around us, but maintain holiness of life and commitment to the word of God and the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Zechariah 14:4. "And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south."

**ZECHARIAH 14:4.**

**HIS FEET.**

When He walked where Moses hid, the stones there turned to grave.
The hardened rock began to glow like light from fine sapphire.
Earth is called in scripture, the footstool of His feet.
Before them every knee will bow when they Messiah meet.

Infant feet were for a time concealed in Mary's womb.
Soon the feet of the Obedient Son filled the reason for which He came.
Moving from place to place, great blessing they brought to man.
Those footprints left by the Son of God no longer are traced on sand.

But when from the sand they went to where He walked on water,
There was unmistakable evidence they were the feet of the Creator.
From day to day, and from place to place they went bringing to many blessings.
Even when sitting on a well, where He sat His human feet resting.

He walked out to the garden, then bowed down in fervent prayer.
From there He was led as a lamb; finally, to the cross where there
They nailed His feet and hands to a cross they formed of common wood.
The pierced feet of the Savior will remind us why He died.

When He ascended into heaven, His feet left earth at last.
Now He walks among the lampstands with feet like shining brass.
In a day yet in the future, His feet again shall stand
Upon the mount of Olives when as King He claims His land.
Then there will be gathered to Him from every part of earth,
All men from everywhere, the lowly and those of royal birth.
Before that King Supreme, every person a date will keep;
And every human being will bow before our Lord Jesus' feet.

“I thank Thee, O Lord God, that by Thy Spirit, I was brought to bow in contrition and thanksgiving before the Lord Jesus Christ. In a fashion, today I bow at His feet and His name I repeat - and the Lover of sinners adore. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

MALACHI
Broken relationships

Perhaps thirty of forty years after Nehemiah's day of governing the remnant of the people of Israel who a generation or more before had returned from Babylon, Malachi came with important messages from the Lord. The book is written as a dialogue between the Lord of hosts and His people. However, those who were in the promised land had become used to life the way it was and had no real personal remembrance of the days of captivity in Babylon. Second and third generations often do not have the same commitment to the things of God as those who have experienced a real deliverance from sin and its consequences.

This attitude is not uncommon in those whose zeal for God has waned or are away from the Lord in heart and life. Those who want to control their own lives and actions without divine guidance or intervention may become hypercritical which indicates a sad spiritual condition, which leads in turn to complacency, decline of spiritual interests, smug self-satisfaction and even skepticism. That is what was happening when Malachi was called as a messenger to confront the nation.

He was the last of the prophets in the Old Testament although John the Baptist came after him in the spirit and power of Elijah. The four hundred years of silence from God and darkness in the nation of Israel from the time of the defeat of the Persians until the conquering of the nation by the Romans, was characteristic of a backslidden condition. The messages Malachi was to pass on to the people were very solemn and important.

The state of the people of God was that of unfaithfulness to God that led to a broken relationship between the Lord of hosts and His people. Sadly, that same condition is that of the majority of people today - even the people of God. There are those who profess to be Christians who have become so used to life in the world, that they adapt as closely as possible to the lifestyle of unbelievers. They think it is important to conform as closely as they can to the ways of the world so they "can reach those who 'haven't opened their heart, or given their heart to Jesus.'"
It is characteristic of many to compare themselves with others, like those who became the sect of the Pharisees in the years of that interval between the testaments. They developed a whole series of "dos and don'ts" that they thought made them superior to those who were "less spiritual." On the other hand, the sect of the Sadducees were skeptics and, and they became the existentialists who doubted almost everything but themselves and their own opinions. It was in this sad spiritual condition the Jews were found when we read the four Gospels of the New Testament. It was to these people John the Baptist preached national repentance, and to which our Lord Jesus Christ came "full of grace and truth." In their antagonism and critical attitude, both of these groups came together to oppose our Lord when He came into this world to seek and to save the lost.

Malachi’s messages were to the priesthood and leadership of the people, and then to the people themselves. It was in similar times John's message and then the Lord's messages were given. It is the same today. Religious leaders are far away from God. Those who lead the people only make a bare acknowledgement of God, and most people today don't care one way or another about spiritual truth as long as it doesn't interfere with their chosen lifestyle.

Malachi's name means "My angel or messenger." Levi in the second chapter is called "the messenger of the Lord of hosts. John the Baptist in chapter three is called God's "messenger," and the Lord Himself is called "the Messenger of the covenant." The message Malachi was to deliver was to urge the people to remember God's love to them. Also, it was that they would repent of their sins and return to Him. Then they would be willing to rehearse among themselves the fact of God's love, grace and promised coming, so that the broken relationship could be healed.

The first few verses of the book are a message of love from God to Israel, but in willful blindness they questioned that love. The Lord gave them an example of what He had done for them. In the Old Testament scriptures, it is God's love for Israel that is emphasized. In the New Testament it is God's love for the world that is declared. The next part of the book is a message of rebuke, first to the priests and then to the people. The last part of the book is a message of hope given in a series of prophecies beginning with John the Baptist, and going to the coming of the Lord and what He will do in the future.

