



# UPLOOK

MAY 1997

*The Minor Prophets*

## Does God Speak Today?

J. B. NICHOLSON, JR.

**T**he most recent issue of *National Geographic* magazine has an article with the latest photos from the Hubble telescope. Included is one shot taken of an area of the universe once thought to be relatively empty. The author of the article stated the area observed was equivalent to viewing a grain of sand at arm's length. The telescope had to be aimed there for several days to gather enough light so that it would register on the highly sensitive film.

The photo is covered with hazy blobs of light interspersed with white pinpoints. The pinpoints are individual stars. And the "blobs"? Those are galaxies, each one containing tens of billions of stars. Empty space, you say?

The photo is entitled "Worlds Without End." That sounds familiar. Let's see. Ephesians 3:20-21, isn't it? *"Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."*

The apostle Paul tells us that creation is one of God's preachers: *"For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse"* (Rom. 1:20).

God continues to speak to His creatures through creation. How eloquently He declares Himself to the human race. From the quarks and neutrinos in the subatomic world to megastars large enough to swallow our solar system, the Lord declares that His power is sufficient to do "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" according to the *power* that works in us.

God not only thunders His power but whispers His Godhead through creation as it progressively unfolds around us. What kind of a God is He? He is a generous God. Who else would give us 90,000 different butterflies and moths? Who but our God would paint a different sunset every night and spread a thousand foods before us? Who else would decorate the ocean floor and the farthest reaches of deep space, unseen by man until our generation? Surely God is speaking!

*Modern man assumes that, if there is a God, He has a problem communicating. Surely the God who made their tongues, vocal chords, and brains, has no difficulty speaking. But does He today?*



God speaks as well today through conscience for His Spirit has been sent out to the darkest hiding places of humanity to *"...reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment"* (Jn. 16:8). He speaks as well—in no uncertain terms—to the believer, and we must not "quench" His holy influence in our lives.

Heaven also speaks through circumstances. This chapter in the book of God is often the most largely written but the most difficult to decipher. As in Job's case, *that God is speaking* may be obvious; *what God is saying* is often an enigma.

The Lord sometimes speaks by being silent. Some of His most eloquent declarations are given when He says nothing. Think of the 400 years of silence, broken only when the Word became flesh. Try to understand, if you will, the silence of the three hours of darkness at the cross, pierced by that unanswered cry torn from the Saviour's heart. Think of the silence of God in this present day, when His longsuffering grace holds back His wrath, soon to break on a world that defies Him to His face and spurns His love. And what of that agonizing half-hour of silence ushered in by the breaking of the seventh seal (Rev. 8:1)? It seems there is nothing left to say.

Although heaven is silent in mercy today, heaven's ambassadors are not. God speaks through His people: *"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God"* (2 Cor. 5:20). Then be careful! says Peter. *"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God"* (1 Pet. 4:11).

Are there prophets today? Not in the primary sense. If prophesy is meant as it is used in 1 Corinthians 14:3—proclaiming the Word so that it ministers to present need and thus edifies, exhorts, and comforts—then of course it is still exercised and we need it as never before. But the church is built on the *foundation* of the prophets. Their work was done when the Bible was complete. Now the teachers utilize the prophets' written ministry to point us to our Saviour, God's only complete revelation of Himself (see 2 Pet. 1:21-2:1).

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**FRONT LINES**

▷ **PHILADELPHIA, PA**

The Olney Assembly (Philadelphia, PA) will have their annual conference on May 24 and 25. A prayer meeting will be held on Friday at 7:45; ministry meetings will be held at 2:30 and 7:00 on Saturday. The expected speakers are Wade LeBlanc (NB), Tom Wilson (NJ) and Mark Kolchin (NJ). Contact:

Harry Wiegand  
321 Asbury Ave.  
Melrose Park, PA 19027  
(215) 635-0822

▷ **OVERLAND PARK REUNION**

The Overland Park Bible Chapel (Overland Park, KS) rejoices in its golden anniversary this year. All who have previously attended or were acquainted with the assembly are invited for a reunion around the Word of God, June 20-22, 1997. (Those who are simply interested are welcome, too.) A program will be provided for children. Contact:

Mary (Miller) Cavanee  
(913) 642-2631 or  
Steve Price  
(913) 897-9034

▷ **IN THE SKYLAND**

The 41st Skyland Bible Conference will be held at Covenant College, atop Lookout Mountain, GA, near Chattanooga, TN, June 28-July 4. Speakers will be J. Phillip Morgan and Joe Reese.

The program includes youth activities, children's meetings (including arts and crafts), Bible lessons, and nurseries for children and toddlers at every meeting. There will be no increase in rates for the third consecutive year. Registrars are:

John and Tina Taylor

P.O. Box 754  
Jamestown, NC 27282  
(910) 454-4927

▷ **SUMMER ADVENTURE**

The Camp Li-Lo-Li (Randolph, NY) summer camps begin with Family Camp June 28-July 5, with Larry Price (FL) as the speaker. This will be followed by three pre-teen camps (ages 9-13) July 5-26 and two teen camps (ages 13-16) July 27 through Aug. 9 with Dave Stiefler (NY). Youth Camp will follow for 17-25 year olds Aug. 9-17 with Frank Burgess (MO) and Ray Blais (NY) teaming up to teach the book of Nehemiah. August 17-23 will be Roundup Camp, featuring specialty areas of learning for ages 11-16. The Family Camp Weekend is scheduled for Aug. 29-Sept. 1.

Call Cathie Whitcomb  
at (716) 945-4900 or  
E-mail: camp-li-lo-li@msn.com

▷ **GREENWOOD HILLS**

Greenwood Hills (Fayetteville, PA) announces the following schedule of family conferences and retreats for the 1997 summer season:

*June 28-July 6* with Rob Lindsted and Carroll VanRyn. Bob Deeds will be the children's speaker.

*July 26-Aug. 3* with Wm. MacDonald and Alan Parks. Mel Wistner will be the children's speaker.

*August 16-24* with Randy Amos and J. B. Nicholson, Jr. Don Dunkerton will be the children's speaker.

*August 29-Sept. 1* (Labor Day Conference) with Bob Gessner. Tom Irwin will be the children's speaker.

▷ **FAMILY CAMP IN THE COLORADO ROCKIES**

Fellowship Chapel in Greeley,

CO, has planned a family camp from August 10-14 at Covenant Heights Conference Center (near Estes Park and Longs Peak). The purpose of the camp is to provide an opportunity for families to share with other believers a time of daily Bible teaching, fellowship, and recreation in the Rocky Mountains. Private rooms are available as well as a campground for those who prefer to use a tent or camper. To obtain an application form and information, contact:

Donald L. Norbie  
2601 14th Avenue Ct.  
Greeley, CO 80631  
(970) 356-0817

▷ **THIS YEAR IN BOULTER**

The Christians at Boulder Gospel Chapel (Boulder, ON) will host their annual summer conference on August 17, in the will of the Lord. The invited speakers are Arnot McIntee (ON) and Wm. Burnett (ON). For more details, call Don Reese at (613) 332-2214.

▷ **UPWARD BOUND '97**

Upward Bound will again be held at Wilfrid Laurier University (Waterloo, ON), from Aug. 17-29. With the encouragement of the saints at Bethel (Waterloo) and Brockview (St. Catharines) chapels, the first week will offer an intensive Bible study at the campus, involving hands-on work led by small group leaders. Other helpful subjects will be addressed as well, such as cults, creationism, and church principles. Not for those who wish to lie in the sun, it does promise a rewarding spiritual challenge, the opportunity to make new friends, and to enjoy the world-class athletic facilities. The second week will consist of a

canoe trip in Algonquin Park. Price for first week is \$200 CDN (\$160 US), or \$350 CDN (\$275 US) for both weeks. Speakers include Frank Burgess (MO) and Roy Houghton (ON). Others to be announced. For brochures, call Saju Mathew at (519) 886-5187 or write S. McEachern at:

Box 212  
Drayton, ON N0G 1P0

▷ **ASSEMBLY LISTINGS**  
**Clearwater, FL**

Cornerstone Bible Chapel, which has been meeting for about a year, has changed its address to

1080 Kapp Dr.  
Clearwater, FL

There are now about 40 believers in fellowship in this work. For more information, contact:

Bill Davis  
1561 Beverly Dr.  
Clearwater FL 34624  
(813) 535-4430

Bibletruth.com/assembly/flcleara

**Mt. Washington, KY**

A group of about a dozen believers have been meeting in a rented space in the downtown area of Mt. Washington, KY (40 miles from Lexington). Their meeting place is located on N. Bardstown Rd. (next door to Pizza Hut). Anyone wishing to visit this new assembly may contact James Sparks for information.

P.O. Box 1232  
Mt. Washington, KY 40047  
(502) 538-8892

▷ **THE LIFEHOUSE**  
**Oklahoma City**

Bryan Hughes (Golden Bible Chapel, Golden, TX) submitted the following update on a current project in Oklahoma City:

Stan and Fiona Engle, in fellowship at the North Bryant Gospel Chapel in Edmond, OK, are in the process of renovating a large building in downtown Oklahoma City for use in the Lord's work.

The five-story building has 50,000+ square feet of space and the renovation is being performed with volunteer help from assemblies across the US and Canada: plumbing, electrical work, carpentry, brick and masonry, painting, landscaping, and general clean-up. The massive project has been underway for approximately two years.

The plans for the building include a bookroom offering Christ-centered literature, office space and meeting rooms for Christian organizations, a creation museum, missionary apartments, and a help center for unwed mothers. The Engles hope to have the first floor (housing the bookstore and meeting rooms) open by this summer). For more information:

Life Issues, Inc.  
P.O. Box 2222  
Oklahoma City, OK 73101  
(405) 236-LIFE  
zilethai@aol.com

▷ **A NOTE OF PRAISE**

In the March issue of *Uplook*, readers were asked to pray for Nancy and Debbie, the daughters of Bill and Mary King (Wilmington, NC). We reported that Nancy was scheduled to receive one of Debbie's kidneys to replace her diseased one. The Lord was pleased to answer the prayers of His people and the girls came through the operation very well. They were in surgery for less time than initially anticipated, and are both doing fine. Thank you for your prayers on their behalf.

▷ **PINE BUSH CAMP**

In preparation for the 1997 camp season, the Board of Trustees for Pine Bush Bible Camp (New Providence, NJ), at the recommendation of the Department of Health, asked an engineer to evaluate their hundred-years-old kitchen/dining room building. The building was pronounced unfit for public use. Due to the age of the building, it is not economically feasible to make all the required repairs. As the Board looks to the Lord for His direction in providing a new facility for the camp, they would appreciate the prayers of concerned Christians.

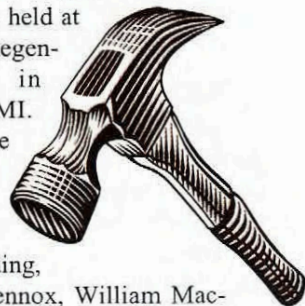
▷ **RISE UP & BUILD 97**

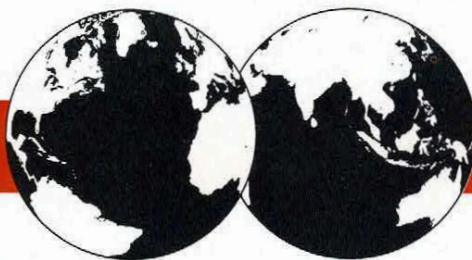
Uplook Ministries will be hosting a North American conference, in the will of the Lord, Dec. 30, 1997-Jan. 2, 1998. The conference will be held at

the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Dearborn, MI. Keynote speakers expected are Dr. David Gooding,

Dr. John Lennox, William MacDonald, Boyd Nicholson and Wm. Burnett. There are also approximately 30 seminars being planned. Registration details will be published in future issues of *Uplook* magazine.

Join more than 1,000 believers for stirring ministry, hands-on workshops, out-of-this-world singing, standing-room-only prayer times, rich fellowship, great accommodations, and one of the best Christian bookstores in North America. Need we say more? Barring the Rapture, you probably ought to be there. **U**





▷ **ASIAN CONFERENCE**

Assemblies in the countries of Hong Kong, Indonesia, India, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, S. Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand are planning, in the will of the Lord, to gather for a conference in Singapore August 12-16, 1997. The four-day schedule will include keynote addresses by Boyd Nicholson, Sr., messages from representative speakers from participating countries, conference workshops, separate meetings for the brothers and sisters to consider their specific roles in the assembly, and reports on the Lord's work by each participating country.

The prayers of Christians in North America for this conference would be greatly valued. If interested in attending, contact:

Mr. Wong Tuck Keong  
Phone (065) 4587474  
Fax (065) 4566771  
e-mail bethesda@pacific.net.sg

▷ **WHO'S ON THE NET?**

The number of computers connected to the Internet has increased by 70% over the last year. Today around 16.1 million computers are linked to the worldwide computer network. About 60% of all the connected computers are in the US. However, Japan and Hong Kong are catching up. South Africa, Italy, Spain, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Belgium, and Denmark have more than doubled their number of Internet users since January 1996.

