

# "WHAT DOES THE LORD REQUIRE?"

LESSONS FROM THE MINOR  
PROPHETS

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## THE BOOK OF THE TWELVE:

“What doth the Lord require?” (Micah 6: 8) - Introduction

*Gary Young*

It is wonderful to be here once again at the 17th Annual Eastern Shore Lectureship. This has become a major event in the calendar, not only of the Eastern Shore congregation, but also of many of the churches of Australia and even further afield. This year we have brethren assembled from Australia, New Zealand and the United States, and we want to extend a warm welcome to all of you, and express the prayer that you will have a safe, enjoyable and edifying time here at Eastern Shore.

The theme for this year's lectureship is “What doth the Lord Require: Lessons from the Minor Prophets”. These books, the last twelve of the Old Testament in the order used by most English Bibles, were grouped together as a single book in the Hebrew canon and referred to as “The Book of the Twelve”. Despite the fact that often these books are quite neglected, the fact is that these are supremely relevant books to the Christian today. Contained in them are a huge number of lessons, which teach us some extremely important and relevant principles which we can most certainly make use of in our day to day lives. The struggles of the ancient Israelites are not so very different to the difficulties which we face in our modern world: while technology, communication and the like have gone through many changes, man himself has not.

The Minor Prophets span the history of the Divided Kingdom period of Israelite history, with the exception of the last three, which come from the period of the Restoration of Israel and the beginning of the Second Commonwealth. Through this time the people of Israel faced problems with idolatry, immorality, foreign enemies, domestic discord, corrupt rulers and internal apathy, and much more besides. Each of these issues is dealt with in the course of these books, and as we study them we will see how very comprehensively they deal with these issues. Such problems, of course, are far from unique to ancient Israel - they are very much still current, and the way in which God deals with these problems through the avenue of the Minor Prophets makes these works a very important focus for our study.

While the date of some of the books is disputed, nevertheless we have a broad idea of the background for each of these books. The first nine come from the period of the divided kingdom, when the people of God were divided into two small kingdoms, Judah and Israel; and, after the fall of Israel to the Assyrians in 722 BC, Judah alone. This was a period that was characterised by idolatry and apostasy, especially in the Northern kingdom of Israel. Hosea, for example, spoke of the state of that kingdom during his ministry:

Hear the word of the Lord, ye children of Israel: for the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land (Hosea 4: 1).

The task of many of the prophets was to call back the people to obedience to God, for many in that period had forsaken the Lord. Indeed, it was for this very reason that God was allowing the pagan nations of Assyria and then Babylon to descend upon Palestine and despoil it. Habakkuk struggled with this concept, but finally came to an understanding that God is just and He would not allow the invaders to go unpunished:

Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation (Habakkuk 3: 18).

Within the Israelite kingdoms, there was political corruption and evil. Those who were supposed to be taking care of the needs of the people were instead stealing their livelihood, they were receiving bribes and perverting judgement. Amos, among others, protested these tendencies and proclaimed the need to restore judgement and for the rulers to behave in accordance with the trust and responsibility that God had placed in them:

But let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream (Amos 5: 24).

At the same time, the enemies of God's people, including the Edomites and others, were lifting themselves up with pride and exultation when they saw the difficulties that God's people were encountering, and the punishment they were undergoing. Part of the task of the prophets was to rebuke the pride of these enemies, and to inform them that they too were amenable to God's justice and that God would punish their pride:

Though thou mount on high as the eagle, and though thy nest be set among the stars, I will bring thee down from thence, saith the Lord (Obadiah 4).

In amongst all these trials and difficulties, however, the prophets never lost sight of the need of the people to have a personal faith, and the necessity of personal piety and responsibility toward God:

And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God (Micah 6: 8).

All these issues and struggles find a resonance today. While the specific background may be different, the basic problems which were faced by the Israelites in those days and which were addressed by the minor prophets remain the same as the basic problems we face today. There are still enemies of God who are filled with pride; there are still corrupt rulers; there are still those who corrupt and pervert the religion of truth; and there still remains the central need for each of us to individually devote ourselves to God and to His Kingdom.

The last three books belong to a more hopeful time, but one which came with its own challenges, some still tougher than the challenges that had characterised the previous books. Judah was carried away into Babylonian captivity in 586 BC, and it was not until the Babylonians were conquered by the Persian Empire under Cyrus that the Jews were allowed to return to their homeland, in 536 BC. Despite the opportunity of renewal, there were also many many obstacles to be overcome. There were foreign enemies who wanted to see the Jews kept at their current level of powerlessness, while there were also many within Israel who were trying to compromise with the powerful surrounding nations, and also to compromise the Law of God in so doing.

Part of the work of reconstruction particularly involved the restoration of the temple of God, which had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Some of the earliest returnees had commenced the work of reconstruction, but in the face of opposition the rebuilding work had come to a halt. God sent at this time the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, whose task it was to inspire a religious revival, and also to inspire the people of God to rise up

and to build the temple once more. Under the guidance of their leaders and the teaching of the prophets, the task was completed in 510 BC.

However, the problems of God's people were far from over: there was still corruption of various sorts, and the last of the minor prophets, Malachi, had to deal with issues of religious laxness and compromise. The people were complaining that God was no longer blessing them, and yet they had been offering the halt and the blind as offerings in defiance of what the Law of Moses said. In addition, they had refused to follow the Law of God regarding marriage and had divorced their Israelite wives to marry pagan women. Malachi told them to put God to the test: do His will, in the knowledge that God will indeed return those promised blessings when they did so. Here too, we see principles which are supremely relevant to the life of a Christian today, for Jesus also promises us that our necessities will be taken care of when we seek first God and His Kingdom (Matthew 6: 33).

One thread that runs throughout all the minor prophets, and indeed through the entire Old Testament, is that of the coming Messiah. The message that God was sending a Kinsman - Redeemer, a King, a Governor, was one that we find referred to in numerous prophecies throughout the books we have under consideration in this lectureship. We read prophecies about His birth, about His betrayal, about His kingship and priesthood, and much besides. It is fitting then that Malachi, the last written book of the Old Testament, closes with a prophecy concerning the one who would open the revelation of the New Testament, the one who would act as the harbinger of the Son of God Himself, the one whom we know as John the Baptist:

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse (Malachi 4: 5-6).

## HOSEA:

“They return, but not to the Most High” (Hosea 7: 16) - Lessons from an adulterous wife

*Ian McPherson*

Hosea is the only prophet who lived among the Northern tribes of Israel. At the time of his prophecy, the idolatry introduced by Jeroboam the Son of Nebat had spiraled, and the idolatrous land had now reached its zenith of corruption and immorality under Jeroboam II. *“Hear the word of the Lord, ye children of Israel: for the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood.”* Hosea 4:1-2

The fact that Israel would be taken away into Assyria forms the basis of the book. The text given to me for this Lectureship, shows the condition of Israel at the time, and why they had reached that condition *“They return, but not to the most High: they are like a deceitful bow: their princes shall fall by the sword for the rage of their tongue: this shall be their derision in the land of Egypt”* (Hosea 7:16). Deceitful” means “idle or slothful”, and “their princes” are their leaders of Israel. The text tells us that because of Israel’s sloth, and the scoffing of their leaders, they would be defeated in war and taken back into the type of captivity from which they were originally called out of when they were enslaved in Egypt.

**HOSEA IS A BOOK OF DOOM.** It opens with Hosea taking a wife and children of whoredom as God asked him to *“The beginning of the word of the Lord by Hosea. And the Lord said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord”* (Hosea 1:3).

This family of Hosea and Gomer becomes a sort of parable which forms the theme of the book. Hosea, as a faithful husband represents God. Gomer, his adulterous wife represents God’s bride, and the three children (Jezreel, Lo-ruhamah, and Lo-ammi represent the children of Israel. The names God gave these children are significant (V6- 9).

**Jezreel (1:4-5)** means "God scatters" or "God sows". "Jezreel" was the place where Jehu put an end to the house of Ahab as the Lord had commanded him to. However, because Jehu himself was also wicked, God lost His patience, and decided to scatter Israel among the nations of Assyria from which they would never return. .

By starting their names with the prefix “Lo” which means “not” God informed Israel of their doom. **Lo-ruhamah** meant “no mercy” and **Lo-ammi** meant “not my people” Thus indicating that God's patience had run out, and that God would no longer grant mercy to the children of Israel, and that they would no longer be regarded as His children.

These two eldest children were actually illegitimate. They were raised in Hosea’s home but were children of harlotry, fathered by Gomer’s lovers (**Hosea 2:4-5**). The Northern tribes were actually illegitimate right from the beginning when Jeroboam the son of Nebat, their founder made them a separated body to Judah. He made priests from those who were not Levites, established his own feast days, and introduced them to Idolatry by setting up golden calves for them to worship in Dan and Bethel. (1 Kings 12:25-33).

**HOSEA IS ALSO A BOOK OF HOPE.** Although the book prophesies the doom of Israel as it is taken into captivity, Hosea is a book of hope. Actually in every negative prophecy there is a seed of hope.

**Mercy will come through Judah** *“But I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the Lord their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen.* (Hosea 1:7). This verse like all those that promise forgiveness and hope to Israel is a Messianic prophecy. Mercy here was not promised to Judah in the fleshly sense, but to those who would receive mercy through the coming Messiah, the descendent of Judah through David (2 Samuel 7:12-17, Isaiah 7:13-14, 11:1)

**Jezreel will become great** *“Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God. Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: **for great shall be the day of Jezreel.**”* These verses are quoted in Romans 9:25-28 and applied to salvation in Christ, when the faithful remnant of Jews, together with faithful gentiles, were joined together in the church. This was the promise that was given through Abraham before the Law of Moses was given (Genesis 12:3, Galatians 3:26-29, Hosea 1:10-11)

The Mercy and deliverance of faithful Israel is predicted in this passage by changing the names of Gomer’s children to Ruhamah and Ammi. Without the prefix “Lo” their names change their meaning to “mercy” and “my people”, thus showing that God is still concerned about them and will save them if they change their ways Chapter 2 begins with a plea from their faithful brethren to repent (2:1-2).

The church began when 3000 Jews who were scattered among the nations accepted the gospel call to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:27-42). This was the beginning of the church. Soon many gentiles also accepted the gospel call and joined this faithful remnant of Jews in the one body. (2 Samuel 7:12-17, Isa 11:1).

Jezreel became great when the Messiah came and granted mercy to Israel. The word “Jezreel” means God scatters or God sows. In the first instance, Israel was scattered among the nations and Jezreel became a day of doom (Hosea 1:4-5). But just as seed must die before it can spring to life, the gospel harvest burst into life in the first century when God’s faithful seed was germinated

**GOMER REPENTS AND RETURNS (Chapter 3)** Her adultery brought irreversible consequences. However, like the prodigal son, Gomer saw her error, came to her senses and sought Hosea’s mercy (Hosea 2:7). Hosea received her back but did not resume his marital relationship with her for many days until she was fully cured of her harlotry. This typified how a remnant of Israel who were scattered among the nations would return *“Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days.* Hosea 3:5. This is a “latter days” prophecy which was fulfilled when faithful, repentant Jews accepted the gospel (See Acts 2:17, Isaiah 2:1-2). Since David was already dead, “David their king” mentioned here clearly refers to the Messiah.

**THERE WAS EVEN HOPE IN EGYPT.** Although Jehovah told Israel that they would “return to derision in the land of Egypt” (7:16). He also said to them *When Israel was a*

*child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt. Hosea 11:1.* This was quoted in Matthew 2:15 as referring to Egypt being the place safety and deliverance for God's Son.

Thus the book of Hosea is a great love story, showing how God continued to love Israel in spite of the fact that they were unfaithful to him, and as soon as they came to their senses and returned with penitent hearts he received them back and saved them through his Son.

**HOSEA IS A BOOK OF APPLICATION.** There are many vital lessons we can learn about adultery and how it influences marriage and society. Here are some of these lessons:

**ADULTERY IS ADDICTIVE** Finding a virtuous wife is a difficult thing at the best of times. King Lemuel said "*Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.*" (Proverbs 31:10). Hosea made a bad choice, in choosing Gomer. He suffered the consequences. Soon after they married, Gomer had two illegitimate children. This is because she had developed a "spirit of whoredoms". . "*They will not frame their doings to turn unto their God: for the **spirit of whoredoms** is in the midst of them, and they have not known the Lord".*" (**Hosea 5:4**). "*Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart.*" (**Hosea 4:11**). Illicit sex is addictive like alcohol and cigarettes. Gomer became so addicted TO immorality that she could not see the value of living faithfully and thought that sex was the way to happiness.

Many a person has suffered because they married someone with "the spirit of whoredoms. I knew a faithful young Christian man who converted a prostitute during a campaign. He fell in love and married her. As soon as the honeymoon was over he came to me in tears because his wife had not turned up one evening. It was not hard to find her; she had spent the night with some previous lovers. She had committed adultery within the first week of marriage. Any Christian who marries a person of the world today has a very real chance of their marriage ending like this.

**IT SHOULD BE A CAPITAL CRIME** Under the Law of Moses, adultery was a capital crime, "*And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbor's wife, the **adulterer and the adulteress** shall surely be put to death* Lev 20:10. The mean of Capital punishment was generally stoning (Deuteronomy 22:24). The criminal was either tied to a post or buried waist deep and the whole congregation would gather around and throw stones. Stones were small enough to not kill instantly. Sometime death would take ten minutes or so. God ordained this punishment because he knew how destructive adultery was to society.

The reason Israel was in such a mess was because they no longer punished adulterers, but gave them free license to practice it wherever they wanted to. The motor car is a great blessing to man if driven responsibly. Imagine however what carnage would result on our roads if all men were free to drive cars without a licence. Sex, if confined to the marriage bed is honourable and undefiled, and should be practiced freely and romantically. (See also 1 Corinthians 7:7:3-5; Song of Solomon 4:8-16). However if it is practiced without a marriage licence it brings terrible carnage. It deprives people of their happiness, robs them of wives and husbands, and breaks up their families. Child abuse is rightly considered a terrible crime in today's society, yet adultery, in homes where there are children is terrible child abuse. Although adultery is not punished by man we can be sure it will be by God on judgment day. . "*Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.*" (Hebrews 13:4)

**LESSONS FROM A LOVING HUSBAND.**

**Although Hosea's wife was unfaithful, he still loved her.** *“Then said the Lord unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the Lord toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine. Hosea 3:1.* This is the woman he married and shared his life with. Notice that continued love is a command of God. It is too often the case that hatred and vengeance results when a person's marriage partner commits adultery. This may be a natural reaction, but anger, vengeance and hatred should never be a part of the Christian character. Look how Hosea reacted.

**He remained faithful to his marriage vow.** It is often the case that a victim of adultery soon goes and does the same thing themselves. When this happens you become a hypocrite and lose your right to another spouse. It would be rather hypocritical to approach the divorce court with a lover's arms around you and say: “Your honour I want to divorce my wife for adultery. Matthew 19:9 infers that the one putting away his fornicating spouse is virtuous.

**He had Gomer back when she repented** *“Then said the Lord unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the Lord toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine. So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of barley, and an half homer of barley: And I said unto her, Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be for another man: so will I also be for thee.” (Hosea 3:1-3).* After her adultery, Hosea had three options. He could have had her put to death as commanded in the Law. He could have divorced her and married another as Matthew 19:9 permits or he could live a chaste single life and hope for an eventual reconciliation. He chose the latter option.

## **WHAT IF HOSEA HAD DIVORCED HER AND MARRIED ANOTHER?**

**His life and family are still seriously affected.** Even if a divorce is for fornication the innocent party is still greatly affected. Children are still left with a separated parent. Property still has to be divided. The guilty spouse will probably still have visiting rights. The innocent party may still have to pay for child care.