The condition of the people as a whole in that day will be evident, but there will be a faithful remnant who will not be afraid of the day of the Lord and will endure through those dark times. The promise of Elijah to come before the "great and dreadful day of the Lord," was well known by the Jews even when our Lord was here. Seven times Malachi passed on the challenge of the Lord to His people, and seven times they arrogantly answered back with saucy questions and refused the warnings of Malachi. That same mindset and spiritual condition was prevalent in the Gospel accounts when the priests, elders, Pharisees and Sadducees led the people away from the Lord Jesus to the extent they said, "Away with Him. Crucify Him. We will not have this Man to reign over us."

Twenty-five times Malachi speaks for the Lord of hosts (Almighty) with words like "saith the Lord," or "saith the Lord of hosts." It is possible for us today to get so used to all of God's blessings to us that we take them all for granted. That is when we in essence forget the Lord Himself. Twelve times the words "ye say," are used by the Lord in reply to the people when His messages and warnings were not responded to. God keeps account of what we say, and corrects it, but because the nonchalant attitude among most in our day towards divine things, people think nothing of what they say, and to whom they say it - whom they even ignore. But we need to remember broken relationships can be healed, and forgiveness and grace on God's part is available when repentance and returning to the Lord is real.

Malachi 1:11. "For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts."

AFTER 100 YEARS.

They had come from slavery and now were free in the temple newly built. Enthusiasm was high; they loved the Lord. His will they were careful to fulfill. But that first generation is gone, and the second one too - worship has since turned to a form. Where once worshipping priests were filled with praise; now hearts are no longer warm.

There were still sacrifices made when they came together; but the offerings they made were cheap. Neglect for God's order was considered unnecessary. God's way they neglected to keep. It seemed to them much easier and faster to conduct the offerings in their own easy way. After 100 years they were more concerned about themselves, than the truth God had to say.
A failing priesthood influences a lot of people when they don’t follow God’s laws. When a nation turns away from the ways of the Lord, a failing priesthood is usually the cause.

A relationship with God is broken by carelessness, disobedience or neglect - there will be sad consequences that follow after, even though God loves us yet.

God doesn’t change, neither His laws or His love, and if His people ignore the way God has told us to worship and serve Him, there will be judgments in store. Correcting wrongs begins with warnings that often come through chosen men. We make a big mistake if we close our ears and refuse the message from them.

God has plans to bless the world through the people He has chosen. May it never be said of us He has called, that after 100 years we ignore Him. Far be it from us to question His Word and the way He wants His work to be done. Worship of God is not for our benefit; it is that we might honor His Son.

We need to be on guard for failure and neglect; if we see it, quickly we must change - and go back in haste to the pattern He gave, determined to give honor to His name. Even though more than 100 years have passed, may it ever be close to our hearts - That God intends our worship to honor Him, just the same as it did at the start.

“I can see Father, how easy it would be to make holy things secondary in the desire to please men and attract a crowd. May we always be committed to Thee and Thy Word as the foundation of our relationship with Thee. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

Malachi 1

THE NATION’S DISRESPECT

The people of Israel had not learned why they had been taken captive by Assyria, and then later the people of Judah taken captive into Babylon. Prophets had warned them, entreated them, and earnest taught them the reasons for their captivity, but for the most part, their messages had been only casually heard, and/or been ignored. It is possible to hear truth time after time preached from the word of God and not even be affected by it or remember what has been said and taught.

It is important that we learn and live by the principles given to us in the word of God by our loving heavenly Father. Hypocrisy and carelessness in the way we live breaks the relationship God wants to have with us. Sincerity is demonstrated by how we live and the kind of reflection we make on others as to who our Lord Jesus Christ is and why He should important to them. Devotion, love and appreciation for God cannot be faked. Insincerity will show itself in one way or another. The heart of a person toward another will become obvious, and will show where our real affections lie.

The priests in the time of Malachi’s prophecy had taken a careless attitude toward God and His word. Their service had become merely an occupation to them, and so they had become arrogant and lazy toward God’s standards of practice and spiritual worship which had been passed on to them. In spite of that, God still loved His people. Consequences for disobedience does not mean people are not loved, but a loving Father has just reasons for what He does in order to bring those He cares for back to Him and to live by faith in Him.

In the early verses of this chapter the sins of the priests and the people had become obvious because of their willful disobedience. They doubted God’s love and questioned it. That was how the devil first got to Eve. He cast doubt on God’s love, and even people in the world today go so far to blame God for not doing something about all the evil mankind is bringing on themselves. Many go so far as to even doubt the existence of God.