▷ **POPULATION PLUNGE**

Last year in Russia, the fertility rate was the lowest ever recorded, an average of 1.3 births per woman, far below the replacement level of 2.1. Many blame the decline on the drop

in the country's living standards since the fall of communism.

▷ **TV SPIRITUALITY**

*TV Guide* conducted a poll recently and discovered that 82% of the respondents would like to see more reference to moral issues on TV and 68% wanted more "spirituality." While these results were somewhat encouraging, other questions revealed that TV viewers have a misguided definition of spirituality.

When asked which characters were most likely to go to hell and which ones they would like to be their child's Sunday School teacher, it became clear that those polled consider spirituality as "being nice" while sin is a matter of being mean. Few seemed to understand that Christians are redeemed sinners.

▷ **DEATH TO EUTHANASIA**

Australian federal lawmakers killed its first pro-assisted suicide law, overruling a Northern Territory statute that took effect last summer. Four people committed suicide under the law, using a computer-controlled machine that injected a deadly drug. Under Australia's constitution, the national Parliament has the right to strike down territorial and state legislation.

▷ **CRACKDOWN IN VIETNAM**

Since last June, the Vietnamese government has turned up the pressure on the country's illegal house churches. Thirteen known house church leaders are in jail, serving a minimum of 20 months each. In addition, authorities have begun raiding churches, arresting entire congregations for short periods. Also, fines are being increased. The gov-

ernment is attempting to make the house churches register under Vietnam's official Protestant church, known as Tin Lanh. "We must force all illegal churches to register under the Tin Lanh churches," said an official of the Ministry of Socialism and Culture. "If not, we will destroy all of them."

▷ **VIOLENCE IN INDONESIA**

During a recent six-week period, a full-scale ethnic war raged in Kalimantan, Indonesia, taking hundreds of lives. Thousands in the region have been made refugees. The violence is between the indigenous Dayak people and Muslim immigrants from Madura.

▷ **ISRAEL'S CLOSING DOORS**

Israel's national legislature has given preliminary approval to what some critics are labeling an "anti-missionary" bill. The law, which has yet to receive final passage, would outlaw the printing and distribution of religious material that had the purpose of persuading people to change their religion. The proposed law provides for one year of imprisonment for violators.

▷ **MYSTERY OF PRAYER**

*Newsweek Magazine* recently asked its readers a series of questions about their prayer life. The following are some of the results:

- 87% say that God answers prayers
- 29% pray more than once a day
- 82% believe that God does not play favorites in answering prayer
- 54% say that when God doesn't answer their prayers, it means it wasn't God's will
- 82% don't turn away from God when prayers go unanswered.

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*Men With a Message*

**G**od's prophets were a varied group. There were preaching prophets, and some who both wrote and preached. The writing prophets are often divided into major (Isaiah-Daniel) and minor prophets (Hosea-Malachi). The only reason is their size, not their importance. In the Hebrew Bible, the minor prophets were in one book. In fact the Hebrew arrangement included the Former Prophets in the historical writings (Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, and 1 & 2 Kings) and the Latter Prophets with Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve Minor Prophets. Daniel, although part prophetic, was included with the "Writings" (Ezra, Nehemiah, and 1 & 2 Chronicles).

Graham Scroggie writes, "The prophets had both insight and foresight, and foresight because of their insight. Theirs was a manifold function: they combined in themselves preacher, teacher, statesman, reformer, and herald. They appeared at times of crisis in their nation's history as the champions of righteousness; they were essentially the moral conscience of their age. They were men of their time and for all time."

**HOSEA:** His name means "Salvation" (like Joshua and Jesus) and his message is the longsuffering love of God. Not surprisingly, he prophesied longer than any other prophet. In the golden but corrupt days of Jeroboam II, Hosea was called to feel the grief of the unrequited love of Jehovah. His wife, Gomer, had prostituted her love (whether before or after her marriage is not clear). Hosea was to seek her return, pay for her restoration, and woo her that she might truly love him. We Gentiles get into the picture as Peter links Hosea's children with the church age (Hos. 1:6, 9; 1 Pet. 2:10).

**JOEL:** This prophet's name is the message of the Old Testament in four words. It is a contraction of

*In every age, no matter how dark, nor how dimly the light of divine testimony shone, God always had His men. Resolute men, real men, albeit made of dust. But see what God can do with dust when mixed with the water of His Word and molded on the wheel of His will. Then, taking such vessels of honor in hand, He put within them a treasure, although not half so precious as the message placed within believers today.*

Yahveh (Jehovah) and El—The Lord is God. The book falls into two parts. First, Joel speaks, giving a historical description of the desolation of Judah (1:1-2:17). Then Jehovah speaks (2:18-3:21) prophesying the destruction and the deliverance to come. Peter uses Joel 2 to convince the Jews at Pentecost of the reality of the work of the Spirit in their midst.

**AMOS:** A herdsman from Tekoa, Amos ("Burden") lived only a score of miles from the border between his native Judah and Israel with its capital, Samaria. Imagine the chagrin for the northern ten tribes to have a lowly gatherer of sycamore fruit to prophesy to them about the wickedness of eight countries in the Levant (chs. 1-2). But how shocked they must have been when, after pronouncing woes on six Gentile nations round about them, Amos concludes with Israel and Judah! Like a great bell tolling, the sentences ring out: "For three transgressions...and for four," a figure of speech describing the overflow of their iniquity. Chapters 3-6 give a series of sermons and chapters 7-9 a series of visions. The threats of impending doom are interspersed with five calls to "seek the Lord."

**OBADIAH:** The vision of Obadiah ("Servant or Worshipper of Jehovah") came about the time of the collapse of Judah (586 BC). A contemporary of Jeremiah, his prophecy is against Edom. It is not so much a warning to them as it is a small ray of light in the darkness for the children of Israel that God will not let their persecutors go unpunished. It is also a solemn word to any nation that would touch the apple of His eye. Israel's deliverance is also foretold (vv. 17-21).

**JONAH:** One of the best-known prophets for the



story of the “whale,” the point of the prophecy of Jonah (Dove) is really about the “worm.” At the time of his call to preach to Nineveh, capital of Assyria, that very empire’s shadow was falling on little Israel. It was only a matter of time. After his famous detour (authenticated by the Lord Jesus as historical), he reluctantly preached to the Ninevites who repented. But the book ends with the messenger getting the message—the “wideness of God’s mercy.” He is not willing that any should perish—even the people of Nineveh.

**MICAH** writes graphically of the prevailing conditions marked by moral decay (see 2:2, 8-11; 3:1-11). Yet in spite of their lack of the fear of the Lord, they were punctilious about their religious observances. Paul prophesied the same concerning our day (2 Tim. 3:5). This prophet’s name means “Who is like Jah!” A contemporary of Isaiah and Hosea, Micah presents three calls: “Hear, all ye people” (chs. 1-2); “Hear, O heads of Jacob” (chs. 3-5); and “Hear ye, O mountains” (chs. 6-7). “In short, sharp sentences he brings his whip down,” says Scroggie, “but...with his threats are mingled promises.”

**NAHUM**: At first it may seem strange that the prophet sent to herald the doom of a city should have a name meaning *comfort* or *consolation*. But the city was more than a thousand miles from Jerusalem. Nineveh, proud capital of the Assyrian Empire, had repented at the preaching of Jonah about 130 years before. But the city that Jehovah had wooed and won a while, had now hardened herself against Him, and her doom was sealed—as surely as that of No (Thebes, ch. 3:8), the capital of Upper Egypt which fell in 663 BC. In our time as well, the heathen appear to sin with impunity. But Nahum reminds us that the city with its walls 100 feet high, defended with 1200 towers, with a circumference of 60 miles, would be leveled with a stroke from God. It happened in 612 BC. Just so, in the end will come the fall of that great city Babylon (Rev. 18). The Lord is still on the throne!

**HABAKKUK**: Does his name mean “wrestler” or “embracer”? We can’t think of this name without Jacob coming to mind. This prophet wrestled out his problems with Jehovah. In 1:1-4, he asks, “Why doesn’t God *do* something?” When God responds that He will, and will use the Chaldeans to do it, the wrestler steps back into the ring. How could God use a

more wicked nation to chasten Israel? (1:12-17).

In chapter 2, Habakkuk withdraws to his watchtower and awaits the Lord’s answer. It is much like Peter’s answer to those believers suffering now: “Judgment must begin at the house of God.” This includes five woes to remind us that “if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” (1 Pet. 4:18). In the last chapter, Habakkuk learns to cling, like Jacob, and the blessing comes to the embracer: “The just shall live by his faith” (2:4).

**ZEPHANIAH**: “Jehovah hides” prophesied between Nahum and Jeremiah. His main theme is the day when Jehovah will no longer hide—“the Day of the Lord” (a phrase found seven times in this book). Here again, along with pronouncing condemnation, Zephaniah also announces restoration. Even in the darkest hours of the night, these men of God saw the gray streaks of dawn on the horizon. Following the dismal days of the kings, Manasseh and Amon, this prophet’s words no doubt encouraged the revival in the days of King Josiah.

**HAGGAI**: Appropriately, the first of the prophets to speak to the returned exiles after the captivity is called “Festal.” But his message at first is not positive. The people have laid the foundation of the temple, but have become discouraged and distracted by their own plans. Sound familiar? The two chapters contain four messages, each carefully dated and designed to encourage the people to finish the work. “Consider your ways,” he cries (1:5, 7; 2:15, 18). And what is the great stimulus? “I am with you, saith the Lord” (1:13; 2:4).

**ZECHARIAH**: “Jehovah remembers,” the second post-exile prophet, was contemporary with Haggai. The first part of his book contains eight visions (chs. 1-6:8). Then follows a living parable (6:9-15). In part two, there are two burdens concerning Israel’s reunification and restoration. The book is liberal with messianic prophecies (9:9; 11:12-13; 13:7; 14:4, 9, etc.). Many of his prophecies have yet to be fulfilled.

**MALACHI**: “My messenger” closes out the Old Testament. What is the “burden” of Malachi? “I have *loved* you,” says Jehovah. The people’s attitude is seen in the sevenfold “Wherein,” and concludes with a contrast between the righteous and the wicked. Again the hope of the coming Messiah is held out as an incentive to Israel, as the Bridegroom’s return should be an incentive to us!

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*Putting the Prophets in Their Place*

J. B. NICHOLSON, JR.

**THE PROPHETS BY THEIR PLACE OF BIRTH:**

*"Yet He sent prophets to them, to bring them again unto the Lord, and they testified against them, but they would not give ear."  
(2 Chronicles 24:19)*



**THE PROPHETS BY THEIR PLACE IN TIME:**

*I. The Pre-Exile Prophets*

Joel	c. 850-700 B.C.
Jonah	c. 800 B.C.
Amos	c. 780-755 B.C.
Hosea	c. 760-710 B.C.
Micah	c. 740 B.C.
Isaiah	c. 740-680 B.C.
Nahum	c. 666-615 B.C.
Zephaniah	c. 630-620 B.C.
Habakkuk	c. 627-586 B.C.
Jeremiah	c. 626-580 B.C.

*II. The Exile Prophets*

Daniel	c. 604-535 B.C.
Ezekiel	c. 593-570 B.C.
Obadiah	c. 585 B.C.

*III. The Post-Exile Prophets*

Haggai	c. 520 B.C.
Zechariah	c. 520-518 B.C.
Malachi	c. 450-400 B.C.