**She would have no place for repentance.** Like Esau she will find no place for repentance even though they may seek it with tears (**Hebrews 12:16-17**). The way of the transgressors is hard (Proverbs 13:15). Those who divorce their wives for fornication however, need to think about this. There are no winners when adultery takes place.

The lesson from Hosea is that we must remain faithful at all costs. No difficulty in marriage will be solved by committing adultery. It has devastating consequences for the adulterer as well as the innocent family. Society also suffers

In closing, let us consider Jehovah's love to us. Aren't we glad that he loved us like Hosea loved Gomer? What if he had cut Israel off completely and left no room for his people to return. This would have left humanity without a Christ, and without a church.

## **JOEL:**

“The land mourns” (Joel 1: 10) - Lessons from a locust plague

*Brett Rutherford*

### **Introduction**

The book of Joel is among the shortest in Scripture, however, there are a few books in the Bible that have a higher percentage of their message quoted by other prophetic writers. Of the seventy-three verses found in Joel's book twenty-seven of them are included in the message of other prophetic writers. Quotes from Joel appear in the writings of Amos, Isaiah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Obadiah, Ezekiel, Malachi, Peter, Luke and Paul. The fact that Joel is quoted so often by other inspired men is an indication of the significance of this short book.

Joel's name means “Yahweh is God.” “Joel” was a very common name throughout Israel's ancient history. Apart from his name, the only other fact we know about Joel is the name of his father. His father was Pethuel. Prophets would often mention the name of their father if their father was a man who was well known to those of his generation. However, this Pethuel seems to be of no particular importance to readers for he is mentioned nowhere else in Scripture. It would seem that the name of Joel's father is likely given to distinguish him from the many other Joels running around Judah at the time of the prophet's ministry. From what we can glean from the Joel's book he does not seem to have been born to any privilege. He appears to have held no post of distinction. In fact, the prophet seems to distance himself from the ruling elite and the religious leadership.

Most scholars support the Jewish traditional view that Joel's prophetic ministry fell under the reign of Joash (835 to 796 B.C.). The basis for the argument of an earlier date for Joel is the list of the enemies of Judah given in chapter three. The primary foes of Judah in the ninth century B.C. are given in this list (the Philistines, Edom, Syria and Egypt etc.) Since Assyria is not found in the list of those nations troubling Judah it is not likely that the book of Joel was written after the mid-seventh century BC. Prophesying during the reign of Joash would make Joel a contemporary of Elisha, and possibly Hosea.

### **The Purpose of the Book**

The purpose of the book of Joel was to encourage the people to see beyond the troubles brought by warfare and natural calamity to an age of refreshing. The prophet is trying to draw the people's attention away from the concerns of this world and refocus their minds upon the spiritual. To accomplish his purpose Joel divides his discourse into two parts. The first half of Joel contains the prophet's plea to the children of Judah to repent before calamity befell them (1:1- 2:27). The last half of Joel includes an expression of God's mercy to the faithful remnant, and a prophecy of the events that would usher in the Christian Age (2:28-3:21).

### **Lessons from Joel 1:1-2:27**

In the first half of the book of Joel warns the people of Judah that the Lord is planning to punish them by sending a plague of locusts. Locusts were on the Mosaic list of divine curses that would be brought upon Israel for her disobedience (Deuteronomy 28:42) Warnings that God would send locusts to punish the Israelites can also be found in II

Chronicles 7:13 and Amos 5:9. When the devastating power of the locust is taken under consideration the threat of these destructive creatures should have been a powerful motivation for the children of Israel to mend their ways.

It is truly amazing how catastrophic a locust plague can be. The largest known swarm of locusts was observed near the Red Sea in 1889. This swarm covered 1,036 square kilometres. It was estimated by entomologists that a swarm of this size would have been comprised of forty billion insects. When one considers that a single locust can eat his own weight in food every day one begins to gain an appreciation for the kind of devastation caused by billions of these insects in just a few days. The catastrophic effects of a swarm are amplified if these insects are carried by a strong wind. A good wind can allow a swarm of locusts to cover 500 kilometres a day.

Certainly, the threat of a locust plague should have inspired a penitent response from among the people. However, it is likely that the swarm of locusts that God threatened to bring upon Judah may have represented something far more ominous. The locusts of Joel could represent an overwhelming military force. They are described in terms of an army in verses four through eleven of chapter two.

The fact that the locust plague will come from the north also adds weight to the argument that this swarm was not literally made up of locusts, but of men. The vast majority of locusts that have troubled Palestine in ancient and modern times have originated in the east. It is extremely rare for locusts to descend upon Palestine from the north. However, invading armies from Mesopotamia most often entered Israel and Judah from the north. When the Assyrians invaded Israel they first took Syria before sweeping away the northern kingdom of the Hebrews. When Nebuchadnezzar led the Babylonians into Judah in 606 B.C., 597 B.C. and 586 B.C. he invaded from the north. It is very likely that the threat to Judah was not an army of mindless insects, but the impenetrable ranks of a determined, unstoppable Babylonian army.

The first thing one should always consider when a nation is disciplined is the causes for that discipline. Judah was being punished. In the first place, they were accused of drinking wine (1:5). The problem of alcohol is a reoccurring theme throughout the books of prophecy. Alcohol has always been a factor in the spiritual and physical decline of a people. In the second place, it appears the people were not making the offerings that God expected from them. The author of Proverbs wrote that “the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord” (Proverbs 15:8). God desires to be worshipped in “spirit and in truth” (John 4:23, 24). The Lord desires praise from a pure heart (Proverbs 21:3).

In the first half of Joel’s dissertation the prophet highlights the utter futility of resisting God. The curse of locust plague was a reminder to men that there is no hope of a positive outcome when one defies God. If God can use the smallest creature to bring a nation to the brink of extinction men what can man hope to gain by opposing the will of God (I Samuel 5:9; Psalm 2:1-12).

Another lesson that can be gleaned from the first section of Joel relates to the proper response toward natural disaster and warfare. Warfare and natural disaster have plagued mankind since Adam and Eve were removed from the protective paradise of Eden. Obviously, no one desires his nation to be brought to its knees through the calamity of war or disaster, but these ever present dangers can bring about positive change. Natural disaster and warfare on the scale of that which Joel described can help a nation realign its priorities. When disaster takes away material possessions all that remains are the blessings that bestowed upon those who have a spiritually focused life. Disasters can

motivate people turn back to God. The need to be receptive to God's guidance can be stirred up in the heart of men. God's purpose for threatening Judah with war and natural calamity in Joel's day was to bring his people to a penitent state (Joel 2:12-17). Natural disasters and warfare remind a nation of the futility of laying up treasures on earth (Matthew 6:19,20). These calamities also give us an opportunity to express our generosity (Proverbs 19:17; Matthew 25:31-40).

The first section of Joel also serves to remind us that the day of the Lord (a day of judgment) is inevitable. The only way that one can escape the wrath of God is through true repentance. God would rather bless than punish (2:13, 14; II Peter 3:1-9). Verses thirteen and fourteen of Joel chapter two are a great testimony to the character and nature of God. He is gracious, merciful, and slow to anger. He is motivated by kindness not malevolence.

### **Lessons from Joel 2:28-3:21**

After the plague, Joel speaks of a time of restoration and respite for the people of God (Joel 2:12-27). The prophet comforts the Hebrews with a message that the restoration of Judah would be followed by a great age of "deliverance" (2:28-32). This era of salvation would be ushered in by wonderful events that would occur in Jerusalem (2:32). These events will include the outpouring of the Spirit upon all flesh, miraculous activity, and strange astronomical phenomena (2:30-31). Furthermore, Joel states that "whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord" during this era shall be "delivered" (2:32).

We don't have to speculate on when this age of deliverance would commence. Peter informed the audience of Jews on the Day of Pentecost (circa AD 33) that Joel's "age of deliverance" had its beginnings on that day (Acts 2:14-21). Peter equated the "age of refreshing" of which Joel spoke with the Christian Age.

The question then arises, "How were the various elements of Joel's prophecy fulfilled in the Christian Age?" First of all, God had promised, through Joel, that the Spirit would be poured out on "all flesh" (2:28). Does this statement imply that every living thing that had flesh would benefit from this outpouring of the Spirit? Of course not! All living creatures of flesh is not what Joel meant by "all flesh." Joel did not mean that cats, dogs, pigeons, horses etc. would receive the outpouring of the Spirit when the Christian Age was ushered in. What then is meant by the statement that "Spirit would be poured out on all flesh?"

In order to understand Joel's message one needs to appreciate the fact that the Bible divides the world into two categories of people (flesh): (1) the Jews (2) the Gentiles or Greeks (Romans 1:14,16; I Corinthians 1:24; Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11) . Therefore, when the prophet states that "all flesh" will receive an outpouring of the Spirit he meant that there would be Jews and Gentiles (Greeks) among those who would receive this outpouring.

For the first ten years of the church's history the Spirit was only poured out only on the Jews. The apostles received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and many of the Jewish Christians received the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit through the laying of the apostles' hands (Acts 8:14-18). Ten years after Peter preached on Pentecost the Roman Cornelius became the first Gentile convert to Christianity. It was then that the Holy Spirit was first poured out upon the Gentiles (Acts 10:24-48). The pouring out of the Spirit upon the household of Cornelius marks was moment at which Joel's prophecy was perfected.

Joel also wrote that “whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord” during this age of refreshing “shall be saved” (Joel 2:32). What does this statement mean? How does one “call upon the name of the Lord.” First of all, it is important to reflect upon the latter part of this verse. Salvation would be available to those who live in the age of refreshing (the Christian Age) of which Joel spoke. It was the shedding of Christ’s blood that made the remission of sins and salvation possible (Hebrews 10:1-10). It was this event that ushered in the Christian Age. The fact that salvation would be offered to those who called upon the name of the Lord is further evidence that the age of refreshing of which Joel spoke could only have begun after the death of the Christ.

We can conclude that “calling on the name of the Lord” is a reference to the manner by which man can come into contact with the blood of Christ and receive remission of sins (i.e. salvation). It is a statement that implies that man must respond to God’s offer of grace in order to benefit from it. This act of “calling on the name of the Lord” is defined in Acts 22:16. Ananias told Paul that he would be “calling on the name of the Lord” by being baptized. Ananias also stated that this act of baptism would also coincide with the washing away of Paul’s sins. To call upon the name of the Lord is achieved through obedience to the commands of God. More specifically “to call upon the name of the Lord” means to engage in that act which results in the removal (or remission) of one’s sins. The act that brings us into contact with the redeeming blood of Christ, and removes our sin, is baptism (Acts 22:16; Galatians 3:27; I Peter 3:21). Therefore, all who have been baptized for the remission of sins have “called on the name of the Lord.” If you have not been baptized for the remission of sins then you have not called upon the name of the Lord and you are not saved!

The Holy Spirit closes the book of Joel with a reminder that God will punish the righteous and reward the faithful remnant (3:1-21). God promised Judah that He would bring all the wicked nations to the Valley of Jehoshaphat and squash them like grapes in the winepress (3:12-13). The last chapter is a sobering reminder that God is in control of the kingdoms of men (Daniel 4:32). For example, the Jews of Joel’s day could not imagine a time when Egypt would be desolate (3:19). The Hebrews of Joel’s day couldn’t conceive of a time when a superpower like Egypt would be reduced to a weak and insignificant player in the region. However, that is exactly what happened in less than two hundred years after Joel’s prophetic career. No individual, no nation (no matter how powerful) can withstand the might of the Almighty. Our only opportunity to escape God’s wrath is to submit.

## AMOS:

“Let justice run down like waters” (Amos 5: 24) - Lessons from rich oppressors

*Allan Fowell*

The Minor Prophets are a study into the way that God worked with Judah, Israel and other nations. They show that God is ruler of this universe and that He has dominion over all nations, tribes and people's. Those whom he used to work through were the prophets. Men chosen by God to, “forth tell.” They were the ones taken, often out of ordinary circumstances, to prophecy in extraordinary times. Their prophesying was primarily not interested in the future, although there was a future predictive element present; but for the foremost part they were concerned with the times in which they prophesied. Their sermons dealt with the present as well as with the future. Through the prophet's God says, *“This is what you did, this is what will happen but there is hope.”*

It is my assertion that God gave them a message for their time and place in history. That message was colored with Doom and gloom yet contained within a message of future hope and restoration. Some would have a problem with this; I concur with Hampton Keathley who states, with reference to their messages:

*“Modern scholars often claim that these positive messages are later additions by some scribe. They say that it doesn't make sense that some guy would come along and pronounce judgment and then turn right around and promise deliverance. But that is because **they don't believe the Bible as the inspired word of God**, which contains the promises of God. The prophets would usually give a message of doom and gloom and then tell the people about the light at the end of the tunnel to give them hope.”*

I want to first, attempt to give a glimpse into the Prophet Amos; date, time, authorship, and historical background and purpose then look at a brief of Chapter 5:24 along with applications for us today in 2011.

### Amos

Amos was not a prophet by profession (7:14). Bible says Amos was the farmer-turned-prophet, or the “unprophet prophet.” The name “Amos” is from a Hebrew word that means “to carry up or lift up a burden.” Amos means “burden-bearer.” His burden was to proclaim Israel's sin to her.

We know little of Amos. No other Amos' exist in the Bible. The following is all that is known of the farmer turned prophet. He is from Tekoa (probably the Tekoa of Judah, south of Jerusalem & Bethlehem). Some want to say that he is from a Tekoa of Israel. Shepherds of a particular kind of sheep (nakads), highly prized for their wool, are found in Tekoa of Judah. He was a dresser of sycamore trees. Amos would probably look rugged, reminding us of John the Baptist. He has been called by some the ‘Great Reformer’, calling Israel to repentance.

## Date

The book of Amos is one of the earliest writings of the writing prophets. Amos, the author, declares that he prophesied concerning Israel two years before the earthquake, in fact the “earthquake” was so cataclysmic that Josephus mentions it in Antiquities (Book 9, chapter 10; cf. II Chronicles 26:18-21). The “earthquake” is even mentioned in (Zechariah 14:5)It was at the time when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam II, son of Joash, was king of Israel. It is not known, however, when that earthquake occurred. Since Amos said Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam II was king of Israel, we can arrive at a rather specific time for Amos’ prophecies. Uzziah reigned from 783 to 742 B.C., and Jeroboam II ruled from 786 to 746 B.C. That means that sometime between 786 and 742 B.C. Amos received these revelations and delivered them to the nation of Israel. The date that seems right is around 765 BC.

## The Times

Amos writes during a period of national optimism (business is booming, boundaries are bulging). Under the surface are greed, injustice, and the trivializing of religion, hypocrisy has run to the core.

Let’s dig a little deeper on this. Israel has reached what was probably its height in terms of economic prosperity. Israel enjoyed peace, and international prestige. International peace allowed Israel to gain wealth via international trade. However, excessive wealth led to the creation of a leisured upper class who increasingly adopted a decadent lifestyle. Other forms of unfaithfulness to the covenant were rampant as well, including immorality (2:7) and idolatry (8:14). It was the exploitation of the poor and defenceless by the rich and powerful that God particularly exposed through Amos’ oracles and constitutes a frequent theme in the book. Religion was enthusiastically practiced (2:8) but by a people whose fidelity to the covenant was a sham. The nation was characterized by religious hypocrisy.