The Lord gave proofs to the children of Israel when they said “Wherein hast thou loved us?” One of the main themes of the Old Testament is God’s declaration and His actions of love toward Israel. In the New Testament God declares His love for the whole world. The words, “Esau have I hated,” simply means that God in His sovereign choice appointed Jacob to be the one through whom our Lord Jesus would come to be the Messiah of Israel. For Malachi to proclaim what he was told to speak to the people, would not have made him a popular man or very well accepted.

Spurned or slighted love is obvious when one is willing to disobey God’s word and do what they want in spite of His affection for them - and His warnings. Lack of love reveals itself in selfish actions and attitudes
that are inconsistent with appreciation of the grace of God to us. Love for God is demonstrated when there is love for one another as God has loved us. That means we want the best for each other, not just make each other feel good about themselves. The arrogance of those who question God's love for them is real evidence of wickedness in their hearts. Israel's spiritual sins were first of all to deny God's love for them. Secondly, they despised God's name, and third they defiled God's altar. The message of love that begins this book becomes a message of rebuke because of the willful disobedience of God's people, beginning with the priests.

The name "Lord of hosts (Almighty)" is used 24 times in the book of Malachi. The title "Father," is also used to indicate there should be honor and respect that was not being shown to God. As casual attitude toward the name of the Lord is indicative of one who is not a true child of God. A father loves his child, and a child or a servant owes respect to the father and master. To shrug off the questions God asks was showing contempt for Him.

Priests at that time insolently asked a question of God, "Whereby have we despised Thy name?" Those men were responsible for the spiritual guidance of the people and should have showed reverential respect for the holiness of God and His name. They had been consecrated to deal with holy things but had treated the things of God as a mere business. That is a common practice among "spiritual advisors" today. They decide on "the ministry" as a career choice rather than having been called by God to be a shepherd of His sheep.

The rebellious attitude of people often is a result of the sneering indifference to the holy things of God on the part of those who lead others. What we give to God is a reflection of our real attitude toward Him and spiritual things. To give God our "leftovers" is an insult to the One who gives us all things to enjoy. There are many today who profess to be spiritual leaders, but deny the fundamentals of Christianity. Some consider the verbal inspiration of the scriptures, the deity of Christ, His virgin birth, and the Gospel to be merely and allegory - a story for moral teaching. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in one who is born again, the rapture of the church and prophecies relating to the future are not important to many because it may make people "uncomfortable."

Giving to God that which was inferior was one way the skepticism of the priests and people was made evident. God told them they wouldn't do that with the governors of the land, but they thought their rejects were good enough for God. To do the work of God deceitfully is a curse, and is worse than not doing it at all. To be contemptuous of God and His word is the heights of disrespect and disdain.

Malachi took a look ahead prophetically when he saw the day when the Lord of hosts and His name would be great among all the nations of earth. The Gospel spread throughout the world is a little glimpse of the blessings of a future day that will be fulfilled in the millennium.

The people at the time of Malachi seemed bored with the things of God and the commitment to Him that was expected of those who love Him. That happens today to the extent that some professing believers will only attend a church service on Christmas and Easter. Others who are saved will only obey the Lord's call to gather together unto Him, for the Lord's Supper on Lord's Day - and that when it is convenient for them. Others will do what God wants, when there is nothing else, they want to do for themselves or their own pleasure.

Some churches only open the doors to the building in which they meet for a short time on Sunday. In that way people can get their church attendance out of the way so they can go to a ball game, or to the beach, or to a movie and have some fun. How grieving that must be to the Lord who is "a great King - the Lord of hosts - and whose name is to be feared among the nations."

Malachi 1:11. "For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts."

**GOD'S GREAT NAME.**

You would think they knew better than to despise God's name.
The priests: role was to represent Him to the people who came
With offerings and sacrifices with which to worship the Lord,
And they were to carefully offer, according to God's Word.

But they became insensitive to God's Word and His truth,
Choosing to give God the leftovers instead of that of highest worth,
When anyone has the idea of worshiping God on the cheap,
They need to be reminded, what we sow, we reap.

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Neglect of things that are close to God's heart
Is an act of disobedience right from the start.
If those who lead God's people act carelessly in spiritual things,
They should not be surprised at the serious consequences that brings.

I know God's name is worshipped by many
Who are spread over the world, for if there be any
Who fear God and work righteousness, they are accepted;
What little they know, has not been neglected.

Those who should know better, often make up excuses
For the things they neglect and their spiritual abuses
That they think will take the place of what God commands,
But there will be no avoiding the judgment of rebellious man.

May we never think that what God wants, can easily be replaced
By some scheme or substitute because we have a smile on our face.
God is not deceived by insensitivity or careless neglect.
His name is great and honored; He deserves our highest respect.

"Father God, may nothing I say or do bring dishonor to Thee. May what I offer, always be acceptable to Thee. May I never carelessly or casually address Thee or Thy work. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Malachi 2

THREE BROKEN COVENANTS

Relationships that are meaningful and last, depend on the degree of commitment on the part of each person to the other. That requires an openness and trust that goes beyond "feeling comfortable" or "I just know," to a calm assurance that barriers are removed and each can look the other in the eye knowing that all is well between them. Three broken covenants on the part of the people of Israel and Judah were the cause of the captivity that is still felt by the Jewish people until this day.