**THE PROPHETS BY THEIR PLACE OF MINISTRY:**

*I. To Israel*

- Hosea
- Amos
- Jonah (also to The Nations)

*II. To Judah*

- Isaiah
- Jeremiah
- Joel
- Micah (also to Israel)
- Habakkuk (also to The Nations)
- Zephaniah
- Ezekiel
- Daniel
- Haggai
- Zechariah
- Malachi

*III. To The Nations*

- Nahum (also to Judah)
- Obadiah



*Hosea's Days & Ours*

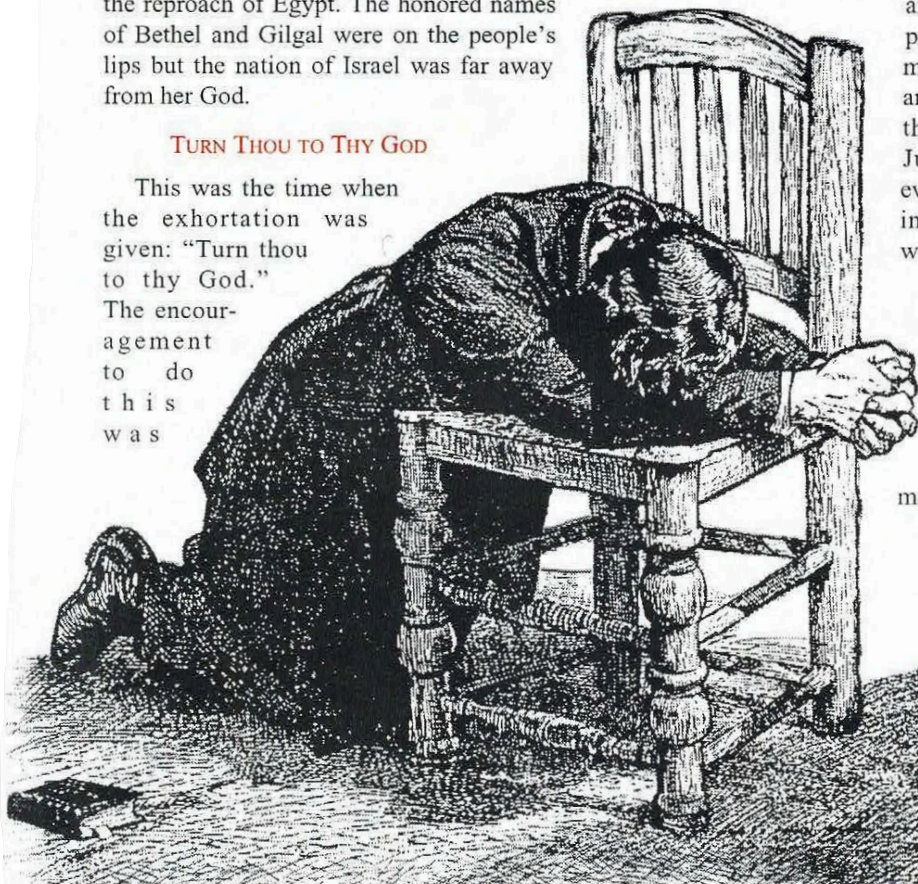
LEONARD SHELDRAKE

*"Therefore turn thou to thy God:  
keep mercy and judgment  
and wait on thy God continually"  
(Hosea 12:6)*

**I**dolatry and wickedness were rampant in Bethel and in Gilgal, the centers of Israel's worship in the days of Hosea. Those two places of hallowed memories were now places of Ephraim's apostasy from God. Bethel—the house of God—the prophet now calls Beth-aven (Hosea 4:15)—the house of vanity or nothingness. The prophet testified, "All their wickedness is in Gilgal" (Hosea 9:15), the place where once Israel had known the rolling away of the reproach of Egypt. The honored names of Bethel and Gilgal were on the people's lips but the nation of Israel was far away from her God.

**TURN THOU TO THY GOD**

This was the time when the exhortation was given: "Turn thou to thy God." The encouragement to do this was



what had happened to Jacob at Bethel when he least deserved God's mercy. The present condition of Bethel might well cause an honest heart to turn from its idolatries; the memory of Jacob's experience in Bethel might well cause the troubled saint to turn again to the God of Jacob.

The darker the day, the more general the apostasy, and the greater the need for the saint of God to turn in faith to Him. This is the great need today. "If any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with Me" (Rev. 3:20). When conditions are discouraging, turn again to the living God Himself. "Turn thou to thy God."

**KEEP MERCY AND JUDGMENT**

Seek the quiet place to be alone with the Lord. Pour out your heart to Him. Tell Him all about yourself and about His people. Seek the conscious presence of God. "Keep mercy and judgment." How needful these are today among the erring people of God! Mercy, that you be not too hard or unfeeling. Judgment, that wisdom might weigh every circumstance. Let God be honored in His holiness; but let everything be weighed in the balance of the sanctuary.

Mercy delights God's heart; judgment honors His truth. He who knows his Lord's will is more responsible than he who knows it not. A blind man who could not see the signs is not so responsible on the wrong road as he who saw but would not heed. A wise man will judge righteous judgment.

**WAIT ON THY GOD CONTINUALLY**

"Wait on thy God continually." This is the daily need, the hourly need until the Lord comes. Let not neglected prayer bring darkness or bitterness into the life. A continual waiting on God brings a continual experience of God's peace garrisoning the heart. This condition is not only blessed, it prepares the Christian to be a blessing to others.

**U**

*Judgment Day*

J. G. BELLETT



**J**oel delivered the Word of the Lord in some day of sore national calamity, when either the adversary came in to waste and destroy again and again, or year after year famine was in the land by reason of plagues on it. But through this calamity, the great closing calamities of Israel are seen, as by the far-seeing eye of Him who knows the end from the beginning. Nothing is more common than this in the prophets. They treat the present as the pledge of a future.

In Joel's day, the vine and the fig, the corn, the wine, and the oil, palm, pomegranate, and apple tree—all are withered. The priests are summoned to weep, and a solemn fast is proclaimed. The services of God's house are suspended, the meal and drink-offering are withheld, and the joy and gladness that belonged to the house is no more. The seed is rotten in the field and the garners are empty. Herds and flocks share the misery of the times. The prophet himself begins to cry to God under his sorrow. He leads the way, as it were, in the humiliation and confessions which suit such a moment.

In chapter 2, we have again a detail of national miseries, but with a near approach to that great final day, to close in righteous, wrathful visitation the story of Israel's apostasy. The call to repentance is repeated, with the hope of turning of God's anger away. And however suitable to that day these calls of the prophet may have been, we know that there will be a spirit of humbling and confession in the coming days of his nation on the eve of their deliverance. A spirit of grace will then be poured out, and everyone will mourn.

In this feature of the prophet's day, we may trace the moral circumstances of the closing day. Calamity comes as the judgment of the Lord in righteousness; repentance comes as the fruit of the Spirit in grace. And then, as the fruit of this repentance, the whole system in Israel is revived; all fruitfulness is pledged to the land now wasted; times of refreshing and the restitution of all things are anticipated; and "My people," says the Lord again and again, "shall never be ashamed." The gift of the Spirit is promised, and "the day of the Lord" ends in the destruction of their enemies, and the deliverance of the Israel of God. In all this we have Matthew 24 and Acts 2 combined: the

*Joel sees the grand finale of history as we know it. Judgment is to clear the scene, and then glory to fill it. The Lord is to dwell in Zion, and Judah and Jerusalem to be at rest and in safety.*

one giving us a sample of the promised gift; the other detailing the terrors of that day for the confederated enemies of Israel, and to deliver God's remnant. Indeed, all the characteristics of this coming day are clustered here, as we find them scattered through the prophets.

We must observe that the gift of the Spirit in the day of Acts 2 was not followed by those judgments on which the darkened sun and moon and the falling stars are thus solemnly to give witness. Why? Israel was not then obedient. These judgments will be in favor of Israel. They will light on the head of the oppressor, and close the day of Israel's tribulation.

The Spirit given at Pentecost led on in a different direction. He became the Baptizer of an elect people, Jew or Gentile, into a body destined to heaven, to be the Bride of the Lamb in that day of glory, when again the Spirit will be given. In what an interesting manner the Spirit in an apostle fills out the word of the Spirit in a prophet! What enlargement of heart and understanding in the ways of God is given to us by it! In what a glorious way is Jesus brought in as having connection with the river of God! He becomes the source of it as soon as the crucified One became the ascended One.

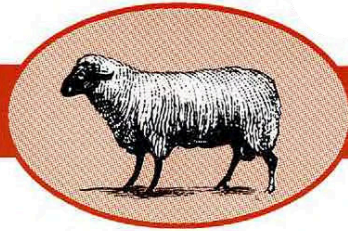
In chapter 3, the Lord comes with a recompense. The last are first. The captive is the spoiler. Israel is the head, and not the tail, as was pledged when Abraham was sought by the Gentile, and in the presence of the King of Gerar he prepared the sacrifice, made the covenant, and gave the gifts (Gen. 21).

God has taken the whole of the interests of His people on Himself. He is summoning the hosts of the nations to the battle to meet their doom. The plowshare must become a sword, the pruning-hook a spear, until the Gentiles in the height of their pride meet the judgment of God in the valley of Jehoshaphat.

Days of blood as in the reign of David will give way to days like those of Solomon the peaceful, realized in their millennial fullness, and the earth itself will be a quiet habitation. **U**

*God vs. Social Injustice*

H . A . I R O N S I D E



*Of Amos, we have much more information than is customary concerning the minor prophets. He gives us, by the inspiration of God, several autobiographical details of deep interest.*

**T**he prophecies by Amos were given in the reigns of Uzziah, king of Judah, and Jeroboam II, king of Israel. He describes himself as a herdman of Tekoa, a town in the hill country of Judea, about twelve miles from Jerusalem. A desert town surrounded by solitude, it was a suitable place for men of pastoral occupation; and there Amos pursued his humble calling till separated to the prophetic office.

He tells us that he was neither born into the company of the prophets, nor did he choose that calling for himself. But when he was "a herdman and a gatherer of sycamore fruit" (the fruit of the wild fig), the Lord said to him, "Go, prophesy unto My people Israel" (7:14-15). This was enough for Amos. We soon find him declaring the word of the Lord away up in the capital of the northern kingdom, to the disgust and indignation of Jeroboam and his false priest Amaziah. When ordered to flee to his own land and do his prophesying there, he boldly gives his divine credentials, and delivers a message more searching than ever.

It is God's way to prepare His servants in secret for the work they are to accomplish in public: Moses on the backside of the desert; Gideon on the threshing-floor; David with his "few sheep"; Daniel refusing to be defiled with the king's meat; Peter in his boat; Paul in Arabia; and Amos herding cattle in the wilderness. Only he who has learned from God in the school of obscurity is likely to shine in the blaze of publicity.

Amos had no thought of becoming a prophet, as men today select "the ministry" as a profession. He would have been content to pursue his humble vocation as a farmhand, to the end of his life, if such had been the mind of God. But as he followed the flock, his soul was communing with Jehovah. As he gathered the wild figs, his heart was meditating on the great issues of the soul's relationship to God and the importance of walking in His ways. As he tended the herds he was learning lessons of a faithful Creator's love and care.

And so the Lord kindled the already prepared fuel into a flame, and the humble herdman became a mighty, Spirit-energized prophet of God.

We read of no unbelieving hesitation, no parleying with God, no bargaining or questioning as to temporal support; even as before there was no fleshly impatience or desire to be at the front attracting notice as a prophet. Throughout is the record of a simple, humble man of God, who can wait or run as his Lord sees fit. In all this how much there is for our souls today! Many insist on taking the place belonging to a servant of God who have never spent any time in His school, learning His ways. Thus their utterances are empty and disappointing, as might be expected when coming from men who had not been sent by the Lord. It is blessedly otherwise with Amos. The more we learn of the messenger, the more we are prepared to listen to his message.

Those hidden years had not been wasted. Not only were they years in which he listened to the voice of God speaking to his own soul, but in them he was acquiring experience, and insight which would be invaluable to him later on. Again and again in his public utterances he uses illustrations which show how closely and thoughtfully he had observed the many things, animate and inanimate, surrounding him in his early life. This the following passages make abundantly plain: 2:13; 3:12; 4:9; 5:8; 6:12; 7:1-2.

The theme of the book is emphatically one of judgment on Israel, Judah, and nations about them. God speaks against dishonest judges, perverted religionists, avaricious businessmen, and self-indulgent women.

In the first two chapters we have eight separate burdens addressed to Damascus, Gaza, Tyrus, Edom, Ammon, Moab, Judah, and Israel. The second part of the prophecy (chs. 3 to 6), gives the word of the Lord to Israel, the ten-tribed kingdom of the north.

In the third and last division (chs. 7 to 9) we have a series of five visions, with a considerable parenthesis (7:10-17) devoted to the personal history of the prophet. The visions close with the declaration of millennial blessing and restoration, as seen in both the preceding books, Hosea and Joel, and generally throughout the Prophets. For though judgment is the theme, yet judgment is but to prepare the way for glory. The Lord will not cease till He has established righteousness and blessing in all the earth.

**U**

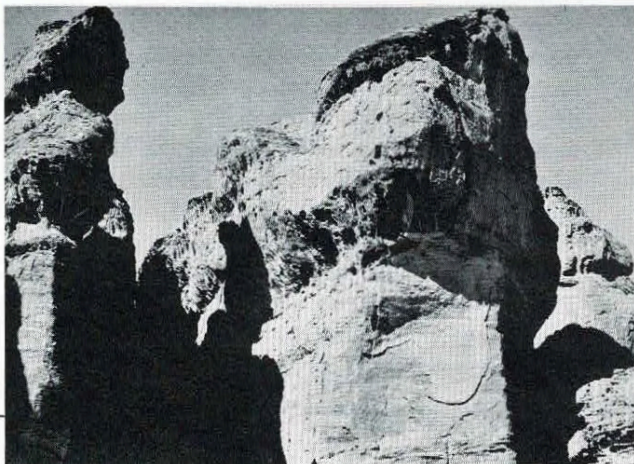
*Edom's Doom*

F R E D K . A . T A T F O R D

**H**ow vividly Sir George Adam Smith describes Edom in *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*

The purple mountains, into which the wild sons of Esau clambered, run out from Syria upon the desert, some hundred miles by twenty of porphyry and red sandstone. From Mount Hor, which is their summit, you look down upon a maze of mountains, cliffs, chasms, rocky shelves and strips of valleys. On the east the range is but the crested edge of a high, cold plateau, covered for the most part by stones, but with stretches of corn land and scattered woods. The western walls, on the contrary, spring steep and bare, black and red, from the yellow of the desert Arabah. The interior is reached by defiles, so narrow that two horsemen may scarcely ride abreast, and the sun is shut out by the overhanging rocks. Eagles, hawks and other mountain birds fly screaming round the traveller. Little else than wild-fowls' nests are the villages; human eyries perched on high shelves or hidden away in caves at the ends of the deep gorges. There is abundance of water. The gorges are filled with tamarisks, oleanders and wild figs. Besides the wheat lands on the eastern plateau, the wider depths hold fertile fields and terraces for the vine. Mount Esau is, therefore, no mere citadel with supplies for a limited siege, but a well-stocked, well-watered country, full of food and lusty men, yet lifted up so high, and locked so fast by precipice and slippery mountain, that it calls for little trouble of defense.