## Purpose/Message of Amos

God calls Amos, even though he lacks an education or a priestly background. Amos’ mission is directed to his neighbor to the north, Israel. His messages of impending doom and captivity for the nation because of her sins are largely unpopular and unheeded however, in fact not since the days of Solomon have times been so good in Israel. ( Amos 2:4), *"This is what the LORD says: 'For three sins of Judah, even for four, I will not turn back [my wrath]. Because they have rejected the law of the LORD and have not kept his decrees, because they have been led astray by false gods, the gods their ancestors followed."* (Amos 3:7), *"Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing His plan to His servants the prophets."* (Amos 9:14), *"I will bring back my exiled people Israel; they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. **They will plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will make gardens and eat their fruit.**" 5:24 **"But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream."** **This is what God wants, justice. He talked about "justice in the gate" v.15.***

When we consider the message we are awed by the righteousness of God as compared against the unrighteousness of His chosen people. We really could sum up the message of the book in one word, **“doom.”** Things were so bad that as a result God was fed up with how things were with his people.

## Amos 5:24

Amos 5:24, as I see it, epitomises Amos' whole message. This passage is a distinctive plea, an expressive exhortation to the people of Israel, in particular those rich and upper-class oppressors, to act justly and righteously instead of corruptly and immorally. In talking to the Northern kingdom God uses some very strong language on how he felt about the way they treated him in worship. Words like Hate, despise, I do not savour, I will not accept, take away from me the noise of your songs. This, of course is not the only time that God has used such strong language of condemnation of religious practice, (Is 1:14), also note the first few chapters of Malachi. [I am also reminded of the Pharisees in Matthew 5:20 and chapter 23].

In Amos 5: 21-24 God in actual fact was repelled by their show of religion where there should have been righteousness and justice. Why? Because there was no heart in their religion, there was no heart in their worship of the almighty God, in fact they really never served God even in the wilderness thus they would be taken beyond Damascus (Assyria) (Amos 5:25-27).

In this great prophetic book it is noted that God is the God of the entire world. He is not just referred to as the God of Israel. We also note that as the chosen nation they needed to be aware that privilege implies responsibility. Failure to recognize and accept responsibility brings punishment. All are obligated to live up to their own knowledge. Ease and idleness leads, as in Israel's case; to open sin. Sin will not go unpunished. Insincere will-worship brings punishment thus the reason that the prophet states in (4:12), *"Prepare to meet thy God."*

People have not changed. The message "you are living in sin" still causes severe problems for preachers and teachers. God rules and is in active control of the world. When we have no will to obey God our worship to Him is vain. God is patient in warning man, but He does not speak and warn endlessly there comes a time when judgement comes.

## Lasting Lessons

- 1- God will judge all nations;
- 2- There is responsibility that goes alongside being God's children.
- 3- You cannot hide from God.
- 4- Worship that is insincere and hypocritical will not cut it with God.
- 5- God is a God of judgement and righteousness and mercy but sin will not go unpunished.

Some further applications:

- **"Establish justice at the Gate."** [5:15]. A modern application of this could be that as Christians we are to adhere to both the moral and social teachings of scripture. Amos was the prophet of 'Social Justice.' The powerful (rich or politicians) are to stop trampling on the less powerful, poor, and naïve by denying them social justice.
- **Sometimes it is the fear of a "social Gospel"** that has immobilised Christians in areas of social concern; while liberalism has neglected the teachings on personal ethics. Amos condemns both of these things.
- [ 5:24] ***"But let justice roll down like waters; and righteousness like an everlasting stream."*** This kind of justice can only find its meaning in the character of God. It is justice tempered with compassion and mercy. For us we see

this in the character of Christ. In [Exodus 22:26-27] we see such. *“If you take your neighbours cloak as a pledge, you are to return it to him before the sun sets, for that is his only covering; it is his cloak for his body. What else shall he sleep in? And it shall come about that when he cries out to Me, I will hear him, for I am gracious.”* In the New Testament [Luke 4:18-19] Christ came to preach the Gospel to the poor etc. Amos views justice as fairness, cheating and extortion must stop. Justice as viewed by God will show compassion. The application for today is we are not to be like this but also we must not cheat and compromise the word of God, justice and mercy demand that we speak only truth.

- **Generosity probably sums up the message of Amos in a word.** This is not a naïve generosity, however, but a generous spirit that cares enough to get to the facts of the problems and work towards a scriptural solution of them. It is a spirit that finds out who the poor really are and what they need [church benevolence]. But like Christ, it is a spirit that preaches the Gospel to the poor in the spiritual sense the “truth in love.”

Let me close with a statement of truth from Jesus:

**No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, *‘And they shall all be taught by God.’* Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me.**

**(John 6:44-45)**

## OBADIAH:

“For thy violence against thy brother” (Obadiah 10) - Lessons from sibling rivalry

*Glen Tattersall*

The boots of foreign soldiers pound the streets of Jerusalem; the screams of terrified women and the cries of men are heard echoing through the city, as their number killed or captured for a life of slavery. The once mighty people of Israel have been brought very low.

From a distance the people of Edom rush to look on with gladness and rejoicing in their heart. Then they too, come close to join in harassing the people and to take their share of the spoil. With great glee, they finally see themselves ascendant over the people of Jacob.

The book of Obadiah is the account of the rivalry between two brothers Jacob and Esau, or as they came to be known - Israel and Edom, reaching its terrible climax. In his condemnation of Edom's hatred to his brother, God inspired Obadiah to record: *“For thy violence against thy brother Jacob shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off for ever. In the day that thou stoodest on the other side, in the day that the strangers carried away captive his forces, and foreigners entered into his gates, and cast lots upon Jerusalem, even thou wast as one of them. But thou shouldest not have looked on the day of thy brother in the day that he became a stranger; neither shouldest thou have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; neither shouldest thou have spoken proudly in the day of distress. Thou shouldest not have entered into the gate of my people in the day of their calamity; yea, thou shouldest not have looked on their affliction in the day of their calamity, nor have laid hands on their substance in the day of their calamity; Neither shouldest thou have stood in the crossway, to cut off those of his that did escape; neither shouldest thou have delivered up those of his that did remain in the day of distress.”* (Obadiah 10-14).

To understand what occurred we need to go back in time and remember the two twin sons born to Isaac and Rebekah - Esau and Jacob; and how that God foretold that the elder would serve the younger (Genesis 25:22,23). We remember how Esau cared not for future or spiritual matters, but rather sold his birthright for a bowl of vegetable stew. When it came time for Isaac to bestow his blessings on his sons; Jacob with his mother's prompting acted deceitfully to ensure that the firstborn's would be given to him. We remember that fearing for his life, Jacob fled from the face of Esau to return 20 years later seeking peace. Though at the end Jacob and Esau were personally reconciled, the animosity of the descendants of Esau towards Jacob's people grew. Years later as the descendants of Jacob fled from Egyptian captivity to the Promised Land, the Edomites would not even allow them passage through their land (Numbers 20:14-18).

In the ebb and flow of events, Edom and Israel would wrestle for advantage, but it was the hatred Edom had to Israel so gleefully expressed when Jerusalem was invaded by foreigners that provoked Obadiah's message of doom on this spiteful brother.

Sibling rivalry - what great harm and heartache it can cause! We do not have time to consider the rivalry between Cain and Abel: Leah and Rachel: or Joseph and his brothers; for we must consider the harm that rivalry can do to us, who are the children of God and brethren together.

As we consider our standing before God there is a great unity we share for we are created equal in God's image, and indeed all races stem from Adam. The apostle Paul refers to this when speaking to the Athenian philosophers in Acts 17:26 *"And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation."* Racism has no place in the purposes of God. Although skin colour and other features may differ slightly, what is within - our intellect, our emotions, our spirit are all the same.

Both sexes are also equal before God. Eve was made to complement Adam, not to be above or below the man. Whilst men and women have different roles, they are nonetheless equal in God sight. Wherever anything approaching true Christianity has gone in the world the lot of women has always been improved.

Given this equality, the Golden Rule, to treat others as we would be treated, has constantly fought against bigotry, prejudice, and inequity.

Unfortunately we are also unified in another sense in that we are together condemned in sin. Sin is the great separator, for sin is evil and God is thoroughly good. Isaiah 59:2 states: *"But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear."* Consider Adam and Eve - they were told not to eat of the forbidden fruit lest they die (Genesis 2:16,17); but they sinned and on that day, spiritually died. It is worth noting it only took one sin.

Each of us have sinned and many times at that. Sins of commission whereby we have deliberately done what God has forbidden and sins of omission where we have failed to do what God has commanded. Some trust in their own goodness but the Scriptures declare that our righteousness is as filthy rags: *"But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."* (Isaiah 64:6). Spiritually we are dead in our sins (Ephesians 2:1), and God shows no partiality. Considering we are all under the same condemnation, how foolish it is to puff ourselves up one against another!

On a much brighter note, when we become Christians we are united in Christ. By the grace of God, we are able to be forgiven of our sins for Jesus came to be the sacrifice for the sins of the world, not for a select few but for all. This lesson had to be learned by the early church for it was not until Peter met Cornelius and the miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit came upon the Gentiles that it was understood that the gospel was indeed for all (Acts 10:34,35). This good news was, and is, to be universally shared (Mark 16:15).

When we obey the gospel our sins are forgiven, we become the children of God (1 John 3:1), we become the brethren of Christ (Matthew 12:49, 50). We need to remember however that though united in Christ we only stand by God's grace: *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."* (Ephesians 2:8-9).

In the sight of God all are equal - of one blood; each lost in our sins - but redeemed through the one sacrifice. Given this equality there should be no rivalry among God's people - as Abraham once stated *"for we be brethren"* - right??

As we consider the theme of sibling rivalry unfortunately there are many threats to our unity as God's children. The greatest of these threats is carnal mindedness. This is the desire to put self interest and satisfaction first in our thinking and affections. It is that

worldly focus which is condemned in 1 John 2:16: *“...the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life...”* Though outwardly expressing spirituality, it afflicts the Christian whose mind looks to the here and now as the only reality. They are blinded to things eternal and spiritual truths. As Paul warns in Ephesians 4:17-19: *“This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.”*

It was this kind of thinking that led Eve to eat the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:6). It caused Esau to trade his birthright for a bowl of stew (Genesis 25:30-32). And it motivated Judas to sell out his Lord for 30 pieces of silver. Unless we leave this kind of thinking behind it will lead to all kinds of evil work and schisms amongst God’s people - backbiting, gossip, factions, and bitterness. It was this worldly thinking that Paul condemned in 1 Corinthians 3:3: *“For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?”* When Christians remain carnally minded they will inevitably become the enemies of God and His people. Listen to what James declares – *“From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts. Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.”* (James 4:1-4)

Another cause of sibling rivalry within the church is the desire for prominence or the pursuit of selfish ambition. We see so many countries today brought low and racked with division because of the desire of a few for power and dominance. More tragically this also can happen amongst God’s people. We could think of how Aaron and Miriam challenged Moses in Numbers 12:1,2: *“And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman. And they said, ‘Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us?’ And the LORD heard it.”*; or how James and John with a little help from their mother wanted high positions in the kingdom of God: *“And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire. And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory... And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John.”* (Mark 10:35-37,41). Diotrephes is another example of such thinking whereby he wanted to cast out brethren who would threaten his control (3 John 9,10).

True esteem comes through faithful service, but some want to take a shortcut and lay hold on that which they have not earned. In order to gain and maintain their position they have to manipulate, manoeuvre, and coerce. They crave attention or power and will do anything to attain it. So much damage has been done to the Lord’s church by brethren motivated by their selfish ambition.

Envy is yet another threat to the unity of the church. It was the motivation for Cain killing Abel – *“Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother’s righteous.”* (1 John

3:12). Abel had what Cain didn't - God's approval. It was that which caused Esau's resentment of Jacob. Jacob had what Esau didn't - Isaac's blessing (Genesis 27:41).

Envy and its twin jealousy, is a curse amongst brethren in Christ. Proverbs 14:30 states: *"A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones."* Envy, being the desire for what someone else has, or resenting them for having it; whereas jealousy is the suspicion or fear of being displaced by a rival, or resenting another caused by envy. We are warned against such evil thoughts: *"Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another."* (Galatians 5:26).

Had Edom not been flawed in these areas it may have been a great nation, but because it did not overcome it was cursed by God. As we consider our relationship with one another, how can we avoid the fate of Edom?

In order to ensure that rivalry does not destroy us there are three areas that we must give the utmost attention to. The first of these is that we must develop the mind of Christ. In writing to the Philippian church, Paul wrote: *"If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name."* (Philippians 2:1-9). From this passage we learn that we must put others before us in love. We are the children of the one Father; and unlike the father of Esau and Jacob, God is impartial to His children. We are brothers and sisters together. Therefore our Father wants for us to put the welfare and needs of others before us be they: physical, spiritual, or emotional. Let us be honest and say that this at times is easier said than done, therefore we must give it the most earnest prayer and strive to practice it towards all.

This same Scripture also teaches us that we must empty ourselves of self. The illustration Paul uses is that of Jesus himself: for though He is equal with the Father, yet in order to achieve our salvation He emptied Himself and submitted Himself to the Father. In all that He did, Jesus worked in harmony, not competition with the other members of the Godhead.

So much strife is caused because we fail to do what Jesus did! We want to protect our ego, our pride, our position, and when these are threatened, tension, hostility and rivalry result. Rather than focussing on being the best sons they could be, Esau and Jacob vied for the best blessing for themselves.

Emptying self of self is what Paul did and hence could write: *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."* (Galatians 2:20).

As God's children we need to focus on putting the Lord first. Consider the example Paul set for us in Philippians 1:13-18: *"So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace,*

*and in all other places; And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.”* Out of envy, in their twisted way of reasoning, some were preaching the Gospel thinking to add to Paul’s burdens. Yet rather than taking offence Paul rejoiced that whatever their motive, the Gospel was being preached. He understood that it was not about him, but rather the furtherance of the Lord’s work that mattered. We need to have this same attitude in the church today. It is better to suffer wrong than allow ourselves to become a source of contention. Consider Paul’s rebuke of the Corinthian Christians: *“Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? ... Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren.”* (1 Corinthians 6:1,7,8). It would be better for them to be taken advantage of, rather than to pursue their rights and harm the body of Christ.

When worldly thoughts of ambition and envy trouble our mind, consider the example of Jesus and humble our hearts so that His work and His church be not harmed. It is not about us, it is about Him.

Maintaining unity amongst brethren also requires us to serve. Remember when James and John wanted to sit beside Jesus in His kingdom (Mark 10:36,37)? This angered the other apostles. Jesus was faced with a crisis; if it were not dealt with properly; simmering rivalry would destroy the unity of the apostles and greatly hinder the proclamation of the Gospel. Jesus countered their request and the ensuing tension by teaching that greatness came through service: *“But Jesus called them to him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”* (Mark 10:42-45). He set Himself as an example of service the night before He was crucified, when rather than having His disciples serve Him, He took a bowl of water and girded Himself with a towel, and washed their feet (John 13:4,5,12-15). How can any strive for advantage over their brethren when the Lord has set us such an example?

Our service needs to be with quietness (Matthew 6:1-4) and without any thought of earthly reward (Luke 14:12-14). How much rivalry between brethren would be resolved if we could learn to serve quietly, rather than wanting to be served openly?

Repentance on our part is also required in order to maintain unity. We are all on a path of transition from being carnally minded to being Christlike. Perhaps we are familiar with the song “None of Self, and all of Thee”? It gives us the transition of this path, but most of us are still striving to attain the mind where it is “None of self and all of Thee”. Changing our thinking, our heart, our ego takes time. We are at different points on this road, which is why we need to be longsuffering and forgiving towards one another.

When a seed of ungodly rivalry germinates within our thoughts, deal with it promptly, before it takes root and strangles our heart. Spend much time in earnest and honest

prayer; confess our sins and struggles to God and to others; consciously override our bruised egos and empty ourselves of self and strive to work with all. These things are not easy, but God who sees the heart struggling to do right will strengthen and bless.