There was a covenant with the priests who had two major responsibilities. They were to represent the people to God, and were to bring the people to God, but in the days of Malachi did this falsely. Therefore, they could not represent God to the people. Also, there was the covenant God had with the people of Israel and Judah. They were to remain pure to God and loyal to Him and His word. On His part He provided them with temporal and spiritual blessings, and would "be their God, and they would be His people," on earth. Then there were broken covenants by individuals who divorced the wives of their youth, and took pagan idol worshipping women of the enemy nations around them.

It was to this disregard of God's law that God give His command to the priests in the first four verses of this chapter. Change from what you have been doing in wrong ways by sincere repentance, or you will be lost forever. The tribe of Levi had been set apart for God's service, but that must be done in God's way - not in ways convenient or advantageous to them. God gave warning to the priests of punishment if they continued to dishonor His name. How important it is that we who belong to Him commit ourselves to honor our Lord's name and give Him glory for who He is!

How do we know what is important to God? His word is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. When we truly love God and set our hearts and minds on Him, we will gladly do what He says. To disregard the word of God is to do what those priests did. They ignored the commandment to the priest, broke the covenant God had with the priests, and so He showed His contempt for the priests. By defiling God's covenant with them, the priests led the people astray instead of guiding them in righteousness and holiness. The background of the priests should have motivated them to be examples because of the special way God had used the Levites in the past.

The covenant of "life and peace" had been made because of the reverential "fear" of the Lord and respect for God's name that was to be characteristics of the priesthood. His words were "the law of truth." His walk was in "truth and equity." His example was to be that he "did turn many away from iniquity." The responsibility of the priesthood was to "keep knowledge" so those who they served would know they were the messengers of the Lord of hosts. His commitment to God's word was more important than the duties of ceremony he carried out. Instead, the priests led others into sin. God's truth is our highest responsibility to maintain.
For a person to claim to speak to the people for God, and to serve Him, and yet not do that in God's ways, will destroy the faith of those who trust them and their leadership, and will bring God's displeasure down on them. There were ideas that started in the days of Malachi which were man-made interpretations of the scriptures and created the "traditions of the fathers." These became the basis of teaching by those who rejected the word of God. The Talmud, and writings of men contain volumes of human opinions that add to or take away from the word of God. This practice is happening today in Christian denominations in which people decide what they are going to believe and do by the votes of people. These "tenants" become the basis of practice and belief that lead to cults and false teaching.

The oral laws passed from one generation to another turned the whole nation away from God and that led to the rejection and crucifixion of Christ. The "leaven" of the Pharisees, Herodians and Sadducees brought judgment down on the nation of Israel. Even today, to many Jews the nation and the religion are one and the same. To put faith in the Lord Jesus as the Christ has no place in their lives. They are willing to die for that the nation might survive, but are not willing to acknowledge the One who died for them.

From verse ten on, Malachi is the speaker and makes his appeal to the priests and people because of their present sin. His rebuke is that they should have been messengers of God, but they did not know God's will, nor were they serving in God's way. Willful ignorance is always inexcusable. "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." The nation's sins included their detestable ways. The priests had allowed influential people to do what they wanted in breaking the law. Partiality in the matters of the word of God does not escape God's eyes. Playing favorites in the things of God demeans His word, and that in turn demeans God Himself and His authority. Sinful people are unfaithful people and cannot be trusted even though they may claim to be believers. To live as if God does not exist or as if what He desires is of little worth, is not acceptable in any way. God did not accept their offerings and would not bless them.

Someone said, "If He is not Lord of all, He is not Lord at all." That is well said in view of complacency towards God's word which leads to accepting sin as normal. When that happens that leads to breakups in relationships such as Malachi addressed and we do as well today. The breakup of marriages is a result of sin. False worship is a result of sin. Shifting blame to others - even to God, and refusal to look at ourselves as the problem and cause of consequences is a result of sin.

The people of Israel had a covenant with God which they invoked when they felt it was profitable to them, and for their advantage, but if not, they acted as if God was not their Father and they had no responsibility toward each other. So, some divorced their wives and married women who worshipped idols. They were supposed to be a holy nation and were prohibited from marrying into pagan families. "Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" is still a principle of life for Christians today.

Even though the Jews denied the faith they professed, they kept up the appearance of their religion. That was a mockery of the truth. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Some Jewish men deserted their wives and took pagan women perhaps for wealth and influence. Those guilty men whose moral compass was gone, and whose consciences were seared, did not seem to know what they had done was wrong in the sight of God. The root of divorce is sin and its lasting consequences are also a result of that sin. Those men were breaking the marriage bond, and they also ignored the bond they had with God. Broken relationships resulted then, and now, instead of the blessings of unity.