The ancient capital of Edom was Bozrah (Gen. 36:33; Isa. 34:6; 63:1; Jer. 49:13, 22), but it was later



*Having been committed—rather against my own inclination—to writing a series of commentaries on the prophetic books of the Bible, I took the easy course and started on the last three first. Then there arose the question of which one to tackle next...perhaps it would be wise to turn to one of the shorter books again. So I opened the Bible at Obadiah, but as the words came to life, memory travelled back to glimpses caught of the former territory of Edom—the subject of Obadiah's book.*

superseded by Sela (i.e. rock). When the latter was captured by Amaziah, king of Judah, he renamed it Joktheel (2 Ki. 14:7), but it later became known as Petra, the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Sela.

I well remember the first visit we paid to Petra soon after World War II. Dean J. W. Burgon described it as "a rose-red city, half as old as time," and it was certainly one of the most fascinating places we had ever seen. An hour by plane from Jerusalem Airport brought us to Maan (the biblical Teman) in the sandy desert, where cars rushed us across the desert to Al Ji. Apart from a patch of green here and there, the country was a complete wilderness, with the hot eastern sun in a perfect blue sky above, and the baking sand throwing up its heat from below. The roads were not of the best and, in some places, one wondered whether they were roads at all. Fortunately, it was only an hour's journey, and Al Ji proved an attractive little village set in a valley of green. It is well-watered and owes much to Ain Musa, or the Spring of Moses, which, the local inhabitants maintain, is identical with Meribah where the waters gushed forth after Moses had smitten the rock (Ex. 17:1-7). There is not, however, the slightest support for the identification.

At Al Ji we left the cars and resorted to our third mode of travel—by horses. The animals from which we had to make our choice were malodorous and dirty-looking and were led by even dirtier Arabs. There was no alternative and we climbed on the backs of these

## Edom's Doom

miserable beasts and resigned ourselves to our fate.

At first the path wound down the hillside amid pleasant gardens and vineyards until it came to the narrow gorge of the Siq. This narrow defile is the only entrance to the city of Petra, and a handful of men could defend it against an army. The path ran down the stony bed of the dried-up river and between sandstone cliffs of red and purple towering 200 to 300 feet above. As we penetrated deeper into the mountain, the cliffs seemed to grow higher and sometimes to shut out the light completely. The path twisted and turned as the horses found their way down over the sliding stones.

Suddenly we emerged from the gorge to be confronted by the facade of a great tomb, cut out of the rock. This is commonly known as the Khazneh, or Treasury, but was probably the tomb of one of the Nabatean kings. The huge urn at the top of the tomb bears the marks of bullets fired by those who hoped to smash it and to release the treasure it was erroneously supposed to contain. The Arabs forced the horses to climb up so that we could see other tombs at close hand and then we started to wend our way down to the Petra Hotel. This was composed of a central marquee, in which meals were served, and a few bell tents for sleeping, with overflow accommodation in the caves, or ancient Nabatean sepulchral chambers, surrounding the area. The cave I shared with six other men proved to be somewhat of a bird sanctuary. Light was provided by a candle, stuck in a niche in the wall, and a jug of water provided facilities for washing and shaving.

The original inhabitants of Petra were the Horites, but they were conquered by the kings who captured Lot (Gen. 14:6). Later, they were displaced altogether by Esau and his descendants, the Edomites (Deut. 2:12). Petra is synonymous with the biblical Seir, as well as with Sela (referred to in Jud. 1:36; 2 Chron. 25:12; Isa. 42:11 and Obad. 3). It was later taken by the Nabateans and ultimately by the Romans.

From the central open space, valleys radiate off in all directions and all of them seem to be full of ancient tombs and dwelling-places carved out of the rock. There are nearly a thousand tombs. Houses of two and three storeys are ingeniously carved out of the rock and in some places the streets are in tiers.

Little remains of the old walled city, but to the east are the ruins of the triumphal arch, the public baths, the

market place, the gymnasium, and an old temple and a palace. There are still remains of the great theater, the 34 tiers of which once accommodated 2,000 people. We climbed up to 3,000 feet above sea level to two obelisks 20 feet high, and opposite the altar, the principal place of sacrifice, about 900 square feet in area.

Descending, we came to the garden tomb and then the tomb of the Roman soldier, and the Triclinium, the festival hall in which were held commemorative feasts for the dead. On the north side of the theater was the urn tomb, the Corinthian tomb, the palace tomb, the Florentine tomb, etc. We found the imposing el Deir, or monastery, a well-preserved monument; a small altar at its back showed that it was formerly a temple.

As we turned back, a young Arab girl emerged from a cave, carrying a bundle containing a tiny baby, while another little child clung to her skirts. In front of her cave were spread out flat cakes, baking in the sun. In this primitive style she was bringing up her family.

This was doubtless the city to which Obadiah referred when he described the Edomites as dwelling in the clefts of the rock. In ancient days it must have seemed completely invulnerable. Reading the prophet's book brought the memories back and I turned to the biblical record with renewed interest.

The prophecy of Obadiah is directed against the Edomites, the descendants of Esau, who acquired the name of Edom (or red) because of his love for the red pottage (actually yellow-brown lentils), for which he sold his birthright to his twin-brother, Jacob (Gen. 25:30). The name may also have been derived, in part, from the reddish hue of the mountainous territory of Seir which Esau took for his possession. Despite the brothers' reconciliation in later life (Gen. 33:4), it seems probable that the strong feelings expressed by Esau regarding Jacob's deceit and duplicity left a deep impression upon his family, which was subconsciously transmitted to their descendants.

One fact is quite clear, that, although they were so closely related to the Israelites, the Edomites were the inveterate enemies of the people of God. They early developed a characteristic fierceness and ruthlessness, coupled later with a haughty arrogance of spirit. Coveting the rocky stronghold of the Horites in Mount Seir (Gen. 14:6), they drove out the original owners and took possession of it for themselves (Deut. 2:12, 22;

Gen. 36:8). The Horites had lived in troglodyte dwellings—caves hewn out of the red sandstone of Petra and other parts of Idumea—and the Edomites flattered themselves that no one could successfully assail their impregnable position. “The brook Zered (Isa. 15:7; Deut. 2:13) formed the northern boundary” of Edom, says one writer, “To the north stretched the plateau of Moab, the south rose the highlands of Edom...characterized by red sandstone cliffs that rise east of the Dead Sea and Arabah in three great steps to the impressive height of more than 5,000 feet above sea level. The rugged territory is very inaccessible and easily fortified. The southern frontier is marked by the Negev, which runs south-east from Ain Sharandel in the Arabah. The desert marks the eastern boundary. The whole, east of the Arabah, is not more than 112 by 20 to 30 miles....In the north and east there are areas for fruitful cultivation, but the land derived its significance and its wealth from its strategic position astride the trade routes between Syria and Egypt...Its inhabitants grew rich and strong on the tolls exacted from transient merchant caravans (Isa. 21:13-14; Job 6:19; Ezek. 27:15, 21, 22; Amos 1: 6-9; Gen. 37: 25).”

Edom's hatred of Israel was constantly in evidence. When, for example, during the latter's journey after their exodus from Egypt, Moses sought permission for the Israelites to pass through Edom's territory by the main highway in order to save a long detour and even promised to pay for any water drunk by the people or their cattle, the Edomites refused the modest request and threatened the use of arms if any violation of their territory occurred (Num. 20:14-21; Jud. 11:17). This was typical of their general attitude. When Saul came to the throne, he made an attack upon them (1 Sam. 14:47), and his successor, David, followed it up by completely subduing them and establishing garrisons

throughout the country (2 Sam. 8:14). In the days of Joram, however, they revolted and eventually recovered their freedom (2 Ki. 8:20-22).

When Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judea and captured Jerusalem, the Edomites gloated over their enemies' calamities and humiliation, and actively aided and abetted the Chaldeans in their onslaught upon the Jews, as foretold in Psalm 137:7-8 (although that prophecy still awaits its final fulfillment). But Obadiah predicted that retribution would follow Edom's malicious action and that she would be completely destroyed. This prophecy was, of course, partially fulfilled at the time

of the Chaldean invasion, but it will be completely fulfilled, as another writer says, in “the last days, when Israel, restored to their land, will be attacked by Edom and kindred nations (Ps. 83). Idumea will be their rendezvous, and the sword of the Lord will be filled with blood (Isa. 34:5-6). Obadiah depicts the Jews themselves as God's instrument for the destruction of Esau (which agrees with Isa. 11:14; Dan. 11:41), ‘Upon Mount

Zion shall be deliverance...the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble.”

While the ultimate fulfillment of Obadiah's prophecy may still lie in the future, there are not wanting those who refuse to recognize any literal application of it at all. T. H. Robinson (*ibid.*, p. 11) says, for example, that, by some expositors, “The historical relationships and allusions are played down or discounted altogether. ‘Edom’ is understood as a pseudonym for the powers of chaos, and the whole is placed within the frame of the cosmic struggle pictured in the New Year's festival.” There are unquestionably basic principles involved and the whole has patently an application to many different periods and circumstances, but it is impossible to discount altogether the historical setting and literal interpretation. **U**

## ANALYSIS of the BOOK

1. v. 1a Title.
2. v. 1b Warning of the impending destruction of Edom's fortified stronghold.
3. vv. 5-9 Completeness of Edom's punishment and plundering.
4. vv. 10-14 Violence against Jacob shown to be the major reason for the judgment of Edom.
5. vv. 15-16 Judgment to be universal; not only Edom, but all nations to be involved.
6. vv. 17-20 Israel saved and restored.
7. v. 21 The Millennial kingdom established.

## The Mercy of God Justified

R. J. REID

*The spectacle of Nineveh repentant  
"displeased Jonah exceedingly" (4:1).  
Alas! he had reverted to his former spirit  
and bigotry. What a contrast to the mind  
and heart of Heaven!*

**I**n his national prejudice against the Assyrian and in the pride that resented the cancellation of his prediction, Jonah objected to the grace of God to that city. What a sad and forcible reminder of the fact that the only hope for mankind lies in God; and what an exhibition of the flesh, even in a child of God.

Now the contrariness of Jonah is used by God to elucidate His right to exercise His prerogative of mercy. While sulkily awaiting developments (4:5), "The Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah...to deliver him from his grief" (v. 6). For this he was "exceeding glad," showing that while opposed to mercy for Nineveh, he appreciated it for himself. "But God prepared a worm...and it smote the gourd," and when the sun arose, He "prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished...to die" (v. 8).

What a terrible lesson Jonah's self-will had necessitated! The destruction of Nineveh would have pleased him well; now he complains at the destruction of the gourd and his consequent discomfort. In divine forbearance God reasoned with him in four distinct ways

*His right to show mercy.* No fault was found with Jonah's desire to have the gourd spared (v. 10), though his sorrow was selfish. But if man may pronounce on little matters, is God to be denied His way in great matters? If Jonah thinks a gourd should be spared, is God to be condemned for sparing a multitude?

*His right to spare the creatures He made.* Jonah thought the gourd should have been spared. But after all, was he competent to pronounce on the matter? Did he ever make a gourd? Could he have protected this one from the worm? For it he had "not labored, neither madest it grow." Yet, despite this, God allows his opinion regarding the gourd to pass, provided he would realize that God, who had made man and watched his course, knew how to deal with His creatures.

*His right to spare a great city.* "Should not I spare

Nineveh...?" One Assyrian was of great value to God, one whom God has made in His own image. Even the cattle were of more importance than a gourd. Would God spare a gourd for Jonah's comfort, "which came up in a night, and perished in a night"—with neither spirit nor soul, that even a worm was superior to—yet pander to Jonah's prejudice by smiting a city that had cried to Him in the day of its distress? How manifestly was Jonah in the wrong, and how manifestly was God in the right! And how conclusively does Jonah, having ceased to speak, prove this with his pen! How abruptly he lays down that pen when the case is made clear.