When Jacob and Esau both vied for their Father's blessing, they had no idea how much the ripples of this conflict would hurt their lives and that of others. The two nations that came from them would be at odds with one another for centuries, until Edom's intense hatred for Israel would provoke Obadiah's prophecy of doom.

Rivalry between God's people can have a more devastating effect. Brethren striving with one another can quickly seize on reasons to justify their hurt. Factions develop, souls are lost, and the Lord's church is harmed.

It is only with spiritual maturity that we can rise above this evil. By understanding that in God's eyes, in whatever we may do, we only stand by His grace. We need to be aware of how easily a spirit of rivalry can threaten our unity, and we must have the humility, the faith, and the courage to take whatever steps are necessary to preserve the unity of the body.

As we strive to save souls, to glorify God, and to help our brethren, we do well to consider the words of the apostle Paul who stated: *"Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved."* (1 Corinthians 10:32-33).

## **JONAH:**

“Salvation is of the Lord” (Jonah 2: 9) - Lessons from a fish’s belly

*Kah Khin Hon*

### **Introduction and background**

The name Jonah means ‘Dove’ and it is quite appropriate because a dove is used in those days to sent messages – A messenger from God.

Jonah was a real person and he lived during the time of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25).

Jesus himself mentioned Jonah in Matt 12:38-40. So Jonah is a real person that was swallowed by a real fish and all the things that were mentioned in the Book of Jonah are real historical event and did occur.

When I first read Jonah, I had a very bad impression of him. I still do, but having done some studying, I am able to understand Jonah as a person better. You see historically, the Assyrians have inflicted a lot of sufferings upon the Jewish people and Jonah being a Jew hates the Assyrians. So when God asks Jonah to go and preach to the Assyrians (in this case – Nineveh); it did not go down well with Jonah. He prefers that God destroy them rather than to save them. So one can understand why Jonah decided to run away.

The standard outline of the Book of Jonah is:-

Chapter 1:- Disobedience, Running away from God.

Chapter 2:- Prayer, Running to God.

Chapter 3:- Preaching, Running with God

Chapter 4:- Complaint, Running ahead of God.

There are a lot of things which we could learn from the Book of Jonah.

We learned about the sort of person Jonah is.

We learned about the nature of our God - about how our God is a gracious God, a merciful God, a kind God and a patient God who is long suffering.

Anyway, let’s get into the Book of Jonah.

### **Chapter 1 – Disobedience – Running away from God.**

Read verses 1 to 3

#### **Point No.1 – You cannot run away from God.**

Nineveh is North East, Tarshih is west (South West of Spain). God tells Jonah to go to Nineveh which is northeast but Jonah runs away from God and goes west. Can he run away from God? NO!! You cannot run away from God.

Today a lot of people think that they can run away from God. They know about God, they know what God wants them to do but they don’t want to do what God wants them to do.

They think that by shutting God out of their lives or by ignoring God they can run away from God. What we need to do is to inform them that they cannot run away from God. Eventually God will get to everyone - Hebrews 9:27 "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgement". Everyone will come face to face with God, so we cannot run away from God.

Jonah tried but he found out that he also cannot run away from God.

**Point No.2 – God is not the only one that can open doors, Satan can too.**

In verse 3 – Jonah went down to Joppa. Conveniently a ship is there going to Tarshish. Conveniently he has the money to pay for the fare. Conveniently he went down into it and conveniently it set sail. Did God do all that? No! It was Satan.

We can look at society today; for example when a man and a woman commit adultery. A lot of the time both the man and the woman never sets out to commit adultery. It just happens conveniently that the man and the woman meets, conveniently the man and the woman has to work together in the same office, conveniently they have to work late. See, God is not the only one that can open doors; Satan can as well. What we need to do is to resist the devil and he will flee away from you (James 4:7).

Coming back to Jonah, he tries to run away from God. So what did God do?  
Read verses 4 to 9.

**Point No.3 – Other people can suffer as a consequence of someone else's sin.**

These sailors did nothing wrong. They were just going about their daily lives. Jonah sinned by not obeying God and because of Jonah's sin; these sailors' lives are put in danger. In fact we can learn a lot about these sailors and we can learn more about the nature of Jonah. Read verses 10 to 16.

These sailors were courageous. They were more concern with Jonah's life than Jonah was concern about their lives. When they found out that Jonah was running away from God and that the sea would become calm if they throw Jonah overboard, what did they do? Verse 13 says "nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land.....". They tried hard to save Jonah. They knew that throwing Jonah overboard means the end of Jonah. Jonah on the other hand wasn't as concerned about the sailors' lives. I mean if he really wanted to save the sailors' lives he could actually just jump overboard!!

**Point No.4 – You cannot fight against God**

When the sailors were told that the only way God would calm the seas down was for them to throw Jonah overboard, they decided that they knew better. They rowed hard to try to get to land. Even though their intentions were noble, it was not what God wants them to do. They found out that you cannot fight against the will of God – however noble their intentions were.

Remember with Daniel and the lion's den, what happened to those who went against God and accused Daniel; they were themselves cast into the lion's den.

Remember with Queen Esther. What happened to Haman who went against God and tried to kill the Jews? He was hung instead of Mordecai. So you cannot fight against God.

These sailors having found that it was God's will to throw Jonah overboard tried to do things their way. In the end, they had to comply.

So when Jesus said in John 14:6 "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me", He meant exactly just that. A lot of denominations in the world however think that they know better. They pray to the Virgin Mary, they pray to St Peter or St John or St Paul or even Mother Theresa. They are in fact fighting against God and his will.

When the apostle Peter said to the people on the day of Pentecost that they need to Repent and be Baptised, he means exactly just that. Again a lot of denominations in the world think that they know better. They say that all you have to do is just believe and call upon the Lord and you will be saved. What do you think that they are doing? They are simply fighting against God and we learn from here that you cannot fight against God. You will lose – everytime!. You cannot fight against God.

### **Point No.5 – God will be glorified regardless.**

Look at verse 16. God used Jonah to accomplish his will and taught these sailors about God even though Jonah had not intended to do so.

Let's read verse 17. God uses a lot of things to accomplish his task. In this case, it is a big fish. Now there's a lot of conjecture as to what this great fish is. Some may say it is a whale which could get as big as 40m long or a whale shark which could get to be 15m long. Both of these fishes could easily fit Jonah in its belly.

However it could also be a one off special fish which God created specially for Jonah. I mean God could create the world and the universe so what's so difficult about creating a fish for this one occasion.

Now here is something that reveals the sort of person Jonah is. In verse 17 we read that "Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights". So how long was he in the belly? Three days and three nights!!!

Talk about being stubborn!! It's only after 3 days and 3 nights in the fish belly that Jonah decided to give in and started to pray to God. I often wondered what he did during the 3 days and 3 nights. Could he be sulking? That's a long time to be sulking. I am sure that it would not have been pleasant in the fish belly. Later on in chapter 2, we read about what it is like to be in the fish's belly.

If it was me, after 3 minutes, I would be begging God to help me. Here Jonah lasted 3 days and 3 nights before he gave in and prayed to God. Jonah was a very stubborn man indeed.

### **Chapter 2 – Prayer, Running to God.**

Read verses 1 to 4. The worst thing that can ever happen to anyone is this: - when we have been cast out of God's sight. Of all the things that's happening to Jonah – the floods surrounding him, weeds wrapped around his head, etc. etc, he considers this to be the worst.

The same can be said for us. Because of our sins we are separated from God. We were out of God's sight. But that does not need to be so because our Lord and saviour, Jesus Christ came down and gave his life for us as a ransom to pay our debt (Mark 10:45). As a result we are now justified (Rom 3:24) before God and is now able to be reconciled to Him (Rom 5:10). Isn't that wonderful what our Lord is willing to do for us!!

Continuing with our reading - verses 5 to 9. Now Jonah recognised that he has no hope and there is nothing he can do. He is totally powerless. So he completely cast himself at the mercy of God.

Sometimes it's the same with us. God says He cares about us yet we don't really trust God enough to completely put our faith into Him. It is when we are at the lowest point, at our weakest; in other words, sometimes we have to hit rock bottom before we realised that the true source of strength comes from God – just like what Jonah is doing now. God's patience and kindness is demonstrated yet again here, in that Jonah has been disobedient, yet God still hears his prayer and still answers his prayer. Verse 10 "So the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land".

### **Chapter 3 – Preaching. Running with God.**

Now Jonah is going to put his will in harmony with God.

Let's read verse 1 to verse 3. Notice how God never harps on the past. God didn't say "I told you to go to Nineveh and you didn't go, now I am telling you again...". God just simply comes to Jonah, never reminded him of what has happened in the past and said, "Arise, go to Nineveh...". How gracious is our God!!!

Continuing with our reading - verse 3 to 9.

If there was ever a great preacher who is able to convert people; Jonah must be the greatest. No one else in the bible could convert **everyone** in the one city. Everybody from the king down to the peasant repented; turned from their evil ways and from their violence.

They heard the message and they believed and more than that, they repented and because they repented, what did God do? Read verse 10 – "The God saw their works that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it".

In Jeremiah 18:7-10 "The instance I speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation, against whom I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight, so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good, with which I said I would benefit it."

It is never too late to repent. If we repent and turn to God, we will be forgiven. If we do not repent, well, we will not be forgiven.

### **Chapter 4 – Complaint. Running ahead of God.**

Now you would think that the deliverance of Nineveh from doom is the climax of the story. But this is not the case. In fact this is a common characteristic of God. Remember the

story of the prodigal son, you would think that because the prodigal son has come to his senses and realise his error and being allowed to reconcile with his father, that it's the end of the story. Instead Jesus puts in a twist about the elder brother. Here it's the same. The deliverance of Nineveh is not the end of the story. The most important lesson from the book of Jonah deals with God's people; in this case it is Jonah.

### **One can do the will of God without doing it with the right attitude.**

Let's read verse 1.

Why was Jonah angry? Well, Jonah wanted God to judge Nineveh because they are the enemy of the Jews. The prophets Hosea and Amos both prophesized that Assyria would invade and defeat Israel (Hosea 11:5 and Amos 5:27). So Jonah told God why he was angry.

Read verse 2 - . A gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness, one who relents from doing harm – isn't that exactly what we want our God to be!!! Yet, because of these good qualities of God, Jonah was angry.

There's a saying "**The heart of every problem, is the problem of the heart**" and that where Jonah's problem is.

Sometimes even the best of people, people such as Jonah, wishes calamity on the wicked, but God does not. How often do you hear people say "I wish you would just drop dead" or "I think you should just go and jump off the Westgate".

Jonah was so angry he said in verse 3 "Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me for it is better for me to die than to live".

But God did not rebuke Jonah, instead in verse 4 – Then the Lord said, "Is it right for you to be angry?". So God proceeded to teach Jonah.

Read verse 5 and 6. This is the only time we read that Jonah was happy. Why was he happy? Because **he** was physically comfortable!! He doesn't care about what God wants. He was happy about the plant but not happy about the repenting city of Nineveh.

Read verse 7 to verse 9 - God asked Jonah in verse 4 "it is right for you to be angry". Now God is asking Jonah "is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" Jonah's answer was the same "I am so angry I could die".

Read verse 10 - This verse shows the contrast between the way man thinks and the way God thinks.

Man becomes concerned and disturbed when that which directly affects him is compromised (In Jonah's case, it's the plant). But when that which is much greater value and does not directly affect him is compromised (in this case it's the souls of the Ninevites), he is unconcerned.

In other words, Mankind can be very self-centred. So what is more important? My own comfort or the souls of many many other people; even our enemies.

God says in verse 11 "and should I not spare Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand."

To God, the souls of people are worth everything.

Jesus said in Matthew 16:26 “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

**This needs to be our primary concern** – our own soul and the souls of others.

John 3:16 – “ For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

The book of Jonah. It is one of the greatest books of the old testament. There are so many lessons which we could learn from it.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude my lesson, earlier I describe the standard outline of the book:

Chapter 1:- Disobedience, Running away from God.

Chapter 2:- Prayer, Running to God.

Chapter 3:- Preaching, Running with God

Chapter 4:- Complaint, Running ahead of God.

I want to ask all of you now, where are you in your life now with respect to God? It is my prayer and hope that you are not running away from God. Certainly pray and run to God with all our needs and be out there preaching and running with God. It is my prayer that you do not complain and definitely not run ahead of God.

## MICAH:

“The best of them is as a brier” (Micah 7: 4) - Lessons from Corrupt Leaders

*William Howard*

**Micah 7:4** The best of them *is* like a brier; The most upright *is sharper* than a thorn hedge; The day of your watchman and your punishment comes; Now shall be their perplexity.

### INTRODUCTION

- A. What can be learned from corrupt leaders?
- B. There is always a value in bad examples
- C. The Bible teaches using bad examples as well as good
- D. The Bible records the lives of both David and Jeroboam (good king, evil king)
- E. It records the actions of both Paul and Demas (one persevered, one did not)
- F. 3 John 1:11 Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God.

### BODY

#### I. Concerning Leaders

##### A. In every human endeavor leadership is needed.

- 1. Humanity needs leaders.
- 2. Groups of people need leaders.
- 3. Leadership is essential to righteousness
- 4. Leadership is essential to the church
  - a. God is so interested in His church and in the leaders in His church He set qualifications concerning them. It sets the bounds for the eldership: 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1
  - b. A congregation with qualified men can be properly led.

##### B. Good leaders shelter righteousness

- 1. They protect the innocent and punish the guilty
- 2. They secure and uphold good works.
- 3. They defend the truth
- 4. They do not subvert justice
- 5. All congregations will go through troubled times
  - a. With good leaders a congregation can sail past with the least amount of harm
  - b. With good leaders problems will be addressed and resolved

##### C. Weak leaders always serve evil (silently accommodating evil)

- 1. Wickedness is advanced by weak leaders who do nothing or make ineffectual actions
- 2. They are indecisive, and directionless
- 3. The decisions made tend to be the results of cowardice
- 4. They are unpredictable except that they will succumb to pressures
- 5. They weigh out matters that are of no real concern (matters that have no weight)
- 6. They will occupy themselves over non-issues

7. They bring good works into disarray and generally try to avoid problems.
8. All congregations will go through troubled times
  - a. With weak leaders a congregation will take greater harm
  - b. Weak leaders look for easy sailing, ignoring problems when they arrive
    - i. It is easy to be a leader in easy times, anybody can lead in easy times
    - ii. Congregations need leaders who are vigilant and diligent – weak leaders will be neither.
  - c. Weak leaders will demand that the faithful not rock the boat while the boat is being overturned by the wicked.
  - d. In their definition upholding the truth is rocking the boat
    - i. Due diligence is rocking the boat
    - ii. Upsetting the wicked destroying the congregation is rocking the boat
    - iii. A call to do what a good leader does is rocking the boat

**D. Corrupt leaders produce wickedness every time.**

1. In Matthew 7:18 Jesus states, “A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor *can* a bad tree bear good fruit.”
2. Wise leaders cannot be found from among the foolish.
3. Honest leaders cannot be found from among the corrupt.
4. Corrupt men cannot be trusted to be honest on a whim. They will choose wickedness.
5. A corrupt man cannot be trusted to do right simply because he is given a place of authority and responsibility
6. Here is no friend of righteousness
7. Righteousness is not protected or upheld
8. Most of the leaders of Micah’s day were corrupt.

**II. The Leaders of Micah’s Day**

**A. Micah lived around 737 BC**

**B. Micah is contemporary with Isaiah and Hosea**

1. Not all men are corrupt
2. Some prophets are faithful

**C. The Kings**

Micah 1:1 The word of the LORD that came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.

1. Jotham – a weak king

2 Kings 15:34-35

34 And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD; he did according to all that his father Uzziah had done.

35 However the high places were not removed; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places. He built the Upper Gate of the house of the LORD.

- a. He is a weak king who does some good, but leaves so much that he could have stopped.
- b. His lack of complete diligence, his weakness will affect his son Ahaz.

2. Ahaz – a wicked king,

2 Kings 16:3-4

3 But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel; indeed he made his son pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out from before the children of Israel.

4 And he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places, on the hills, and under every green tree.

### 3. Hezekiah – a good king

2 Kings 18:3-4

3 And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done.

4 He removed the high places and broke the sacred pillars, cut down the wooden image and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan.

### **D. The legacy of past kings have effect on the people - their evil influence lives**

Micah 6:16 For the statutes of Omri are kept; All the works of Ahab's house are done; And you walk in their counsels, That I may make you a desolation, And your inhabitants a hissing. Therefore you shall bear the reproach of My people."

### **E. The Powerful**

Micah 2:1-3

1 Woe to those who devise iniquity, And work out evil on their beds! At morning light they practice it, Because it is in the power of their hand.

2 They covet fields and take them by violence, Also houses, and seize them. So they oppress a man and his house, A man and his inheritance.

3 Therefore thus says the LORD: "Behold, against this family I am devising disaster, From which you cannot remove your necks; Nor shall you walk haughtily, For this is an evil time.

Micah 3:3-5

3 Who also eat the flesh of My people, Flay their skin from them, Break their bones, And chop them in pieces Like meat for the pot, Like flesh in the caldron."

4 Then they will cry to the LORD, But He will not hear them; He will even hide His face from them at that time, Because they have been evil in their deeds.

### **F. The Rulers – every man, prince, judge, great men**

Micah 3:1-5

1 And I said: "Hear now, O heads of Jacob, And you rulers of the house of Israel: Is it not for you to know justice?

2 You who hate good and love evil; Who strip the skin from My people, And the flesh from their bones;

Micah 7:2-4

2 The faithful man has perished from the earth, And there is no one upright among men. They all lie in wait for blood; Every man hunts his brother with a net.

3 That they may successfully do evil with both hands -- The prince asks for gifts, The judge seeks a bribe, And the great man utters his evil desire; So they scheme together.

4 The best of them is like a brier; The most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge; The day of your watchman and your punishment comes; Now shall be their perplexity.

## G. The Prophets and Religious Leaders

Micah 3:5

5 Thus says the LORD concerning the prophets Who make my people stray; Who chant "Peace" While they chew with their teeth, But who prepare war against him Who puts nothing into their mouths:

Micah 3:5 ASV (1901)

5 Thus saith Jehovah concerning the prophets that make my people to err; that bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace; and whoso putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him:

### 1. Corruption brings punishment

Micah 3:6-8

6 "Therefore you shall have night without vision, And you shall have darkness without divination; The sun shall go down on the prophets, And the day shall be dark for them.

7 So the seers shall be ashamed, And the diviners abashed; Indeed they shall all cover their lips; For there is no answer from God."

8 But truly I am full of power by the Spirit of the LORD, And of justice and might, To declare to Jacob his transgression And to Israel his sin.

### 2. Justice is demanded and the nation will suffer

Micah 3:9-12

9 Now hear this, You heads of the house of Jacob And rulers of the house of Israel, Who abhor justice And pervert all equity,

10 Who build up Zion with bloodshed And Jerusalem with iniquity:

11 Her heads judge for a bribe, Her priests teach for pay, And her prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the LORD, and say, "Is not the LORD among us? No harm can come upon us."

12 Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed like a field, Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins, And the mountain of the temple Like the bare hills of the forest

## III. Corrupt Shepherds

A. Description of the shepherds in Ezekiel's day - Ezekiel 34:1-10

B. The Shepherd of Luke 15:4-7

1. There is a difference between the Good Shepherd to the shepherds of Ezekiel 34
2. He has a love for all His sheep
3. He is willing to leave all in search for one
4. His sheep are not there to be fleeced
5. His sheep are not there to be abused
6. He will make the sacrifice for them

C. Rewriting Luke 15:4-7 - Leaving the ninety-nine to rescue the one lost sheep becomes

1. Scattering all the sheep
2. Scattering the ninety-nine for the sake of one sheep
3. Using the sheep for gain, for advantage, for fleecing

D. The steward entrusted with the household

Luke 12:42-45

42 And the Lord said, "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom *his* master will make ruler over his household, to give *them their* portion of food in due season?

43 "Blessed *is* that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.

44 "Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has.

45 "But if that servant says in his heart, 'My master is delaying his coming,' and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk,

E. Corrupt elders

1. Destroy the local congregation
2. They will take the state of the local congregation into denominationalism
3. Compare the state of Ephesians 5:27 to Isaiah 1:4-6

Ephesians 5:27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

Isaiah 1:4-6

4 Alas, sinful nation, A people laden with iniquity, A brood of evildoers, Children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, They have provoked to anger The Holy One of Israel, They have turned away backward.

5 Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, And the whole heart faints.

6 From the sole of the foot even to the head, *There is* no soundness in it, *But* wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; They have not been closed or bound up, Or soothed with ointment.

- a. Where there is a fever there is an infection.
- b. Where there are sores there are causes.
- c. Where the church is diseased, rotten, and left to die there is wicked leadership.
- d. Where there are wicked elders the congregation will be diseased, rotten and left to die.
- e. This described the denominational world.

F. A prophesy concerning corrupt and wicked elders

Acts 20:28-29

28 "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

29 "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.

G. Christ's words of warning to the congregation of Ephesus

Revelation 2:5 "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place -- unless you repent.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **Corrupt Leaders:**

1. Are the problem, bringing nothing but evil
2. Will not fully defend the truth
3. Bring church into denominationalism
4. Will not make the sacrifices – all others do that
5. Are the shepherds that eye the flock for their own advantage
6. Will not purge out leaven from the congregation
7. Are part of the leaven in the congregation
8. Are an enemy of those who will do right
9. Are an enemy of Christ
10. Bring punishment from God

### **What is the solution?**

Micah 6:6-8

6 With what shall I come before the LORD, And bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, With calves a year old?

7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, Ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

8 He has shown you, O man, what *is* good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God?

### **If the foundations are destroyed, What can the righteous do? (Psalm 11:3)**

1. As did Micah against a wicked nation with oppressive leaders
2. As did Elijah against Ahab and Jezebel
3. As did Christ against the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Sanhedrin, the power of Roman

## NAHUM:

“All their faces are drained of colour” (Nahum 2: 10) - Lessons from the fall of Nineveh

*Jimmie B. Hill*

**“She is empty, and void, and waste: and the heart melteth, and the knees smite together, and much pain is in all loins, and the faces of them all gather blackness”** (Nahum 2:10 - KJV). This is how the inspired prophet Nahum described the capital city of Assyria, Nineveh. **“Empty”** and **“void”** and **“waste”** was the prophets prediction of the utter ruin that was to come to that once magnificent city. It was Sennacherib who made Nineveh such a magnificent city. He laid out new streets and built beautiful squares, parks, gardens, and water works throughout the city and built within its wall the famous “palace without rival.” It is said that the palace took ten thousand workers twenty years to build and took fifteen million tons of earth and brick to complete it.

Its population was around six hundred thousand. The city was founded by Nimrod, who was the great grandson of Noah (Genesis 10:11). The city was sixty miles in circumference and its walls were one hundred feet high. The wall itself was an ancient marvel. It was so thick that four chariots could drive along side by side at the same time. It had fifteen hundred defense towers that were two hundred feet high and fifteen gates. For further defense, there was a moat around the city that was one hundred forty feet wide and sixty feet deep.

The remainder of verse ten is a description of the aggravated state of mind that the citizens of Nineveh would experience at the great destruction of their beloved city. The phrase, **“...the faces of them all gather blackness”** of the King James Version, is an unusual rendering of the Hebrew. Some versions have translated **“blackness”** as **“drained of color”** while others read **“black fear”** or **“waxed pale.”** In each of these renderings, however, the idea is that the terrible and complete destruction on the city would have a grave effect upon its citizens that would be shown in their faces.

Consider this quote from page 66, *Myers, Ancient History*.

*“Saracus, who came to the throne towards the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C., was the last of the long line of Assyrian kings. For nearly or quite six centuries the Ninevite kings had now lorded it over the East. There was scarcely a state in all Western Asia that during this time had not, in the language of the royal inscriptions, ‘borne the heavy yoke of their lordship,’ scarcely a people that had not suffered their cruel punishments, or tasted the bitterness of enforced exile. But now swift misfortunes were bearing down upon the oppressor from every quarter. Egypt revolted and tore Syria away from the empire; from the mountain defiles on the east issued the armies of the recent-grown empire of the Aryan Medes, led by the renowned Cyaxares; from the southern lowlands, anxious to aid in the overthrow of the hated oppressor, the Babylonians joined the Medes as allies, and together they laid close siege to Nineveh. The city was finally taken and sacked [plundered], and dominion passed away forever from the proud capital. Two hundred years later, when Xenophon with his Ten Thousand*

*Greeks, in his memorable retreat passed the spot, the once great city was a crumbling mass of ruins of which he could not even learn the name."*

The Assyrians were a very cruel and war-like people. They had reigned supreme in the region for almost two hundred and fifty years. However, though they could win wars, once their enemies were conquered, they could not control nor rule them. Neither would they repent before Jehovah God!

It is ironic that "Nahum" means "comfort or compassion." Nahum announces Jehovah God's displeasure with Nineveh and seems to very glad concerning the impending downfall and doom that lies before the city. He has been referred to as "The Prophet of Vengeance" which seemed to be a source of obvious comfort to Judah. His home was Elkosh which was probably in Galilee. The meaning of the word "Capernaum" means "village of Nahum." He was a contemporary of Jeremiah and Zephaniah.

The theme of the book of Nahum is the destruction of Nineveh and this is the second book of the Bible that deals with Nineveh. The first book was the book of Jonah which was written approximately 100–150 years before the book of Nahum. The book was probably written about 612 B.C., which was just shortly before the fall of Nineveh.

In the book of Nahum, one can see the vengeance and the slow anger of God (Nahum 1:1-7). This is the same message that Jonah preached some 100-150 years earlier. The text teaches that, although Nineveh had received the message before, the Lord's longsuffering must not be interpreted as indifference or a lack of power. God, throughout time, has been patient and longsuffering. Many in the Old Testament believed, just as many do today, that because sin is not immediately punished that it will never be punished. The book of Nahum shows the reader that this is not so! Jehovah God does get angry and when His anger is made manifest by His actions, nothing will stop or pervert His will (Nahum 1:2, 3; 6; 8-14). The Lord was taking care of Judah and His destruction of Nineveh was the deliverance of the Jews (Nahum 1:15).

Although the Bible does not tell us exactly who overthrew Nineveh, history reveals that it was primarily the Medes, Chaldeans, and Scythians. However, the careful reader can see Jehovah God's hand in it. The Tigris River rose and flooded during this time and washed away part of the great defensive walls of Nineveh (Nahum 1:8, 9). There were chariots in the streets, there was a call to defend the city but without response, they had an abundance of "things" but nothing would help (Nahum 2:1-9).

It is interesting that the symbol of Assyria was the lion. Lions have no fear. They live by themselves in prides and protect and provide for one another. Any outsider is devoured. In Nahum 2:11-13, the reader will see that now the enemies of Assyria were going to treat them the way they had been treated. Jehovah God taught Nineveh that they were to reap that which they had sown.

In chapter three, the reader can see a very vivid and haunting picture of war. Chariots can be heard, horses are jumping with fright, and there are the numerous bodies of the slain scattered throughout the streets (vs. 1-3).

The great and powerful city is portrayed as a harlot that has been stripped, cast down, and has been covered with appalling filth (Nahum 3:4-6). Nahum then tells Nineveh that she is no better than No Amon (Nahum 3:8; Jeremiah 46:25; Ezekiel 30:14-16). This was the city of Thebes which was located in Egypt four miles south of Cairo. This city had a large

population, it had allies, and it was protected by the sea. Yet, like Nineveh, when Jehovah God's judgment was made, it was no more secure than the ripe fig shaken by the wind and ruined (Nahum 3:12).

Also in chapter three, Nahum condemns those whose trust is in bricks and mortar. Mockingly, the prophet tells the Ninevites to draw water for the making of bricks to fortify the city for their defense (v.14). He then mocks the instability of Nineveh's leadership and how fleeting their power was against God (vs. 17, 18).

Then, in chapter three and verse nineteen, Nahum states that Nineveh is a wound that will not heal. The people of the earth would applaud their downfall. Some twenty years later this prophecy was fulfilled.

When Jehovah God releases His wrath and vengeance, nothing can stand in His way. The prophet stated that the destruction of Nineveh would be complete and final. And the destruction of Nineveh was so complete that when Alexander the Great marched over her ruins, he did not know that he marched over one of the greatest of the world empires of the past. The ruins of Nineveh were not discovered until 1842. Today there is a mound at the site of this once great city that is one mile long, six hundred fifty yards wide and ninety feet high. God's fulfill His promises!

From the book of Nahum, one can learn of God's nature. Yes, He is slow to anger, His is good, and He is a stronghold and a refuge. But there is a limit to His patience. One day His mercy and grace will be finished. We also learn that God gets furious and when He releases His great power, kingdoms will fall. Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome, all fell.

We learn from the book of Nahum that Jehovah God will unleash His great power against brutality, idolatry, immorality, and all iniquity.

The only kingdom that will survive is the Kingdom of God, the church. It was prophesied (Daniel 2:44), it was established (Mathew 16:18), and will not be shaken (Hebrews 12:28). It will last forever!

## **HABAKKUK:**

“Let all the earth keep silence” (Habakkuk 2: 20) - Lessons from a Holy God

*Patrick Swayne*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Have you ever had a moment in your life where you found yourself suffering for something out of your control? Did you feel as though God was at fault? When I first made the decision to come to Australia as a missionary, I always assumed that raising support would be my challenge. Never once did it occur to me that I might meet the meagre total that I had set as my minimum support goal and find that my real difficulty would be in receiving permission from the Australian government to come. Yet in October 2007, I found that my support was in place, but my working visa was not.

What followed for me was seven of the most stressful months I have ever experienced in my life. I had told myself I would never “move back in with my parents” – I was forced to live with my mother. I had told myself after preaching school I would always be involved in full time preaching – I found myself working a night job in a warehouse to support myself. I even tried to volunteer my services at places as far away as four hours by car and still could find nowhere to preach regularly. My pride was battered; my life was in limbo. Every week a supporter emailed, asking, “Has the work visa come yet? When is it going to come?” I had no answer but, “No,” and “I don’t know.” Every Sunday and Wednesday I faced a dear brother or sister – often several – asking, “So, when are you going to Australia?” As time wore on, I began to think never.

I had felt that Australia was my “Macedonian call.” I had felt that leaving my work as a full time preacher (which was going well) in the preacher rich state of Tennessee and going to the mission field was the morally right thing to do. I had seen God’s hand in it all. I was prepared to sacrifice; I was prepared to work; I was prepared to go. I was not prepared to wait, which is what God wanted me to do. Unfortunately, instead of seeing this as a part of God’s plan, I felt angry at God for leading me down what I felt was a dead end path. I felt betrayed and cheated.

A man named Habakkuk once felt the same.

### **HABAKKUK’S SITUATION**

Digging through the Bible, you will never find a mention of Habakkuk outside of the book that bears his name – in fact, even in that book you will only find his name twice. In the context of a covenant that generally is very quick to point out who someone was the son of and where a person was from, Habakkuk stands out in that he doesn’t stand out. Habakkuk is clearly a faithful follower of God, and definitely a prophet (Habakkuk 1:1), but beyond that nothing is known. His name means, “to embrace,” or “ardent embracer.”

As the text quickly transitions from Habakkuk’s introduction to Habakkuk’s description of his situation, it almost seems as though Habakkuk could not wait to get into the meat of his message. His prophecy begins with a cry to the Lord that looks as though it has been ripped out of one of the Psalms: “O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear!

Even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!” (1:2). Habakkuk has a complaint against Jehovah God that he makes clear from the onset – God is not responding quickly enough to what the prophet and his people are suffering.

In regards to the situation Habakkuk faced, Habakkuk himself speaks in very general terms. It’s not clear whether he has suffered anything or he is simply observing the suffering of others. He says, “Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? For spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention” (1:3). Habakkuk, as a righteous man, seems to be concerned with what all righteous men are suffering. He sees that the trend of society is moving against righteousness and has even resulted in the suffering of many righteous people; he is fearful for what the future beholds.

The lack of biographical information and the relative ambiguity of Habakkuk’s description of his situation speak volumes as to why God might have placed this in our Bibles. Yes, due to the mentioning of the Chaldeans later as an up and coming power in the world, we are able to place the book into a historical context – it took place prior to the Babylonian captivity and was written to comfort the Jews living in that time. However, it’s my opinion that these historical and biographical details were kept to a minimum so that it would be easier for future audiences to identify with the book.

Habakkuk’s situation has been my situation; I am sure it has been yours as well. Habakkuk was doing all he could to serve God personally and encourage others to do so, but forces outside of his power were conspiring against him and seemed to be gaining the upper hand. No change was in sight. Is it all that different when we consider what is happening to marriage in western society? When we consider the degeneration of the media? When we consider the rise of militant Islam? When we consider a host of other societal issues, not to mention our own personal struggles and difficulties?

What can the righteous do when things beyond their power are not going their way? Certainly Habakkuk is appealing to the right source – God – but his appeal is full of fear and frustration rather than faith. Rather than asking the Lord to act, he accuses the Lord of wilful inactivity – “thou wilt not hear... thou wilt not save” (v. 2). The situation must be terrible, but can it really be as bad as Habakkuk envisions – “judgment doth **never** go forth?”

While God is mindful of the tears of the righteous and while His ears are always open to their prayers (Psalm 56:8; 1 Peter 3:12), sometimes He calls us to wipe our tears away and open up our eyes. Before Habakkuk can continue pleading, God interrupts him to reveal the first part of His solution.

## **GOD’S SOLUTION, PART 1**

God receives no introduction by Habakkuk, and a cursory reading of the first chapter might confuse anyone not familiar with the set up of the book. The book plays out like this - Habakkuk talks (Habakkuk 1:1-4) and God interrupts; God talks (1:5-11) and Habakkuk interrupts; Habakkuk talks (1:12–2:1) and finally waits for God to answer; God answers (2:2-20) and Habakkuk responds with a song of prayerful praise (3:1-19). There’s a reason for this layout, particularly for the lack of an introduction for God in the first chapter – the book is like a conversation with God. Habakkuk is in the midst of heartfelt prayer to God when he receives this “burden” (1:1) or “vision” (2:2) in which God speaks directly to him.

Try to imagine yourself in Habakkuk's position. You're suffering due to circumstances beyond your control and you're pleading to God to do something about it, and all of a sudden God says, "I'm going to do something that's going to shock you – you won't believe it! I'm going to allow your country to be overtaken by the Chaldeans. You know - that terrible Gentile nation in the west!" That's essentially God's solution, or at least the first part of it; what's worse, God actually describes the terrible Gentile nation that he's using to overtake his country, as if Habakkuk had not heard of them.

Habakkuk had complained of violence; God tells him that the Chaldeans would come "all for violence" (1:2-3, 9). Habakkuk had complained of spoiling; God tells him that the Chaldeans would come "to possess the dwelling-places that are not theirs" (v. 3, 6). Habakkuk complained of wicked people surrounding him; God tells him that the horsemen of the Chaldeans would spread themselves through his land (v. 4, 8). Habakkuk complained of wrong judgment; the judgment of the Chaldeans proceeded from themselves and was whatever they desired (v. 4, 7).

This seems more like a cruel joke than a response from a loving God to a penitent believer. How could God respond to Habakkuk's problems by giving him worse problems, problems that he couldn't have imagined even if he tried? Habakkuk must have been flabbergasted, and he lets God know as much.

## HABAKKUK'S SUGGESTIONS

If you were in Habakkuk's shoes, you might have responded as he did – utter denial. "No way, God! You've got it wrong. You wouldn't do something like this – you couldn't!" As I read through this section, I am reminded of when Peter received the commandment from the Lord, "Rise Peter, kill and eat," and Peter responded, "Not so Lord" (Acts 10:9-16). The text says this happened three times, but should it have happened at all? What Peter, Habakkuk and men of every age need to realise is that **if He is the Lord, it is so and should be so**, regardless of what anyone says!

Habakkuk knew it was the Lord that spoke and yet still thought he knew better. First, no way Israel could be overthrown – maybe chastened a bit, but, in Habakkuk words, "we shall not die" (Habakkuk 1:12). Second, no way God could use someone so wicked to accomplish His ends – how could He stand to even look at the Chaldeans (v. 13)? Third, no way God could let a dog like Chaldea off the leash. If the Babylonians were given a fishing license in the sea of the nations, they wouldn't stop until all the fish were in their boat and the lake was empty, and they still wouldn't acknowledge God (v. 13-17). Basically, Habakkuk's statements can be boiled down to one: this plan isn't right God – you need to pick another one.

Habakkuk had succumbed to a spirit of suggestion rather than summoning the spirit of a supplicant. There is a fine line between the two. Supplication – a humble request for help from someone in authority, in this case, God – is expected and even commanded of the faithful as a part of their prayer relationship with God (1 Timothy 2:1). God desires that we go to Him with our needs and concerns even though He knows our needs (Matthew 6:8-13; 1 Peter 5:7). Suggestion however is neither commanded nor acceptable. Suggestion is where individuals go to God in prayer without this core value in their hearts: "Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). Instead, they feel that they know what is best and will hold God accountable to performing their will, not His.

Even though Habakkuk spoke out of turn, he managed to pull back his pride and ego and give the Lord a chance to respond. “I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower,” he said, “and watch what He will say unto me” (Habakkuk 2:1). Further, he recognised that in the final analysis he would be “reproved” (v. 1).

God always responds to the person who is willing to investigate the matter deeply enough. He does not rebuke the questioner (John 20:27) and even tolerates the suggester (Genesis 18:20-33), providing that anyone who questions or suggests will also listen and accept. He promises with infinite longsuffering that if anyone will seek, he will find (Matthew 7:7). However, He will bring to nothing anyone who clings to his own wisdom rather than God’s (1 Corinthians 1:19-20).

## **GOD’S SOLUTION, PART 2**

What had escaped Habakkuk’s mind in his initial reaction was a proverb as old humanity: “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7). In Paul’s record of that proverb, he adds this introductory statement: “God is not mocked.” I remember Thomas Warren explaining this passage something like this: “No one can make a mockery out of God. You can’t make things turn out any other way than God said they would.”

Did Habakkuk really think that God would forget His promises to the Israelites and allow them to be wiped off the face of the earth? Did he think that God would allow the Chaldeans to run amuck indefinitely? Did he think that God would tolerate a nation that evil forever? I have little doubt that Habakkuk didn’t think those things. He just needed to be reminded of the old proverb.

In continuing to explain His solution, God reveals what Habakkuk should have realized – “The just shall live by his faith,” and, by implication, the wicked shall die without it (Habakkuk 2:4). The Chaldean’s sinful pride would be his undoing – he only cared for himself, and both self indulgent nations and individuals cannot live forever. The writing was already on the wall for a nation that had not even risen to world power in the eyes of Jehovah: “Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee; because of men’s blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein” (2:8).

God was not overlooking Babylon’s sin – far from it. In fact, He was actually omnisciently aware of all future sins the nation was going to commit and that these sins would be Babylon’s undoing. God notes four categories of sins that would bring upon Babylon the hatred of the world and pronounces woe on them for engaging in them:

- Greed/Covetousness – “Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house” (2:9)
- Violence – “Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood” (2:12)
- Deceit and Drunkenness – “Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink [alcohol – PWS]” (2:15)
- Idolatry – “Woe to him that saith to the wood, Awake” (2:19)

These sins, sown in a heart full of pride, could reap nothing but corruption As Paul said in making application of the proverb, “For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption” (Galatians 6:8).

So what was God's plan? God would take care of the sin in Israel by bringing a more sinful nation to power to defeat it (1:6). He would take care of that sinful nation by bringing others to power whom that nation had conquered (2:6-8). Basically, God would allow things to get a whole lot worse just so they could eventually get a whole lot better. As a result of the rise of Babylon and subsequent Babylonian captivity, the children of Israel would never again fall into physical idolatry (the worship of graven images). Further, the influence of Jehovah would spread into the world through the Jews scattered abroad and in the fullness of time the church would be given a foothold in nearly every major Gentile city through these synagogues. Ever noticed how Paul began preaching in each city at a synagogue or gathering place of the Jews? Without the Babylonian captivity, he never would have been able to do so.

This plan revealed to Habakkuk was to be just a thread in the infinite tapestry of God's protective and providential wisdom in bringing into existence the church and paving the way for ultimate salvation for all the faithful (Ephesians 3:11; Romans 8:28). It alone was beautiful enough to be painted in the broadest letters so that one could read and run to tell others (Habakkuk 2:2). It proved that God was in control, reigning from His holy temple: "The Lord is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him" (2:20).

## **HABAKKUK'S SURRENDER**

A good friend once relayed to me a piece of information he had received from another good friend. "Patrick," he said, "There are always three parts at work in every situation dealing with other people. There's your part, the other person's part, and God's part. If you're not doing your part, you're going to find yourself in a great deal of stress. But if you try to do God's part or the other person's part, you're going to find yourself in just as much stress."

Sometimes you just have to accept the fact that some things are beyond your control. How do you know what's in your control and what's not? All you really have to do is ask a couple of questions.

First, Have I done what God told me not to do or gone somewhere He has told me to avoid? If I'm breaking some law of God, then I certainly can expect to find myself in some difficulties in life. The law of sowing and reaping will apply to me, even as a Christian. Remember, when a son leaves the Father's house, he can't be surprised when he winds up in the mud with the pigs (Luke 15:11-16). If he runs with pack, he can't be surprised when he comes out smelling like a dog (1 Corinthians 15:33). Hopefully, you can answer no.

Second, Have I done what God told me to do, in keeping with my talents and abilities? Please don't be one of those people who misapply James 4:17 in answering this question. Some people are constantly stressed and depressed because they think that every moment one is not involved in Bible study or evangelism is a moment in sin. That passage was not designed to create that kind of mindset – in fact, in context it has reference to the person who does not keep God in his plans (v. 13-16). Not every Christian can be a Paul or a five talent man – there have to be some two and one talent men out there as well. If you are keeping God in all that you do, doing what He says (as no command of His is grievous/burdensome – 1 John 5:3), repenting of sins and confessing them as they come up (1 John 1:7-10), and doing what you can (Mark 14:8), then you can answer yes.

If you answered no to the first question, yes to the second question, and yet you are still having difficulties, then it's time for you to realise that something is beyond your control. All you can do now is submit it to God and leave it in his care. This is exactly what Habakkuk learned.

Habakkuk concludes the book by doing whatever anyone should do when taught a lesson by a holy God – he offers up a prayerful song of thanksgiving (that ch. 3 is a song is signified by the term, Shigionoth). The song can be summed up by the first couple of lines: “I... was afraid... God came” (Habakkuk 3:2, 3). Habakkuk ultimately surrendered to the wonderful wisdom of God and His plan, and learned to trust Him no matter what. “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (3:17-18).

## CONCLUSION

Obviously God took care of my working visa worries, because I am now living in Australia and God is looking after me in an amazing way. Looking back at that time in 2007-2008, I am ashamed to admit that I had not surrendered my trust to a holy God. Although I cannot say for sure on this side of eternity, maybe that's exactly why God worked things the way He did. As I look at my life in general, I am amazed at how God has put things together. I couldn't have envisioned it if I had tried.

Rather than blaming God for our difficulties and accusing Him of inactivity, maybe we should simply do our part and leave the rest to Him and everyone else. Maybe we should realise that out of great pain, great sin, and great tragedy, God can bring about things “exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Ephesians 3:20). The same God who watched His Son die upon the cross is watching over our cares and concerns as well.

### His Eye Is On The Sparrow

By Civilla D. Martin

*Why should I feel discouraged, why should the shadows come,  
Why should my heart be lonely, and long for heaven and home,  
When Jesus is my portion? My constant friend is He:  
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;  
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.*

*“Let not your heart be troubled,” His tender word I hear,  
And resting on His goodness, I lose my doubts and fears;  
Though by the path He leadeth, but one step I may see;  
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;  
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.*

*Whenever I am tempted, whenever clouds arise,  
When songs give place to sighing, when hope within me dies,  
I draw the closer to Him, from care He sets me free;  
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me;  
His eye is on the sparrow, and I know He watches me.*

*I sing because I'm happy,  
I sing because I'm free,  
For His eye is on the sparrow,  
And I know He watches me.*

## **Zephaniah:**

“I will search Jerusalem with lamps” (Zephaniah 1: 12) - Lessons from the Day of the Lord

*Ritchie Ares Doña*

After the downfall of the Northern kingdom, Zephaniah preached to Judah. Zephaniah was one of the first of the three prophets to preach to Judah. His name means “the Lord hid” which corresponds with the declaration of the tenderness of the love of God for the remnant of Israel, “the afflicted and poor people,” whom God would “leave in the midst of them” (3:12). Zephaniah seems to converge in the love of God for the remnant of His people. The remnant He calls the “undesirable nation” (2:1). The remnants are those who walk faithfully in the Lord or who have turned away from wickedness. The Lord will hide the remnant when He said, “It may be that you will be hidden in that day of the Lord’s anger” (2:3). Zephaniah foretells of a sifting time, when God will take away the proud among her (3:11-12), yet there follows the largeness of the Gospel promise and of love (3:12-17). Zephaniah’s name speaks of God’s protections and promises for the remnant of Israel.

The theme of the book of Zephaniah is the “for the day of the Lord is at hand” (1:7). Zephaniah’s message vividly speaks of the terror of a people and nations without God. On the same token, from judgement, God shows His incredible Divine love. Since time began, God has been very clear to His people, He hates evil and blesses those who obey Him. The message is that all hope is not gone even though the judgment day is near. Like many prophets, Zephaniah emphasises the point that God does not forget those who do not forget Him. A promise is given to a nation whose God is their Lord (Psalm 33:12).

King Hezekiah was Zephaniah’s great-great-grandfather (1:1). Due to his royal lineage one may call him the royal prophet. He was contemporary with Jeremiah, as were Nahum and Habakkuk. Zephaniah prophesied in the days of king Josiah. Josiah became king at the age of eight. In the early days of Josiah, idolatry and anything to do with wickedness filled the land. Josiah was a good king. The scripture described his ways, “he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left” (2 Kings 22:2). At the age of sixteen Josiah began to seek the Lord and the age of twenty he began to purge the land of idolatry. In 621 B.C. after the “book of the law” was found by Hilkiah the high priest, Josiah led an extensive series of religious and social reforms (2 Kings 22-23). Zephaniah may have prophesied before or during these reforms. Zephaniah’s message was for the people who had departed the true worship to God. The people seem to be happy in their sins. The depth of idolatry and sin in the land it seems not possible for this people to turn. Only the remnant had the hope given to them. Josiah’s reforms were short-lived. The nation soon returned to its wicked ways.

Zephaniah proclaimed the coming “day of the Lord” (1:7,14-16). His description was powerfully clear that an Assyriologist George Adam Smith wrote, “No hotter book lies in all the Old Testament.” The judgment or the day of the Lord was truly great. However, the book ends on an encouraging message concerning the future. Josiah’s reformation did not go far enough in the minds and hearts of the people. One may destroy what causes people to sin, however, if the heart is not changed then reformation serves a little. The

prophet's duty was to preach to the hearts of the people. "They needed to see the real problem was within themselves" (Petrillo, p.48).

### **God's punishment toward the wicked: Judah – 1:1-2:3**

The Lord will consume everything (1:2-3). In this first section Zephaniah encouraged people to look within. "I will utterly consume all things from the face of the ground, saith Jehovah" (1:2). Utterly consume all things literally "sweep away" or "scrape off utterly". The Lord's consummation is not with partiality or limitation. This phrase speaks of the incredible warning of the great day coming. Here the Lord speaks "expressing the utter final consumption of all things" (Barnes). The expression of the Lord's words shows the intensity of His judgements. The Lord will consume man, beast, birds of the heavens, fish of the sea, and He will even consume idols that made Judah stumble (1:3). "I will cut off man from the face of the ground" was used in the days of Noah. The Lord said to Noah, "I will destroy from the face of the earth all living things that I have made" (Genesis 7:4). God was true to His words. With the flood God destroyed the face of the earth. The same warning of judgement was used against disobeying the Lord. After given the Ten Commandments in the wilderness God warned them about disobedience when He said, "for Jehovah thy God in the midst of thee is a jealous God, lest the anger of Jehovah thy God be kindled against thee, and He destroy thee from off the face of the earth" (Deuteronomy 6:15). These incredible warnings against sin have been given since the beginning of time. The affect of man's sins is powerful. The Lord's creation has been affected because of man's sin. In Noah's days, every living thing on earth was destroyed because man would not turn away from sin. Fools who do not believe in God blame God for the calamities and sufferings in the world. How foolish are these people. Man brings sin causing sufferings and blame God for their action.

The Lord will judge Judah because of idolatry (1:4-6). "I will stretch out My hand upon Judah" (1:4), this shows the Lord's destruction against Judah. The idolatrous ways of Judah and Jerusalem is causing the Lord's wrath to come upon them. The Lord will cut off the remnant of Baal worship. According to commentators that there still remains of Baal worship, which Josiah was not able to utterly eradicate in remote places (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown). Baal worship has been a problem with the children of Israel from the time of the Judges (Judges 2:13). This is a powerful warning about not completely eradicating one's sins. A Christian cannot live a Christ life while enjoying a little bit of sin. As anything, a little seed of sin grows and brings destruction (James 1:15). God will cut idolatrous priests. These idolatrous priests were of the Levitical family who were supposed to be priests serving God. However, these priests appointed by the Jewish kings serve Baal. It is a warning to preachers and teachers of God who are unfaithful will rightly be rewarded with God's wrath. God will cut off star worshippers and false swearers (those who have divided loyalties). God will cut off those who have turn their back from following the Lord. "These were priests claimed to worship the Lord but worship the Baalim (plural)" (Petrillo, p.51). These priests will be cut off because they have not sought the Lord or inquire of Him. So many Christians have turned their backs on the Lord because they have not sought nor inquire of Him. Our faithfulness depends on our diligence to seek God. Without diligence it is impossible to "add" to our life faith, virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love (2 Peter 1:5-7, cf. Hebrews 6:11). Our worship to God must be with all diligence (cf. 2 Corinthian 8:7). Drifting away from the Lord instruction is caused by laziness. We can easily be guilty of the idolatry of these priests if we are not diligent enough to seek or inquire of the Lord. We are not to be "lagging in diligence" as Paul instructed all Christians (Romans 12:11).

The Lord will punish those of the royal family and the rich (1:7-9). On the great day of the Lord, boasters will be silenced. He will punish the princes and the king's children. The Lord will disable the economy of the kingdom (1:10-11). He will also punish the commerce of Jerusalem (1:12-13). In everyway the Lord will destroy them. The prophet announces a universal and all-consuming judgment with special mention and attention given to Judah.

The great day of the Lord is near. On this great day Judah and Jerusalem will be affected (1:7-13). The punishment will be upon the princes and king's children and upon those who are full of violence and deceit. There will be wailing and mourning at the northern wall (Fish Gate). The Lord will search out and punish the complacent. They will be punished because they disregarded the Lord and said they were not afraid of any distribution from the Lord. The complacency of the people said in their hearts, "The Lord will not do good, nor will He do evil" (1:12). This is the summary of the people's hearts that have become hardened. These people imply that God is not going to do anything so they are not worried about anything. Complacency comes to the hearts that think all things are well and we do not need God. This is a powerful lesson about complacency. From the moment we get too comfortable and say in our hearts we do not need God is the moment we drift away from Him. Before the great day, the Lord will search and punish these people mentioned above. The great day is coming and Zephaniah described with urgency in his tone (1:14-18). The day is near and hastens quickly. It is describes as the day of devastation, desolation, darkness, and distress. This great day will be so severe that nothing can save them from the Lord's wrath, not even silver or gold. This is an incredible reminder of nations who trust in their wealth. Nations who hold world power because of their wealth will crumble like dust if they forget God.

The Lord God calls them to repent before that great day of His wrath comes upon them (2:1-2). The nature of God's mercy is that He continues to warn them through His prophets of the impending disaster. We often forget that through God's judgment is His love to redeem them. He wants them to seek the Lord, to seek righteousness, and to seek humility (2:3). Humility is what will save them. A humble person carries out God's ordinances. Humility describes the one who submits to the will of another. In this case, the blessing comes from submitting to God's will. Seek the Lord, seek righteousness, and seek humility all of these convey activity on the part of the person. The Lord's instruction will only work to those who have a humble heart, seeking that which is from the Lord, and to seek His right ways or seek His wisdom. Observing the evangelism in Tasmania, I have noticed that people are full of pride. I have understood the power of humility. It is hard and almost impossible to obey the Lord without humility (cf. 1 Peter 5:5, Proverbs 22:4).

### **Punishment toward the wicked nations surrounding Judah – 2:4-3:7**

The Lord will punish nations on East and West. Having Zephaniah to cause Israel to look within them, he is now prompt the people to look around them. It has been the history of Israel to seek other nations' help. God will punish them as well. He will punish Philistinian cities (2:4-7). Its cities will be made desolate and the inhabitants destroyed. "The coast will be for the remnant" (2:7).

"This statement speaks of the small group of faithful people who return from captivity. 42, 360 returned. 'The remnant' – the faithful few (1:4, 2:7,9; 3:13. They will be able to lie down and rest, and the Lord will take care of them. He will restore their fortune. This was fulfilled when they returned to the Lord" (Petrillo, p.54).

The Lord will punish Moab and Ammon (2:8-11). They shall be like Sodom and Gomorrah because of their pride and for insulting God's people. God make an oath to Himself when He said, "As I live" (2:9). This confirms with surety that He will destroy both nations. Both nations will overrun with weeds and salt pits. "Nelson Gluek, a Jewish archaeologist, has discovered 100's cities that were desolated with salt pits" (Petrillo, p.55). The sin of these cities was their pride (Isaiah 16:6, Jeremiah 29). From the sin of pride all things flow from it (cf. Proverbs 16:18).

The Lord will punish nations on south and north of Judah (2:12-15). Ethiopia will be slain by the sword. This was fulfilled when Nebuchadnezer conquered Egypt, 536 B.C. The Lord used Nebuchadnezer as His instrument. The Lord refers to him as His sword, rod, and servant throughout scripture. Assyria with its capital Nineveh will become desolate. Nebuchadnezer destroyed Nineveh in 612 B.C. What was once a powerful city now is place mocked. God raises one nation to become great in order to punish another nation. On a smaller scale of territory, sometimes God uses our own brethren, friends, and family to punish us. Whom the Father loves him He corrects (Proverbs 3:12).

Woe is pronounced to Jerusalem. She has rebelled against the Lord (3:1-5). She has not obeyed the voice of the Lord to draw near to Him and appeal for His help (James 4:8). Her civil and religious leaders are like lions and wolves, insolent and doing violence to the Law. The unjust know no shame. However, in contrast the Lord is righteous and never fails in His justice. There were three things Jerusalem and Judah trusted. She trusted in false gods, military strength, and alliances with foreign powers. Neither of these can help them, the Lord will destroy all. She also ignored God's judgment upon other nations (3:6-7). Judgments upon other nations would have prompted her to receive God's instruction. They could not receive God's instruction because the people were corrupted in all their deeds.

### **Punishment serves to teach God's love and mercy toward the faithful – 3:8-30**

They are to wait upon the Lord. Zephaniah is appealing to the righteous few because He is going to come and bring vengeance. Zephaniah ends his message with a look beyond. "To wait for the Lord is to put your trust in Him" (Petrillo, p.57). The faithful are told to wait for the Lord to carry out His judgment (3:8). There is a wonderful promise to those who wait on the Lord. "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord!" (Psalm 27:14).

After judgment, God will restore His peoples a "pure language" to worship and serve Him in one accord (3:9). The remnant who are scattered will eventually come back and worship God. God will be worship, however, He demand it to be done according to His will. Israel the dispersed shall bring offerings from afar (3:10). God will remove the proud from His "holy mountain", leaving a meek and humble people will trust and rest in the Lord (3:11-13). This is possible through the Gospel of Christ. Their sins are forgiven. "The remnant of Israel will do no wrong and tell no lies" (3:13). There will be no more deceit in the mouths of the people. No one will cause them to worry because they will be able to lie down and they will be fed.

Since the promise of restoration was pronounce to the remnant, there will joy in Jerusalem. For the Lord will remove their judgments and their enemies (3:14-15). They would not have to fear disaster since He has cleared away their enemies. For the Lord will be in their midst, providing them with gladness, love and singing (3:16-17). God is happy when people trust Him. The Lord will give them great assurance (3:18-20). God will gather

who sorrow over the reproach of His people. God will deal with those who afflicted His people. This assurance is applicable to all Christians. There will be time when our faith is mocked and ridiculed. Be assured, whatever the assault may be, God will deal with them. God will gather those who have been driven out and give them fame and praise. For those who have been affected by the sins of others and remain faithful one will prosper.

The message of Zephaniah is simple: Judgment is coming; however blessing will follow for those who heed the warning to repent. It was a message that would comfort the remnant taken away into Babylonian captivity. It was a message that perhaps had an initial fulfillment following their restoration under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. The ultimate fulfillment pertains to the age of the Messiah. Began with the establishment of His spiritual kingdom, the church. Into which God is gathering His people (1 Thessalonians 2:12). In which we enjoy the presence of God and His blessings (Hebrews 12:22-24). In which will end when Christ comes again (Revelation 21:1-22:5). The message of the apostles is very much the same today when it was first written. The “day of the Lord”, which Zephaniah’s day was a type, is coming (2 Peter 3:7-10). As God’s people are we ready for the second coming the great and final day, the Judgment Day? Many died because of complacency. Already, there are many Christians who are becoming lazy in their service to the Lord. God’s people are admonished to remain faithful (2 Peter 3:11-14). Hope of salvation is given to those who seek the Lord, seek righteousness, and has a humble heart.

“Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:19-21).

## **Haggai:**

“Be Strong and Work” - Lessons From An Unfinished Temple

*Ronald D. Gilbert*

### **Introduction**

The northern kingdom was taken captive by Assyria about 721 B.C. The southern kingdom was taken captive by Babylon about 606 B.C. Cyrus issued the first decree to rebuild about 538 B.C. (Ezra 1:1-6). About 50,000 Jews returned in 536 B.C. (Ezra 2:1-70). During the seventh month (536 B.C.) the altar of the Lord was built and sacrifices are offered (Ezra 3:1).

In 535 B.C. during the second month of that year, work on the Temple begins but is stopped (Ezra 4:24). In 520 B.C. the work of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah begins (Haggai 1:1; Zech. 1:1.). In 516 B.C. the twelfth month and the third day, the Temple was completed. In 457 B.C. Ezra comes to Jerusalem and makes certain reforms. In 444 B.C. Nehemiah rebuilds the wall around Jerusalem. These dates help us get a time frame in mind of the events we will be discussing.

Haggai is the second shortest book of the Old Testament behind Obadiah. In the 38 verses of this book “Thus saith the Lord” and like phrases appear 26 times. The theme of this book is “Build God’s Temple”. Haggai was God’s prophet, Zerubbabel was the governor of Judah and Joshua was the high priest. Our lesson on this book will consist of three main points. The need for the work, the responsibility for the work and the encouragement in the work.

### **The Need For The Work**

In order to understand what had happened to the Temple of God we need to read Jer. 52:12-13. Babylon had marched on Jerusalem and “burned the house of the Lord, and the king’s house; and all the houses of the great men, burned he with fire”. In Haggai chapter one the prophet calls upon the people of God to build the Temple. After the return from 70 years in Babylon they laid the foundations and started to rebuild the Temple but the work was stopped. In Haggai 1:2 the people argued that the time is not come to build the Lord’s house. Whether they were arguing that the 70 years was not yet up or that they had more pressing matters to do they were still not doing what God wanted them to do. God said the time is now. We always make the wrong decision when we decide to put other things before the work of God. It had been 16 years since Cyrus had given command that the house of God be built. The people wasted no time in building their own houses. Their houses are described as “ciled houses”, that is roofed with costly woods, or vaulted houses, houses whose door posts were elaborately adorned with emblems and devices. These were houses of luxury and God’s house was in waste. David was of a different mindset than the people of Haggai’s day.

“And it came to pass. when the king sat in his house, and the Lord had given him rest round about from all his enemies; That the king said unto Nathan the prophet,

See now, I dwell in an house of cedar but the ark of the Lord dwelleth within curtains” (II Sam. 7:1-2). If we truly put the Lord first in our lives then His work will come first, (Matt. 6:33).

In Haggai 1:6-11 God told the people that all these bad things were happening to them because they refused to obey God and put Him first in their lives. The prophet of God called upon the people to “consider your ways”. As preachers and teachers of God’s Word today this is also our task (II Tim. 4:1-5).

In Haggai 1:12-15 we see the power of preaching God’s Word, “and they came and did work on the house of the Lord”. These passages also show the power in preaching, I Cor. 1:18-25, Rom. 1:16.

### **The Responsibility For The Work**

It seems that many times when it comes to the work of the Lord many are uncertain as to who has the responsibility for the work. Who had the responsibility to build God’s Temple? Was it only the high priest or the governor? The prophet of God called upon all the people to rise up and build the Temple of God. All of God’s people were responsible for the work God gave them. The same is true today. Sometimes brethren argue over the work in the Kingdom and whether it is the responsibility of the leaders in the church or the members. All of God’s people are to be workers in His kingdom, Mark 16:15-16; Gal. 6:10; Titus 3:1; I Cor. 16:1-2; Gal. 6:1, 5. In Haggai 2:4 this point is clearly seen. The prophet called upon Zerubbabel the civil leader, Joshua the spiritual leader and “all ye people of the land” to be strong and work. We need more in the church today like Isaiah who said, “Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I send Me” (Isa. 6:8).

### **The Encouragement In The Work**

In Haggai 2:4 God told the people to be strong and work, “for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts”. In Rom. 8:31 Paul asked, “If God be for us who can be against us?” As God’s children we should always be encouraged in doing the work He has given us. There has never been a time in the history of man that God has given us a task to do without also giving us the ability to do that task. Not only do we have the encouragement from God in the work He has given us we also have the encouragement from our brethren. There is much strength and encouragement in working together for the Lord.

In Haggai 2:9 the prophet gives further words of encouragement in stating that “the glory of the latter house shall be greater than of the former”. He was not talking about the physical Temple for in Haggai 2:3 he clearly stated that the glory of the Temple before it was destroyed was superior. Here in Haggai 2:9 he was speaking of the spiritual Temple or the church. In I Cor. 3:16 Paul stated, “Know ye not that ye are the Temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” Then in I Tim 3:15 Paul said, “But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God the pillar and ground of the truth.” The Greek word for “house” here can be translated family, home, house or temple. As glorious as the Temple Solomon built was it is not to be compared to the spiritual Temple or the church. The first Temple was dedicated by the blood of many bulls and goats. The church was purchased by the blood of Christ, Acts 20:28.

In Haggai 2:9 God promised to give peace. This refers to spiritual peace. In Eph. 2:13-16 Paul said, "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us: Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby". Haggai spoke by inspiration of the greatest peace the world would ever know, the peace that passeth understanding.

## **Conclusion**

From the book of Haggai we learn that there can be no success in life without obeying God. When we fail to do God's will in our lives we are "earning wages and putting them in a bag with holes". "Be strong and work" is the key to success. "I am with you saith the Lord" is all we need to know for our strength and encouragement.

Discouragement comes when we only look to the conditions around us rather than the mission before us. The Lord's cause cannot go forward without personal dedication and personal involvement. There must also be personal sacrifice. God's work requires my time, energy and my money. We also should remember the Lord will reward His faithful servants in this life and the life to come. The Hebrew writer quotes Haggai 2:6, 20 as confirmation of the Lord's establishment of the kingdom of Christ in Hebrews 12:22-29.

## **ZECHARIAH:**

“The Lord shall yet comfort Zion” - Lessons from a hopeful future

*Joseph Renne*

I want to go back in Bible history and remember some things about God's chosen people, the Jews. They had problems staying faithful to the Lord. On the way to the Promised Land they sinned by melting the spoils of the Egyptians and forming a golden calf as their “god” (Ex. 32:1-10). They would later fail in conquering the Promised Land because they listened to the ten unfaithful spies (Num. 13-14). As a result, God made them wander in the wilderness for forty years (Num. 14:33-35). When they went over into the Promised Land, they were instructed to remove all the residents from that place and seize the land. However, they failed to do so and eventually were influenced by the inhabitants of the land (Jud. 2:11-15). God then appointed Judges to correct the Jews when they turned to idol gods (Jud. 3-16). According to Scripture this happened many times over as Israel had fifteen different Judges.

Next, God's people asked for a ruler to be over them like the other nations (1 Sam. 8:1-9). God did grant them a leader and Saul was their first king (1 Sam. 9). It did not take Saul long to depart from God's plan and he was rejected as king (1 Sam. 13-15). David, whom God loved, became king next and was a warrior. His son, Solomon, was next in line during a time of wealth and peace. Solomon allowed the nation to be influenced with idol gods because of the foreign women he married (1 Kings 11:1-13). Solomon's son, Rehoboam, was to inherit the kingdom but Jeroboam also wanted the kingdom. Rehoboam was offered advice by the elders who served with Solomon and the young men with whom he grew up (1 Kings 12). He followed the advice of the younger men and made service harder for the inhabitants of the land (1 Kings 12:12-17). Making their burdens harder gave the other tribes reasons to leave Rehoboam's kingdom and unite with Jeroboam's kingdom in the north. Jeroboam didn't want his people to travel to Jerusalem to worship (1 Kings 12:25-27), so he set up his own mode of worship (1 Kings 12:28-33). Later Israel would fall to the Assyrian armies because of their sins (2 Kings 17). The tribes of Judah and Benjamin saw what took place with their sister tribes, but did not learn from them. Joel and other prophets foretold what would happen if they continued to disobey God. Many prophets were ignored and some were even killed. Both the Northern and Southern tribes did not do what was right in the eyes of God. Judah and Benjamin had a few faithful kings, but most of them were evil in the eyes of God. What happened to them? They too went into captivity because they failed to repent. It came to pass they did not keep His commandments and were carried off by the Babylonians (2 Kings 24-25).

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, failed to acknowledge God and his kingdom was taken away from him (Dan. 4:28-33). Cyrus of Persia became the next ruler of a world power (2 Chr. 36:22-23). He ordered the temple to be rebuilt in Jerusalem and some did not want that to happen (Ezra 4). Haggai was a prophet sent to encourage the rebuilding of the temple. He reminded the people that their houses were built and the temple was in ruins (Hag. 1:1-11). The temple was the central location for Jewish worship and socialization. Without the temple God's work was not being carried on. The temple was the stepping stone for the Lord's church and is where Zechariah comes into the picture.

Zechariah's mission is to give hope to God's people. "Again proclaim saying, Thus says the Lord of hosts, My cities will again overflow with prosperity and the Lord will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem." After all the trials and disobedience, God would set Jerusalem on a high place among all the cities of the world to show that these are His people. Darius' letter to the Jews speaks of the plans to rebuild the temple (Ezra 5). The Jews would prosper and grow into a nation that came under Greek rule and later under the Roman Empire during the life of Christ. We read In Daniel 2, of God's kingdom being built during the days of the Roman Empire (Dan. 2:44-45). Zechariah came to support Haggai and the Jews who were rebuilding the temple. These two men had a mission to complete, and if they failed, the preparation of the Kingdom would be lost.

Zechariah has similar visions to that of Daniel and other prophets. He gave hope of rebuilding the temple and encouragement to the people of that day. Zechariah wrote his book around 520 BC and it is a book containing eight visions. The first vision is of horseman, riding under a myrtle tree which was a symbol of fertility and renewal. The rider on the red horse became a spokesman delivering a message from God (Zech. 1:12-17). The Gentiles did not rule the world where he was concerned. This was the right time to build the temple. The horseman patrolled the earth and reported all was well.

The second vision was a matter of hope containing horns and craftsmen (Zech. 1:18-21). The four horns, which represented languages or governments, represented the four world powers of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. These four nations had scattered the people of Judah and taken her freedom away. The craftsmen were coming to, "terrify them, to cast out the horns of the nations that lifted up their horn against the land of Judah to scatter it" (Zech 1:21).

The third vision (Zech. 2:1-4) was of Jerusalem being measured out and protected by God. Zechariah 1:16 reads, "Therefore thus says the Lord: I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy; My house shall be built in it, says the Lord of hosts, and a surveyor's line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem." The wall was for defense against their enemies and it gave the people confidence. They really did not need the wall, for God was, "a wall of fire all around her" (Zech. 2:4). God also made this promise to Jerusalem, "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst, says the Lord" (Zech. 2:10). There was still hope for God's people!

The fourth vision was of Satan accusing Joshua the high priest (Zech. 3:1-2). The priesthood was guilty of sinning before God. Joshua stood as a representative for all Israel and Satan was criticizing her sin. Joshua's filthy garments symbolized the sin and pollution of the people (Zech. 3:4), but God forgave them and clothed them in clean garments. There was then a promise made to Joshua in prophecy of the coming Christ. He was referred to the Branch who would be the true High Priest of God's people (Zech. 3:8-10). The book of Hebrews tells of this great High Priest (Heb. 3:1).

A fifth vision gave the people hope and encouragement (Zech. 4). It is believed that Joshua and Zerubbabel are the two olive trees on each side of the lampstand which held seven lamps. Zerubbabel was in charge of the building of the temple and we know that he faced great opposition which was like a great mountain (Zech. 4:7). The good news, however, was that the mountain would become a plain before him. The two olive trees represented the leadership in spiritual and political matters.

The sixth vision of a flying scroll is contained in Chapter 5:1-4. God was going to give hope to the freed nation by removing the law breakers from the land. The explanation given

was, “I will send out the curse, says the Lord of hosts; It shall enter the house of the thief and the house of the one who swears falsely by my name” (Zech. 5:4).

The seventh vision was of a woman in a basket (Zech. 5:5-11). This vision represented the iniquities that were in the land. The woman representing wickedness, sitting in a large dry measure was sent to Shinar where sin would find a home. When the temple was rebuilt evil was to be removed from the land.

According to his eighth vision Zechariah saw that there was hope for Jerusalem in “four chariots” (Zech. 6:1-8). They represent the Spirit of God going forth in the north country and another in south country and so forth. They seem to symbolize God’s protection and providence. The earth is at peace under God’s control. In 6:9-11 the peace that resulted from the eighth vision made it possible for Joshua to wear the crown as high priest and for the people to now focus on the coming of the Messiah called the Branch (Zech. 6:9-15).

Chapters 7 through 13, teach the people about worshiping from the heart, doing justice, not mistreating widows, orphans, foreigners, or the poor and to stop hurting others. A picture of hope and joy is set forth in Zechariah 8:4-8: “Thus says the Lord of hosts, Old men and old women will again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each man with his staff in this hand because of age. And streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls playing in the streets. Thus says the Lord of hosts. If it is too difficult in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, will it be too difficult in My sight? Declares the Lord of hosts. Thus says the Lord of hosts, Behold, I am going to save my people from the land of the east and from the land of the west: and I will bring them back and they will live in the midst of Jerusalem, and they will be My people and I will be their God in truth and righteousness.” Verse 19 states, “Thus says the Lord of hosts, The fast of the fourth the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth months will become joy, gladness and cheerful feasts of the house of Judah; so love truth and peace.”

God was encouraging the people not to be afraid to rebuild. Jerusalem would be called a city of truth and the mountain of the Lord of hosts was the holy mountain. He wanted the glory to be returned to the temple: “Thus says the LORD, I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts will be called the Holy Mountain” (Zech. 8:3). Verses 11 and read, “But now I will not treat the remnant of this people as in the former days,’ declares the LORD of hosts. For there will be peace for the seed: the vine will yield its fruit, the land will yield its produce, and the heavens will give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to inherit all these things.” God’s people would be providing food for themselves and the land would give abundance for their comfort. They were assured that God would be with them. We can also learn from them that God wants His people to be happy and full of joy (1 Pet. 3:10-12). We are encouraged by His word and the support of the Church as the Jews were by the temple.

Zechariah 8:22 reads, “So many people and mighty nations will come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD.” Zechariah spoke of the great promise of the Messiah coming in humility and mounted on a donkey (Zech. 9:9-10). Zechariah 12:1-4 looks forward to the restoration of the land and the rebuilding of the temple. God preserved the Jews until the coming of the Messiah. The temple had to be rebuilt for the coming of Christ. All of this had to be in place. The work of Zechariah was very important for the preparation of the coming of the Branch.

## MALACHI:

“Where is mine honour” (Malachi 1: 6-8) - Lessons from polluted offerings

*William Howard*

- I. Introduction
  - A. Malachi - last book of the OT
  - B. Malachi referred to as a post-exilic prophet.
  - C. Background of Malachi’s message.
    1. Polluted Offerings
      - a. Violation of specific commands in the Mosaic Law.
      - b. Deuteronomy 15:21
    2. Specific reference to their sin.
      - a. Malachi 1:8
      - b. Is God not infinitely greater and worthy?
        - i. Jeremiah 10:6
    3. Point of the original command in Deuteronomy 15:21?
      - a. Show that God deserves and accepts only the best.
      - b. Acknowledgment of His position as the Supreme Ruler and Creator.
  - D. Jews suffered the consequences of their sins by not putting God first.
    1. From the beginning, Moses had offered this warning - Deuteronomy 8:11.
    2. How could they be so blind?
      - a. Be careful before we cast any stones.
      - b. Man, in general, is a forgetful creature.
    3. God knows His creation and has provided continual reminders.
      - a. Ironically, found in these very sacrifices which they were now defiling.
      - b. Forgotten the point of the very thing God had given them to remind them not to forget.
- II. How do we make application to our own lives?
  - A. New Covenant no longer requires animal sacrifice.
    1. Jesus is our eternal sacrifice.
    2. A continual reminder so that we never forget; The Lord’s Supper.
  - B. We too can forget the point of that which was given to remind us to remember.
    1. Church in Corinth.
      - a. I Corinthians 11:20-22
      - b. Was Christ being honored by such actions? Was this a form of a polluted offering?
      - c. Paul refocuses their minds on its true purpose. I Corinthians 11:27-29
    2. What about us?
      - a. Do we forget to remember properly?
      - b. And, if so, where is God’s honor?
  - C. Let’s widen the scope of this discussion of “polluted offerings.”
    1. God is still above all.
      - a. Psalms 57:5
      - b. Psalms 113:4
      - c. Psalms 135:5
      - d. Ephesians 4:6

2. Deserved the best animal sacrifice available and deserves the best we have to offer under the New Covenant.
- D. Some verses that drive this point home:
1. Mark 12:30
    - a. First expressed in the OT. God's expectation of man has not changed. Deuteronomy 6:5.
    - b. "All" is a very important descriptor.
    - c. Heart, soul, mind and strength encompass all that we are.
      - i. Our physical nature.
      - ii. Our intellect.
      - iii. Our emotion and affection.
      - iv. Our spirit. (that part of us made in the image of God)
    - d. God wants us to love Him with everything we are.
    - e. Anything less robs Him of the honor due Him and becomes a "polluted offering."
  2. Colossians 3:23-24
    - a. Did your father ever tell you, "Whatever you put your hand to, give it your best"?
    - b. Giving your best effort is the measure of a person who is honorable, trustworthy and full of integrity.
    - c. That's what this verse says. Give it your all.
    - d. Anything less becomes comparable to offering an animal that is blind or lame, or has some other defect.
- III. Some obvious and perhaps challenging areas of life.
- A. Our time
1. There only 24 hours in a day.
    - a. Can't do everything.
    - b. Have to be able to prioritize.
  2. Whatever is important to you, you will make time for.
    - a. You will find a way to fit it in.
    - b. Is God important enough to us that we are making time for Him every day?
  3. Jesus gave simple advice in Matthew 6:33.
    - a. What things would be added?
    - b. Look at the context. The physical things; food, clothing, shelter.
    - c. Put God first and He will ensure we have the physical things we need.
    - d. Time is perhaps our most precious commodity.
- B. Our talents.
1. The church has many needs.
  2. Are we bringing our talents to bear on the work?
    - a. Parable of the talents - Matthew 25:14-30
    - b. Jesus' point - you must use what God has given you, physical possessions or unique abilities.
    - c. You must find what you are good at and then use it to His glory.
  3. The real question; are we trying?
  4. To give God our best means our talents are engaged in His work.
- C. Our physical possessions.
1. Many sayings that are true and biblical:
    - a. "God loves a cheerful giver." 2 Corinthians 9:7
    - b. "We are just stewards or caretakers of the things He has blessed us with."

- c. "We must give to God first off the top and not of what is left over."
- 2. This is perhaps, one of our greatest tests of faith.
  - a. We live in a physical world requiring physical things
  - b. Really believe God is in control and will provide if we just serve Him faithfully?
  - c. Giving of physical possessions demonstrates faith in God and not in things.
- 3. No one can tell you how much to give to the Lord.
  - a. That's something personal to each of us.
  - b. Does what you give reflect your love and faith in Him who has blessed you so richly?
- 4. Failing to give or use our possessions in a way that puts God first robs Him of His honor just as much as a defective sacrificial animal.

#### IV. Conclusion

##### A. God deserves the best, period.

- 1. Whether an animal sacrifice, or your time, talent, or possessions.
- 2. Must be ever mindful and continually diligent that our lives represent an acceptable offering and not a polluted sacrifice.
  - a. 2 Peter 1:10
  - b. What things? All that He has commanded and revealed to us in His holy word.
- 3. Avoid having God ask you, "Where is mine honor?"
  - a. Live your life in such a way as to extend that honor.
  - b. Strive to give your best at whatever you put your hand.
- 4. And, on those occasions when we do stumble, thank God for the blood of Jesus Christ that overcomes our shortcomings.