We need to have the same commitment to marriage that God has to His people. Twisting words of truth to suit our own actions, or the positions we take without the word of God behind them, will in God's time bring consequences and punishment for sin that cannot be avoided. The Jews even attacked the blessings that God had given them by saying, in an attempt to justify their own actions, that God was doing good to evildoers, so was being unfair to them. That attitude of calling evil good, is not uncommon throughout the whole history of mankind. Not only were the sins Malachi condemned detestable way, but they led to deserted wives and distorted words.

Malachi 2:5-6. "My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name. The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips; he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity."

LEARN FROM THE PAST GENERATIONS.

There is much to learn from those who lived for God in the past. The new priests had become corrupt and changed things so the people would feel more comfortable with them, rather than the Lord their God. Those
in the past had made a covenant with God and took seriously the fact that when covenants are made, a new life, and a new life principle, are at work. God gave them life and peace and they had reverenced and feared the Lord. They knew Him as a holy God who wanted a holy people. For years the Lord’s people enjoyed their covenant relationship with Him and He gave them the life and peace He gives to those who love, and respect Him.

Truth was so real to the earlier generation that it became a law to which they were committed. They spoke truth and did not mislead others with subtle and deceptive words. There was fellowship with God as they led the people in righteousness and turned them away from discrimination against those who were different.

Then, there came the latest generation who heard, but would not lay truth to their heart. They had the feasts, but carried them out according to their own ways. They didn’t care that God has a pattern and plan He follows for the lasting fellowship He wants with His own people. They were very concerned for their own financial situations but left unfulfilled their responsibility to God. What will the Lord do?

He offers opportunity to bring into the storehouse that which belongs to God. Then there will come the abundant blessings that the Lord wants to give His people when they seek Him. He is wanting to refine and purify the silver. His plan is to have a cleansed people that fear the Lord and enjoy all that He has done for them. They will write a book of remembrance of all God was to them in the past, and they will reverence every mention of His name. They will be His own for ever and will rejoice forever when the Sun of righteousness arises. The Lord is not finished with us yet. We are well to learn from the past history of God’s people. It is essential for happy fellowship with God to act according to the law of truth.

"O righteous God: we are slow learners and fast forgetters. I need to be reminded that all Thy ways in the past were not without a plan or a purpose. I want to be sure I have learned from those before me and be able to teach those around me and perhaps behind me that «as for God, His ways are perfect.» Amen.”

Malachi 3:1-5

GOD ANSWERS THEIR QUESTIONS

An insincere, nonchalant response to a warning can be given and perhaps understood to a degree, when people have been so preoccupied with their own interests that hey haven’t paid attention to what is going on around them. But when a cynical attitude leads one to ask an ignorant and insincere question, that is very offensive. When the Jews asked, "How have we wearied Him?" in reference to the Lord, and by blaming God for the sins of people, they opened the way for the first verses of Malachi 3 to be given as a warning answer. The Lord’s Coming is not some scare tactic to make people act out of fear, but is an actual fact to let the Jews, and the world, know that He is coming to deal judgmentally with sin.

The Jews had complained, "Where is the God of justice (judgment)?" because they had wanted Him to deal in judgment with those who opposed them. Their smug complacency had come to the forefront and they did not consider their own failure and unfaithfulness. So, it was the first part of the Lord's answer to tell them clearly of messengers who would come. The first would come to "Prepare [ye] the way of the Lord." This is a reference to John the Baptist. Then He declares the fact of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in the two aspects of His coming. His first coming would be to reveal Himself as the Son of God, and to bring about true repentance in His people for their willful ignoring of God's word and will. "...But His own received Him not.”

People all over the world have been trying to serve God in their own ways, often in view of hoping for material blessings. Because this does not work the way they want, they accuse God of being unfair, and blame Him for the problems human sin brings upon them and the world in general. Some will even deny God's existence by saying the "concept of God" is of man's own making to try and keep people civilized. The fact is, if God were absolutely fair in dealing with all mankind, no one would even exist.

God's answer in dealing with the problem of sin and the skepticism of the people is to purify by just judgment for sin, like a refiner purifies a metal. He did not do this by initiating some program, or have a variety of means to bring cleansing from sin and its consequences, nor even by a message giving information. He has addressed this problem by sending a person, a messenger. John the Baptist is called, "My messenger." Then following him is the "Messenger of the covenant," the Lord Jesus Christ.

God's answer was the second Messenger who satisfied the terms of the old covenant which demanded death for those who broke the covenant they had made with God. He did this by establishing a new and better covenant. This new covenant would change those who were spiritually dead because of sin, to being
made spiritually alive by the Spirit of God and the word of God. They would be "born again;" "made alive in Christ" who "suffered, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." "The Messenger" told Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, that his new birth was absolutely essential to enter the kingdom of God.