*His right to spare the ignorant.* Into the discussion as to whether the clause "sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand," refers to little children who literally could not discern this, or to the moral condition of the Ninevites, we do not enter. This much we do know, that the idolatrous Ninevites were ignorant of God. The entire period of heathenism until the advent of the Son of God is summed up as, "The times of this ignorance" (Acts 17:30). Yet all the idolatrous systems from Egypt to Rome were inexcusable in their ignorance (Rom. 1) inasmuch as they glorified not God, whose visible works were constantly before their eyes.

Thus did God spare Nineveh on the ground of mercy. This is according to the "kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man" (Titus 3:4-7), the philanthropy of God. The character of love we are considering has been commended to us, in that, "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). In our misery God intervened, "according to His mercy."

This compassion, or philanthropy of God, is what we trace in the book of Jonah; and that in a deeper way than the prophet could then do. For as those who know the substance can better perceive the form, so can we in the light of the gospel discern the direction in which God was moving in past times.

Thus we see an underlying, consistent purpose of grace throughout this little book, which unbelievers, ignorant of the ways and grace of God, have sought to ridicule. But as it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent" (1 Cor. 1:19). So has God shown the supposed wisdom of critics to be foolishness before the eyes of all willing to see.

**U**



*How We Build Matters*

BRIAN GUNNING

**G**od has a building code when it comes to how we contribute to the construction of the local church. This was one of the Corinthians' problems. They assumed natural and carnal thinking were relevant and helpful in the life of the local assembly. Paul faithfully corrected them and so left the Divine order on record for us.

The apostle pointed out there are two types of building materials—the enduring and the consumable. This will all be exposed and evaluated in a future day (1 Cor. 3:13). We are told this so we might, in anticipation of that day, make sure we are building with the quality, enduring materials described as gold, silver, and precious stones.

What materials are gold, silver and precious stones, and how can I know whether I am using them? A brief survey of the Bible tells us about certain qualities that are linked to gold, silver, and precious stones. Here are some of them:

**GOLD**

Gold is linked prophetically to the Person of Christ (Song of Sol. 5:11, and in various pictures of the tabernacle). This would teach us that when our work is focused on exalting Him, we are using quality material in building.

Gold and silver are compared to faithfulness (Ps. 66:10; Job 23:10; 1 Pet. 1:7). Faithfulness in our tasks produces the kinds of material God can use. He tests us to prove us. Are you faithful in your duties, no matter how small? When we prove faithful in small tasks, He will enlarge our service. To seek large service before being proven in small service is not a spiritual approach, but a fleshly one.

There is also faithfulness under trial. These are the qualities needed in every believer. As you remain faithful, God is building into you a knowledge of Him that in turn will benefit others now or in the future (2 Cor. 1:4).

**SILVER**

Silver was the mark of the servant, both his price and the expression of his submission (Ps.

*The  
Corinthian  
assembly  
surely had its  
problems.  
But it has  
proven a  
useful  
schoolroom  
for  
assemblies  
looking for  
God's  
instruction  
in building  
a local  
church.*



68:30; Zech. 11:12-13). This should remind us that we are all servants; we are not our own. This should also remind us of Paul's words to the Ephesians: "Submit yourselves one to another in the fear of God" (5:21). Try using a little silver in building up the church of God.

Silver is also linked to the Word of God (Ps. 12:6) The Word should be central in all assembly endeavors. There is no point in getting confused and distracted with complicated programs designed to generate a crowd if we do not make the Word the primary thing. When we present believer and unbeliever alike with the truth of the Scriptures, we accomplish great things, since the Scriptures have their own life and power, a power that can truly change people. Make the Bible the main thing in all your building.

"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver" (Prov. 25:11). Speaking the truth in love is another quality material. Speaking the truth at the right level, in the right quantity, in the right way, at the right time takes spiritual discernment. The Lord knew how to speak to the "bruised reed" and to the "whited sepulcher" and His tone and language was not the same. Use some gold and silver words.

**PRECIOUS STONES**

Finally, precious stones are compared to a gift (Prov. 17:8). God's gifts to His church are vital in building. It tells us we all have a duty and we are all needed. Exercise your gift. Encourage others in theirs. They will emerge as precious stones.

Building is not of the flesh, nor does it honor the flesh. Using the right materials builds a solid building and will stand the test in a future day. But notice the warning about inferior materials. Not only will they be burned up, but persistent use of materials that advance the flesh (thereby destroying the body) will bring about that same destruction to those who thus treat the church with such disdain (1 Cor. 3:17). His glory and our glory cannot exist side by side. Let His glory be shown! Use quality building material. It matters how we build.

**U**

*Prophet of Messiah's Coming*

WILLIAM KELLY

*The word of Jehovah came to Micah the Morasthite, a contemporary of Isaiah, concerning Samaria (capital of Israel) and Jerusalem (capital of Judah). Their rituals were right but their hearts were far from Him.*

**T**he book of Micah is composed of three chief divisions, ushered in by a call to listen, "Hear, ye peoples, all of you; hearken, O earth, and all that is therein" (1:2); "And I said, Hear, I pray you, ye heads of Jacob, and princes of the house of Israel" (3:1); and "Hear ye now what Jehovah saith" (6:1). Can the least discerning of believers fail to apprehend its distinctive character?

It opens with the imminent fall of the northern kingdom because of its transgression, but goes on to the punishment of Judah and Jerusalem as well. "Of late My people is risen up as an enemy." "Arise ye, and depart; for this is not the rest, because of defilement that destroyeth, even a grievous destruction" (2:8, 10).

The people and their prophets were alike wicked and rebellious. As chapter 1 has a predictive sketch of the Assyrian foe coming against Jerusalem, so does the end of chapter 2 present the One who will effectuate Jehovah's purpose of deliverance and blessing for the remnant of Israel at the end.

In the next section he appeals to the chiefs, warning them against the prophets that cause Jehovah's people to err. If they cried, Peace, without a vision or light from God, Micah could say that he was filled with power by the Spirit of Jehovah to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin. Heads, priests, prophets were only building up Zion with blood and Jerusalem with unrighteousness, while veiling iniquity under the privilege of His name. Zion and Jerusalem should come to utter desolation (3:9, 12).

This is followed, however, in chapter 4 by the glowing picture with which Isaiah begins his chapter 2. But Micah, instead of going on to the overwhelming judgment of the day of Jehovah as being there, predicts the going to Babylon as Isaiah does in his chapter 2. Then he turns to the closing scenes where many nations gather against Zion, which is told to arise and thresh many peoples: a judgment awaiting its sure fulfillment

when the first or former dominion shall come to her.

This gives occasion for announcing a still deeper reason for putting off blessing and the giving up His people for a season. Awful to think and

say, they should smite the Judge of Israel with a rod on the cheek (5:1)! And a parenthesis reveals Him born at Bethlehem, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting. His rejection was their own rejection, till God's counsel comes to birth; when the residue of His brethren, instead of merging in the church of God as now, shall return unto the children of Israel, and the kingdom shall be displayed in power and glory before all the world. The prospect is beautifully described to the end of this part of the book.

The third section is a most touching call to hear Jehovah's controversy with His people, in spite of His goodness to them from the beginning and through the wilderness into Canaan. It is not offerings but righteousness He values. In the face of iniquity, deceit, and violence, of family bonds turned to enmity all the more evil and destructive, the prophet waits on Jehovah with confidence of deliverance and vindication.

However, he looks through the desolation that must intervene because of Israel's sins to the restitution of all things in the latter day, when the nations shall be ashamed of all their might, and lick the dust. "Who is a God like 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. He will turn again and have mercy upon us; He will tread under foot our iniquities. And Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the seas. Thou wilt perform truth to Jacob, lovingkindness to Abraham, which Thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old" (7:18-20).

In denying God's faithfulness to Israel and monopolizing the earthly promises, Babylon has shown herself, as in all else, faithless to the true place of His church, in present suffering and future glory with Christ.

U



## William Sloan

JOHN BJORLIE

**W**e think that Irish monks came to the Faroe Islands before the Vikings. These 21 islands of the North Atlantic are in the middle of a triangle between Scotland, Iceland, and Norway. There the Irish brought their livestock to graze on the hills, and so called the islands *foer* (sheep) and *ey* (island) or Faroe.

The Norwegian chieftain, Guim Kamban, around 825 murdered most of those hapless Irish and drove the rest into hiding in the mountains. So whatever Christianity the Irish had did not get a foothold; neither did the Irish tongue. The Faroese language is of decidedly Norse origin, similar to Icelandic. But the Norse are not the chatty sort. Short on verbal communication, the broad ax and the hammer were the first Norse response to the gospel. A grim answer indeed!

Christianity displaced Norse idolatry around 1000 AD so that today, instead of fantasizing about going to Valhalla so they can fight all day and drink all night, the descendants of the Vikings give away the Nobel peace prize. It is the gospel that changed the Norsemen. We assume that most of that early evangelism came through imported Christian slaves brought over from Britain and Ireland.

Englishman David Clifford, reporting on a visit to the Faroes in 1980, wrote, "Would you believe it? There is still a country in this world where there is no unemployment and no strikes. Where there are no murders, no shooting and no guns. No mugging, no pornographic sales, no prostitution, and no drug addicts." For years the Faeroese have had no police force.

The after effects of Christianity were only a monument to the past when William Gibson Sloan (1845-1914) came in 1866. There the Lutheran church practices infant baptism. So that, though there are true believers among the Lutherans, their doctrines of baptismal regeneration cut at the jugular of true evangelism.

The Islands' peculiar natural beauty and rugged peaks are matched by the hardy people that fish from its shores. Their austere, rigorous

*One great farce of fiction is the glamorizing of those slave-trading, marauding, idolatrous barbarians. Surely one of history's greatest tributes to the gospel is seen in the transforming of this people.*

lifestyle has made them a longsuffering lot who would not leap into any new ideology. Like Luther's hymn, their spiritual views are "a bulwark, never changing."

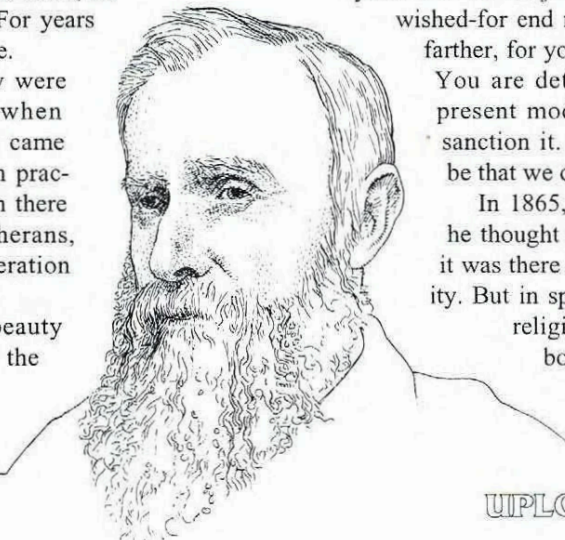
William Sloan of Dalry, Scotland, went to the Shetland Islands in 1863 as a Christian book salesman. At this time there were signs of an awakening. He gave out tracts, and preached wherever he found an open door, in church buildings and in cottage meetings. From Shetland fishermen, he heard about conditions on the Faroe Islands.

The Lord confirmed to William in his own spirit that he should fulfill his ministry in the north. When he laid the matter before his brethren in Motherwell, they commended him to the grace of the Lord for this service. So he returned to Faroe in 1866, visiting various places in the Orkneys and Shetlands on the way.

It was a return with a difference: Sloan was no longer depending on his ecclesiastical connection (because he had none!), nor on the sale of literature (although he still recognized its importance) to maintain him materially. He was depending entirely on the Lord for his support, both spiritual and temporal. He reckoned that the God who had saved him could keep him.

His fiancée, Jane Watson, broke up with him when he told her of his decision to live by faith. She wrote: "Now Willie, you know we have been holding correspondence for nearly seven years and we are just as far from attaining the wished-for end now than we were, I think farther, for you don't seem to care for it. You are determined to stick to your present mode of living and I cannot sanction it. So the consequence must be that we cease to correspond..."

In 1865, he settled in Tørvshavn. If he thought the Scots were a stern lot, it was there that he faced Norse austerity. But in spite of the indifference and religious obstructionism, he labored for thirteen years with few evident results. One of the first converts,



## William Sloan

however, Elsebeth Isaksen, became his wife in 1881.

While evangelizing from door to door in a fishing village on the Isle of Sandoy, evening fell and he had no accommodation for the night. The snow was falling as he came to the last house on the street. From inside the people asked, "Who are you?" When he answered, they said, "No, we cannot have you in our home. The priest has told us you are a heretic."

Finding a boathouse which was open at both ends, he bundled himself up for a long cold evening, praying "that he might survive the night."

Meanwhile, the oldest daughter at the last home where William had stopped, looked at her parents and asked, "If a dog had come to the door, you wouldn't have chased it away on a night like this." Her parents admitted that she had a point, and so let her go to find the man and bring him home. She followed the prints in the snow to the boathouse and invited him home. There he was given dry clothes and food. But Sloan was a bold man, and in spite of his tenuous status asked if they would let him read the Bible and pray with them. They agreed but "only from our Bible." He sang beautifully, read and prayed, and they retired for the night. The bad weather persisted, so that he stayed with them several days, resulting in blessing for the girl and her family.

He had become acquainted with Thomas M'Laren, Rice T. Hopkins, and others. Mainly through their help, a small hall was built at Tørshavn. At first only a handful met to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Sloan was joined by A. P. Macdonald from Scotland, and they shared the attic above the meeting room. In 1881, M'Laren visited and preached by interpretation. Later on, the missionaries were joined by Alexander and Christina Mitchell, who serviced there for nearly ten years before moving to Norway in 1899.

The work was getting on its feet at Tørshavn, enabling William and Alex to branch out in the work. They toured other islands with the gospel in 1891. D. J. Danielsen of Solmunde, a native of the Faroes, worked

Forty years after Sloan went to be with Christ, a woman lay dying in the hospital at Tørshavn. She suddenly regained consciousness, sat up in bed and exclaimed, "It is only to believe in Jesus; that is what Old Sloan said!" She then fell back on the bed and died peacefully.

About that time, a visiting Englishman said to a local preacher, "I heard that William Sloan was not a very dynamic preacher." The brother, Petur Haberg, replied, "Maybe this is true, but forty years after his death he is still speaking to the hearts of the people. That is what I call a good preacher!"

—*Fisherman of Faroe*, by Fred Kelling

the northern islands. Farmhouses became spiritual birthrooms, as the locals gathered to hear one of their own describe the gospel in the Faroese language. Christian meeting places began to appear as the blessing spread.

Sloan's last message was on the Second Coming, September 2, 1914, in Ebenezer, Tørshavn. One Faroese young man tells the sequel: "After the meeting, we followed him home. We often walked home with him. I had visited his home many times, and always he spoke to me about eternity, and of how much the Lord Jesus had loved me; but I only laughed at him and didn't want to be affected by what he said. Although I attended the meetings it was just in order to please him. But Mr. Sloan used to say, 'I trust, however, that I shall see you saved before I leave this scene.'

"Sloan habitually gave away tracts. On this evening, as his eyesight was poor, he saw what he thought was a man standing by the roadside, and approached to offer a tract. But it was only a pillar of stone! When I saw this, it was as if I had been struck by lightning. I thought, 'You are just like that rock. Just dead, cold and hard as that stone.' As I followed that old warrior of the Lord Jesus Christ to his home, it came to me with tremendous force how necessary it was for me to be saved, and how dangerous it is to harden your heart against the calling of the Spirit.

"Two days later, Mr. Sloan left to be with the Lord, but before he went home to Glory, he was told the great news, which brought joy to him, that I too, was saved and had found forgiveness of sins, peace and eternal life through the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ."

MATERIAL FOR THIS ARTICLE WAS TAKEN FROM:

David C. Clifford, *The Faroe Islands*, Interest, May, 1981

Fredk. A. Tatford, *That the World May Know*, *West European Evangel*, Vol. 8, Echoes of Service

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U

## Prophet with a Poet's Heart

KINGSLEY G. RENDELL

**T**he identity of this prophet is uncertain. Nahum calls himself the Elkoshite. Elkosh was probably situated in Galilee; certainly Nahum was familiar with this particular part of Palestine. It is most

probable that the prophet moved into Judah after the fall of Israel, when the northern territory was repopulated by Esar-haddon. It is not difficult to date this prophecy; obviously it was written soon after the fall of No-Amon in Egypt (3:8) which took place in 665 or 664 BC, and shortly before the fall of Nineveh in 607 BC. It may well have been written in the 630's or 620's.

The subject of the prophecy can be conveniently expounded according to its chapter divisions. In the first chapter, we have a forceful reminder of the sovereignty of God's power. The second chapter reminds us of how faithful God is to His Word. The last chapter declares the finality of God's judgment.

### THE SUPREMACY OF GOD'S POWER

God, not man, is the final arbiter of men's destinies. When Nahum prophesied, Nineveh's day of grace was almost at an end. Since Jonah's ministry in the city, succeeding generations had relapsed into all kinds of iniquity. We must never forget that, while God is always presenting men with opportunities to repent, while He is ready to pardon the penitent, He never condones sin, but judges it thoroughly.

There can be no doubt about the meaning of 1:2-5. The picture which Nahum paints is somber indeed, yet majestic in its description of the eternal God. He is portrayed as Master of the elements, rebuking the sea, withering the vine, removing the mountains by the thundering of His word, scorching the earth by the fire of His holiness. Nature, as Paul reminds us in Romans, is subjected to vanity because of man's sin and consequently must share its judgment until the manifestation of the sons of God. Indeed the prophet reminds us that every force is subject to His sway: flood (v. 8), fire (vv. 5-6), darkness (v. 8), and drought (v. 4). It is a dark picture, yet not one of unrelieved darkness, for here and there a shaft of light penetrates the gloom. When we consider God's sovereignty we must not think of it as unmitigated severity. In our consideration of this chapter we may notice three important truths.

1. God's power is always subject to His patience. Though God is sovereign, He is not swift to punish the

*Nahum may not be the most widely read of the Prophets, but in many ways it is the most moving and the most poetic. The beauty and force of his description has fortunately been preserved in our English translations.*

sinner. Nahum describes Him as "jealous." In the Septuagint the word is rendered *zelotes*, from which comes our English word "zealot," a term which gives a more correct indication of the prophet's mind. Though God is zealous for righteousness He is slow to anger, and because He is sovereign He can afford to wait, yet men must never interpret His patience as weakness, for God will never acquit the wicked.

2. God's omnipotence is always conditioned by His benevolence. God's power may be irresistible (v. 6), but His purpose is beneficial. His might may be insuperable, but His mercy is undeniable. Nineveh had enjoyed His mercy; now it was to suffer His wrath. When God chastens, it is that He might cleanse.

3. Though God wages war on evil, He publishes peace to His people. The last verse of the first chapter is like the first ray of sunlight which breaks through the storm clouds. "When the city is destroyed; when the gods, the custodians of its civic life are dishonored (v. 14); when the roar of its falling masonry is hushed, and the noise of war is silenced, the sweet flute-like overtures of the gospel are heard. The Messiah swiftly and silently speeds on His way.

### THE FIDELITY OF GOD'S WORD

Nahum declared that Nineveh was about to learn that, as obedience had brought them blessing in Jonah's day, so now, iniquity would result in judgment. How vividly the prophet paints the picture and how dramatically he describes the horrors of a siege! How alarmingly the second chapter begins with the words, "The breaker is come." Suddenly and swiftly Nahum imagines the enemy appearing before the battlements of the city. As we follow the course of the conflict there are three lessons we learn.

1. Man makes a vain effort to preserve his *modus vivendi*. Like every other city, Nineveh had its own civic consciousness, its own peculiar characteristics.

Truly it was a wicked city; no people were more cruel and bloodthirsty than those of Nineveh, yet even Nineveh had its redeeming features. Its people had responded wholeheartedly to the preaching of Jonah. Men will defend their heritage no matter how degenerate it has become. Like the Ninevites we do our utmost to preserve our life, we zealously guard our gates. No matter how rotten a man's way of life may be, he will cling tenaciously to it. It is a fact we must bear in mind in our evangelism among the unsaved.

2. A man's enemies will make a determined assault on his way of life, seeking to destroy it, bringing him into captivity. That is why empires flourish and fade. Man in his lust and greed must ever impose his practices by force of arms on others. Freedom, indeed, is only to be found through faith in the Saviour. "If the Son shall make you free ye shall be free indeed." Liberty can only be realized as we are "transformed by the renewing of our minds"; slavery is experienced conversely as we are "conformed to this world" with its evil principles. Nahum describes the soldiers in the streets and steel chariots flashing in the sun, a vivid description to which the most ludicrous interpretations have been attached, interpretations from which every sane commentator turns in disgust.

3. Divine judgment can leave behind it terrible desolation. The prophet records that the first to fall would be the defenders of the city. Veterans would be pressed into service (2:7), but they must stumble in the streets. Nahum predicts that the streets which will run red with blood, will be deluged with water ere the destruction of the city is complete. There was a tradition that the city of Nineveh would never fall to the enemy until the water of the Tigris flowed through its streets, and that is precisely what happened. Then the Assyrian would be devoured as he had devoured his prey (2:13).

### THE FINALITY OF GOD'S JUDGMENT

The final chapter of this short prophecy begins with a lurid picture of the horrors of the siege. We hear the crack of the whip (3:2), the rattle of wheels in the streets and the snorting of the horses as they speed to the scene of the fighting. Nahum shows us the flashing sword and the gleaming spear, the bodies of the slain piled high in the city streets, obstructing the escape of the defeated Ninevites (v. 3). It is an intensely human

picture and yet inhuman. Yet behind the inhumanity of man, we see the terrible outcome of man's sin and divine judgment. God permits one nation to be the scourge of another. The true cause of Nineveh's fall is not the hostility of Babylon but the displeasure of God (v. 5). The prophet declares that God will treat Nineveh as a harlot, exposing her shame (vv. 5-6). In that day Nahum maintains that none will sympathize with her, so cruelly has she treated her captives (v. 7).

No city was more ideally situated for defense than No-Amon, the celebrated Thebes in Egypt, yet as it had fallen, so Nineveh would fall ingloriously. Is it not a warning that the strength of a nation lies not in its geographical position, its military defenses or influential allies, but in the godliness of its people? How vital it is to be reconciled to God, to be at peace with Him, to know Christ as Saviour. How incumbent it is on every gospel preacher to declare the whole counsel of God and warn his hearers to flee from the "wrath to come."

The reaction of Nineveh was that of the unrepentant in every age. Instead of crying to God for mercy, its people made desperate efforts to save themselves, seeking refuge where it could not be found. When the judge has passed sentence, it is too late to escape the nemesis of one's sin.

Finally, the prophet predicts the extinction of the city's life. Nineveh was ripe for judgment, as ripe as the fig that falls from the tree into the mouth of the eater (v. 12). Its ill-gotten gains would be spoiled, its corrupt culture would collapse, and its doom was inevitable (v. 14). The whole prophecy is a warning to the wicked that God judges man's sin, but a comfort to the godly that God vindicates righteousness. All that exalts itself against God must ultimately be as Nineveh. Truth will conquer and right must win since God is sovereign in the world He created and controls. **U**



*The Book of Faith's Problems*

W. ROSS RAINEY

**H**abakkuk has been called “the doubting Thomas of the Old Testament,” “the grandfather of the Reformation,” “the prophet of faith,” and “the free-thinker among the prophets.” Had they known each other, there is no question but what Habakkuk and Job would have been bosom friends. It is evident that he lived in the period of the rise of the neo-Babylonian Empire (c. 625 BC), for the Chaldean invasion of Judah was threatening (1:5-6) and the iniquity of Judah was increasing.

Habakkuk was contemporary with Jeremiah at home and with Daniel abroad, having undoubtedly prophesied in the reigns of Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim. The state of things recorded in 1:2-4 coincides with the conditions in Jehoiakim's time, and the threatened invasion of the Chaldeans (i.e., the Babylonians) answers to the facts recorded in 2 Kings 24 and 25.

A key word for the book is *justice*, while Robert Lee has stated its message as “God's consistency with Himself in view of permitted evil.” Eric W. Hayden has summed up the book's message as “Living the Life of Faith,” while its key verse is 2:4— “The just shall live by his faith.”

It has been suggested that Habakkuk seems more concerned with solving a problem than with delivering a message. Nevertheless, we can learn a valuable lesson from him, for when he was faced with a seemingly unsolvable problem, he took it to God instead of for-

*Virtually nothing is known of Habakkuk, although his life's testimony is reflected in the meaning of his name, “clinging” or “embracing,” illustrated in Genesis 33:4 where Esau embraced Jacob after 20 years of separation.*

saking his faith as some would do and have done. Habakkuk's problem centers upon the same theme taken up in Psalm 73—namely, why a just, holy and omnipotent God at times permits the wicked to flourish and the more righteous to suffer at their hands. In other words, the theological question at stake is how God's patience with evil can square with His righteousness. With Job the problem was personal; with Habakkuk it was national. Having learned that the Chaldean nation was merely a tool employed by God to chasten Judah for its own shameful cruelties and the idolatry of the days of the wicked kings, Manasseh and Amon, the prophet's perplexity was only intensified. How could God punish a nation by a less righteous nation?

It is well to remember that war is God's scourge, and with it He chastens rebellious nations. Habakkuk's problem is perennial and is as pertinent today as it was in his day. The answer to the problem is disclosed in the book's key text of Habakkuk 2:4, the main thrust of this prophecy showing how God's troubled prophet

**The prophet,  
when he prayed “Revive  
Thy work, O Lord,” did not  
desire only that the few right-  
eous might become more earnest  
and godly, but that God would so  
use His Word that many might be  
turned from their sin and thus  
the spiritual life of the nation  
might be quickened  
and renewed. —Goold**



## The Book of Faith's Problems

took his doubts and difficulties to the Lord, and how he found his answer.

The late J. Vernon McGee said that Habakkuk "had a question mark for a brain." It is certainly true that the prophet began his book with a question mark (1:3), but he closed it with an exclamation point (3:18-19).

While Jonah related his personal experience in prose, Habakkuk related his in poetry. Dr. Merrill F. Unger has commented that "Habakkuk, like Nahum and Isaiah, is couched in sublime poetry, reflecting the classical era of Hebrew prophecy. The magnificent lyric ode of chapter 3 contains one of the greatest descriptions of the theophany in relation to the coming of the Lord which has been given by the Holy Spirit, awaiting fulfillment in the day of the Lord (cf. 2 Thess. 1:7-10)."

### A SIMPLE OUTLINE

1. Faith Tried (ch. 1)
2. Faith Taught (ch. 2)
3. Faith Triumphant (ch. 3)

### SOME NOTABLE NOTES

Martin Luther has given a striking definition of Habakkuk's name, which can hardly be improved upon. "Habakkuk signifies an embracer," he wrote, "or one who embraces another, takes him into his arms," i.e., he comforts them and holds them up, as one embraces a weeping child, to quiet it with the assurance that if God wills it shall soon be better.

What Habakkuk wrote concerning himself, which is very little, explains the resemblance of his prophecy to the Psalms. He was not only a prophet (1:1), but also one of the Levitical choristers in the temple (3:19). His description of the majesty and self-revelation of God in chapter 3 stands supreme, and the fact that the whole of the book is written in a strongly lyrical character makes its structure nearer to the Psalms than any other of the prophetic writings.

The book is unique in that two-thirds of it is a conversation between the prophet and his Lord.

Habakkuk's prophecy must have been a favorite of the Apostle Paul's, for in the New Testament he quotes from it three times, that is, if Paul was the human author of the Letter to the Hebrews (cf. Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38). To this might be added the fact that

in Romans 1:17 the emphasis is on "just"; in Galatians 3:11 it is on "faith"; while in Hebrews 10:38 it is on "live."

W. Graham Scroggie has said of Habakkuk that "His first complaint is because of the apostasy of Judah, and his second is that the Lord could and would use as the instrument of chastisement such a wicked people as the Chaldeans. The Divine reply to the latter complaint is the heart of the book (2:4). It announces the Divine principle of righteousness which, in effect, is 'The unjust shall die: the just shall live.' This principle is applied, first to the Chaldeans (2:5-20), and then to Judah (ch. 3). In the first application a five-fold 'Woe' is pronounced against the Chaldeans, and the second application is a sublime Theophany and its effect. The text of the effect (3:16-19) is one of the finest sections in the Bible." Thus Habakkuk began his prophecy with a *sob*, but ends it with a *song*; he opened in *gloom*, but ends in *glory*.

Today, since there has never been a darker hour in the history of the world, God's people need to read Habakkuk's prophecy again and again in these critical, complex times. He reminds us that *God is still on the throne*, and that no matter what the outward appearances may be, His all-wise and loving purposes cannot be thwarted.

*Deep in unfathomable mines  
Of never-failing skill,  
He treasures up His bright designs  
And works His sovereign will.*

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### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Robert Lee, *The Outlined Bible*.

<sup>2</sup>Eric W. Hayden, *Preaching through the Bible*, II, p. 171.

<sup>3</sup>J. Vernon McGee, *Briefing the Bible*, p. 59.

<sup>4</sup>Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Handbook*, p. 425.

<sup>5</sup>W. Graham Scroggie, *Know Your Bible*, I, pp. 195-96.

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*Messiah is the Answer*

H. P. BARKER

**I** will utterly consume all things from off the land" (1:2). Man had become obnoxious in the sight of God, polluting the land with his idolatry and violence, defiling the whole creation. There was nothing but for him to disappear under God's judgment.

"Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth...it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger" (2:3). In the midst of corruption there has always been a remnant that fears God. Such are called on to seek Jehovah so that in the day of His anger they may be hidden. This brings us to the heart of the prophecy. Zephaniah means "hidden of the Lord," and he foretells how the "hidden ones" will be brought through the storm of the last days into the joy and glory of the millennial world.

Who but Christ could be the hiding-place of these godly Jews? From Him will come the resources to sustain them in their faithfulness to the truth. He will be their protector until the land is purged of the ungodly.

The prophecy does not refer to Christians but to Jews. Yet we observe a parallel between what Zephaniah unfolds and the gospel. Man in the flesh is utterly obnoxious to God, and must be got rid of in judgment. The believer can see this effected for him in the cross. Man, the world, sin, himself—all is removed from the eye of God in the death of Christ. But in raising Him from the dead, God starts the history of man again. It is, however, man of a new order, the order of Christ. We are brought to God as hidden in Him. This is beyond what we find in the prophets, but we can hardly read Zephaniah without being reminded of the way that God has brought us into blessing in Christ.

In chapter 2, the nations around the land of Israel come into view for judgment: Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia, Assyria. But just as there will be a spared remnant of Judah, so there will be some spared Gentiles to share the blessing of Christ's kingdom—"the isles of the heathen." They are not "hidden" like the remnant, but when judgment is executed they are spared, and have the healing and peace that will come.

In chapters 2 and 3, the remnant is in view, the afflicted and poor who trust in the the Lord (3:12), and who are blessed in Christ. Three times Jehovah is said to be in the midst of His people. That surely is Christ.

"The just Lord is in the midst thereof; He will not do iniquity...He faileth not" (3:5). The state of Jerusalem is dealt with in this chapter, called "filthy."

*Zephaniah views the day of Israel's future blessing, and touchingly speaks of how God will rest in His love and joy over His ransomed ones with singing. As we study the road which leads to this glorious goal, we see how it all depends on Christ.*

Her princes were roaring lions; her prophets treacherous persons. Her priests had defiled the sanctuary. But in shining contrast we have Him who was "Faithful amid unfaithfulness; 'Mid darkness, only light."

But His presence brought to light the workings of evil, and necessitated the condemnation of it. Besides judgment for the rebellious, however, there were other results that flowed from His presence in the midst of Israel. He attracted many to Himself. They were not of much account in the world, a few poor fishermen and others, but they were precious in His sight. And they will have their counterpart in that day, for there shall be "an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of Jehovah." This remnant will be characterized by that which marked Him when He was here: "the remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity."

"The King of Israel, even Jehovah, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more" (3:15). God's thought of a king is that he should rule for the blessing of his subjects. Israel had suffered at the hands of many rulers. Her first monarch oppressed her and appropriated her possessions (1 Sam. 8:11-18); most of his successors walked in his ways. But Christ will be in the midst of His people with unbounded blessing. If, as the Righteous One in the midst, He exposed Israel's sin (and bore it), as the King in the midst He will drive evil away, so that it may be said: "Be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem."

"Jehovah thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy" (3:17). What an insight we get here into the very heart of God! Often He had mourned over the unfaithfulness and sin of His people. He had, times without number, entreated and warned them. But they had turned a deaf ear.

At length God shows Himself mighty, not to judge, but to save. Instead of mourning over His wayward people, He will rejoice over them with joy. Whose singing? Ours? Israel's? No: the Lord Himself "will joy over thee with singing."

**U**

*The Messenger & His Message*

HAMILTON SMITH

*The prophet Haggai has the distinction of being called "the Lord's messenger," and of delivering "the Lord's message" in a day of ruin and outward weakness. His is a call to "rise and build" again when discouragement has set in.*

**H**aggai's messages were addressed to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua, the high priest, clearly proving that the prophet was sent to the remnant of the Jews that returned to Jerusalem in the days of Cyrus, king of Persia, as recorded in the book of Ezra (Ezra 3:2).

To understand the significance of these messages, it is necessary to recall the special circumstances of this remnant. Seventy years before their return, the prophet Jeremiah, who lived in the closing days of the kingdom of Judah, had foretold that judgment would overtake the nation. Because of their wickedness they would be carried into captivity at Babylon and their land would become a desolation. Nevertheless, it was prophesied that after seventy years the Lord would cause them to return to their land (Jer. 25:12; 29:10; Dan. 9:2-3). The history of this return is recorded in the book of Ezra, which opens in the first year of Cyrus, the king of Persia, or seventy years after the Captivity. At that time, in order that the word of the Lord by Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, who issued a proclamation to the people of God setting them at liberty to return to the land to "build the house of the Lord God of Israel."

This proclamation became a test of the moral condition of the people of God. On the one hand, it raised the question, Were their affections so set on their land, their God, and the house of God, that in simple faith they were prepared to face trials and difficulties, opposition and reproach, in order to answer to the mind of God and carry out His will? Or on the other hand, Did they prefer to remain in Babylon with its ease and material comforts? Alas! the vast majority of God's people preferred to remain in the easy circumstances of a humiliating captivity, rather than face the trials and reproaches entailed by carrying out God's will.

To realize the significance of the charge to build the house, it is well to recall the great place that the house

of God has in the ways of God. The first mention of the house of God is in Genesis 28:17; the last in Revelation 21:3. From the first Book to the last—from the present creation in time right on to the new heavens and earth in eternity—the house of God has a great place in the purpose of God. The composition of the house may vary at different periods—formed of boards and curtains, or living stones—but the purpose of the house is ever the same, namely, to form a dwelling-place for God among men.

It follows that everything in God's house must take character from, and be consistent with, the One who dwells in the house. Thus the first characteristic of God's house is holiness: "Holiness becometh Thine house, O Lord, for ever" (Ps. 93:5). Further, everyone in God's house must be dependent on God, and subject to His will. This dependence finds its expression in prayer. "Mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people" (Isa. 56:7). Further, if, in God's house, all are dependent on God, then all in that house will be blessed by God, and the house in which man is blessed will be the place where God is worshiped.

Thus we learn from Scripture that it is God's desire to dwell in the midst of His people, and that His dwelling is marked by holiness, by dependence on God and subjection to God; by blessing for man and worship to the Lord.

In connection with these great truths, and in order to build the house of God, a remnant had been set free from Babylon and brought back to God's land. The proclamation of Cyrus definitely stated that he was charged to build Jehovah "an house at Jerusalem." His appeal to any among God's people is to "go up to Jerusalem...and build the house of the Lord God of Israel." Those who remained were exhorted to help with a "freewill offering for the house of God that is at Jerusalem." In response to this appeal there came forward a remnant "whose spirit God had raised to go up to build the house of the Lord which is at Jerusalem."

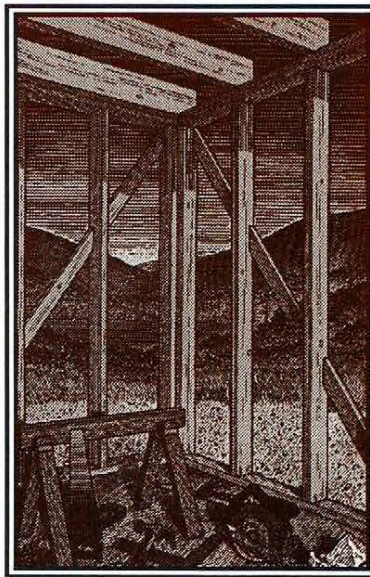
"Upon this," it has been said, "hung all their fortunes, and as it was prosecuted or neglected, their prosperity ebbed or flowed." It has, however, been invariably found throughout the history of God's people that whatever has been the will of God for the moment, has always been the special object of the enemy's attack. So the returned remnant found in their day. Two years

after their arrival at Jerusalem they take in hand the special work for which they had been brought back to the land; as we read, they “set forward the work of the house of the Lord,” and “laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord” (Ezra 3:8-10). For two years the enemy had left them in peace; but as soon as they took up their proper work, according to the will of God, the enemy raised opposition (Ezra 4).

Moreover, it is instructive to note the character of the opposition. The adversaries did not at first condemn the remnant for building the house; on the contrary, they said, “Let us build with you” (Ezra 4:2). It is only when the people of God refused to be associated in the work of the Lord with those who worshipped after a human fashion that the storm of opposition arose. Sadly, in the presence of this storm, their faith gave way; for twelve years the work was in abeyance.

The people had failed, but God never gives up His purpose, nor forsakes His people because of their failure. So it came to pass, in the mercy of God, at the end of fourteen years after their return to Jerusalem, the prophet Haggai, the Lord’s messenger, is sent with several definite messages from the Lord.

We may pause to enquire, Is there anything in these days that is illustrated by the history of the returned remnant as recorded in the book of Ezra? Looking back over the history of the professing Church we cannot but recognize that for long centuries the professing Church has been completely under the dominion of the world. There have been, indeed, a great number of true believers who were faithful to the light they had, and in the day to come they will walk with Christ in white and have their bright reward. Nevertheless, the professing Church, as a whole was, and still is, enslaved in Babylonish captivity. Then in the early part of the last century, there was a very distinct work of God by which the great truths concerning Christ and the Church were recovered for the people of God.



As a result of this work a number of God’s people, in order to answer to the truth, separated from the systems of men which, in different measures, set aside the truth of Christ and the Church. They abandoned the traditions and customs of men, and all the rites and ceremonies of man’s invention, and, refusing every human head, and acting on the sole authority of God’s word, they met together seeking to give Christ His place as Head of the Church, and the Holy Spirit His place as dwelling in the midst of God’s people. They separated from the corruptions of Christendom in order to walk in the light of these great truths under the leadership of Christ, and their spiritual prosperity wholly depended upon their maintenance of these truths.

However, the spiritual energy of that revival has not been maintained. Many, indeed, awakened to the increasing corruptions of Christendom, have separated from the systems of men, like the remnant who escaped from the corruption of Babylon, but have become little more than companies of believers separate from that which is grossly evil and condemned by the Word of God, but falling short of positive care and concern for the principles of God’s house as revealed in the Scriptures.

Let us remember that “building” is a positive thing. However right it is to separate from that which the Word of God condemns, it is at best a testimony against that which is wrong. If God directs us to depart from iniquity, and to separate from vessels of dishonor, it is in order that we may “follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart.” Thus walking in the practice of the great truths of the house of God—holiness, dependence on God, subjection to God—we shall become a positive witness to the grace of God and be able to worship God in spirit and in truth.

If then we realize, in any measure, our failure, the word of the Lord by the prophet Haggai will surely have a voice that speaks to the conscience and appeals to the heart today. **U**

*The Prophet of Glory*

ARNO C. GAEBELEIN

*The most holy man in Jerusalem, the high priest, wore the inscription, "Holiness to Jehovah" on his mitre, but Zechariah envisioned a day when even the bells on the horses and the cooking pots would be holy.*

**T**he name Zechariah means *Jehovah remembers*. The prophet by that name was born in Babylon in the captivity, for when he returned to the land of his fathers he was but a child. Like some other prophets, he was a priest as well as a prophet. His work as prophet was commenced by him when he was a young man, for thus he is called in one of the visions. The time of his opening address to the people is two months after Haggai had opened his lips in Jehovah's name. Haggai received the word of the Lord in the sixth month in the second year of Darius, and Zechariah in the eighth month of the same year, about 520 BC.

Both prophets had the same desire, namely, to encourage the Jewish remnant in the blessed work of rebuilding the house of the Lord. This work had suffered an interruption; the Samaritans were the cause. They had applied to join in the work, but as the remnant considered them idolators and not belonging to God's people, the application was rejected. These Samaritans tried after that in various ways to hinder the rebuilding, which had so blessedly begun. At last they succeeded in obtaining a decree which forbade the building.

All work ceased for about 14 years. But when Darius became king, the building of the temple was once more made possible. The leaders in the enterprise were Zerubbabel and Joshua, the high priest. But again they were hindered from the outside, while on the other hand the people themselves had lost much interest and no longer possessed that love and zeal for God's house, so prominent after their return. Thus Haggai said: "This people say, It is not the time for us to come, the time for the Lord's house to be built...Is it a time for you to dwell in your ceiled houses, while this house lieth waste" (Hag. 1)?

In that critical moment these two prophets made their appearance, and God gave them visions of comfort and glad tidings to encourage the disheartened, selfish, and unbelieving people.

The visions and prophecies of Zechariah, however, do not only give assurance that there could be no failure in the work the remnant had taken up anew, but more than that in them the glorious future of Jerusalem and Zion is unfolded. They lead up to the grand finale of the history of God's ancient people, the time when Israel, redeemed and restored forever, will sing the grand and glorious Hallelujah.

It is, of course, true that Zechariah did a blessed work for the people who lived in his day; he had a special mission to perform and succeeded in it, but the Spirit of God in the message of comfort for that time gives the history of events then in a distant future. The Babylonian captivity of Israel foreshadows their greater dispersion in which they are wanderers today, and the restoration which took place in the time of Zechariah is typical of that coming restoration for which we hope and pray.

Zechariah may therefore be fitly called the Prophet of the Restoration. Surely it is a deplorable blindness in some teachers of the Word, who see in the book of Zechariah nothing but past history, and who claim that all has been fulfilled in the return of the small Jewish remnant from the captivity, and whatever promises of mercy given to Jerusalem and the land of Judah find now their spiritual fulfillment in the church.

We find that instead of the book of Zechariah being all fulfilled prophecy, as some would have it, it is indeed mostly unfulfilled, and even some of the prophetic promises which on the surface seem to have seen a fulfillment, were only in part realized. And how important at this time to study the book of Zechariah! We are living in the time when that greater restoration is about to come to pass.

Several of the Jewish commentators confess an inability to explain the book. The well-known Jewish commentator, Solomon Ben Jarchi (generally known by the name Rashi), says: "The prophecy [of Zechariah] is very dark, for it contains visions much like dreams, which want interpreting, and we will never succeed in finding the true meaning until the Teacher of righteousness arrives." Abarbanel makes a similar confession.

We praise God that the Teacher of Righteousness has come, even the Spirit of Truth, who guides into all truth and reveals the thing to come.

**U**

*Fearing God*

RANDY AMOS

**G**od sent His prophet Malachi to reveal the missing ingredient in Israel's national life. The Lord asked the question, "Where is Mine honor?" and "Where is My fear?" The word "fear" both in the Old and New Testaments means "awe-inspiring," to be afraid of, to reverence. The Bible does present God as Someone to have a relationship with by grace and to be loved and enjoyed; yet at the same time to be greatly feared. How can both be true?

Take the example of the surging ocean and the radiating sun. The ocean can be positive. It is peaceful to the eye. One can immerse himself in it and experience its refreshing vitality. Yet at the same time with its mighty waves and strong tide it can bring sudden death. If one is to enjoy the ocean he must also fear its mighty power. The fear-respect of the negative governs the positive. In a similar way, the sun can bring warmth and growth and yet can cause one to be burned or to die of thirst. If not feared for its mighty radiation and thus abused, the positive is lost.

God is love and His gospel saves the repentant believer forever from the penalty of sin, death, and the lake of fire. Yet God is awesome, holy, and righteous, and there will be consequences in our lives and at the Judgment Seat of Christ (the place where rewards for the believer's service are given) for those who abuse His standards.

It is, "by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil" (Prov. 16:6). This fear is the beginning of wisdom. A healthy fear of God will hinder a person from sinning and motivate the believer to please Him. When only love is emphasized, fear is diminished and actions become irreverent to God.

**SYMPTOMS OF NO FEAR**

If the outer form was right (and it was) but "fear" was missing, then what are the telltale symptoms of

*Though a remnant was back from Babylon and residing in the land, though the house of God was rebuilt and functioning, and the sin of idolatry was no longer present, God was highly displeased. Whatever for?*

God's people when they have lost the fear of the Lord? Following are ten evidences God brings through His prophet Malachi to His people who served God but no longer feared Him.

1. *Questioning God:* The believers of Malachi's day questioned God's ways with them: "I have loved you, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, Wherein hast Thou loved us?" (1:2). Though they were back in the land and had their temple, it was inferior to Solomon's and they were under foreign rule. Therefore in spite of God's promises to them and His historic faithfulness, they questioned Him.

One no longer holds God in awesome respect and fear when he or she questions His dealings. To question God is to doubt His word, veracity, knowledge, wisdom, faithfulness, and love, and therefore defame Him. To not understand God's ways and ask "why?" is one thing, but to ask a question that implies doubt is quite another. The one thief on the cross questioned, "If Thou be Christ..." The other thief replied, "Dost not thou fear God?"

2. *Not the Best for Worship:* God charged them with despising His Name and polluting His worship, (1:7-10). This was a mystery to them, for they spoke well of God in their services and the priests showed up at the temple to offer various worship sacrifices. But their actions in the house of God revealed that they considered worship to God secondary and regarded the table of the Lord as contemptible (despicable). In what way? By how and what they offered!

They did not give God the fresh, yeastless bread but old bread. Not prime animals but the sick and blind. Their attitude made an explicit statement about God's worth. God responded by declaring that His Name is great and challenged them to offer such to their governor, a human dignitary. They honored men more than God. Their worship was a sham to His awesomeness.

Do we fear God and offer Him the best in our



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preparation for worship at the assembly, or do we go to be entertained and to feed on soulish feelings? One could stay home and worship Him, but that doesn't require as much sacrifice as assembling together as He desires. But is He worth it? Is worship an option if our schedule permits, or "a must" in respect for our Lord? Does our attitude, dress, and punctuality exhibit we are in the presence of awesome Majesty?

3. *Boredom with Worship:* The people in Malachi's day said in regard to worship, "What a weariness is it!" (1:13). There are more pressing things in life than to expend the effort in giving God the best. After all, "God should understand our needs," was their attitude. God responded by proclaiming what they had forgotten. "I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and My name is dreadful (feared) among the heathen" (1:14).

4. *People's Feelings Over Truth:* God's messengers who were to give people the plain and simple truth of His Word, actually by their actions and words, caused the people to fail to grasp the truth (2:7-9). How did they do this? They put certain people's preferences above "Thus saith the Lord." God said, they "have been partial (respecting persons) in the law" (v. 9).

5. *Relationships Over Holiness:* God's people were charged with having "profaned (defiled) the holiness of the Lord" (2:11). How? By denying God was holy? No—by entering into relationships that were forbidden by His Word. (They broke the holy covenant sealed with their wives so they could enjoy relationships with other women.) Though God hated divorce (2:16), they did not. Self-fulfillment was their emphasis.

6. *Grace Excuses Sin Attitude:* Their concept of a holy God had diminished. They said concerning those who sinned, "He [God] delighteth in them" (2:17). They based this on the fact that those who sinned were not immediately punished. They reasoned that God was not just when they said, "Where is the God of judgment [justice]?" However, it was their responsibility to judge by the law, but instead they faulted God. Why? They "fear not Me" (3:5), said God.

7. *Ordinances Not Important:* In their defective image of God they thought He changed with the times. They regarded the ordinances given to the fathers as old fashioned, irrelevant, and optional—ordinances such as correct conduct in the house of God. God reminded them, "I change not" (3:6) and charged that

they had "gone away from My ordinances" (3:7). Though they still held the fundamentals, God saw their hearts were far from Him (revealed by their dishonoring His ordinances) and so entreated, "Return unto Me." How do we respond to the commandments given to the church of God, as in 1 Corinthians 14:37?

8. *Giving to God Not a Priority:* They stole from God. They didn't take from the temple treasury, but they did not give Him the desired tithe or the best offerings (3:7-10). God was given leftovers. The Lord deserves the honor of being put first; if so, He will see to it that our needs are met (Mt. 6:33; 2 Cor. 9:7-8).

9. *Equated Results with Rightness:* They looked around at circumstances to reach their decisions. They saw the sinner prospering, the arrogant happy, and the tempters of God escaping problems. They concluded it was "vain to serve God," and asked, "What profit is it that we have kept His ordinance?" (3:14). Success convinced them it was fine to do it differently. It wasn't God's Word that guided their thinking. If they didn't benefit, then God's ways weren't worth the bother.

However, God encourages the minority that "fear the Lord" to fellowship together and to encourage each other. God is preparing treasured jewels and has a book of remembrance written, "for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name" (3:16-17).

10. *Could Not See Their Wrong:* Though God was highly displeased and dishonored by their worship and service, they had no idea anything was wrong. As wrongs were pointed out, they would respond with, "Who me?" They said, "Wherein have we wearied Him?" and "Wherein shall we return?" and "What have we spoken so much against thee?"

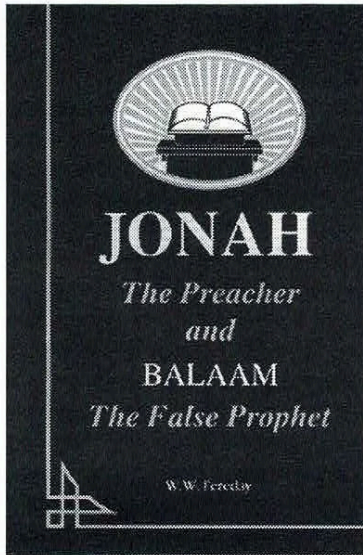
Like the assembly in Laodicea which lacked burning passion for God's glory and honor (Rev. 3), they were thus blinded and oblivious to their situation. God rejects form without passion. One of the greatest needs in the church today is that by grace we "serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Heb. 12:28).

For those who want to fear God, Malachi ends with encouragement: "But unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings" (4:2). Although this promise is made to faithful Israel in a day to come, who can doubt that those who reverence Him today will know the smile of heaven upon their lives.

U

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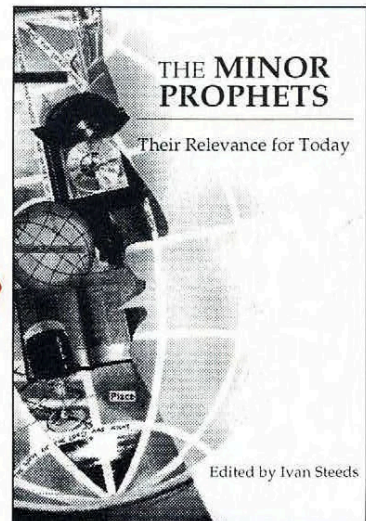
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# AFTER

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