The effect of the new birth, a spiritual regeneration, has been experienced by people all over the world, not just the Jews. This new covenant is made with people of all nations who come to God by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ as their own Savior from sin, its power, and its consequences. This new covenant makes it distinct from the covenant God made with Israel as a chosen earthly people. John's preaching concluded the final entreaty for national repentance. Their lip service was not acceptable. From then on it was "Him that cometh to Me, I will in not wise cast out."

The intention of John's message, and of the coming of the Lord Jesus to earth, was that human pride would yield to humility, sin and dishonesty would be rejected and righteousness and honesty would be real. "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." A few people of the Jews responded to John's message, and there were some Jews who were glad when the Lord Jesus Christ came the first time. But the nation as a whole, "despised and rejected" Him. When He cleansed the temple saying they had made the house of prayer a den of thieves, He exposed their religious hypocrisy for what it truly was.

In telling of judgment on sinners for their ungodly actions, Malachi's message was twofold. The Lord was coming in grace first, and then He was coming in governmental justice. Looking into the future, the Lord of hosts speaks of His coming as that of a refiner's fire and a launderer's soap. Israel will have a terrible time of refining to remove all the impurities they have mixed into the real worship and service of God. Like heat melts metal so impurities rise to the top so they can be skimmed off, so Israel will suffer until reality is finally seen in them as the chosen earthly people of the Lord. One who launders clothes scrubs and uses bleach to remove dirt that has permeated the cloth.

The coming of the Lord in a future day will purify His people so that their sacrifices and offerings come from clean hands and pure hearts. It it then the Lord will be pleased with His people and the priesthood will be what He intends. We learn for ourselves that the priesthood of all believers today is not what it should be. Many do not prepare sacrifices and offerings to give to the Lord. They come expecting to get spiritual blessings passed on to them from others rather than the other way around. Many are merely watching and listening as spectators rather than functioning as priests offering spiritual sacrifices. When the Lord comes, He will bring purity to His own, and will bring judgment to sinners. Those who were false representatives of God will be exposed as to who they truly are.

He watches as the heat is increased -
The colors in the metal begin to change.  
And the impurities are more fully exposed
Because of the power of the flames.
It is not because of a desire to get even
The Refiner increases the heat -
But that those things exposed by the oven
Will be taken away, not again to repeat.

Far too often we think all is well -
We are doing okay in our own eyes.
Until some unknown pressure will tell -
That I need to be pulled down to size.
Then the heat of oppression or pain,
Will do what I tried to ignore.
In the end it will be a great gain -
What seemed good once, now I will abhor.

When the Lord deals with us by His grace -
We may take what He has done for granted.
When governmental justice then takes its place -
We realize we allowed bad things in us to be planted
And to take over our life and will.
So instead of spiritual worship and service -
It is important to stop and be still -
So then, we allow God's word and Spirit to guide us.

"Father, may I learn from these verses how important the refiner's fire and launderer's soap is. Give Thy servant the common sense and spiritual discernment
to not question divine guidance and actions in my life. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Malachi 3:6-15

ROBBING GOD

Strangely the Israelis who returned from exile did not learn from their history and were repeating many of the same things their forefathers did when the unique relationship they had with God was broken because of their willful sin. The ungodly actions in which they persisted, led to the ungodly attitude they had toward God and ungodly arguments they had with the Lord. The Jews continued in disobedience to God even after returning from captivity. They were unfaithful to God and His word in spite of the difficulties they were facing all around them. Often lessons that could have been learned through the trials of life, have to be repeated over and over again by each generation. We warn our children about things that happened when we pursued a certain course of action, but they do not listen and have to go through the same things themselves.

A wrong condition of soul and spirit makes it easy for believers to deviate from the revealed will of God through His word because we want things to suit our own wishes. Coldness of heart comes from lack of communion with God and the neglect of God's word. That in turn leads to avoiding our responsibilities to Him and His people. That leads to lack of understanding as to why we are in the poor condition of soul, and we look for someone or something to blame rather than face our own sin. How we conduct ourselves and our words, walk and actions in life are a reflection of our faithfulness - or unfaithfulness.

Why would people hold back from giving to others that which belongs to them or is due them? There can be an ungodly attitude even in Christians that indicates to another person, "You do not need this as much as I do." Even if we have been allowed to use something that came from another, to say to that person, "You gave this to me. Go get your own!" would be the heights of arrogance and lack of appreciation. To give ten percent of what we have been given for the benefit of others and for the furtherance of the Lord's work, is a simple and easy way to show our appreciation to the Lord for all His benefits to us.

The Lord called to the people of Israel to "Return to Me." When one is called to "Come to me," or "Visit me," or Return to Me," more is implied than just a passing "Hello - goodbye." Meaningful communication, some personal interaction, fellowship in things of common interest and commonality are desired. That is what the Lord expects of us in the same way He did with the Jews in the past.

The unchanging God is always love, light and life. He is reliable in every way in His dealings with people. His justice and truth are unchanging. His word is unchanging - "Settled in heaven." There is no deviation in His character, and all His actions are consistent with His nature. So, when the Jews accused God of being unjust and unfair to them because of the enemies and opposition that He allowed to be directed toward them because of their sin, His call to return to Him was challenged. For some reason people think they should be able to do wrong, or not do right, and there should be no consequences. The people of Israel did not acknowledge divine ownership of everything by the One who created and maintains it all.

Tithe for the temple service of the priests and Levites was an opportunity for them to show appreciation for all they had received themselves. A tithe actually belongs to God, and to withhold that is to rob Him of that which is His. It is our "interest on the loan" of everything we receive. It is a very fair way of responding to the benefits received because it is proportionate to what we have received ourselves. To imply ignorance by saying, "How do we rob You?" is to not acknowledge God as the Giver of "every good and perfect gift." It is because of His "fullness" being made available to us that we can even live.

Arrogance, selfishness and ingratitude breaks relationships with people. How much more with God who supplies our needs and on whom we depend for everything from the air we breathe to the food we eat. In spite of ingratitude, God does not change and is ready to receive the repentant sinner who returns to Him in grateful thanks and humility. It is a principle that when we give of our labor, finances, time and talent, "it will be given unto you." God's blessings are not always material things because eternal things are more important than temporal things, and spiritual things are more important than physical things.

The "storehouse" at the temple was where the tenth part of all the people had was brought to be dispersed to the priests and Levites who gave their time to the service of the Lord. If our attitude is "What good does it do me to serve God or give to His work?" our focus is selfishly on ourselves. Our attitude should rather be, "How can I serve God and bring glory, honor and blessing to Him?" He is God our Father and it is our privilege to be allowed to participate with Him in the work of building His kingdom. If our service for God is what we get out of it, we are like those who called the proud blessed, and the wicked honorable and good.
We need to remember we are accountable to God for our words as well as our actions, and our ungodly arguments against God do not go unnoticed.

Some things are way beyond my comprehension.
Endless space, timeless eternity - even precipitation.
But people who get benefits but never express or show appreciation -
That really tops them all.

There is a price to pay for every acquisition.
Someone labored hard at their chosen occupation -
In that way to meet others needs, or for their consolation -
They gave without a call.

A brother or sister with sincere, heart-felt dedication
Gave time, effort and money in sincere consecration
To be used for the Lord in holy convocation -
That others may not fall.

To defile that which belongs to God is called desecration.
To keep back what is His or others is despicable self-absorption.
To rob God and not to return to Him in faith brings condemnation -
From which there will be no recall.

"Father, may what I give never become a calculating chore, but always a response of love and gratitude to Thee. May I never hold back from giving that which is Yours. May I always give from my heart, so You will know that to be allowed to share with Thee is an expression of privilege. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."

Malachi 3:16-18

**THE LORD LISTENS TO THE FAITHFUL FEW**

All down through the ages there has been a faithful few who love and honor God. That godly remnant is precious to God and He remembers the righteous even in the midst of departure and declension. Not only does He remember them but will reward them and He recognizes them. God deals justly with those and His blessing is evident in many ways. It always pays to serve the Lord knowing that any service done for Him is not wasted in any way. God is faithful. He will remember, and this statement is true, "Them that honor Me, I will honor, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed."

Those who "feared the Lord," are people who with reverence and awe for the Lord, serve Him faithfully and consistently. He gives them the strength and courage to do that which pleases Him. People who have common interests do "speak often one to another." The unifying interest is the Lord Himself and He is usually the subject that is most important to them in conversations. God keeps track of what is said in the sense of paying close attention, and so harkens to, and hears what the faithful few are concerned about. There is a record being kept that will likely be one of the books opened in the future judgment. God's "book of remembrance" is always before Him and in His time He "will make up His jewels." He treasures people who choose to love and serve Him with grateful hearts. Such people consider it a privilege and high honor to be identified as one of His people. To serve God always pays in a meaningful reason for living, everlasting joy, enduring peace, eternal hope and endless faith.

Malachi 3:16. "The they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name."

**A BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE.**

They are there, speaking together of things close to their hearts.
In their hearts they have a sincere desire to honor God.
Those few faithful saints not yielding to temptation to depart,
From the commitment they made when they first came to the Lord.

Listening in with understanding that reaches into the mind,
Is One who reads all thoughts and intents whatever they may be.
Those that think upon the Lord will be comforted to find,
God recognizes the tithes as well as words, given without hypocrisy.

The faithfulness of God is a subject dear to those who know the Lord.
They have experienced over time, God is with them all the way.
Now in a book of remembrance, their faithfulness is written in words;
The faithfulness of God, and the few, will be known in a coming day.

Remembering God's love is a main subject of their conversation;
When those who love the Lord gather in conversation together.
They love to review God’s great grace that brought salvation;
And enjoy the thought that divine life will be enjoyed forever.

God's grace is never very far from the thoughts of the faithful.
In every part of life, they review God’s amazing grace.
In the book of remembrance there is proof, they are truly grateful
For every blessing that God gave, and they received by faith.

What we speak about to others is never just in private.
God hears in that book of remembrance written about those who call upon His name.
Are not words that are trivial, their worth is very great.
The faithful few truly appreciate the reasons why Christ came.

“There has been a lot of failure, Father. I confess this to Thee. Help me to not take anything for granted. May I watch my words when I speak to Thy people. May I never think I can say what I want without consequences. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.”

**Malachi 4**

**THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS**

The day of the Lord is again brought before us as we read the concluding words of the Old Testament. This is another time of emphasis on the Lord’s coming, not for cleansing but for justice and blessing. The return of the Lord in glory will be fearful and final for those who have no interest in God's way, His will and His word. It will be a blessing and healing for those who "fear [His] name." The Day of the Lord will be like a furnace to the wicked, but to the righteous it will be the beginning a new and beautiful day. The last verses of the Old Testament are full of hope when things are made right by God who controls the future.

Our faith is in God, not human leaders, governments or religions. Those who are righteous will be rescued from the judgment that will fall on the wicked. The righteous will also be revived when the work done in their hearts will have a unifying effect because of the forgiveness that the Sun of Righteousness gives. This is a name that is given to our Lord Jesus Christ that tells of a whole new day of blessing. In that day justice and righteousness as given in the law will be kept. The moral laws that are the foundation of the life of the nation of Israel, and through them has extended to many countries of the world, will be obeyed.

John the Baptist, like Elijah many generations before as the first in a great line of prophets, will call the nation to repentance, and prepare the people for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Last part of the coming of the Lord will bring unity and peace to the people of Israel who repent of their sins, and judgment on those who do not. In a summary judgment is prophesied, the authority of the law is emphasized and the restoration of Israel is prophesied.

Common sense instructions from the book of Malachi are: give God the best you have, not the leftovers of time, talent and possessions. Change what is wrong in the way you live and commit to righteous living. Make sure that family life is a priority, and take the needed steps when change is necessary. When God corrects us and the refining process takes place, be thankful for it and that He cares enough for us to be with us through the difficulties we will face. Give God what is His from that which He has allowed us to have. Ten percent belongs to God and the offerings we give from our hearts should reflect our appreciation for Him and His grace to us. Avoid pride like you would a disease or a plague. It should have no place in the life of a believer.

A day of judgment is ahead, but for believers it will be a time of joy which we have looked for ever since the time we were born into the family of God and made part of His kingdom. For those who are not saved, they will be eternally lost. The Old testament concludes with the Jews being reminded of the God who chose them simply because, in His sovereignty He set His love on that obscure tribe of people. At the same time, He tells them who had failed over and over again to keep the terms of the covenant (Old Testament), that another choice is coming. A New Testament (covenant) would come through our Lord Jesus Christ, for whom John the Baptist would prepare the way. They could choose the curse with which the Old Testament ends, or Christ who brings in the New Testament by His sacrifice on their behalf.

**Malachi 4:4.** "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves from the stall."
THE HEALING SUN.

To be warm where others are cold is not just an act of chance.
That happens when we turn and face the Lord, not just giving Him a passing glance.
It is then we learn the lessons so many others seem to have missed.
To live in the presence of God each day is when we submit our will to His.

Lesson one is evaluate that you think is yours, and give to God the best.
Don't claim for yourself what He first gave you, thinking you own all the rest.
All we are and have, we owe to Him, and then He leaves us to choose,
Are we going to save our lives, or will we for Him our lives lose?

Lesson two is be willing to change. I know I am not perfect yet.
There are things I pay a lot of attention to, and other things I neglect.
When it comes to my attention, there are changes I must make.
Then it is up to me to act in haste, to change and not hesitate.

Lesson three is God gave me a family over which I daily pray.
I need to be reminded, they pay attention to what I do, more than what I say.
My responsibility for them really changes as the years of life pass by.
When they ask the reason, I do things, I should be able to tell them why.

Lesson four is God is working on me to make me what He intends.
He has the right to refine me in His way, until my will to His will bends.
My Lord knows the end from the beginning and will supply the needed heat.
To refine my rough and polluted self, till His expectations I will meet.

Lesson five, is I owe God a portion of all He lets me have.
It is up to me to willingly set aside what I sincerely give.
All I have belongs to God, but from all of that I set aside
An agreed-on proportion of my substance, that I in His will abide.

Lesson six is one quite obvious: never make a place for pride.
My sins, which were many, have been atoned for when my Savior died.
That humbles me to consider, I owe to Him everything.
And God gives me the privilege of honoring Him, when offerings I do bring.

"Heavenly Father, the lessons of Malachi are ones I need to be reminded of over and over. Anything that I am able to do for Thee - please accept it as from a grateful heart. I know any sacrifices I might make are trivial to the blessings You have given - and I thank Thee, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen."