

*A Partial Survey of the Major and  
Minor Prophets*

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## *The Major and Minor Prophets*

### *I. Interpretation of Prophecy*

#### *A. The Difficulty of Interpreting Prophecy*

Prophecy is perhaps the most difficult genre (form) of Biblical literature to interpret, and one about which there is the most disagreement among evangelical scholars. Ramm highlights this difficulty in the following quotation:

The prophetic material of Scripture is to be found from Genesis to Revelation. To assemble each passage, to thoroughly digest its meaning, to arrange the passages in a prophetic harmony, would involve a prodigious [amazing] memory, years of exacting work, a masterful knowledge of Biblical languages, an exhaustive reading of prophetic literature, a keen exegetical sense, a thorough knowledge of the histories of many peoples and a knowledge of all relevant archaeological materials. And yet some claim that prophetic Scripture is as easy to interpret as the prose passages [ordinary form of written or spoken languages] of the New Testament!<sup>1</sup>

#### *B. Defining Prophecy*

Berkhof has defined prophecy as “the proclamation of that which God revealed”.<sup>2</sup> The prophets were ordained of God to explain the meaning of past events, clarify events which were taking place in the present, and predict what was going to happen in the future. Prophecy is commonly defined as the prediction of the future, but by examining the literature, we find that the predictive element is a *minor* part of their task. Mostly the prophets are preoccupied with admonition, rebuke, and warning to those who persisted in sin, as well as comfort and encouragement for those who were willing to forsake their sin and repent. In this more limited sense of the word—declaring the word and will of God rather than predicting the future—the prophetic gift continues in modified form today. Pastors should, preach the word of God prophetically by declaring the whole council of God. Their teaching office is not, however, a continuation of the official prophetic office given to the OT prophets who were ordained by God to be the special mediators between God and men (See Appendices A and B). They were, therefore, mediators of the covenant established between God and the people of Israel.

So Israel’s prophets saw themselves as raised up to be the living line of covenantal mediators between God and His people. Their solemn position involved being brought into the counsels of the Lord of the Covenant. Because of this privileged position, the prophet could declare authoritatively both *the moral will and the redemptive purpose* of the sovereign Lord of creation. In this role, the prophet could announce the *consequences of blessing or cursing* that would attend the chosen lifestyle of the people. In addition, by divine revelation, the prophet was enabled to anticipate the history of divine judgment and blessing in both its short-term and its long-term eventualities, making known to the people the plans of the Lord by which he would accomplish his redemptive purposes.<sup>3</sup>

As we shall see below, the prophetic task was a continuation of that given to the first great prophet, Moses, who also mediated the Law to the people of Israel. Thus, the prophets are more commonly

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 245

<sup>2</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*. p. 148)

<sup>3</sup>O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*, abridged edition., p. 8, emphasis mine

looking *backward*, not *forward*. They are looking back to the Covenant Law given through Moses and interpreting how this Law had been violated in the national and personal life of Israel as well as how it should be implemented in the present. At the same time, they are also looking forward to what the consequences will be for the nation if this Law continues to be set aside. Thus, many of the predictions of the prophets concern judgment and exile if Israel refuses to repent and fails to keep the stipulations of the covenant.

### C. *The Institution of Prophecy*

Allan Harman mentions many heathen practices of the Canaanites in use when the Israelites entered into the Land of Promise: <sup>4</sup>

- Passing through the fire, a practice connected with the worship of Molech (2 Kings 23: 10; Jer. 32: 35)
- Divination (Ezek. 21: 21; Gen. 44: 5: 15)
- Magic or sorcery (Dt. 18: 10, 14; 2 Kings 21: 6)
- Spiritists, mediums, or necromancers who spoke from within a person (Lev. 20: 27) and who got messages from the dead for the living (1 Sam. 28: 1-20)

In contrast to these *illegitimate* means of discerning the will of God, the Lord had promised Israel a prophet in whom He would put His words (Dt. 18: 9-22). Moses, who had received the will of the Lord through the Law given at Sinai, was the first of such prophets. The prophet coming after him would be like him. He would be an Israelite, not a foreigner (Judges 22: 24). God would put his words in his mouth, and the Israelites were commanded to listen to everything he says. This was the means of God communicating with His people and supplying *additional information to them which Moses did not supply*. All other forms of discerning the will of God were forbidden. “The ongoing ministry of the prophets would be essential in restraining the people from resorting to these forbidden methods of determining his will.”<sup>5</sup>

We know from Acts 3: 22-23 and Acts 7: 37 that Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promise of a prophet for Israel, but it is clear from the history of Israel that the promise of Dt. 18 applies to the entire institution of prophecy scattered throughout OT history. Every true prophet of Israel, including Moses, is a type of Jesus Christ, and every true prophet had something to contribute to the ongoing instruction from the Lord. In this sense, the prophetic institution was similar to the ongoing priestly institution. Just as the priestly institution pointed to the priesthood of Christ, all the prophets from Moses onward pointed to the prophetic ministry of Christ.

### D. *The Uniqueness of Moses as an OT Prophet*

We have some hint of the uniqueness of Moses’ stature as the premier OT prophet from his own words in Deut. 18: 15, “The LORD your God will raise up for you *a prophet like me* from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him.” The first thing we notice about this verse is the singularity of the word, “prophet” (not “prophets like me”). Although Moses is the first of a long line

<sup>4</sup> *Approaching the Psalms: Judges to Poets*, unpublished syllabus, pp. 68-69

<sup>5</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*, p. 20

of prophets who mediate the word of God to the people of Israel, *he is not thereby placed on an equal basis with them*. He is unique among the OT prophets. His uniqueness, moreover, is verified by God Himself in Moses' confrontation with Miriam and Aaron.<sup>6</sup> In this passage, Miriam and Aaron (and primarily Miriam whose name is mentioned first and who alone is afflicted with leprosy) challenge the priority of Moses as God's spokesman. As a pretense, they criticize him for taking a Cushite wife (v. 1), but the real reason for their discontent was his exalted position before the nation and before God. Were they not *also* prophets with whom God had spoken (v. 2)? Their motive was jealousy, plain and simple. God's displeasure with this challenge is immediately registered in the passage, "And the Lord heard it." Subsequently, the Lord gathers the three together and explains the difference between Moses and all other prophets whom He has called. The difference will consist primarily in the *method and intimacy* of communication. For all other prophets, God will make Himself known indirectly in *dreams and visions*, but with Moses, God will speak directly "*mouth to mouth*" as one who is "faithful in all My house."

Furthermore, with other prophets God will speak in "dark sayings" and not "openly" as with Moses. When we examine the writing prophets later, we will see first-hand what God meant. When they were not specifically applying the Law of Moses to Israel's current situation—by far the bulk of their ministry—the OT prophets were describing obscure visions or dreams which were often difficult even for them to understand (Ezek. 1, 10; Dan. 8: 15, 27). Furthermore, even when preaching the requirements of the Law, their language was veiled in a poetic language which is often interpreted only with difficulty. One might say that the cryptic [mysterious] style of the prophets even in preaching the law foreshadows the method of Christ whose teaching in the latter part of His ministry was often veiled in parables to a resistant Jewish audience.

In contrast, God did not communicate with Moses in obscure visions and sayings, but in plain speech as if one human were speaking to another. All the laws of Israel are plainly spoken, and were easily understood within their cultural context (cf. Deut. 30: 11, in which "not too difficult" refers *not* to the "doing" of the law but to the *plainness of communication*). The Israelites fully understood the requirements of the Law. They were not obscure or "out of reach" intellectually.

It is evident from the contrast given in Num. 12: 6-8 that neither Miriam nor Aaron was a recipient of this special kind of communication from God, *nor would any other merely human prophet in Israel's history* share this special distinction. Consequently, they should have been afraid to challenge Moses as if he were only one prophet among many (v. 8).

The jealousy of Miriam and Aaron became the opportunity for God to underscore Moses' uniqueness. In effect the Lord says, "You think Moses holds too exalted a position? Let me explain to you just how exalted he is! He stands not only higher than the two of you; he stands in an entirely different category from all other prophets that ever will arise in Israel's history. He is unique. He functions as the fountainhead of all Old Testament prophetism. All subsequent prophets shall be overshadowed by Moses. The validity of all later prophecy shall be determined by comparison with the prophetic utterances of Moses."...

None other in Israel was like him. As a later text in Deuteronomy indicates, "No prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Covenant Lord knew face to face....For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel" (Deut. 34: 10, 12).

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<sup>6</sup> Num. 12; cf. Robertson, pp. 16-19

In summary, the priority of Moses in the prophetic line is clearly established, which provides a key to the entire subsequent history of prophetism in Israel. Later prophets never rise above Moses in their position or experience. ***The bulk of subsequent prophetic literature essentially expands on what Moses already declared to God's people.*** The Pentateuch as revealed through Moses functions as the foundational document for the entirety of revelation that comes to the theocracy. Much of the work of subsequent prophets builds on the foundation of revelation as it has been laid by Moses as the fountainhead of revelation for the old covenant people of God.<sup>7</sup>

Such being the case, it is strange, is it not, that so many claiming to be prophets in our day are thoroughly ignorant of the Pentateuch and the treasures of Biblical law. If they object that we are now living in the New Covenant of grace in which OT law has become passé (obsolete and no longer needed), they must then explain why Jesus spends so much time in the Sermon on the Mount explicating the Law of Moses and going beyond its surface applications and why the writers of the NT epistles use so much space explaining how to live the Christian life, often using the language of Old Covenant law (cf. Eph. 6: 1-3; 1 Cor. 6: 9-10; Gal. 5: 19-21).

It is only in terms of the uniqueness of Moses' prophetic administration that we can appreciate the importance of his typical significance in the history of redemption. Although God "spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways" (Heb. 1: 1-2), the author does not specifically compare the prophetic ministry of Christ with that of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, or Daniel—the so-called "Major Prophets" of the OT. Rather, he goes all the way back to the foundational ministry of Moses, the prophet who would provide the type, par excellence, for the antitype, Jesus Christ.

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession; He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house. For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; but Christ *was faithful* as a Son over His house—whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end (Heb. 3: 1-6).

That it was necessary for the author of *Hebrews* to say such things in proof of Christ's superiority is testimony to the unique and exalted position which Moses had in the history of the nation. In this context we can also understand why Moses used the singular, "***prophet*** like me" (Deut. 18: 15) rather than the plural form, "prophets". In a singular way, Moses typified the later, greater prophet, Jesus Christ, who would become the new Law-giver over-shadowing Moses as the redeemer of Israel (Acts 3: 22; 7: 37).<sup>8</sup>

## ***E. The Function of the Prophet<sup>9</sup>***

### ***1. Represented God before men***

<sup>7</sup> Robertson, pp. 18-19; emphasis mine

<sup>8</sup> For an examination of the similarity between Jesus and Moses in giving the law, see Vern Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*.

<sup>9</sup> Adapted from Allan M. Harman, *Approaching the Psalms: Judges to Poets*, unpublished notes pp. 69-70

The prophet was God's spokesman, and since he was God's representative, not men's, God alone could choose his successor. The office was, therefore, unique among the three offices of prophet, priest, and king. The offices of priest and king were hereditary—the priestly line proceeding from Aaron and the kingly line from David. But with the prophetic office, God picked each one individually to deliver His message as He required; thus, Amos declared,

"I am not a prophet, nor am I the son of a prophet; for I am a herdsman and a grower of sycamore figs.<sup>15</sup>  
"But the LORD took me from following the flock and the LORD said to me, 'Go prophesy to My people Israel.' (Amos 7:14-15 NASB)

Even Moses himself had no control over who would be given the Spirit of prophecy, but willingly submitted to the continuing prophesying of Eldad and Medad (Num. 11: 25-30; Robertson, p. 21).

## 2. *Guarded the theocracy, the kingdom of God*

The ongoing need for prophetic activity, in addition to restraining the Israelites from illegitimate means of knowledge, was that the people of Israel were not properly interpreting or applying the word of the Lord to their particular cultural context. The Law had become a dead letter with theoretical, but no practical, significance. Therefore, as the need required, God would send His "servants the prophets" to properly interpret and apply the Law to particular forms of disobedience (2 Ki. 17: 13; Jer. 7: 25-26; Zech. 1: 6). This can be seen in the way Amos preached against the oppression of the poor during the reign of Jeroboam II. There were many provisions for the poor in the Law of Moses, all of which were being neglected during the time of Jeroboam II. Harman makes a very interesting observation concerning the relationship between the prophetic office and the kingly office

Though the institution [of prophet] was promulgated [made known officially or publicly] in Deuteronomy 18, yet the prophets only came to the fore at the time when the theocratic kingdom received an earthly ruler. The idea of the kingdom was a dominant theme thereafter, and the task of the prophets was to keep it as a true representation of the kingdom of the Lord. The office of prophet was needed to keep Israel in a true covenant relationship. ***The presence of a king promoted the greatest possible source of breach [break] of covenant relationship, as a centralized bureaucratic office would seek solutions to problems in purely political terms.***

A corollary [a truth which follows from the one above] of this is that a clash between the kings and prophets was inevitable [certain to come]. This was because the prophet was a spokesman for the Lord, and constantly the prophets had to intervene in the life of the nation and advise the king on political matters. They were ***not content to accept the separation of religion from politics.***<sup>10</sup>

Many examples of this adversarial (antagonistic) relationship between kings and prophets occur in OT history, the most notable being the strained relationship between King Saul and Samuel. Samuel rebuked Saul's contempt for his authority as God's prophet and pronounced judgment upon his dynasty (1 Sam. 15).<sup>11</sup> As Moses served as the fountainhead of the prophetic institution, Samuel becomes the "prophetic role model" as guardian of the theocracy.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Harman, pp. 69-70, emphasis mine

<sup>11</sup> 1 Sam. 13; cf. Dale Ralph Davis, *Looking on the Heart—First Samuel*

<sup>12</sup> Willem A. VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, p. 35

Later the theocracy is threatened by David's adulterous relationship with Bathsheba, and God summons Nathan the prophet to remind David that he is not a law unto himself but stands under the Law of God and is subject to its demands (2 Samuel 13; in v. 13 the prophet seems to imply that failure to repent would have meant death). Another well-known example is the relationship between Ahab and Elijah, who challenges the prophets of Baal to a "duel" (1 Kings 18) and rebukes Ahab and Jezebel for murder and theft and pronounces their future judgment (1Ki. 21 compared with 1 Ki. 22: 24-28 and 2 Ki. 9: 29-36). Throughout the OT witness, the so-called "divine right of kings" as justification for doing whatever they wished is flatly denied. God alone was the absolute King under whose rule all earthly kings must submit (See also Dan. 4 and 5).

These examples prove that the word of God is never subordinate to the rule of men—even powerful men. The opposite is true; men are subordinate to the rule of God's law. This principle has been a very important one throughout the history of mankind and continues to be today. The preaching of the word of God is not limited to private citizens, but must be applied to kings, presidents, senators, representatives, and members of parliament. No man is a law unto himself but must one day stand in judgment and give an account for his public administration, whether good or bad. He will be held more accountable than the average citizen for the privileges bestowed. This heightened accountability is implied in the OT prophets who address kings as "shepherds" who have led the people of Israel astray (Jer. 23 compared with Jer. 22).

The continual desire of fallen man is to be his own god, and it is within the halls of human government that this desire reaches its peak and appears within his grasp. Many theologians believe the beast of *Revelation* to be the opposition of human government to the divine rights of Jesus Christ. Throughout the history of the church, there has been no greater enemy of the church than powerful men in government who wish to boast with the kings of Ps. 2, "Let us tear their fetters apart, and cast away their cords from us!" But this desire to be independent of God will never be granted to even the most powerful king or president on earth. They are all without exception accountable to the King of kings and His law.

### ***3. Wrote the history of the theocracy***

The books of *Joshua*, *Judges*, *1 and 2 Samuel* and *1 and 2 Kings* were designated as "the former prophets" by Jewish readers. The prophetic authorship of these books helps explain the divine perspective presented throughout their contents—"And he [Jeroboam II] did evil in the sight of the Lord..." (2 Kings 14: 24, words in brackets mine).

### ***F. Periods of Prophetic Activity***<sup>13</sup>

#### ***1. From the prophet Samuel (1070 B.C. [?]) to the time of the writing prophets of the eighth century (750 B.C.).***

During this time the prophetic message was only *oral* and not committed to writing. This would include the ministry of Samuel as well as Elijah, Elisha, Nathan, and anyone who belonged to the school of the prophets (1 Sam. 10: 5, 10-11; 1 Kings 18: 13). Their messages are simply embedded in the historical books of the OT.

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<sup>13</sup> Adapted from Harman, pp. 70-71

## 2. *From the eighth century (about 750 B.C.) to the end of OT history (about 425 B.C.).*

This was the major history of prophetic ministry which included *oral* and *written* prophecy.

- Prophets to Israel—Hosea, Amos
- Prophets to Judah—Isaiah, Joel, Micah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel
- Prophets to reunited Israel after the exile—Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
- Prophets to the Gentile nations—Jonah, Nahum, Obadiah

### G. *Characteristics of Prophecy*<sup>14</sup>

#### 1. *Progressively realized in history*

For example, we have the prophecy of the coming of the Messiah as far back as Gen. 3: 15, but this promise receives a more definite character progressively in the history of redemption. Isaiah 53 is a much more definite and explicit promise of the Messiah, as is Micah 5: 1-4. Consider the illustration of the seed and the tree. The seed doesn't look much like a tree, but all the genetic materials of the tree are present in the seed. Genesis 3: 15 doesn't look much like the promise of Christ, but in the mind of God, the whole promise is there in "seed" form, waiting to germinate and grow.

#### 2. *Embedded in history*

Context is the most important principle of Biblical interpretation. It continues to be important in the study of prophecy. To understand their prophetic message to us, it must first be acknowledged that their message was first of all *to the audience living in their own day*. The prophets were the watchman (guards) upon the walls of the city ready to warn the inhabitants when their enemies were coming (Ezek. 33: 1-11). However, the enemy the prophets were watching was the enemy already *within* the gates, namely, the enemy of sin and apostasy which threatened to destroy Israel spiritually from within.

For the reader to understand *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel*, he must consider the captivity of the Israelites in foreign lands, and Obadiah must be understood within the context of Israel's relationship with Edom. Habakkuk prophesies the judgment of Israel by the Babylonians, a people more wicked than they; and it parallels the inclusion of the Gentiles in the kingdom of God. The Jews could not have comprehended either of these possibilities.<sup>15</sup>

How are we to understand Haggai's rebuke in Hag. 1: 1-11? Did he get a good night's sleep the night before? Was he feeling ill that morning, or did he have an argument with his wife the night before? Well, none of the above, but what did the people of Israel do to deserve such a sharp rebuke on the first day (?) of Haggai's prophetic ministry? The answer lies in the historical context of the book of Haggai. The people had been directed to rebuild the temple, but they had allowed personal peace, security, and comfort to hijack their responsibilities.

<sup>14</sup> Adapted from Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 148-151

<sup>15</sup> Ramm, p. 248



### ***3. The time-frame between the prophecy and its fulfillment is difficult to determine.***

Often, momentous historical events which will later occur over a large segment of time are seen by the prophet at a glance as if they occur in a short length of time. This is called the “prophetic perspective” or “prophetic foreshortening”. If we were to visit the Rwenzori Mountains in west Uganda, we would see the peak of Mt. Stanley at a huge distance. Several other mountain peaks which are shorter than Mt. Stanley would be seen in front of it which would appear only a short distance away from it. In reality, the several peaks would be separated by many miles with valleys in between which cannot be seen. When the prophet reported his visions or dreams, he could see the final event (the tallest mountain) along with several other events leading up to it (shorter mountains). All the events seemed to him to take place in short succession to one another, while in reality, they were separated by many years.

To illustrate this prophetic foreshortening, consider Isaiah’s prophecy in Isa. 9. In that chapter, he prophesies both the birth of Christ, His first advent (first coming), and the final consummation of the Messianic kingdom in which Christ reigns with power and glory (second coming). One would think by reading the passage that this child is born into a noble family, lives the life of a prince, and immediately begins to reign. No doubt this caused confusion among some of the Jews of Jesus’ day who were looking for a military king to deliver them from Roman oppression.

As it has turned out, the birth of Christ and the consummation of the kingdom in His second coming have been separated in time for 2000 years now—and still counting. In between His birth and the final consummation are His humiliation, suffering, death, and resurrection, none of which are mentioned in the context of the passage. Consider Jesus’ birth (v. 6a) to be the first mountain peak and the consummation attended by great power and might to be the last (tallest) mountain peak (vv.6b-7). In between these two peaks is the great valley of the death and resurrection of Christ which are not mentioned at all. On this occasion, Isaiah saw the two peaks as if they were not separated by the enormous valley which spans 2000 years (and possibly much more). He prophesied of the valley of humiliation and death later, as in Isa. 53.

### ***4. Sometimes conditional***

Sometimes the fulfillment of the prophecy depends on whether or not certain conditions are met by the people to whom the prophecy is directed. For example, in the prophecy of Jonah, the prophet declared that in 40 days the city of Nineveh would be overthrown because of its wickedness (3: 4). Then something unexpected happened. The inhabitants of the city actually repented (vv. 5-9), and God decided not to destroy the city. Could it be that the king and the people had already heard of Jonah’s miraculous deliverance from the belly of the fish (1:17- 2: 10)? Was their repentance genuine? Jesus said that it was genuine and used the story of Jonah to condemn the unrepentant Jews of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum (Matt. 12: 41; see 11: 20-12: 45 for the broader context).

Other examples of prophecies which were conditional upon a response are Jer. 26: 12-19; 1 Kings 21: 17-29; and 2 Kings 20: 1-7.<sup>16</sup> A careful study of these cases, including Jonah, will reveal that conditional prophecies referred only to events in the near future and not to events which were to take

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<sup>16</sup> See also Virkler’s analysis of Jer. 18: 7-10 in *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation*, p.198

place in the distant future. <sup>17</sup>Prophecies of distant events obviously could not be contingent (dependent) on the actions of people who would not be alive when the prophecy was fulfilled.

The story of King Josiah presents us with interesting questions about the conditionality or unconditionality of OT prophecies. When Hilkiah the high priest found the lost book of the law (the Law of Moses), he sent it to King Josiah by Shaphan the scribe who read the book in the king's presence (2 Kings 22). When King Josiah heard the law of God, he was horrified and tore his robes as a sign of repentance. He then sent for Huldah, one of four prophetesses mentioned by name in the OT, to inquire of the Lord what wrath was in store for Judah for sinning against the Law. Huldah gave Josiah the grim picture of what would happen to Judah. Judah would become desolate, just like Israel; but because Josiah had showed humility and repentance, the destruction of Judah would not come in his days, but later in the history of Judah. Josiah reigned from 640 B.C. to 609 B.C. and during his reign many reforms took place which eliminated idolatry from Judah and restored the true worship of God (2 Kings 23). But the harm had already been done, and the judgment against Judah was irreversible.

During the reign of King Hezekiah (716-687 B.C), ending 47 years before the beginning of Josiah's reign, Isaiah the prophet had already predicted that all the treasures of Hezekiah's house would be taken away to Babylon (See 2 Kings 19-20 for context). This prophecy was the implied judgment upon the nation of Judah. If the temple treasures would be taken away to Babylon, then Judah would become a tributary to Babylon, that is, a vassal country subject to Babylon. Was this a conditional prophecy or an unconditional one? Hezekiah was a **good** king (2 Kings 18: 1-6). Why then, was Isaiah pronouncing judgment upon Judah? Keep reading the story!

Manasseh, Hezekiah's son and Josiah's grandfather, was one of the more wicked kings of Judah (perhaps the most wicked) who practiced witchcraft, used divination, and even made one of his sons pass through the fire (human sacrifice). He seduced (tempted) the people of Judah to do more evil even than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed. As a consequence of his wickedness, the prophets of the Lord (who are not named in the passage; v. 10) prophesy the destruction of Jerusalem (2 Kings 21). Josiah's good reforms, recounted in much detail in 2 Kings 23, do not succeed in reversing the judgment that had already been pronounced upon Judah earlier during the reigns of Hezekiah and Manasseh. By reading the story, we can see that Isaiah's prophecy of implied judgment (20: 17) was grounded upon the certainty of Manasseh's apostasy and Judah's participation in it (21: 9-16). Thus, in spite of Josiah's reforms, the "fierceness of His [God's] great wrath" was not turned away from Judah, and it was judged and taken away into Babylonian exile (23: 26-27). The prophecy of Isaiah, then, was conditional upon the reign of Manasseh whose apostasy confirmed the destruction of the nation which also participated in his sins (23: 26). Of course, in the mind of God, everything is certain, but God generally works through means, sometimes sinful means, including the apostasy of a king. He will not judge the nation upon a whim (a sudden, unreasonable fancy), but because the nation has broken His covenant (Dt. 28).

The ultimate fate of a nation, any nation, is not the result of good luck or bad luck, but each nation is judged according to faithfulness or unfaithfulness to the moral law of God. Quoting Girdlestone, Ramm remarks,

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<sup>17</sup> Berkhof, p.150

“It is probable that hundreds of prophecies, which look absolute as we read them were not fulfilled in their completeness because the words of warning from the prophet produced some result, even though slight and temporary, on the hearts of the hearers. God does not quench the smoking flax”<sup>18</sup>

### 5. *Symbolic language common but not exclusive*

It is a grave mistake to think we can discover some kind of prophetic formula for certain words or phrases which is consistent throughout any particular prophecy. Berkhof gives the negative example of Fairbairn (who is usually a sound exegete) who says that “nations” are a common word for worldly kingdoms in the OT prophets and the Revelation to John. “Stars” represent ruling powers. Nations in political upheaval and turmoil are “roaring and troubled seas”. “Trees stand for the higher levels of society and “grass” the lower levels of common people, etc.<sup>19</sup> Such hermeneutics may lead to all kinds of fanciful interpretations. It is better to consider locusts as locusts, the moon and stars as the moon and stars. The context will usually indicate when something should be taken symbolically, as for example in Dan. 7 and 8. Thus, the language of the prophets should be understood *literally* unless there is good reason to interpret it otherwise.

An examination of Haggai will reveal that the prophet speaks in prose and poetry but not with symbolic language. His contemporary, Zechariah, on the other hand, uses a mix of language in his prophecy, much of which is symbolic visions difficult to interpret. For example, compare chapters 1-6 with chapters 7-8.

There is much disagreement among evangelical scholars concerning the issue of literal versus non-literal (spiritual or mystical) interpretation.

If we may provisionally define the spiritual as the non-literal method of the exegesis of the Old Testament we may further state that the issue is not between a completely literal or a completely spiritual system of interpretation. Amillennial writers admit that many prophecies have been literally fulfilled, and literalists admit a spiritual element to Old Testament interpretation when they find a moral application in a passage, when they find a typical meaning, or when they find a deeper meaning (such as in Ezekiel 28 with reference to the kings of Babylon and Tyre). Nobody is a strict literalist or a complete spiritualist.<sup>20</sup>

Virkler agrees with this analysis by providing the humorous illustration of the woman on seven hills in Rev. 17: 9. Either these are very small hills, he suggests, or this is a woman of a “very unusual figure”.<sup>21</sup> For another example, are we to conclude from Revelation 19: 12 and 15 that Jesus is some kind of monster who has a sword coming out of His mouth and flames of fire flickering out of his eyes? Even literalists do not believe this. Jesus is a man like us, and His divine nature does not alter His physical appearance. The whore (prostitute) of Babylon in Rev. 17 is not a literal woman. What she symbolizes may be debatable, but her non-literal meaning is not debatable. The “weeks” in Daniel 9: 24-27 are admitted by both literalists and non-literalists interpreters to stand for something besides literal weeks. Either they are weeks of years (e.g. 7x7=49 years) or they stand for “the fullness of a specified time”<sup>22</sup> or some other “symbolical number”.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Ramm, p. 250

<sup>19</sup> Berkhof, p.151).

<sup>20</sup> Ramm, pp. 243-244

<sup>21</sup> Henry A. Virkler, p. 196

<sup>22</sup> R. J. Rushdoony, *Thy Kingdom Come*, p.65

<sup>23</sup> E. J. Young, *Daniel*, p. 206

The above observation leads us to the sixth character of prophecy enumerated by Berkhof.

### ***6. Forms, terms, and events familiar to the audiences of their day***

The prophets did not speak or write, first of all, for 21<sup>st</sup> century Africans or Americans. They prophesied for Israel, or in the case of Jonah, for the Ninevites. They therefore used language and terms which were familiar to their audience; otherwise, the communication would have been incomprehensible. If the visions given to the prophets had been clothed in symbols familiar to the modern mind, it would have been incomprehensible even to the prophet. If it turns out that prophecies have a distant fulfillment (for example, prophecies pertaining to the end of this age) we should expect their actual fulfillment to look quite different from the prophetic picture given in the Bible. For example, if there is a *physical* battle to take place at the end of the age at Armageddon—something which is debatable—it most likely will not take place with horses (Rev. 14: 20). Besides, with Christ appearing in power and glory, the battle will be over as soon as it begins.

When Isaiah predicts the coming of the Messiah in Isa. 11, he prophesies his reign as the signal of the deliverance of Israel from all of its *then-known* enemies. At the time he wrote, Assyria was the greatest threat to Israel, and the reader will notice that Assyria is mentioned first on the list (v.11). The description given is the dispersion (scattering) of Israel to many foreign lands, a dispersion which had not yet happened. Thus, Isaiah is predicting the future of Israel when it will be scattered all over the then-known world as a result of her apostasy. But he is also predicting the re-gathering of Israel into one unified nation which is no longer divided between the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah (v.13).

When was Israel gathered together from all the nations of her dispersion? There was a partial re-gathering in the land of Palestine when the Jews returned from Babylon (Ezra), but this receives a broader fulfillment in Acts 2. Shortly after the ascension of Christ, the Holy Spirit fell upon the disciples who then began to preach the gospel to thousands of Jews who had come from distant lands to celebrate the Passover (vv. 9-11). Many of these were converted and united under the rule of their one true King, Jesus Christ (vv. 41-47). Gone was the enmity (hatred) between Israel (represented by Ephraim) and Judah. Under the “banner” (“standard”) of Christ at Pentecost, they are now one in Christ Jesus.

So far, the interpretation given would satisfy the literalistic demands of many dispensational scholars. The dispersed Jews are *literally* brought together on the Day of Pentecost. But then what are we to make of the other figures given in the chapter which describe the Messiah’s reign as a military victory (Isa. 11:14-16)? Certainly during and after the ministry of Christ on earth there was no such military victory, and Christ expressly said that His kingdom was not of this world and that no such violent uprising should be expected of His disciples (Jn. 18: 36). Isaiah is clothing his prophecy in terms which would be meaningful to the fearful Jews of His day who dreaded the onslaughts of enemies like Assyria and its old enemy, Philistia.

All these figures are drawn from the existing condition of things. The people of God had been surrounded by external foes, which had been conquered by David, and which had rebelled and at one time or another had vexed Israel and Judah. The picture is of complete reversal of conditions, not to take place in

Palestine, but *in the greater field of the world*, a reversal which would consist in the people of God reaching out to bring *all men* and make them captive to Christ.<sup>24</sup>

Young's emphasis upon the mission to the Gentiles is striking throughout his interpretation of Isaiah 11. In v. 12, he applies the re-gathering of Israel not primarily to the physical nation but to all of God's elect people.

The Messiah would be the standard to which the Gentiles might rally. Here also we learn that the Lord will lift up a sign for the heathen, and through the work of Christian preaching and Christian missionaries He will draw them unto Himself....

Great has been the dispersion! To the four corners of the earth the people have been scattered....Our Lord was reflecting upon this passage when He said, "And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt. 24: 31).<sup>25</sup>

It is clear that Young, representative of many OT scholars, does not approach this passage with the hermeneutic of a wooden (rigid and inflexible) literalism in which the chronology of events in Isaiah 11 are linear, i.e. happening one after another in succession. Many difficulties emerge if we do so. For instance, how do we interpret vv. 6-10 which describes a world of perfect peace and harmony in which wolves and lambs lie down together, cows and bears graze together, lions eat grass, and infant children play with cobras and not get hurt? Such imagery describes a world which is untainted by sin, a world in which the effects of Adam's fall and God's curse are no longer in operation. It is a restored universe as described by Paul in Romans 8: 18-25 and not the world of the returned exiles in Jerusalem or even the world of the victorious risen Christ at Pentecost. It would seem safe to say that Isaiah mixes the figures of several periods of history and of the final world to come (and not in exact order) to give us a full description of the consummation (completion) of Christ's kingdom. It includes the return of the Jews from exile to Palestine (v.16); it also includes the Day of Pentecost and the conversion of many Jews to Christ (Acts 2); and it also includes the total restoration of the universe (vv. 6-10) which, not incidentally, comes first in the picture Isaiah presents us. The picture he gives us is the kind of picture common in the prophets which is true to the progressive revelation of the Bible in the historical narratives. What the prophets do, which the historians don't do, is give us *telescopic* views of where history is going and how it will end. But the views they give us conform to the world of their day and not ours.

The prophet Micah does the same thing in Micah 5: 1-6. The Messiah, born in Bethlehem, will deliver the nation from the siege of the Assyrian Empire. The Assyrian attack upon Judah takes place about 700 years before the birth of Christ during the reign of Hezekiah in which God promises and accomplishes a mighty victory (2 Kings 19) typical of the victory of Christ against the real enemy of God's people, sin.

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<sup>24</sup> E. J. Young, *Isaiah*, p. 399, emphasis mine

<sup>25</sup> Young, pp. 396-397

### ***7. Transcend the limitations of time to speak of the future***

The more spiritual blessings of the NT church are evident in these prophecies, such as that found in Jer. 31: 31-34, Isa. 11 and 35. As we should expect, they occur more often in the later prophets than the earlier prophets. God is revealing more and more of His plan of redemption as the day of Christ's coming approaches.

### ***8. Prophetic enactment***

Ahijah (not a writing prophet) takes his cloak and tears it into ten pieces, giving ten of them to Jeroboam I, signifying that the Lord had given Jeroboam ten of the twelve tribes of Israel because of Solomon's apostasy (1 Kings 11: 29-35).

Isaiah is told to strip naked and walk barefoot through the streets of Jerusalem (Isa. 20). Though scandalous to the ancient Jews, the command should not utterly scandalize the modern reader. It did not require complete nudity, for Isaiah still had on his undergarments, but his appearance was uncovered sufficiently enough to draw attention to his message.<sup>26</sup> At the time, Judah was trusting, not in God, but in the help of Egypt and Cush (modern-day Ethiopia) to protect them against the power of Assyria. Isaiah's actions were designed to demonstrate in vivid fashion the "nakedness" of their hope in these two countries. As an additional meaning, he wished to show that the king of Assyria would lead away the inhabitants of Cush and Egypt naked and barefoot.

Ezekiel is instructed to take a brick, write the name of Jerusalem upon it and lay siege against it to symbolize the siege which is coming upon the city by a foreign power (Ezek. 4). Other symbolical acts follow such as digging through the wall and carrying his luggage through the hole to signify Judah going into exile (Ezek. 12: 1-7).

Hosea is ordered to marry Gomer the prostitute, an action so radical that some commentators prefer to interpret this action as a vision and not an actual fact. In this particular case, Hosea is a symbol of Jehovah and Gomer is a symbol of Israel who prostitutes herself to all the false gods of the nations. In the end, Gomer's illegitimate lovers fail to care for her or protect her from slavery, and Hosea must purchase her from the slave market and take her home. The picture is that of Israel who worships every god but the true God and ends up destitute and barren. But God is merciful and constantly restores her to favor.

Agabus, a NT prophet, binds his feet and hands with Paul's belt to show that he would be bound by the Jews in Jerusalem (Act. 21: 10-11).

Jeremiah breaks a clay jar in pieces to demonstrate that Judah is broken beyond repair (Jer. 19). He also wears a wooden yoke to demonstrate that Judah should submit to the yoke of Babylon (Jer. 28).

Through the dramatic actions of the prophets, God's truth is impressed upon the Israelites (and now us) in ways which capture the attention and aid the memory.

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. 2 Sam. 6: 20; Jn. 13: 4; 21: 7

## ***II. Rules for Interpreting Prophecy***

In addition to the special characteristics of prophecy, Berkhof gives us five rules for its interpretation.<sup>27</sup>

***A. “The words of the prophets should be taken in their usual literal sense, unless the context or the manner in which they are fulfilled clearly indicate that they have a symbolical meaning.”***

For example, the locusts in Joel do not refer to a heathen people. Refer back to **e.** above under 1. “Characteristics of Prophecy.”

Ramm encourages the interpreter to pay careful attention to “proper names, events, references to geography, references to customs, references to material culture, references to flora [plants] and fauna [animals], references to climate.” The use of Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias, or commentaries is advised to sort out the precise meanings of these references. They must be taken in their literal meaning unless the context of the passage indicates a symbolic or figurative sense of the word. On the other hand it must be admitted by all that prophetic literature contains many figures of speech and much of it is in poetic style and not prose (everyday speech used in ordinary conversation). Further, the symbolism of Daniel, Ezekiel, et al, is obvious to any reader.<sup>28</sup> We may not insist on either complete literalism or complete symbolism in any given prophecy, and this is what makes its interpretation so difficult.

***B. “In studying the figurative descriptions that are found in the prophets, the interpreter should make it his aim to discover the fundamental idea expressed.”***

We have already discussed Isa. 11 with its descriptions of wild and domesticated animals grazing together and children sticking their hands in cobra pits. The fundamental idea in the passage is the perfect peace which will be obtained in the new heavens and new earth, a world without sin or the effects of sin. The main focus of Joel 2: 28-32 is the coming of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh, an interpretation which is given to the passage by the apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 14-21). The other details of the prophecy (vv.30-31) may have occurred during and after the crucifixion of Christ seven weeks earlier (Lk. 23: 44-45; Matt. 27: 45, 51-53). After His death, the sky turned dark during the middle of the day and the moon could have appeared blood red.<sup>29</sup> However, these details may have a future fulfillment, and their absence at the time did not prevent Peter from announcing that the prophecy of Joel was fulfilled in the coming of the Spirit.

***C. “In the interpretation of the symbolical actions of the prophets, the interpreter must proceed on the assumption of their reality, i.e. [that is] of their occurrence in actual life, unless the connection clearly proves the contrary.”***

In other words, when the Bible tells us that Isaiah walked naked through the streets of Jerusalem (probably with his undergarments) and that Hosea married a prostitute, we have no reason to believe that these were only visions. There is nothing in the context of these events which suggests a vision (cf. Ezek. 11: 24; Dan. 2: 19, etc. in which a vision is explicitly mentioned).

<sup>27</sup> Berkhof, pp.152-153

<sup>28</sup> .Ramm, p. 246

<sup>29</sup> Leslie C. Allen, *Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, p. 103, citing F. F. Bruce, *Acts*, p.69

***D. “The fulfillment of some of the most important prophecies is germinant, i.e., they are fulfilled by installments, each fulfillment being a pledge of that which is to follow.”***

Prophecies do not have two or three meanings or senses, but they may have a two or three-fold fulfillment. Consider the predictions about the second coming of Christ in Matt. 24. A careful examination of this passage will reveal that Jesus is answering two questions at the same time (vv. 1-2). The disciples want to know when the temple will be torn down and what will be the sign of His coming and of the end of the age. They figured that the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and the end of the age must be the same event. As it turns out, they are not the same event. (Preterists insist that they are the same event, but this is not the predominant interpretation of Matt. 24). Jesus describes two separate events, one of which is the destruction of the temple by Titus in 70 A.D. during the siege of Jerusalem by Roman armies. Before the siege, believers, who are given previous warnings in this chapter (vv. 15-20), flee Jerusalem and are saved. But Jesus also tells of events surrounding His second coming, events which are very similar to those which occurred during the destruction of the world by the flood. Terry, a preterist, insists that all the events of Matt. 24 must have occurred when Jerusalem was destroyed, but this is very doubtful since the return of Christ in judgment is likened to the flood.<sup>30</sup> Unless we are willing to admit that the flood was a local catastrophe instead of a world-wide catastrophe (something argued by Terry), the analogy does not hold up. Besides the description of the second coming given by Jesus, we have that of Peter in 2 Pet. 3: 10-13 which hardly describes a local event, but rather, the destruction of the whole world akin to that of the flood (2 Pet. 3: 1-9).

The best way to understand Matt. 24 is to reason that many of the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem were similar to what will happen at the end of the world. Jesus treated the two subjects together, and was not obligated to give exhaustive details.

***E. “Prophecies should be read in light of their fulfillment, for this will often reveal depths that would otherwise have escaped the attention.”***

We are now able to read Joel 2: 28-32 in light of its fulfillment on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. If Peter said that Joel’s prophecy was fulfilled, who are we to say that it wasn’t? We may read Isaiah 53 in light of the suffering and atonement of Christ. Psalm 2, a Messianic psalm, may be read in the light of the consummation (fulfillment) of the kingdom of Christ when all the enemies of Christ and His people will be finally vanquished (conquered) and the kingdoms of the earth will become the kingdom of God and of His Christ (Rev. 11: 15).

There is need for caution in this matter however. Not all prophecies refer to specific historical events. Sometimes they refer to ***general principles*** which are fulfilled in a variety of ways. In the interpretation of Revelation, we go astray to find in each prophecy a specific reference, but instead find the general principles of good and evil, warfare, etc. which could refer to hundreds of historical events which bear a resemblance to the prophecy. To narrow the fulfillment down to one single event would severely narrow the scope of the Book of Revelation, as well as the scope of many OT prophecies. Also, as we noted above, the prophet used terminology which was familiar to his audience. Therefore, prophecies are not always fulfilled in the same way that they are uttered by the prophet. In our study of Isa. 11, the reign of Jesus is described in terms of an earthly kingdom akin

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<sup>30</sup> Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, pp. 451-453



(similar) to the Davidic kingdom. This kind of kingdom will come at the consummation; but until then, Jesus reigns in a different way in the hearts and minds of His people whose influence in this world has a variety of effects, including socio-economic and political.

### ***III. Additional Principles of Interpretation<sup>31</sup>***

#### ***A. Determine whether the prophecy is cited in the OT or NT as fulfilled.***

We have already cited the prophecy from Joel which is found in Acts 2. Other examples include the prophecy of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem (Micah 5: 2 with Matt. 2: 6); the death of the Israelite children during the time of Herod (Jer. 31: 15 with Matt. 2: 18); the preaching of John the Baptist (Isa. 40: 3 with Matt. 3: 3); the ministry of Jesus in Galilee (Isa. 9: 1 with Matt. 4: 15-16); the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem riding on a donkey (Zech. 9:9 with Matt. 21: 5); Jesus' announcement of His ministry to the downtrodden (Isa. 61: 1 with Lk. 4: 18-19); the coming of a Redeemer to save the nation of Israel (Isa. 59: 20-21 with Rom. 11: 26-27); the session of Christ at the right hand of God the Father (Ps. 110: 1 with Acts 2: 34-35).

I found all these fulfillments of prophesy just casually flipping through the Bible. A good study Bible is very helpful because OT prophecies are indented in the text or set apart from the other script in such a way that the quotations are easily identifiable. The reader can then find the reference in the margin.

Much of the time, we will find the fulfillment of prophecy within the OT era. For example, God promised Abraham that his seed (descendants) would become as numerous as the stars of the heavens (Gen. 15: 5). He also promised him that he would give him the land of Canaan (Gen. 15: 18). All of these promises were fulfilled in the multitudes of Israelites coming out of Egypt and the conquest of the land of Canaan under Joshua (Joshua 21: 45). Many dispensationalists are still waiting for the fulfillment of these promises during the millennial kingdom of Christ. The fact is, these prophecies have already been fulfilled, and we don't need to wait for their fulfillment.

Jeremiah prophesied that Shallum, one of the sons of Josiah, would be led away into a foreign land and would never return to Jerusalem, but would die away from his homeland (Jer. 22: 11-12 with 2 Kings 23: 30-34; 1 Chron. 3: 15). Micaiah the prophet predicted the death of Ahab (1 Kings 22: 27-28 with 1 Kings 22: 34-37). Isaiah predicted the rebuilding of the temple according to the decree of Cyrus 150 years before the event (Isa. 44: 28-45: 1). The seventy years of Babylonian captivity is prophesied by Jeremiah (Jer. 25: 11) and fulfilled during the time of Daniel (Dan. 9: 1-3).

#### ***B. Find out what prophetic passages parallel each other.***

Several prophetic words and phrases are repeated in different prophecies: "the day of the Lord, the remnant, the shaking of the nations, the outpouring of the Spirit, the re-gathering of Israel, and the millennial blessings...."<sup>32</sup> An exhaustive concordance is indispensable for tracing down parallel passages. Two such prophecies are Isaiah 2 and Micah 4.

<sup>31</sup> Adapted from Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 249-256. The reader will see much agreement between Ramm and Berkhof concerning the interpretation of prophecy.

<sup>32</sup> Ramm, p. 249

***C. Determine whether the prophecy is predictive or whether it deals with moral, ethical or theological truth.***

As we have said earlier, the prophets spend a great deal of time in providing moral instruction for their hearers. This instruction can occur right in the middle of passages which are predictive in nature. Notice that the first six verses of Zechariah are didactic (moral instruction) but beginning in v. 7 through the rest of the chapter, he receives a vision. The prophecy of Amos is a scathing denunciation of the wicked life-styles and idolatry of the nation of Israel during a time of economic and political prosperity. He also includes the predictive element of Israel's demise.<sup>33</sup>

***D. Observe carefully how the NT writers use the OT scriptures<sup>34</sup>***

***1. Sometimes the NT writers use the OT to prove a point.***

In Stephen's sermon before his accusers in Acts 7, he gives a summary of the OT wilderness wanderings and Israel's rebellion against Moses, God's appointed leader. At the end of the sermon, Stephen uses the history of Israel to illustrate the same rebellion of the Jews in his day. "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing *just as your fathers did*" (Acts 7: 51; See also vv. 52-53). His point? The Jewish people had not improved from the time of their forefathers. After years of judgment and exile, they still didn't understand.

***2. Sometimes the NT writers use the OT to clarify or illustrate their teaching.***

The writer of Hebrews uses the awesome and fearful thunder and lightning of the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai as a contrast to the more favorable conditions of the new covenant (Heb. 12: 18-24). Paul uses a case law of the OT to support his argument that those who preach the gospel are entitled to be paid by the congregations they serve (1 Cor. 9: 9). This is a very interesting use of the OT, and it proves that the OT can be useful in unusual ways.

No doubt many would say that we cannot do the same kind of moralizing that Paul did who was inspired by the Holy Spirit. It is true that Paul had insight unique to Him as an inspired apostle; and, granted, we must exercise extreme care in this matter. However, the NT provides us with so many examples of the practical uses of the OT that we are warranted from this methodology to look for additional OT illustrations with moral instruction otherwise absent from the NT. If we fail to use the OT this way, it becomes only a history book of redemption without practical benefit for Christian sanctification. This naturally leads us to the third topic under this heading.

***3. The NT writers recognize a clear continuity (continuation) between Israel and the church.***

Paul formally recognizes this relationship in his parting words to the Galatians, "And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God" (6: 16). Paul is not speaking to ethnic Jews or even Jews who had become Christians. He is speaking to all believers regardless of nationality who have embraced Christ as their savior. This is obvious from the broader

<sup>33</sup> McNeill, *Hermeneutics—Principles of Biblical Interpretation*, "Historical-Cultural Context"

<sup>34</sup> Ramm, pp.261-269

context of Galatians which denies any merit in circumcision (a Jewish rite) and instead places the importance where it belongs, saving faith in Christ—“this rule.” If Paul had wished to single out the ethnic Jews from the Gentiles in this statement, he would have contradicted his whole argument.<sup>35</sup>

One of most convincing texts proving the continuity from Israel to the church is found in 1 Corinthians 10: 1-13 in which Paul explicitly makes use of every event of the wilderness wanderings as a moral object lesson for Christian behavior. “Now these things [namely, the sinful history of Israel and its consequences] happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved” (v. 6). He says it again for emphasis in v. 11, “Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.”

Much of the weakness in modern evangelical preaching today is its unwillingness to take seriously the analogy which the NT writers make between the nation of Israel and the church. By separating the NT church and Israel, as if they are completely separate people with distinct purposes in the plan of God, they fail to reckon with the covenantal responsibilities of the NT church and the curses which fall upon it through persistent and unrepentant sin. Indeed, the consequences of sin demonstrated in the nation of Israel had already been demonstrated in the church at Corinth before Paul wrote his letter. Just one chapter later in his letter to the Corinthians, Paul informs the Corinthians that some of their number had died because of their immoral, careless participation in the Lord’s Supper (vv. 17-34).

This should be enough to convince us that the God of the NT and the God of the OT are the same, a God who is a consuming fire and not one to be trifled with. The greater grace and benefits of the new covenant do not imply that God is now obligated to overlook sin. The same covenantal obligations of obedience apply today; the difference is that we are given more ability through the indwelling Spirit and a regenerate heart to comply with those demands. The eventual demise (downfall) of the seven churches in Asia Minor (even the few good ones) is testimony to the ongoing requirements of covenantal faithfulness (Rev. 2—3). Asia Minor is now modern day Turkey. I have a good friend now living in Turkey who tells me that Christians are scarce in that country. The once thriving church of Asia Minor has essentially ceased to exist.

After being a Baptist for many years, my study of the prophets convinced me that there was more continuity between the people of God in the OT and the NT church than I had previously realized. Throughout history the church has just as easily gravitated toward dead formalism and institutionalism as the nation of Israel, putting more emphasis on tradition, ritual and formal worship than practical obedience. Consequently, I became a Presbyterian, a theological position which, although beset with some of the same problems as Baptists, takes more seriously the alarming similarities between Israel and the church. One cannot read the prophets without seeing an accurate picture of his own local church—and even more frightfully, himself—assuming he has the spiritual eyes to see himself as he is. The prophetic material is just as relevant today as the day the prophet strolled into Israel proclaiming his message from the Lord.

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<sup>35</sup> Ramm, pp. 263-264. For further study of this point, see Gal. 3: 29 and Rom. 9: 6-8; 2: 28-29.

The interpretation of God's Word naturally forms tradition, and tradition shapes interpretation. Traditional interpretation often leads to a *reductionistic hermeneutic* that is unable to adapt to either new revelation or new insight. This was already the situation when the prophets of God encountered the rigidity and systematization of their contemporaries. Recognized leaders opposed the prophets by appeal to traditional interpretations, application, and values. The Word becomes an "it" whenever people resist the Spirit.

Even though the fixation of the "meaning" of canonical writing brings stability to the community and an expression of faith, it is not without danger. Reception of God's Word sets in motion a wave that begins with renewed understanding of spiritual things and a spiritual renewal but all too often ends with a dead tradition and an unwillingness to apply God's Word to new contexts (2 Cor. 3: 6). Thus the Word becomes an "it" whenever it supports human traditions.

Fixation in hermeneutics explains the differences between the Jews and the Samaritans and between the various groups of Pharisees and sects in Jesus' day. It also explains distinctive differences between Catholics and Protestants, between Reformed and Arminian, and between pre-, post-, and amillennialists.

The Spirit of God calls each generation to respond anew to his revelation. He is the power who applies the Word of God to each new situation in the progress of redemption. He transforms human beings, interpretations, and traditions. As long as the Spirit is operating in and through the Word, the community of God's people lives in the tension between *instability* and *adaptability*.<sup>36</sup>

Not only the admonitions and rebukes, but the encouragement and hope given by the prophets to the believing remnant of Israel—who were looking for the hope and consolation of redemption in their Messiah—are also relevant for the NT believer. Their message was not merely gloom and doom for the impenitent, but blessings and salvation for the OT believer which applies equally to the NT believer (Rom. 15: 4). Take for example the prophecy of Jeremiah 31: 27-34. This same prophecy is quoted in Heb. 8, and the blessings of the new covenant mentioned throughout Hebrews are applied to NT believers. In fact, the old covenant made with Israel is superseded (surpassed) by the new covenant and is made obsolete. But Jeremiah was not deceiving the OT people by applying the new covenant to Israel and Judah. Since Israel and Judah may also partake of the new covenant blessings through faith in Christ, the prophecy belongs to them as well. In fact, salvation is of the Jews and is first offered to the Jews by Christ and the apostles (Matt. 10: 5-6; Rom. 1: 17). Clearly in Hebrews 10: 15, the blessings of the new covenant made with "them" (the Jews) are addressed to "us" (vv. 15-16), believers in the NT era who are warned in this epistle not to go backwards to the types and shadows of the old covenant. There is only one new covenant for everyone, not two, one for the church and a different one for Israel. Whenever we partake of the Lord's Supper, we partake of the new covenant in His blood (Lk. 22: 20).<sup>37</sup>

In Isaiah 2, we read of the prediction of universal peace brought about through the teaching of God's ways (v.3). All the nations of the earth will stream to the mountain of God, Mt. Zion (v.3), and there will no longer be hostility and war between the nations (v.4). Strict literalists would apply the blessings to the Gentiles in this passage to a future millennial age when Christ is sitting on His throne in Jerusalem.<sup>38</sup> It is more accurate to apply the passage to the "last days" which include the first and second advents of Christ—His first and second coming (See Acts 2: 17; Heb. 1:2; James 5:3; 1 Pet. 1: 5, 20; 2 Pet. 3: 3). After the first coming of Christ, the nations (the Gentiles) begin to hear the gospel (the "ways" of God) as never before in the history of the world. They begin to stream to the

<sup>36</sup> Willem A. VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, pp. 84-85; emphasis his

<sup>37</sup> Ramm, p.264

<sup>38</sup> Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, p. 134.

mountain of the house of the Lord to hear His word—a mountain which is not the literal Mt. Zion of Jerusalem (as the dispensationalists maintain), but His spiritual church, the pillar and support of the truth (1 Tim. 3: 15a).

Remember that the prophets often saw events which were separated by many years, even hundreds of years, as if they were the same event (prophetic foreshortening). The first and second advents of Christ are often seen as one event and are described as such. The same is true of this prophecy which is why Christ is presented as a ruler who will judge between the nations (v.4), something He did not do in His first advent but will do at His second coming . This is a very similar depiction of the coming of Christ found in Isa. 11 in which the prophet sees the first and second coming of Christ as one event. Truly, when the kingdom of Christ is consummated in the second coming, He will put an end to war, and universal peace and righteousness will prevail throughout the whole world. At any rate, if one recognizes the continuity between Israel and the church, he will admit the possibility that this and many other such passages refer to the triumph of the gospel through the church rather than through the presumed thousand year physical reign of Christ in Jerusalem.<sup>39</sup>

#### ***IV. True and False Prophets***

Then the LORD said to me, “The prophets are prophesying falsehood in My name. I have neither sent them nor commanded them nor spoken to them; they are prophesying to you a false vision, divination, futility and the deception of their own minds.” (Jer. 14: 14).

In this declaration, we have a clear revelation that ***not all*** the self-proclaimed prophets in the OT were true prophets sent to the people with a message from God. Yahweh had neither commanded them to speak, nor had He given them His message. Rather, these false prophets were proclaiming a message originating from themselves, “the deception of their own minds”, much as many modern-day “prophets” are being deceived.

VanGemerer develops the phenomenon of the false prophet in Israel from the two twin threats of “Realpolitik” and “Vox Populi”, both of which have a tendency to reduce the genuine revelation of God to ***popular*** religion.<sup>40</sup>

##### ***A. Realpolitik***

*Realpolitik* is “power politics” which “operates from the assumption that the political, social, economic, and religious structures are ***basically good*** and that humans can improve their lives and society by preserving and improving the ***existing structures***”.<sup>41</sup> On the surface this definition of Realpolitik appears benign (harmless), but it is nothing but the politics and religion of ***pragmatism***—the best course of action is determined by whatever “works” for the betterment of society (“better” as vaguely and subjectively defined), ***not by what is authorized by the word of God***. “Yes, we know that Solomon shouldn’t marry pagan wives, but it’s best for the economy and national security.” It is also the religion of self-improvement, self-righteousness, and institutional religion. We, not God, can

<sup>39</sup> For a thorough treatment of this text from an Amillennial perspective, see E. J. Young, *Isaiah*, from which much of the above discussion is taken.

<sup>40</sup> VanGemerer, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*, p. 26)

<sup>41</sup> VanGemerer, p. 52; emphasis mine

make a real difference in our society for the better, and after we attempt to make a better world for ourselves through lawless means, we then ask God to bless our work—“God bless America!” or “God bless Uganda!” In this scenario, people do not look to Christ for salvation; they look to the institutional church.

For an ancient example, King Solomon sought to enhance political and trade alliances with foreign powers through multiple marriages with foreign princesses (1 Ki. 11: 1-5). From a political perspective, these marriages constituted an intelligent strategy for ensuring peace with the foreign powers which surrounded Israel. They were also strategic in developing trade associations with many nations thus enhancing the economic prosperity of Israel. Former president of the United States, Bill Clinton, whose advisors coined the expression, “It’s the economy, stupid”, would have heartily approved. The only thing which really matters in selecting a president, he argued in his campaign, is that he facilitates economic prosperity. Everything else—including fidelity in marriage—is purely secondary.

From an economic perspective, Solomon’s foreign policy “worked”. Money flowed into Israel during Solomon’s reign, even to the point that the price of silver reached an all-time low in the “commodities” market (2 Chron. 9: 20). However, the multiple marriages proved to be spiritually devastating to Solomon personally and to the nation as a whole. His foreign wives wooed his heart away from pure devotion Yahweh, dividing it between Yahweh and all the gods of the nations. As Solomon’s heart became divided, his kingdom was also divided between the northern and southern portions of Israel—a fragile unity to begin with that his father, David, had achieved only with difficulty (cf. 2 Samuel). Considering the rebellion of Jeroboam and the northern part of Israel, it can be seriously questioned whether the common people benefited much from Solomon’s trade associations with foreign nations (1 Ki. 12: 4)—as is often the case when there is little integrity among government officials controlling the trade. The northern kingdom of Israel was never again blessed with a godly king. God had already promised Solomon prosperity (1 Ki. 3: 13), and he didn’t have to violate the regulations for kings laid down in the Law to achieve it (Deut. 17: 14-17 compared with 1 Ki. 4: 26; 11: 3). Since the marriage alliances were pragmatically necessary to achieve the economic and trade alliances with other nations, we may assume that Solomon was disobedient on both accounts. “It’s obedience to the Lord and His law, stupid.” Everything else is secondary. Solomon’s great wisdom, a gift from God, evaporated in a whirlwind of idolatry, greed, and sexual lust.

Even though there were periods of economic and political prosperity under the reigns of many ungodly kings in Israel’s history—e.g. Omri, Ahab, and Jeroboam II—the nation as a whole was continually under God’s covenant curse culminating (reaching a climax) in the destruction of Samaria in 722 BC by the Assyrians and their exile from the Land of Promise—proving that the promise was based on the condition of belief in the true God and keeping the covenant stipulations (conditions) on the basis of that belief.

Political and religious pragmatism (*Realpolitik*) was also the strategy of Jeroboam I (the first king of the northern kingdom) who made it convenient for the northern tribes to “worship” Yahweh within their own territories by establishing cult worship centers in Dan (the northernmost reaches of Israel) and Bethel (the southernmost reaches of Israel; see Bible map; also see 1 Ki. 12: 25-33)). After all, why must the Israelites of the northern kingdom inconvenience themselves by traveling all the way south to the temple in Jerusalem? Thus, Jeroboam cleverly prevented the attrition (loss) of the

northern tribes back to the southern kingdom for the legitimate religious purpose of worshipping Yahweh in the only officially authorized place—the temple in Jerusalem. By setting up these false worship centers, Jeroboam I was “successful” in keeping his kingdom together, but he *also lost the soul of the nation* to idolatrous worship and all the wicked kings of the northern kingdom of Israel thereafter are compared to Jeroboam (1Ki. 16: 1-2, 19, 26, *passim*—“in other places”).

Ahab presents another picture of *Realpolitik* by marrying the Sidonian princess, Jezebel, who led Ahab into the worship of Baal and, thus, into conflict with Elijah the prophet (1 Ki. 16: 31; 1 Ki. 18). Once again, this was a logical decision both politically and economically designed to enhance Israel’s prosperity and security by aligning the nation with the prosperous Sidonian shipbuilders and merchants (see Study Bible map which shows that the Sidonian cities, Tyre and Sidon, were on the coastline of the Mediterranean Sea). But anyone familiar with Jezebel and Baal worship will immediately recognize the long-term spiritual devastation of this *unholy* matrimony. The economic prosperity was not worth the costs.

Even godly kings were inclined toward the *pragmatism* (whatever works is right) of Realpolitik. King Jehoshaphat of Judah (generally speaking, a good king—1 Ki. 22: 42-43) compromised his integrity by going to war with the ungodly king Ahab, saying to him, “I am as you are, my people as your people, my horses as your horses” (1 Ki. 22: 4). Jehoshaphat, although calling for a true prophet later (v. 7), fails to inquire of the Lord whether his alliance with Ahab is legitimate in the first place (and it wasn’t); and he goes to war with Ahab against Aram in spite of the prophetic voice of Micaiah the prophet prophesying Israel’s defeat by Aram and Ahab’s death. Jehoshaphat barely survived this decision. (Read the rest of the story in 1 Kings 22 and see further information below.)

Further proof that pragmatism was not limited to ungodly kings is the story of Hezekiah who attempts to forge an alliance with Babylon against Assyria by showing the dignitaries of Babylon all the treasures of Judah (2 Ki. 20: 12-19; note: the events of chapter 20 actually take place *before* the events of 2 Ki. 19; see commentary on Isa. 36-39 below). As the events of 2 Kings 19 demonstrate, Hezekiah did not *need* an alliance with the pagan nation of Babylon. God was quite capable of taking care of Judah and dealing with Assyria all by Himself without any help. Ironically, the very nation with which he attempts an alliance turns out to destroy the Southern kingdom.

The policy of *Realpolitik* continues today among the leaders of most nations who take the road of political expediency (popularly known as “political correctness”) rather than the way of obedience to the Law of God. For example, the former US president, George W. Bush, a professing Christian; declared Islam a “peaceful religion” (a statement which may be excusable due to ignorance of the Koran) and stated that Christianity is not the *only* way to God (a statement which is not excusable; *World* article by Joel Belz, publication date unknown). Thus, Bush calculated that it is politically wise not to offend Muslims living in the US or the Muslim countries with which the US has formed tenuous (unstable) alliances—e.g. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Turkey, etc. But he has done so—in the second statement—by compromising the essence of the Christian faith which maintains that there is *no* salvation apart from faith in Jesus Christ.

Our current US president, Barack Obama, participates in Realpolitik by downplaying China’s abuse of human rights and the persecution of Christians in favor of trade negotiations which will further enhance the US economy, as other presidents and congressman (both Democrat and Republican) have done before him. In Uganda, Museveni befriended Qaddafi, the dictator of Libya for over forty

years, a man who has admitted terrorist activities, including the downing of a commercial jet from Lockerbie, Scotland. But, after all, Qaddafi had money which has been useful to Uganda. Most politicians seem to have their price, and it's usually in currency.

False prophets are those who participate in the existing religious, political, and economic structures of society by their explicit or implicit agreement with their legitimacy. The prophets of Baal legitimized (made legitimate or “right”) the worship of the false god, Baal. They did nothing to convince King Ahab of the evils of Baal worship, but actually facilitated it.

### ***B. Vox Populi***

This brings us to the second platform and threat of the false prophets, *vox populi*, “the voice of the people”.<sup>42</sup> The *vox populi* is just another manifestation of *Realpolitik*.

In the search of freedom, prosperity, and happiness, humans in any society establish a sacred alliance of relative values that form the basis of laws, social interaction, politics, economics, cultic expressions, and traditions. *Vox populi* rewards all who support the common ideals but punishes anyone who challenges them. *Vox populi* shuns the absolute demands of revelation by softening the radical nature of faith in favor of popular expectations. Israel’s false prophets, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees were bound by the *vox populi*. The true prophets, our Lord, and the apostles faced the antagonism aroused against them by a human commitment to pragmatism (*Realpolitik*) and to popular views and traditions (*vox populi*).<sup>43</sup>

In other words, the voice of the people (*vox populi*) is generally in full compliance (agreement) with the pragmatic politics (*Realpolitik*) of their leaders who are but *mirror-images of the general population*. Thus, when the loose confederation of Israelite tribes demanded that Samuel give them a king, they received Saul who eventually reflected the very evils characteristic of the ungodly kings of the surrounding nations, thirst for power and unwillingness to submit to God’s word. Public policy which *appears* (though not perhaps in actual fact) to improve the lives of the *general majority* or the *powerful minority* will be supported *regardless of its ethical content*. Thus, abortion rights in the US have continued from 1973 since a vast number of men and women consider it an improvement to a woman’s quality of life in disregard for the life of the unborn who cannot vote. In the case of ancient Israel, the foreign and economic policies of Jeroboam II enabled many Israelites to vastly improve their standard of living, but *these policies did not include judicial or social justice for the poor* or anyone who could not afford to pay bribes to the judges at the gates (see commentary below). The voice of the poor—an insignificant, marginalized segment of society—was not heard.<sup>44</sup>

Enter Amos, who challenges the official cliché (repetitive saying) of the *vox populi*—“It’s the economy, stupid.” By condemning the social injustice of the rich and powerful, Amos also condemns the administrative policy (*Realpolitik*) of Jeroboam II, one of the most powerful kings in the history of the northern kingdom. The real issue for Amos was not material prosperity or military security—the most important concerns of the people—but covenant faithfulness; and because the nation as a whole had violated covenant law, particularly with idol worship and the oppression of the poor, the pragmatic success of *Realpolitik* would disappear within thirty years in the exile of Israel.

<sup>42</sup> VanGemeren, p. 26

<sup>43</sup> VanGemeren, p. 26; underlined emphasis mine, bold italics his

<sup>44</sup> VanGemeren, p. 53



(God *never* gets in a hurry. He doesn't have to.) But further, Amos was equally opposed to the *religious formalism* which attempted to mask (cover up) the moral corruption of the nation. Speaking for the Lord, he proclaimed,

I hate, I reject your festivals, Nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept *them*; And I will not *even* look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps. ***But let justice roll down like waters And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream*** (Amos 5: 21-24).

Amos' words were addressed to the northern kingdom of Israel with its illegitimate worship centers in Dan and Bethel, but perhaps the inhabitants of the southern kingdom of Judah could reason that they were in a different category altogether from the northern apostates. After all, their capital was Jerusalem, the city of David where God had chosen to put His name and the location of the temple (1 Ki. 11: 36). The temple which Solomon built symbolized the very presence of God with His people, and He would never allow any harm to His temple—so they thought.

But the absolute ideals of God's word against the relative values and common ideals of the people comes to expression with equal force in the prophetic ministry of the southern prophets of Judah. As stated above, popular religion in Judah insisted that the key to God's blessing was the maintenance of religious rituals associated with the true temple, but like Amos his contemporary, Isaiah condemns any false security in religious ritual while simultaneously calling their attention to the covenant responsibilities of loving one's neighbor.

“What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?” Says the LORD. “I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle; And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats. When you come to appear before Me, Who requires of you this trampling of My courts? Bring your worthless offerings no longer, Incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. I hate your new moon *festivals* and your appointed feasts, They have become a burden to Me; I am weary of bearing *them*. So when you spread out your hands *in prayer*, I will hide My eyes from you; Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good; ***Seek justice, Reprove the ruthless, Defend the orphan, Plead for the widow***” (Isa. 1: 11-17).

Likewise, Jeremiah discounts any security in the physical presence of the temple in Jerusalem, as if God would never allow any harm to Judah on account of the sacred place representing His presence and kingdom.

Do not trust in deceptive words, saying, “This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.” For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly practice justice between a man and his neighbor, *if* you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, nor walk after other gods to your own ruin, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever. Behold, you are trusting in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery and swear falsely, and offer sacrifices to Baal and walk after other gods that you have not known, then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, “We are delivered!”—that you may do all these abominations? (Jer. 7: 4-10).

Both Judah and Israel had made the fatal mistake of believing that the covenant promises of God operated *automatically* and *unconditionally* apart from steadfast faith and *genuine* obedience. The promise of the land, the Davidic kingdom, and God's presence with them (symbolized in the temple) were, for them, inviolable (indestructible) rights. And while the *false* prophets assured the people of the covenant *promises*, the *true* prophets went against the stream of popular opinion by warning them of the covenant *curses*.<sup>45</sup> As Jeremiah reminds Hananiah, who was prophesying peace, *most* of their prophetic predecessors (fore-runners) were "*negative*" preachers.

"The prophets who were before me and before you from ancient times prophesied against many lands and against great kingdoms, of war and of calamity and of pestilence. (Jeremiah 28:8 NASB)

### ***C. The Distinction between True and False Prophets***

#### ***1. Different motivations***

This last quotation from *Jeremiah* brings us to the question of the practical difference between the true and false prophets of Israel and how the common people should distinguish between them. The false prophets of the OT, like many of the kings of Judah and all the kings of Israel, reflected the common values and religious formalism of the general population. These were contrasted to the covenantal values and genuine religion of the *faithful remnant* (cf. 1Ki. 19: 18). Basically, *false prophets told the king and the people what they wanted to hear*.

Robertson notes two basic *motivations* of the false prophets of Israel and Judah—*personal gain and popular acceptance*—corresponding to the *vox populi* of VanGemeren's analysis.<sup>46</sup> Both forms of motivation are exposed by the prophet Micah.

As for the prophets who lead my people astray, if one feeds them, they proclaim "peace"; if he does not, they prepare war against him. (Mic. 3: 5)  
If a liar and deceiver comes and says, "I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer," he would be just the prophet for this people! (Mic. 2: 11)

Micah 3: 5 indicates the tendency of the false prophets to prophesy for personal gain. If the prophet was not adequately paid for his prophetic word, he would pronounce a curse instead of a blessing. Thus, his prophecy depended upon what he received materially from the people rather than the word he received from the Lord. This corresponds with some current preachers in Uganda and the US who assure a blessing for people who are contributing to their ministry, but who also imply that these same people may receive a curse if they fail to contribute. The second motivation, approval from the people, went hand in hand with the first motivation. The people wanted positive prophesying, and if the prophet was willing to speak favorably for the people, predicting prosperity and blessing—"plenty of wine and beer"—they would listen to him and reward him accordingly. It is therefore not difficult to imagine that the false prophets were more than willing to adjust their message to the desires of the people in expectation of reward. "If you will scratch my back, I will scratch yours." It was a quid pro quo ("this for that") arrangement.

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<sup>45</sup> VanGemeren, pp. 56, 60

<sup>46</sup> Robertson, p. 61)

How clearly, then, do the false prophets foreshadow the false preachers of the present day! There are millions of preachers throughout the world proclaiming a message which is calculated merely to win the approval of their congregations. As long as their message therapeutically soothes the psychological and emotional aches and pains of their audience or gives them hopes of God's blessing even in the midst of their sinful, rebellious life-styles, the people are willing to retain their services, pay them a comfortable living, and even provide for a modest retirement. Reciprocally ("this for that"), the false preachers—if well-paid—are more than willing to turn a blind eye to the sexual immorality, lying, shady business deals, repression of the poor, and morally bankrupt thinking of their congregations, in exchange. If the congregation will let them alone to live their lives in peace, they are more than willing to tip-toe around the prevailing sins of their congregations, preaching instead a "gospel" which demands no repentance (cf. Lk. 24: 47; 2 Tim. 4: 3).

Moreover, the pastoral negligence plaguing modern preaching sometimes takes insidiously (not easily noticed) harmless forms like preaching topical sermons from one text and then another throughout the Bible. While topical preaching is not inherently evil, it can become evil when the preacher carefully avoids any text of scripture which may even remotely provoke the resistance of their audience. At the same time, he avoids preaching through a book of the Bible which forces him to address the relevant issues exegetically as they present themselves from the text itself. But even expositional preaching is not a sure cure for false preaching if the preacher is adept (skillful) in maneuvering through the "obstacles" in his own barnyard (I hope you get the analogy). Any method requires integrity, but at least expositional preaching is more inclined to let the text set the agenda rather than the preacher.

Contrary to the false prophets, *the true prophets of Israel were motivated not by a desire to fulfill their own needs but the desire to address the spiritual needs of the people.* But in order to do this, they focused upon the word of truth received directly from the Lord. God set the agenda and laid the foundation and framework for their prophetic ministry, not themselves. They were men bound hand and foot, so to speak, by the message commissioned to them, a message which gave them no latitude to the right or to the left in what to speak to the people. In no sense does this imply a mechanical dictation of the message from the Holy Spirit to the prophet, but it does imply that *the prophets were not free to develop their own message* independently of the Spirit's influence or independent of the stipulations of the Law established since the time of Moses. They spoke only what the Lord "commanded" them to speak, not what He simply "suggested" (Deut. 18: 18b). They fully understood that they could help their people only if they stayed on track with the message committed to them by the Lord. Anything less would serve only as a superficial bandage upon an incurable disease requiring radical surgery.

Likewise, the modern preacher, though not commissioned directly *by* the Lord or given a message through direct communication *with* the Lord, nevertheless understands his limitations. Even as the OT prophet, *his message is set within the boundaries allowed by God*, not by "Thus says the Lord" but rather, "The Scripture says". By comparing Rom. 9: 17 with Ex. 9: 13 and 16, we learn that "Thus says the Lord" and "Scripture says" are one and the same thing; and to be faithful to his calling as a preacher of the word, he must as clearly as possible illuminate and explain the infallible and unalterable text placed before him. Illustrations, stories, anecdotes, etc. may be used only to the extent that they serve to explain, illuminate, and apply the text of scripture; but they may not be used as substitutes for it. God has something *He* wants to say to His people, and He will not be pleased if preachers set this aside in favor of what *they* want to say or what their *congregations* want to hear.

The preacher's fundamental decision, then, is whether his primary motivation for preaching is to be pleasing to men or to be pleasing to God. To be pleasing to men, he must keep a wet finger constantly in the air, knowledgeable of which direction the winds of public opinion are blowing. To be pleasing to God, on the other hand, the preacher must keep his mind and heart upon the text of Holy Scripture, laboring earnestly to determine what God has to say to His people within the cultural contexts and circumstances of their day. The results of such labors are out of their hands, and they are content to let God determine whether their message will be received or rejected. Their message is not in any sense determined or altered by the response.

## ***2. Criteria for distinguishing between true and false prophets***

Considering the enormous consequences of cursing or blessing accompanying the nation's response to the prophetic word, there must have been some objective criteria or standards given to the people for distinguishing between a true and false prophet. Obviously, they could not see the prophet's motives, and both true and false prophets claimed to speak in the name of the Lord. So how could they determine the difference between them?

### ***a. Predictions of the true prophet came to pass.***

The problem is anticipated in Deuteronomy 18: 21, "You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?'" The answer is forthcoming in v. 22, "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him." Robertson has noted that this criterion was not based on percentage points—as we say in the US, "batting averages"—as if a prophet could be trusted if *most* of his predictions came to pass. If a prophecy did not come true, it was not the prophesy *itself* that was discredited, but the prophet *himself* (p. 65). Only brief reflection is necessary to understand why. The omniscient (all-knowing) Lord did not have to work on the basis of percentages. His predictions of the future were correct *every* time, not *some or most* of the time. If, then, a prophet was receiving his message from the Lord, there should be no room for error.

Yet, the problem remains concerning distant prophecies. If a prophecy was not fulfilled until many years after the prophet's prediction, how could the people know that his word was true? The answer lies in the fact that *distant prophecies were accompanied with near prophecies*. One example is that of the "man of God" during the reign of Jeroboam I. Jeroboam had established illegitimate worship centers in Bethel and Dan for the idolatrous calf worship borrowed from pagan nations. The man of God came to him predicting the birth of Josiah the king who would one day desecrate the pagan altars by burning the bones of the idolatrous priests upon them (1 Ki. 13: 2; cf. 2 Ki. 23: 16). Josiah would not become king of Judah until 638 BC, almost 300 years later. As a confirmation of his prophecy concerning Josiah, the man of God (unnamed) also predicted the splitting apart of Jeroboam's altar on the same day. According to his word, the altar split in two and spilled its ashes on the ground (vv. 3, 5).

In the same way, Jeremiah prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple many years in advance of 587 BC. He also prophesied that Judah would be in exile in Babylon for seventy years (Jer. 29: 10). Hananiah, a false prophet, insisted that those who had already been taken into exile earlier, including Jehoaichin (Jeconiah), would be returned within two years along with the vessels of

the temple which had been taken to Babylon (Jer. 28: 3-4). As confirmation of his predictions, Jeremiah prophesied that Hananiah would die within the year, a near prophecy which came to pass (Jer. 28: 16-17). ***The distant predictions of the true prophets were confirmed by the predictions which would come to pass in a shorter period of time during the lifetime of those hearing the prophesy.***

The prophetic books give us very few examples of the fulfillment of near prophecies in confirmation of distant prophecies, but the few we are given provide the pattern of prophetic confirmation. Most of what we encounter in the Old and New Testaments are the fulfillments of distant prophecies. For example, Isaiah prophesied the decree of Cyrus, king of Persia, to rebuild the temple roughly 200 years before Cyrus was born; yet, Isaiah gives us no record of any near prophecy which would confirm this distant prediction. This does not, however, prove that there was none. Isaiah did not likely record everything he spoke to the people of Judah during his long ministry. Quite as we would have expected, it is the distant prophecies concerning Israel and Judah's exile, God's judgment of the nations, the birth, ministry, and crucifixion of Christ and the restoration of the created order which receive the emphasis in Scripture (see below in the various prophetic books).

### ***b. True prophets prophesied only in the name of Yahweh***

Prophets who spoke in the name of ***other gods*** should be given no audience and should be punished with death (Deut. 18: 20). It should be obvious, however, that this was not the only necessary qualification of a true prophet since ***many false prophets also prophesied in the name of the true God***. The false prophet Hananiah, who opposed Jeremiah, prophesied in the name of the God of Israel (Jer. 28: 1-2) as did the false prophet Zedekiah of Ahab's regime who opposed Micaiah (1 Ki. 22: 11). On the other hand, it is also necessary to point out that even those prophets performing ***signs and wonders*** should not be given a hearing if they prophesied in the name of a different God.

“If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder ***comes true***, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him” (Deut. 13: 1-4).

The genuineness of the sign or wonder does not seem to be the relevant issue. Even if it appears genuine, the Israelite must not follow any prophet, however sensational or convincing, who counsils the people to follow another God. Christ warned that false prophets would appear later flouting signs and wonders, and He would not specifically deny the future claims of many unbelievers who had prophesied in His name, performed miracles, and cast out demons. He simply said that there would be such people calling Him, “Lord”, whose lives would be characterized by lawlessness and would not be recognized as believers (Matt. 7: 22-23). Thus, the ability to perform signs and wonders, however significant, is not the only necessary criterion for true prophets. Their work must be done in the name of the true God.

### ***c. True prophets upheld the law stipulated in the Mosaic Covenant***

The texts from Deuteronomy 13: 4 and Matthew 7 indicate that the true prophet was not above the law but under it.

A prophet should be regarded as true only if he spoke in conformity with God's previous revelations, particularly as they had come through Moses as the fountainhead of biblical prophecy.<sup>47</sup>

Rather than improvising with some new sensational teaching, the OT prophets were constantly reaching back into the treasury of God's law showing the people a better way, the *old* way of blessing and peace (cf. Deut. 27-28). ***The bulk of their ministry consisted of practical applications of the Mosaic Law to the cultural context of the people of Israel.*** The case laws of the Pentateuch were never intended to be an exhaustive code-book of all possible applications of the Ten Commandments. Rather, they were given as examples from which extrapolations (hypotheses from known facts) could be made for an endless array of ethical situations for all times and all cultures. The prophets were sensitive to how these laws were being violated and what could be done to correct the deficit (cf. Isa. 1: 17; Amos 2: 8; 5: 24; Mal. 3: 5; Zech. 7: 9-10; Jer. 22: 3). In this sense, the modern preacher should become thoroughly familiar with the case laws of the OT, the Sermon on the Mount, and the ethical teaching of the NT epistles to make relevant applications for his time and his culture.<sup>48</sup>

Not only must the OT prophets' pronouncements harmonize with the Law of Moses, but their moral behavior must provide corroborating support for their public ministry. The true prophets *lived* by their profession of faith in Yahweh, but the false prophets were mirror-images of the avaricious (greedy) liars, adulterers, and cheats who listened to them (Jer. 23: 14; Mic. 3: 5).

'Because of them a curse will be used by all the exiles from Judah who are in Babylon, saying, "May the LORD make you like Zedekiah and like Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire,"<sup>23</sup> because they have acted foolishly in Israel, and have committed adultery with their neighbors' wives and have spoken words in My name falsely, which I did not command them; and I am He who knows and am a witness," declares the LORD.'" (Jeremiah 29:22-23 NASB)

One of the distinctive characteristics of false prophets was that they led people astray not only with words but with actions. If anyone should have been walking in the light, it was the prophet who claimed to speak for God; but when even he lived an immoral life, his hypocrisy encouraged others to do the same. Small wonder why there was so much immorality in Israel when their religious leaders set such a poor example.

Small wonder, still, that the contemporary church is filled with members whose lives are no better than their non-confessing counterparts outside the church. Many of their leaders are immoral men. What truth could be more relevant for the modern preacher who must nurture his congregation both in *word and deed*? But is it not true that throughout the church on every continent, many preachers are proclaiming *one* message but living *another*? They proclaim the excellence of Christ and His moral purity, but they are ensnared in adulterous relationships or pornography or caught in the web of greed and materialism—the two great competitive gods of sex and money which destroy even evangelical preachers. Genuine prophetic preaching is impossible apart from a clear conscience, for the true preacher must believe the message himself before he is able to convince others.

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<sup>47</sup> Robertson, p. 69

<sup>48</sup> For a thorough demonstration of the prophets' use of the Law, see chapter 6, "Prophetic Application of Law" in Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*

This does not imply that the preacher who is not ensnared in sin is now justified in proclaiming the word in bold self-righteousness. But for God's grace, he, too, would be ensnared. Quite the contrary, one who studies the righteousness found in the Scriptures will identify with Isaiah who included himself among his sinful contemporaries saying, "Woe is *me*, for *I* am ruined! Because *I* am a man of unclean lips, And I live among a people of unclean lips" (Isa. 6: 5a). Anyone who daily examines the Scriptures in an effort to feed others should be humbled by what he finds. He should know how pitifully short of the glory of God's righteousness he falls (Rom. 3: 23), for sexual lust and greed are not the only sins. There is also self-righteousness pride, competitiveness with others in ministry, uncontrolled anger, lack of compassion for the lost and those in need. Yet, rather than allowing his own faults to paralyze him, he, like Isaiah, should be overwhelmed with the desire to help others avoid the pitfalls of sin and the judicial punishment of God. And he will do so by pointing them to someone greater who lived a perfect life and was pleasing to the Father in every way—the very one to whom the OT prophets pointed in their predictions of the coming Savior.

Jesus Christ, the greater Prophet, also pointed His audience to the virtues of the Law of God. As the ultimate fulfillment of all that was written in the prophets, He did not wish His hearers to think that He was offering them some short-cut to covenant blessings by abolishing the Law. Rather, He came to fulfill the Law and the prophets as the perfect embodiment of all that was holy, good and true (Matt. 5: 17-20; cf. 3: 17). But unlike the OT prophets, Jesus had no need of proclaiming, "Thus says the Lord", but could say with His own authority, "*I* say unto you" (Matt. 5: 22, 26, 28; passim—"in other places"). "Thus says the Lord" never occurs in any of Jesus' discourses, for He was not on the same level of authority as the OT prophets before Him. He is the Lord who not only proclaimed the Law, but originated it. He is the same Lord who says to His disciples, "If you love Me, you will keep **My** commandments" (Jn. 14: 15) and "If anyone loves Me, he will keep **My** word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him" (Jn. 14: 23). Contrarily, "He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me" (John 14: 24).<sup>49</sup> It should be evident that there is no contradiction in the mind of Christ between His word and the Father's word. His "commandments" and "word" cannot be anything other than the Father's who sent Him; moreover, from the beginning to the end He submitted Himself to the Father, His word, and His commandments by placing Himself under the authority of His Father. He was "born under the Law" (Gal. 4: 4).

The connecting link here is that just as the prophets consistently drew their hearers back to the Law, Christ as the perfect fulfillment of all prophecy does the very same thing. He is the Prophet par excellence who has come to restore the hearts of the people back to the Lord of the covenant. Furthermore, He does this in much the same way as the prophets before Him—by bringing to bear the weight of the Law upon the sins of the people (Matt. 5—7; 19: 16-23), by requiring repentance (Matt. 4: 17; 11: 20) and then offering grace and restoration (Matt. 11: 28-30; cf. Isa. 1: 18-20; Hosea 14: 1-4). The OT prophets did not offer cheap grace to unrepentant, recalcitrant sinners; and neither did Christ or the apostles (1 Cor. 6: 9). Finally, Christ does what the OT prophets could not do; He brings men to God by sacrificing Himself upon a cross, thus proving that the curses of the Law could not be set aside without the shedding of blood.

Grace does not obliterate law but is the only means of keeping it. Grace was freely offered to the wayward people of Israel and was vividly typified in the OT sacrificial system; thus it cannot be

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<sup>49</sup> Where the words, "not mine", mean that the word is not merely human [Calvin] or that it is not exclusively His but also originates from the Father.

maintained that the Law was held out as a possible, *alternative* means of salvation (Heb. 4: 2). Life was, indeed, offered to those who kept the Law (Deut. 30: 19) but with the full realization that none would, or could, keep it. Therefore, the Law was given not as a means of salvation but with the *gracious purpose* of driving the sinner to the only one who could save (Gal. 3: 24). Reciprocally (in the same way), the prophets did not unrealistically present law-keeping as the means of national restoration—as if such could really be accomplished through perfect conformity. Rather, they called for *heart repentance* which led to obedience—not perfect obedience, but consistent obedience which practiced justice, loved kindness, and walked humbly with God by crying out for mercy (Mic. 6; 8).

Not because the chastened nation achieves a meritorious righteousness that earns for itself a restoration to God's favor, but only because of the priority of grace in the covenant may the nation expect fulfillment of the promise that they shall return to the land they have lost. Indeed, in the process of restoration they will be given a new heart which will incline them to walk in all the commandments of the Lord. But the grace of the covenant forever remains supreme. Never may the nation demand blessing because of the perfections of their law-keeping. Instead, the people must always plead humbly on the basis of the unmerited promises given graciously in the covenant.<sup>50</sup>

### 3. *Biblical accounts demonstrating the difference between true and false prophets*

#### a. *1 Kings 22—Micaiah versus Zedekiah*

In 1 Kings 22, as King Ahab of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah prepare for battle against Aram, Jehoshaphat requests consultation from the Lord's prophets. He's a little late. The word of Yahweh is something he should have sought prior to forming an alliance with Ahab. He allowed his son, Jehoram, to marry Ahab's daughter, Athaliah (2 Ki. 8: 18; 2 Chron. 18: 1). Thus, Jehoshaphat had already "painted himself into Ahab's corner".<sup>51</sup> Ahab obliges by assembling four hundred prophets before Jehoshaphat. These were not the prophets of Baal who were defeated and later executed in a stand-off with Elijah (1 Ki. 18; especially v. 40); rather, they were prophets *who claimed to speak in the name of the Lord* (vv. 5, 6, 11, 12, 24) and were possibly associated with the syncretistic bull-worship of Jeroboam I.<sup>52</sup>

Ahab inquires of these prophets, "Shall I go against Ramoth-gilead to battle or shall I refrain?" The false prophets answered, "Go up, for the Lord will give *it* into the hand of the king" (v. 6b). Not fully satisfied, and knowing a counterfeit prophet when he saw one, Jehoshaphat then inquires whether a "prophet of the *Lord*" is available for a second opinion. Ahab's response is possibly one of the most revealing statements in the OT distinguishing true prophets from false.

The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the LORD, but I hate him, because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. *He is Micaiah son of Imlah.*" But Jehoshaphat said, "Let not the king say so." (1 Kings 22:8 NASB)

The clear implication is that while the four hundred prophets were simply telling Ahab what they knew he wanted to hear (*Realpolitik*), Micaiah the prophet regularly failed to cooperate with their sycophancy (flattery of the rich and powerful). He simply told Ahab the truth, and the truth was

<sup>50</sup> Robertson, p. 89

<sup>51</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *The Wisdom and the Folly—An Exposition of the Book of First Kings*, p. 319

<sup>52</sup> Davis, p. 320; cf. 1 Ki. 12: 25-33. I have used Davis' commentary on this passage extensively throughout this section. See pages 319-330.



seldom favorable. How could it be favorable while Ahab diluted the worship of Yahweh with the bull cult of Jeroboam I and with Baal worship and while he murdered godly men to steal their land?<sup>53</sup>

While Micaiah was being summoned, Zedekiah, one of the four hundred false prophets, possibly their chief, provided live entertainment for the two kings by making a set of iron horns and running around like a mad bull, saying, “Thus says the LORD, ‘With these you will gore the Arameans until they are consumed.’” With this all the prophets agreed saying, “Go up to Ramoth-gilead and prosper, for the LORD will give *it* into the hand of the king” (vv. 11-12). Zedekiah’s message was not mere fluff, but solidly based on the covenant blessing pronounced upon Joseph by Moses, the man of God.

“As the firstborn of his ox, majesty is his, And his horns are the horns of the wild ox; With them he will push the peoples, All at once, *to* the ends of the earth. And those are the ten thousands of Ephraim, And those are the thousands of Manasseh.” (Deuteronomy 33:17 NASB)

The two tribes of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, were the two largest and most important tribes of the northern kingdom, often referred to in the prophets simply as “Ephraim”. Thus, Zedekiah was not simply pulling a blessing out of thin air, but repeating the blessing of Moses in the Law.

Perhaps we can now appreciate the weight of Micaiah’s opposition. These prophets, especially Zedekiah, speak with parabolic action (v. 11a), using the prophetic formula (v. 11b, traditionally, ‘Thus says Yahweh’), anchored in a biblical promise (v. 11c; cf. Deut. 33: 17), and with multiple attestation (v. 12, ‘And all the prophets kept prophesying that way’).<sup>54</sup>

Meanwhile, the messenger sent to summon Micaiah coaches him saying, “Behold now, the words of the prophets are uniformly favorable to the king. Please let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak favorably” (v. 13). In other words, “Micaiah, please don’t sink the boat. Don’t sabotage the efforts of all the prophets who are prophesying victory. Just read the script and stay on track.” Implicit in the messenger’s advice was the ancient superstition that the prophetic word could actually *control* the gods.<sup>55</sup>

Was this the beginning of the “Word of Faith” movement in the US in which one can create his own physical reality simply by speaking a word—not necessarily from the Bible—and believing it passionately and sincerely?<sup>56</sup> This is one reason Ahab hated Micaiah; his consistent negative message actually *caused* “bad things to happen to good people”—like him!<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, the messenger also assumed that the prophet had control over Yahweh’s word. If Micaiah wanted to, he could say something favorable to the king. He could preach a positive message of victory, and he was not under any compulsion to say what he did not desire to say.<sup>58</sup>

But this was the foundational misunderstanding of the nature of true prophecy. The *true* prophet—as opposed to the false—could not simply say what he wanted to say or what a human king wanted him to say. He was compelled to say what Yahweh commanded him to say. He was, therefore, a man under bondage to the word of God. It is against the law to tamper with the mail by opening other

<sup>53</sup>Naboth and his sons (1 Ki. 21; 2 Ki. 9: 26)

<sup>54</sup> Davis, p. 323

<sup>55</sup> Edward J. Young, *My Servants the Prophets*, p. 138

<sup>56</sup> For an examination of the “Word of Faith” movement, see John MacArthur, *Strange Fire*, pp. 28-31.

<sup>57</sup> See Rabbi Harold Kushner’s heretical interpretation of *Job* in *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*. Kushner takes the position that although God wanted to help Job, He was not capable of doing so.

<sup>58</sup> Davis, p. 323. The message of victory is the repetitive teaching of another prosperity preacher, Joel Osteen, who basically believes that Jesus exists to make our dreams come true (MacArthur, *Strange Fire*, pp. 10, 50-51)

people's letters, changing the message, or stealing the contents. The mailman is hired by the government to do one thing and one thing only—*deliver* the mail. Micaiah was simply Yahweh's mailman. Yahweh gave him the mail He wished delivered, and it was Micaiah's obligation to deliver it as it came to him without human tampering or alteration. Fully aware of this responsibility, Micaiah answers the messenger, "As the LORD lives, what the LORD says to me, that I shall speak" (v. 14). "I am only the mailman. I am not God."

Yet, when he finally appears before Ahab and Jeshoshaphat, he parrots (mimics) the party line, saying, "Go up and succeed, and the LORD will give *it* into the hand of the king" (v. 15a). This response is nothing but biting sarcasm (saying one thing but meaning just the opposite). Ahab has learned to expect this kind of sarcasm from Micaiah, and his subsequent response indicates that this sort of interchange had occurred frequently. "*How many times* must I adjure you to speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD" (v. 16b).<sup>59</sup> Fun and games over, Micaiah now does what he intended to do all along—tell the truth. "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, like sheep which have no shepherd" (v. 17a). By saying they had no "shepherd"—a term synonymous in the prophets for "king"—Micaiah subtly announces the sure death of Ahab, something he explicitly declares in v. 28. He also implies "good riddance"—that Israel will be better off without him. "And the LORD said, 'These have no master. Let each of them return to his house in *peace*'" (v. 17b). In other words, "When he is gone, maybe Israel will finally enjoy some peace." Ahab's retort was predictable, "You see, Jehoshaphat, he never says anything nice about me! His preaching is always negative!" But Ahab does not acknowledge the kindness of God in "being stubbornly faithful to him by repeatedly telling him what he does not want to hear".<sup>60</sup>

One sometimes wonders if the church is drifting back to an Ahab mind-set, or, if not hostile toward the candor of the word at least embarrassed by it. I have received church advertisements in my mail. A new church is forming in our area. It is going to feature, among other attractions, a 'non-judgmental atmosphere' to attract me. I know, I mustn't over-interpret. But what does that mean? Likely that the church means to eschew [avoid] negativism, refrain from making folks 'feel guilt', or—the ultimate contemporary sin—feel bad about themselves. What will the ministry of the word be like in such a church? Will it ever press home the word of God in its searing honesty? Or must that be sacrificed lest it destroy the non-judgmental ambiance? Ahab would love such a place.<sup>61</sup>

Picking up on the ambiance (surroundings) of his situation—two kings sitting on their mobile thrones, dressed in royal robes, and enjoying the entertainment of performing prophets—Micaiah begins to preach. Note the antithesis (contrast) between vv. 19-23 and vv. 10-12—Zedekiah and the hosts of 400 false prophets standing before the kings of Israel and Judah *on their thrones*, while Micaiah stands seemingly alone, but side by side with the "host of heaven" standing at the right and left of the Lord, sitting *on His throne*.

Therefore, hear the word of the LORD. I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right and on His left. The LORD said, "Who will entice Ahab to go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?" And one said this while another said that. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD and said, "I will entice him." The LORD said to him, "How?" And he said, "I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets." Then He said, "You are to entice *him* and also

<sup>59</sup> Davis, p. 325, who points out the continuing action of the verb

<sup>60</sup> Davis, p. 321

<sup>61</sup> Davis, pp. 321-322; words in brackets mine

prevail. Go and do so.” Now therefore, behold, the LORD has put a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; and the LORD has proclaimed disaster against you (vv. 19-23).

Before we get upset with the idea of God *deceiving* Ahab, a closer look at the text will reveal that the Lord is now, through Micaiah, exposing the deception and giving Ahab an opportunity to rethink his decision. True, God has ordered a deceiving spirit into the mouths of Ahab’s prophets; but God is now warning Ahab that his prophets are, indeed, deceived and that he should not listen to them. In the technical sense of the word, this is not deception. But the point is: It doesn’t matter because Ahab is not going to listen to God anyway; and this may have been the very reason for Micaiah’s sarcasm in v. 15b. Whether Micaiah speaks the truth or a lie, it is all the same to someone who refuses to listen to what he says. Furthermore, although God had ordained Ahab’s death, He accomplishes His ordained will through the instrument of Ahab’s hardness to revelation. Men are responsible to obey whatever measure of revelation they receive from God, whether the general revelation of creation (Rom. 1: 18-32) or the special revelation of His word spoken through the prophets (Jer. 29: 19). If men refuse any of it, they have no one to blame but themselves (Lk. 16: 27-29). Ahab is now in hell; and if we could ask him why he is there, he would have to admit, “Because I didn’t listen.”

Micaiah’s reward for exposing Ahab’s danger is a slap in the face (v. 24)—common fare for honest preachers who dare warn their congregations of the coming wrath of God against unrepentant sinners.<sup>62</sup> Zedekiah also claims to speak for Yahweh, so he says, “How did the Spirit of the LORD pass from me to speak to you?” Micaiah is making contradictory claims, so one of them must be mistaken or a liar. One of them is a false prophet who does not possess the Spirit of God, and Zedekiah identifies Micaiah as the culprit. But there is no need for an extended debate or finger-pointing over the issue—“No, but *you* are the false prophet!” “On the contrary, *you* are!” ad nauseam. The genuine prophet is one whose prophecy comes *true*, plain and simple (Deut. 18: 22); and everyone will know soon enough whether this is Micaiah or Zedekiah. If Ahab comes back safely, Micaiah will admit to being a false prophet to whom the Lord has not spoken (v. 28).

The rest of the story shines a spotlight on Micaiah’s prediction and his confirmation as the true prophet. In spite of every effort to hedge his bets against Micaiah’s prophecy by disguising himself—he was not too sure of himself, after all—Ahab was a doomed man. While the whole army of Arameans could not locate him, the *un-aimed* arrow of an *unnamed* soldier *did*—right through a narrow space between his armor (v. 34). Bad luck? No, a divinely-guided missile of providence. In fulfillment of the word of Micaiah, Ahab died that evening.

### ***b. Jeremiah 28—Jeremiah versus Hananiah***

Like Zedekiah in the northern kingdom, Hananiah was considered a legitimate prophet in the southern kingdom (Jer. 28: 1) who enjoyed the popular support of the *vox populi*—the voice of the people. And while Jeremiah depended solely on the vindication of God, Hananiah and other false prophets depended on popular opinion.

The rise of false prophets was inevitable because of the expectations of popular theology (*vox populi*) that *defined what the prophet could or could not say*. It was also inevitable that the monarchy would develop a group of professional counselors. The false prophets gained status by *promoting the interests of the*

<sup>62</sup> This is also the reason we have preachers like Joel Osteen. Popularity is financially profitable (1 Tim. 6: 5).

*monarch* and by speaking to the desires of the people. Thus when a true prophet of God spoke, his audience might misinterpret his message as being “false” when it *contradicted their expectations*.<sup>63</sup>

Hananiah predicted the return of all the treasures from the temple and the king’s house within two years, treasures which had been removed to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in the second deportation of Judah (Jer. 28: 3; cf. 2 Ki. 24: 10-16). In order for this to happen, the yoke of Babylon upon Judah would be broken, something he also predicts (Jer. 28: 2, 4). Also in the second deportation, Jeconiah (or Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim) had been taken captive into Babylon; and Hananiah prophesies that Jeconiah, along with the other exiles, would be released at the same time, within two years (Jer. 28: 4). Jeremiah’s response to Hananiah is similar to the sarcastic retort of Micaiah to King Ahab, “Amen! May the LORD do so; may the LORD confirm your words which you have prophesied to bring back the vessels of the LORD’S house and all the exiles, from Babylon to this place.” This, too, was sheer sarcasm toward false words of hope and comfort commonly spoken by false prophets; but like Micaiah before him, Jeremiah does not debate the issue but submits himself and Hananiah to the *test of prophecy*. If, indeed, the yoke of Babylon is broken and if the exiles return in two years, then Hananiah is a true prophet (v. 9). Alternatively, if Hananiah’s prophecy does not come true, he is a false prophet who must face the consequences.

Sadly, there are many others who also face consequences for *following* a false prophet. Davis relates the story of Thomas Mūnster who in 1525 persuaded the peasants of Thuringa that God had promised him victory over their prince overlords. He would even catch their cannon-balls in the sleeves of his jacket. Rather than let His people perish in battle, God “would transform heaven and earth” at which point in his speech a rainbow appeared, the very symbol on Mūnster’s flag and, thus, a sure signal from God that the victory was his. While singing “Come, Holy Spirit” enemy cannons opened fired, scattering the peasant army like sheep who were similarly run down and slaughtered by the cavalry. Mūnster had failed the test of a true prophet, and his sheep had suffered for it.<sup>64</sup>

More recently Jim Jones of Guyana persuaded his flock to commit suicide with him by drinking poison. Most of the 900 complied and died with him; others who attempted to escape were gunned down, leaving only a few survivors to tell the tale.

Another tragedy took place in the Kanungu District of southwest Uganda about fifteen years ago. A false prophet convinced his congregation that Jesus was coming back on a certain date and would meet them at the church. Over the previous months, perhaps years, he had been chiseling money out of his devotees by telling them that if Jesus was coming back, they should sell their possessions. Needless to say who should be the treasurer. Jesus *didn’t* return that day, but the prophet had the church burned down on top of his congregation to avoid paying back all the money he had defrauded them.

But it is the Mūnster story which comes closest to the Joseph Kony rebellion in Uganda (still continuing in Congo) which started out with the Holy Spirit Movement of Alice Auma—also known as Alice Lakwena, after the spirit who possessed her. Auma trained her army, the “Holy Spirit Mobile Force”, in the unusual battle strategy (“Holy Spirit Tactic”). Her army refused to take cover under fire; but rather, faced the enemy standing up without clothing from the waist up, singing hymns for 10 to 45 minutes as the spirit (or Spirit?) led them. Another tactic was rubbing one’s chest with

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<sup>63</sup> VanGemeren, p. 62

<sup>64</sup> Davis, p. 329

shea nut butter oil to prevent the penetration of bullets. If such protection did not work, the soldier had sinned in some way. At first the HSMF soldiers were not even allowed to aim their guns for the kill, leaving it to the spirits to direct the bullets toward those who deserved to die. A major skirmish with the NRA (National Resistance Army) of Museveni in November, 1986, left 25 NRA soldiers dead and only one dead HSMF soldier, lending weight to her claim of spiritual powers and encouraging others to join her movement, including peasants and school-age children, bringing the peak of her army to 7000. But by November, 1987, her soldiers were now aiming their guns but losing more battles and their lives, as well as faith in Alice Auma. Upon losing her last battle to the NRA in Kampala on November, 4, 1987, she escaped to Kenya with a few followers.<sup>65</sup> Following false prophets can be as dangerous to your physical health as to your soul.

Getting back to *Jeremiah*, Hananiah takes the wooden yoke from Jeremiah's neck, breaks it, and repeats his prediction that within two years the yoke of Babylon will be broken (v. 11). Jeremiah goes his way, but afterwards, the word of the Lord comes to him contradicting Hananiah's prophecy (vv. 13-14), thus confirming to Jeremiah that the Lord had not sent Hananiah or spoken His word to him. Furthermore, the Lord gives Jeremiah a second prophecy by which he could prove the falseness of Hananiah's claims before the two year period had expired—within the year Hananiah would be dead. This would be the price he must pay for making the people trust in lies and counseling rebellion against the Lord (vv. 15-16). In the seventh month of the same year, Hananiah died (v. 17), thus fulfilling the word of the Lord to Jeremiah, His true prophet, and confirming the curse upon false prophets spoken by Moses (Deut. 18: 20). Furthermore, Hananiah's death confirmed Jeremiah's distant prophecy that Judah was a doomed nation whose city would be destroyed and whose inhabitants would be led away into exile.

In spite of Hananiah's death—the confirmation of Jeremiah as a true prophet and Hananiah as a false one—Jeremiah was unsuccessful in getting Judah to listen; and they continued to turn a deaf ear until Judah and the temple were utterly devastated by Babylon. Furthermore, after Jerusalem was captured, they still refused to listen (Jer. 42—44.) Jeremiah's prophecy of the destruction of the temple and the exile of Judah was unthinkable—so unthinkable that it was also *unacceptable*. They turned instead to other prophets who claimed to speak in the name of the Lord and who offered them hope for deliverance—prophets like Hananiah who told them what they wanted to hear, prophets who did not trespass the boundaries of popular opinion.

Furthermore, Jeremiah's prediction of 70 years captivity in Babylon was equally unacceptable (Jer. 29: 10). After part of the nation was deported to Babylon in 597 BC, other false prophets arose among the exiles who disputed Jeremiah's testimony (namely, Ahab the son of Kolaiah, and Zedekiah, the son of Maaseiah; cf. Jer. 29: 21-23). People will believe whoever will deliver the most favorable message.

#### **4. The true God versus “God in the box”**

As the keepers of the temple, the people of the southern kingdom believed that they were

the legitimate heirs of the covenant, temple, theocracy, and Davidic monarchy...the children of God....Their hope was *fixed on institutions* (God's law, the temple, the Davidic monarchy, and the

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<sup>65</sup> Faith J. H. McDonnell and Grace Akallo, *Girl Soldier*, pp. 69-70; 84, 87-88

privileged covenant status of Judah) rather than the living God. They considered Jerusalem, “the city of God,” to be invincible.<sup>66</sup>

How could it be otherwise, for if Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed the covenant promises to the nation would have become null and void. The covenant promises, they reasoned, were inviolable (incapable of violation) regardless of their behavior as a people and as a nation. But while the false prophets fueled this misinterpretation of the covenant, the true prophets taught otherwise, reminding the nation that the covenant promises were based upon the *stipulation* (condition) of obedience and that the covenant curses were as real and equally potential as the covenant blessings (Deut. 27—28). While there was, indeed, a godly remnant in Israel and Judah, the nations as a whole were disobedient to the covenant and could therefore not continue enjoying its blessings. Thus, they were spewed out of the land even as the Canaanites were before them.

While God’s promises for faith and obedience never fail, His “promises” (of curse) for apostasy and disobedience also never fail.<sup>67</sup> In reminding the nation of this, the prophets were not preaching a salvation based on works, but were simply expressing the same truth proclaimed later in the New Testament. Salvation by faith in God’s promises, if genuine, produces good works. The covenant blessings of salvation and eternal life in the New Covenant are not unconditional, but are conditional upon true faith in Christ, a faith that inevitably produces obedience, not lawlessness (James 2: 20; Matt. 7: 21; Matt. 24: 13). Moreover, the true believer’s experience of God’s favor and blessing is also conditional upon obedience. The Christian who is living in sin cannot experience the joy of his salvation, nor can he expect God’s temporal blessings on his life and work (Ps. 51: 12).<sup>68</sup> Even if he is blessed with prosperity, the spiritual joy and benefits of communion with God and His people will be withheld, and his prosperity will be mixed with sorrow. On the other hand, “It is the blessing of the LORD that makes rich, And He adds *no* sorrow to it” (Prov. 10: 22).

Some 650 years after Jeremiah’s ministry, the Apostle Paul once again challenges the conclusion that the promises of God to Israel operated automatically or unconditionally.

For he is not a Jew who is one **outwardly**, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one **inwardly**; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God (Rom. 2: 28-29).

But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel....What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles....God **has not rejected His people whom He foreknew**. Or do you not know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel? “Lord, they have killed your prophets, they have torn down your altars, and I alone am left, and they are seeking my life.” But what is the divine response to him? “I have kept for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.” In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time **a remnant according to God’s gracious choice**” (Rom. 9: 6, 22-24; 11: 2-5)

<sup>66</sup> VanGemeren, p. 60; emphasis mine

<sup>67</sup> 2 Tim. 2: 13.(See Hendriksen and Calvin on this verse

<sup>68</sup> The superscript reads, “A psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.”

Thus, God never intended to save the whole elect *nation* but only an elect *remnant* within the nation who repented of their sins and trusted His promise of grace. Added to the elect remnant of the Jews were *elect Gentiles* who were called by His name and given token (limited) representation in the OT (e.g. Uriah the Hittite, Ruth the Moabite, Rahab the harlot of Jericho, the repentant Ninevites from Jonah's ministry).

The prophet [and in the NT, the apostolic writers] *expanded the boundaries of traditional theology* when they spoke of the great acts of Yahweh in judgment and restoration. Traditional theology had confined Yahweh and his promises to their interpretation of Moses [God in the box]. But the prophets exploded the traditional concept of the promises and displayed them as being more magnificent and wonderful. They proclaimed that Yahweh would be faithful to the covenants and the promises and that the Spirit would inaugurate a new era: the era of the new covenant and of spiritual transformation.<sup>69</sup>

What could also be said is that the true prophets proclaimed that Yahweh would be faithful to His threats—something which seems to have been conveniently forgotten, or at least, swept under the rug of traditional, popular theology. God had been neatly confined in the box of popular opinion, and He was not “allowed” out of the box. But unlike Solomon who acknowledged that God was too big for the temple (1 Ki. 8: 27), Israel, Judah, and their false prophets failed to understand that God could not be contained. “Surely”, they thought, “God could not destroy His own temple.” On the contrary, God could, and would, do anything He deemed necessary within the boundaries of His own immutable nature—including destroying His own temple. He has responded similarly in the history of the church, removing the “lampstand” in Asia Minor, modern day Turkey, and leaving that country to the desolation of Islam (cf. Rev. 2—3).

The NT church, like Judah and Israel, often makes the same futile attempt at confining God to the box of its own traditional understanding of the nature of God. God must simply act like He is *expected* to act, no misbehaving allowed.<sup>70</sup> Recalling the earlier quote by Davis, the church will not “allow” God to be judgmental or negative; and what we have hallowed as traditional theology has become so concretized and rigid that the church will not allow a fresh application of the prophetic message of the OT to the current problems facing today's church—the *evangelical* church included.

Traditional interpretation often leads to a reductionistic hermeneutic that is unable to adapt to either new revelation or new insight. This was already the situation when the prophets of God encountered the rigidity and systematization of their contemporaries [e.g. Zedekiah and Hananiah]. Recognized leaders opposed the prophets by appeal to traditional interpretations, application, and values [e.g. the overemphasis on the value of religious ritual]. The Word becomes an “it” whenever people resist the Spirit.

Even though the fixation of the “meaning” of canonical writing brings stability to the community and an expression of faith, it is not without danger. Reception of God's Word sets in motion a wave that begins with renewed understanding of spiritual things and a spiritual renewal but all too often ends with a dead tradition and an unwillingness to apply God's word to new contexts (2 Cor. 3: 6). Thus the Word becomes an “it” whenever it supports human traditions....

Each prophetic writing challenges the *stability* of the community. More than that, the prophetic books individually and collectively challenge our approach to and understanding of the New Testament.

In the new revelation of God in Jesus Christ, the prophetic canon [the prophetic books of the OT] underwent another challenge. The people of God in the first century had to wrestle with many questions,

<sup>69</sup> VanGemeren, p. 57; emphasis and words in brackets mine

<sup>70</sup> Read about the mistaken notion of retribution theology in the book of Job which maintains that God always blesses the righteous and punishes the wicked *in this life*.

such as what the Spirit of God was saying in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, how those Scriptures related to the mission of Jesus of Nazareth, how the church should adapt the old revelation to the new revelation (New Testament books), and how their system of faith and ways of living should be altered in the coming of the Spirit of Christ. These issues have to do with *adaptability*.

Gradually stability set in, and the tension between Old and New was reduced in favor of the New Testament writings. The voice of the prophets became silenced, and the community's understanding of the apostles determined how the prophetic word should be understood. However, reducing the Old Testament to a minor premise is dangerous. This is done when tradition encourages reading the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament only. The Old Testament is also all too often reduced to a collection of morals, prooftexts, or predictions. The problem with the Old Testament is not found in its content, but in humans who ignore tensions and differences in favor of a preunderstanding (vox populi).<sup>71</sup>

A quote like this may lend itself to those who would argue, wrongly, for continuing revelation; but VanGemeran simply means that the church no longer listens to the voice of the prophetic canon of the OT. How many sermons have we heard preached from the OT prophets as opposed to the epistles of Paul or the gospels—carefully selected, of course, to avoid the “negative” passages (which are many). Where is the prophetic thundering against the contemporary failings of the church? Do most Christians even believe that the prophetic canon applies to the contemporary church? How many preachers even dare to preach the negative messages of the prophets, properly contextualized for each cultural situation? As mentioned above, they are scrutinized primarily for their predictive content or simply to illustrate the multitude of types pointing to Christ. That these are legitimate uses of the prophets cannot be denied, but we often relegate (put in an inferior place) the prophets to a position of irrelevance as far as the life and practice of the church is concerned. As a result, the prophetic ministry of God's prophets has all but disappeared from our churches whose pastors have ceased to preach prophetically and have too often parroted (mimicked) the party line of a therapeutic gospel designed to make people feel good—right up to the day they are permanently exiled in hell. Many have become false prophets, or they have come dangerously close to crossing that line.

In the consumerist, therapeutic culture of the US—the only one with which I am thoroughly familiar—the “stoning” of the prophets (Matt. 23: 37) has created alarming results even within the evangelical church, results sufficient to call forth the following prophetic response:

We have turned to a God that we can use rather than to a God we must obey; we have turned to a God who will fulfill our needs rather than to a God before whom we must surrender our rights to ourselves. He is a God *for* us, for our satisfaction—not because we have learned to think of him in this way through Christ but because we have learned to think of him this way through the marketplace. In the marketplace, everything is for us, for our pleasure, for our satisfaction, and we have come to assume that it must be so in the church as well. And so we transform the God of mercy into a God who is at our mercy. We imagine that he is benign, that he will acquiesce as we toy with his reality and to co-opt [persuade to join] him in the promotion of our ventures and careers. Thus do we presume to restrain him in a Weberian “iron cage” of this-worldly preoccupation. Thus do we tighten our grip upon him. And if the sunshine of his benign grace fails to warm us as we expect, if he fails to shower prosperity and success on us, we will find ourselves unable to believe in him anymore.

What has been lost in all of this, of course, is God's angularity, the sharp edges that truth so often has and that he has preeminently. It is our fallenness fleshed out in our modernity that makes God smooth, that imagines he will accommodate our instincts, shabby and self-centered as they so often are, because he is love.

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<sup>71</sup> VanGemeran, pp. 84-85; emphasis his, words in brackets mine



In a psychologized culture such as ours, there is deep affinity for what is relational but a dis-ease with what is moral. This carries over into the church as an infatuation with the love of God and an embarrassment at his holiness. We who are modern find it infinitely easier to believe that God is like a Rogerian therapist who empathetically solicits our knowledge of ourselves and passes judgment on none of it than to think that he could have any serious business to conduct with Moses.

This peculiarity of the modern disposition, this loss of substance and vigor, betrays our misunderstanding of God's immanence [His nearness to us], his relatedness to creation. We imagine that the great purposes of life are psychological rather than moral. We imagine that the great purposes of life are realized in the improvement of our own private inner disposition. We imagine that for those who love God and are called according to his purpose, all things work together for their satisfaction and the inner tranquility of their lives. Modernity has secured the triumph of the therapeutic over the moral even in the church.

The fact is, of course, that the New Testament never promises anyone a life of psychological wholeness or offers a guarantee of the consumer's satisfaction with Christ. To the contrary, it offers the prospect of indignities, loss, damage, disease, and pain. The faithful in Scripture were scorned, beaten, imprisoned, shipwrecked, and executed. The gospel offers no promises that contemporary believers will be spared these experiences, that they will be able to settle down to the sanitized comfort of an inner life freed of stresses, pains, and ambiguities; it simply promises that through Christ, God will walk with us in all the dark places of life, that he has the power and the will to invest his promises with reality, and that even the shadows are made to serve his glory and our best interests. A therapeutic culture will be inclined to view such promises as something of a disappointment; those who understand that reality is at heart moral because God is centrally holy will be satisfied that this is all they need to know.

We will not be able to recover the vision and understanding of God's grandeur until we recover an understanding of ourselves as creatures who have been made to know such grandeur. This must begin with the recovery of the idea that as beings made in God's image, we are fundamentally moral beings, not consumers, that the satisfaction of our psychological needs pales in significance when compared with the enduring value of doing what is right. Religious consumers want to have a spirituality for the same reason that they want to drive a stylish and expensive auto. Costly obedience is as foreign to them in matters spiritual as self-denial is in matters material. In a culture filled with such people, restoring weight to God is going to involve much more than simply getting some doctrine straight; it's going to entail a complete reconstruction of the modern self-absorbed pastiche [jumbled] personality. The cost of accomplishing this may well be deep, sustained repentance. It is our modernity that must be undone. Only then will the full weight of the revealed truth about God rest once more on the soul. Only then will we recover our saltiness in the world. Only then will God genuinely be known again in his church<sup>72</sup>

Another term for this "therapeutic" gospel is "cheap grace". Turning to the African continent, a culture I am learning very slowly, the same kind of "God in the box" mistakes are being made. They are being made partly as imported errors from the West through well-meaning but theologically uninformed Western missionaries, and partly through their own cultural world-view which has been "baptized" with Christian concepts but not thoroughly changed. One example is the seeming disallowance of the consequences of sin. At the beginning of my teaching at a Bible college, students habitually arrived late. The faculty responded to this chronic tardiness by counting three "tardies" as one absence and two unexcused absences as grounds for a reduction in one letter grade. This got their attention, so afterwards the late students, formally apathetic about their offense, would even ask for my forgiveness if they were late. I responded with, "Of course, I forgive you, but you will still be counted tardy." My response was interpreted as unforgiving and ungracious as if a simple, "Please forgive me", should erase any consequences of their actions. I have come to believe that the practice of *ritual repentance*—the form without the substance—is characteristic of many African Christians,

<sup>72</sup> David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, pp. 114-115; emphasis his, words in brackets mine

as it is many Western Christians. Despite all the cultural differences, human nature on any continent is alarmingly similar.

This, of course, is only an innocuous (harmless) example which has relatively minor implications for a culture's well-being—although it could be forcefully argued that the chronic African inattention to time limitations seriously reduces productive labor and Gross Domestic Product.<sup>73</sup> A far more serious example would be the tendency to forgive capital offences without the imposition of punishments. Recent examples in Uganda include amnesty for some of the leaders of the Kony rebellion responsible for the murder of tens of thousands of innocent people in the last 22 years—possibly hundreds of thousands when dislocation and starvation are considered. Government officials throughout sub-Saharan Africa, many of whom are professing Christians, systematically steal public funds to fuel their personal empires. Africans seem to accept this as a matter of course—“This is Africa”—without holding their leaders accountable. Or it could be they have simply given up. Church discipline for anyone is virtually non-existent, but especially for powerful men.

So, what is the way forward for Africa and the West? Part of the solution is to resurrect the true prophets from their obscurity by preaching from their books, for how can people repent unless they hear the truth, and how can they hear the truth without true, prophetic preaching (Rom. 10: 14)? Their message is equally as relevant for the church today as it was for Israel and Judah—otherwise, why would the prophets have a place in the Scriptures? To be sure, they are not a curious, outmoded (obsolete) relic of God's dealings with His OT people as any fair reading of the prophets (or 1 Cor. 10—11) will prove. The burden of the modern preacher is to become sufficiently acquainted with his own cultural context to make the message of the prophets relevant for his own congregation; and since personal and social sins are never very original, this should not be too difficult.

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<sup>73</sup> For more on this subject, see McNeill, *Anthropology*

**IX. Chronological Table of Kings and Prophets of Israel and Judah (931-586 B.C.)<sup>74</sup>**

<i>Israel</i>	<i>Prophets in Israel</i>	<i>Prophets in Judah</i>	<i>Judah</i>
<b>I</b> Jeroboam I (931-910) Nadab (910-909)		<b>931BC</b>	Rehoboam (931-913) Abijah (913-911)
<b>II</b> Baasha (909-886) Elah (886-885)		<b>900BC</b>	Asa (911-870)
<b>III</b> Zimri (885)			
<b>IV</b> Omri (885-874) Ahab (874-853) Ahaziah ((853-852) Joram (852-841)	<i>Elijah</i> <i>Elisha</i>	<b>875BC</b>  <b>841BC</b>	Jehoshaphat (873-848)  Jehoram (848-841) Ahaziah (841) Athaliah (841-835)
<b>V</b> Jehu (841-814)  Jehoahaz (814-798)  Jehoash (798-782) Jeroboam II (793-753) Zechariah (753)	<i>Jonah</i> <i>Amos</i> <i>Hosea</i>	<b>800BC</b>	Joash (835-796) Amaziah (796-767) Uzziah (792-740)
<b>VI</b> Shallum (752)			
<b>VII</b> Menahem (752-742) Pekahiah (742-740)		<b>750BC</b>	Jotham (750-731)
<b>VIII</b> Pekah (740-732)			Ahaz (735-715)
<b>IX</b> Hoshea (732-722) <b>FALL OF SAMARIA</b>		<b>722BC</b>	Hezekiah (729-686)
		<b>700BC</b>	
		<b>650BC</b>	Manasseh (696-642)
			Amon (642-640) Josiah (640-609)
		<b>625</b>	
		<b>J</b>	
		<b>E</b>	
		<b>R</b>	Jehoahaz (609)
		<b>Habakkuk</b>	Jehoiakim (608-598)
		<b>600</b>	
		<b>E</b>	
		<b>M</b>	
		<b>I</b>	Jehoiachin (598-597)
		<b>Ezekiel</b>	Zekeiah (597-586)
		<b>A</b>	
		<b>Daniel</b>	
		<b>586</b>	
		<b>H</b>	<b>FALL OF JERUSALEM</b>
		<b>Obadiah</b>	

Note: Roman numerals on the left refer to dynasties of the northern kingdom

<sup>74</sup> Reproduced from Willem A. VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word*

## ***X. The Prophecy of Amos***

### ***I. Historical Context (1: 1-2)***

By his own admission (7: 14), Amos was not a prophet by profession like Isaiah who had ready access to the king's court (2 Kings 19). He was a humble sheep-herder and a farmer of sycamore figs making him well-suited to be God's representative to the snobby aristocrats of Israel. He prophesied during the reign of Uzziah king of Judah and Jeroboam II of Israel sometime around 753 B.C. Jeroboam's reign was an astounding success militarily and economically—the most successful reign of any monarch of the northern kingdom of Israel. Because of the threat of Assyria, the rivalry between Israel and Syria had been put on hold allowing Jeroboam to increase the northern borders of Israel to their original boundaries during the reigns of David and Solomon. Trade with wealthy neighboring countries was at its peak, and at no time since Solomon's reign had Israel enjoyed such wealth, peace, and security.<sup>75</sup> Undoubtedly he was a very popular king among the wealthy—"It's the economy stupid", and nothing else really mattered.

From the internal evidence of *Amos*, it was clear that the poor of Israel certainly didn't matter, for they were being oppressed with impunity (exemption from punishment) by the rich. Furthermore, there had been some revival of Baal worship in which male and female temple prostitutes were employed in the religious rituals. In the midst of this wealth and power of the rich, social injustice and oppression of the poor, and religious debauchery (immorality), Amos the simple shepherd-farmer, a nobody from Tekoa, came marching into Samaria (capital of the northern kingdom of Israel) with his negative preaching and the prediction of Israel's exile. Of course, no one but the faithful believed him. To put the matter in modern terms, had Amos not read the *Wall Street Journal* and *Forbes 500 Magazine*? Didn't he know that the stock market was going through the roof and that rich Israelites were getting richer? Who did this rag-tag nobody think he was, stirring up the masses? "We'll just ask him to leave and go back home to Judah where he belongs." And they did tell him to leave, but Amos wasn't going anywhere until he delivered his message. Then, and only then, would he return to the farm where he would rather be in the first place. For Amos, Yahweh was "roaring" from Zion in judgment upon the whole land of Israel (v. 2).

### ***II. Oracles against the Nations (1: 3—2: 16)***

#### ***A. Against the Foreign Enemies of Israel (1: 3—2: 3)***

Beginning in v. 3 Amos pronounces judgment upon several nations before he gets to the northern kingdom of Israel. The formula for judgment is: "For three transgressions of [the name of the country] and for four I [Yahweh] will not revoke its punishment." The formula "three...four" symbolized an indefinite number of transgression, not just the literal three or four.<sup>76</sup> Damascus (Syria) was guilty of cruelty to their conquered victims by running threshing sleds with toothed iron wheels over their bodies (2 Kings: 10: 32-33). Gaza (the capital representing the Philistines) took captive Israelites from their lands and handed them over to the Edomites, the archenemies of Israel. Tyre, the capital of the Phoenicians, had done the same thing. Their offense was aggravated by the fact that King David had forged a strong alliance of friendship with the king of Tyre (2 Sam. 5: 11; 1

<sup>75</sup> R.K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 885

<sup>76</sup> *Eerdman's Handbook to the Bible* [hereafter *EHB*], p. 444

Kings 5: 15). Edom, the descendants of Esau, was the archrival of Israel who was constantly at odds with Israel and guilty of various acts of aggression against her.<sup>77</sup>

Now, by the time Amos mentions hated Edom, the crowds in Israel were beginning to enjoy this simple preacher from Tekoa. One by one he was condemning their *enemies*, getting closer and closer to home territory. One can imagine them saying, “Hey, this fellow Amos is okay. Preach on, brother!” Then Amos condemns Ammon for brutally torturing and killing the pregnant women of Gilead, adding fuel to the fire of Israel’s enthusiasm (1: 13). Moab, the cousin country of Ammon (Gen. 19: 37-38), is indicted next for the crime of burning the bones of the king of Edom to lime, heaping insult upon the king of Edom. It is difficult to figure how this judgment had relevance to Israel. Every other judgment mentioned was God’s revenge against those who had harmed Israel. Perhaps the king of Edom was a vassal king to Israel during this time.

### ***B. Against Israel’s Brother Judah (2: 4)***

Beginning in **2: 4**, Amos really begins to preach by condemning the despised brother of Israel, the kingdom of Judah. By this time, the crowds are really getting excited, but they shouldn’t be. Amos does not condemn any sin of Judah toward his brothers in Israel, but only Judah’s violation of the Law of God, the very Law which Israel had violated with greater guilt than Judah. For its crimes against the Law of God, Judah would be reduced to ashes, a prophecy which is fulfilled in the conquest of Judah by Babylon in 587 BC.

### ***C. Against Israel Itself (2:6-16)***

Amos is now through with beating around the bush. He has the inhabitants of Samaria eating out of his hands; the crowds are with him, although the more astute among them may wonder by now where Amos is going with this sermon. “For three transgressions of Israel and for four I will not revoke its punishment.” At this point, Amos is through giving short accounts of atrocities and goes into more detail. The sins of Israel include:

- (1) Obstruction of justice by the bribery of judges who hand out convictions to innocent people (**v. 6**; see Ex. 23: 6-8)
- (2) The sentence of slavery for poor Israelites who could not pay off simple debts, like the debt of a pair of sandals (**v. 6**; see Lev. 25: 39)
- (3) Oppression of the poor (**v. 7**; cf. Ex. 22: 25; Deut. 24: 15)
- (4) Failure to help the poor in their financial distress (**v. 7**; there were many laws in the OT for the aid of the poor; cf. Dt. 15: 7)
- (5) Shameless sexual immorality in which a father and son resort to the same prostitute, possibly a temple prostitute for Baal worship (**v. 7**)
- (6) The use of garments taken as pledges from the poor for something to lie on while having sex with temple prostitutes (**v. 8**; note: “beside every altar”; see also Ex. 22: 26; the garments taken as guarantees for loans should have been returned to the poor every night to keep them warm.)
- (7) Profaning the temple by drinking wine bought with the ill-gotten fines of those falsely accused by dishonest judges (**v. 8b**). People were judged for crimes at the temple by priests or judges, some of whom could be bribed by the rich for a favorable verdict (Dt. 17: 8-12; Isa. 5: 23; Mic. 3: 11; 7: 3).

<sup>77</sup> C.F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Amos*, pp. 240-248

The criminal docket against Israel was full, and she had less excuse for her sins than the pagan nations condemned by Amos earlier in the chapter. God had graciously delivered Israel from her enemies (**vv. 9-10**), raised up prophets to communicate His will to them and Nazarites to live exemplary lives of special devotion before them, but they had tempted the Nazarites to break their vows and told the prophets to be silent about God's will. The result of all these sins is destruction by a foreign enemy (**vv. 11-16**).

### ***III. Prophecy against Israel (3:1—6:14)***

#### ***Verses 1-2***

Election produces responsibility. Israel had been chosen from among all the nations but had not remained faithful to the covenant. Consequently, she will pay the costs of disobedience, for election does not grant immunity from judgment. With a list of rhetorical questions (questions with pre-determined answers) Amos leads up to the inevitable conclusion that he as a prophet of God had been sent to pronounce judgment upon Israel.

#### ***Verse 3***

Amos assures Israel that though they may despise him as a simple man, he nevertheless walks in agreement with God and speaks by the command of God. As a companion, God has confided in Amos as with a friend that judgment is coming.

#### ***Verse 4***

Just as a lion will not roar when there is no prey, God will not cry out by his prophets when there is no reason. Amos' presence among the Israelites is proof that God is about to do something.

#### ***Verse 5***

As nets are laid for birds, so men become entrapped in the punishments of God. A trap is not laid by chance, but by men intent on catching their prey. Even so, God has spread a trap for Israel.

#### ***Verses 6-7***

Through his prophets, the Lord had sounded the trumpet of impending doom, but in the case of Israel, none had heeded the prophet's message. God is merciful in giving Israel advanced warning, something he had not done for the other nations of the earth which he had destroyed. Their status as the covenant nation afforded them this extra blessing of prophetic warning.<sup>78</sup>

#### ***Verse 8***

Like a lion, God is now roaring. He is speaking and Amos is telling Israel what he is saying.

#### ***Verses 9-10***

Israel's sins were a show-case to the nations.

#### ***Verses 11-15***

Because of the sins of Israel, God will send an enemy to destroy her. The short-lived prosperity of King Jeroboam's reign will come to an end, and those who have lived in luxury will lose their fine

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<sup>78</sup> Nineveh (Assyria) was an exception to this rule since God sent Jonah to warn them.

estates. Notice that both the winter houses and the summer houses of the rich will be destroyed. A large gap existed between the rich and the poor, the rich being so well-endowed that they could afford two homes, not just one—a house in a cooler spot for the summer (perhaps in the mountains at a higher elevation) and one in a warmer spot for the winter (perhaps in the valley where the wind would be blocked by the hills). There was nothing inherently wrong with having two homes. The practice is condemned here simply because while the rich lived extravagantly, they were indifferent to the poor at the same time. Moreover, they charged exorbitant (excessively high) rent for rental property and for land rented by the poor. (Sound familiar?)

Since Samaria fell in 722 BC, Israel had 30 more years to repent from the time of this prophecy. No one can accuse God of being impatient.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Verses 1-3**

Amos addresses the rich women in Samaria as if they were fat cows grazing on the pastures of Bashan, a mountain known for its rich pasture land. Not a very flattering picture. By addressing the women, he is not implying that they alone were to blame for Israel's sin, but addresses them as representative for the whole of Israel.<sup>79</sup> Their husbands are represented here not as men of principle but as “hen-pecked” husbands who continue their unscrupulous business practices in order to satisfy the material cravings of their avaricious (greedy) wives, hence the description, “fat”. These same women and their husbands will one day be taken away into captivity by the Assyrians whose practice was to stick fish hooks in the mouths of their captives and lead them away to foreign countries in single file.

### **Verses 4-5**

Israel was mistaken if they believed that God accepted their worship. God established His name only in Jerusalem, but Jeroboam I (from whom Jeroboam II derives his name) had established illegitimate bull worship in Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 12). They pretended to go through the forms of true religion, but God had never authorized these worship centers rendering their sacrifices and rituals null and void.

### **Verses 6-13**

In order to warn Israel of His displeasure, he had sent less devastating judgments upon them: famine (**v. 6**), draught three months before the harvest when the best growth of crops would occur (**v. 7**), indiscriminate rains which demonstrated God's judgment—one city getting rain but not another (**vv. 7-8**), crop destroying winds and insects (**v. 9**), a plague like that sent upon Egypt (v. 10, war (**v. 10-11**)). Some of these judgments most likely occurred before the prosperous reign of Jeroboam II, but Amos reminds them that they occurred at the hand of God. None of these judgments resulted in repentance as the history of Israel before Jeroboam II will demonstrate. Amos uses a repetitive refrain after each account of judgment: “‘Yet you have not returned to Me,’ declares the Lord” (**vv. 6, 8, 9, 10, 11**).

Because God is able to do these things, Israel should prepare to meet their God. This may be a summons to mercy if Israel should decide to repent, or a further warning to “brace herself” for

<sup>79</sup> In literature, this is known as a *metonymy*. As another example, the “White House” would be a metonymy for the entire executive branch of the US government, the presidency.

imminent judgment. The God who created the heavens and the earth, knows the thoughts of men, and controls all the elements, is not the kind of God Israel can trifle with. We learn from this passage that God's covenant people *need not look for miraculous signs* of catastrophe to interpret the displeasure of God. He judges His people with *natural* disasters like famine, draught, and sickness—the same catastrophes which he sends on other people without any warning. He does so to bring his people to repentance, but so often, we look at these things only as “bad luck”, “unfortunate circumstances”, or “fate”. But there is no such thing as luck, good luck or bad luck, or fate—only the providence of God ruling the universe to accomplish His will.

## Chapter 5

### Verses 1-3

An announcement of the judgment coming. Amos's message is purposely repetitious to get his message across. Remember, too, that before *Amos* was written, the message of the prophet was preached in the streets of Samaria, the capital of Israel.

### Verses 4-27

This is a series of warnings interspersed with sincere calls to repentance (**vv. 4, 6, 14-15, 24**). Three main offenses of Israel are included in this section.

**(1) False worship (vv. 4-6; 21-23).** The Israelites need not resort to the safety of Bethel, Gilgal, or Beersheba (all places of illegitimate worship). God will destroy every city; none are safe. He despises all their religious assemblies and sacrifices for they are nothing but a false substitute for the true religion of Yahweh in which justice “roll[s] down like waters” (waterfalls) and righteousness like continuous streams (perhaps mountain streams) (**v. 24**). Righteousness and religion are not the same things. We are sadly mistaken if we think we can bribe the Lord with offerings and songs when we live like the devil (**v. 23**). In a nation which operated on the bribery of judges and public officials, the Israelites came to the wrong conclusion that *God could be bribed as well*. This can be a common error in countries rife with corruption and bribery. It could be partly the result of a religious world-view in which the gods or ancestral spirits can be bribed to give people what they want. Therefore, the political leaders of such nations take on the qualities of false gods who can be bought.

**(2) Injustice in the courts (v. 7, 10, 12-13, 15, 24).** Courts were held at the city gates (Deut. 21: 19). The judges of Israel were known to be corrupt and to take bribes from the rich to pervert justice and deny the poor of proper, unbiased justice and due process of law. The poor, of course, had little if any money for bribes and none to match those of the rich. Instead, the judges would demand the produce of their land for a bribe (**v. 11**) or “turn them aside at the gate” (**v. 12**) because the bribe was too insignificant.<sup>80</sup> With the many references to the sins of the rich, we must not assume that the prophet considered the poor as innocent. They were not innocent (**6: 11**), but would be judged along with the rich. Nevertheless, to whom much is given much is required (Lk. 12: 48). The rich had been given much which they had misused, and for this reason, their judgment would be greater than the poor. The fine mansions they had built would not be lived in because they would be deported to another country (**v. 11**). They would have far more to lose than the poor.

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<sup>80</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, p. 282



Injustice had grown so badly that righteous people who had the courage to speak out against this injustice did so at the risk of their own lives (v. 10), until it became so dangerous that most of the righteous became silent (v. 13). The danger does not excuse their silence, but at least makes it understandable. When the court system is corrupt, *liberty of speech* is thrown out the window, for evil men with money can buy all the injustice they can afford. Jezebel demonstrated this fact in bribing worthless scoundrels to accuse Naboth of blaspheming God so her equally worthless husband, Ahab, could steal his vineyard (1 Kings 21). It is not surprising, then, that the Messiah is described by Isaiah as a ruler who establishes justice and righteousness on the earth.

There will be no end to the increase of *His* government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this” (Isa. 9: 7).

The prophet’s admonition to “Seek good and not evil, that you may live” is not directed merely to individuals but primarily to *national leaders and judges*, as the next part of the verse proves, “And establish justice in the gate!” He is warning Israel to clean up its courts or suffer the consequences. No nation can avoid the judgments of God (war, draught, economic poverty, pestilence, etc.) while neglecting the public administration of justice. Africa is a prime example of God’s judgments falling on whole nations because of public corruption and bribery in the courts. God is a God of justice, and he will not acquit a nation if it perverts justice.

If Israel fails to establish justice in her courts, the result will be wailing in the streets and farmlands (vv. 16-17). Calling for **the day of the Lord** will not help, for the day of the Lord will not be a day of celebration for Israel, but a day of gloom in which one narrow escape follows another (vv. 18-20). The day of the Lord was normally considered as the coming of judgment upon Israel’s enemies, but it is quite apparent from the prophet’s words that God had declared himself as the enemy of Israel because of her sins; thus, the day of Lord would not be a happy day for Israel, but a terrifying one.

(3) *Idolatry* (vv. 25-27). This is different from the false worship described above. Along with what they considered to be legitimate worship of Yahweh at Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba, Israel also engaged in outright worship of pagan gods just like their forefathers who wandered for forty years in the wilderness. They were of the same stripe as their fathers and they will be judged accordingly (v. 27).

## Chapter 6

### Verses 1-3

Because of Jeroboam’s military success in expanding the borders of Israel to the boundaries of Solomon’s kingdom, Israel felt **secure in the mountain of Samaria** which was a very well-placed and well-fortified city. The Prophet reminds them that other great and powerful cities equally secure had also fallen in the past—Calneh, Hamath, and Gath all of which had become tributaries under the control of more powerful nations.

### Verses 4-8

Once again the Prophet attacks the pride of the rich who lie down on **beds of ivory** (an expensive import) and eat lambs and calves (young animals only partially grown)—thus illustrating their extravagant materialism—while the poor were denied justice in the gate. Again, the riches

themselves would not have been an issue if they had been more considerate of the poor. The rich were very cultured (**vv. 5-6**), playing harps and composing songs, but they are enjoying life while the nation lies in spiritual ruin. They are totally indifferent to the rampant immorality and injustice which prevails in Israel (**v. 6b**). Because of this indifference, they will one day be carted off into exile and their sumptuous parties will come to an abrupt end (**v. 7**). The certainty of their ruin is interposed with God's oath (**v. 8**).

### ***Verses 9-11***

Men and women will die like flies in the day of Israel's calamity. Whole families will be wiped out so that there will be neither father nor mother, sons or daughters, to bury the dead in their immediate families. The family name will be blotted from the earth (Ps. 34: 16). An uncle will have to bury his brother and sister-in-law and all his nephews and nieces. In that day there will be no joyful cry in the streets about the day of the Lord. The people will know for sure that God has come against them in judgment, and there will be no desire to speak His name or wish for **the Day of the Lord**.

Keep quiet, do not stand preaching to us about the hand of providence in this calamity, for we may not make mention of the name of the Lord; God is so angry with us that there is no speaking of him..."<sup>81</sup>

In the day that God sends a nation against them (**v. 14**), the rich and poor alike will suffer ruin, for both the great houses of the rich and the small houses of the poor will be smashed to pieces.

### ***Verses 12- 14***

Horses cannot run on rocks, nor can oxen plow rocky fields (**v. 12**). God had sent his prophets to plow up the stony hearts of the Israelites, all to no avail.<sup>82</sup> By trusting in their strength, they had trusted in "Lo-debar", a thing of nothing. Lo-debar was a city in Israel (2 Sam. 9: 4) and Amos uses it as a pun (play on words).

## ***IV. Visions of Divine Retribution (7: 1—9: 10)***

### ***Chapter 7***

#### ***Verses 1-6***

Beginning in this chapter, God gives Amos a series of visions through which he would warn Israel of the coming wrath of God: a plague of grasshoppers, consuming brush fires which eat up the crops (or the fire could be that of pestilence (sickness) which consumes every home). In both judgments, the prophet intercedes for Israel and God relents or changes his mind. This doesn't mean that these judgments were bad ideas from the first and that Amos' prayer helped God to rethink the issue. In the words of Calvin,

God changes not his purpose so as to retract what he has once determined. He indeed knew what he would do before he showed the vision to his Prophet Amos: but he accommodates himself to the measure of men's understanding [what theologians call anthropopathisms], when he mentions such changes. It was then the eternal purpose of God, to threaten the people, to show tokens of his displeasure, and yet to suspend for a time his vengeance, that their perverseness might be the more inexcusable.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>81</sup> *Matthew Henry's Commentary*, Vol. 4, p. 1253

<sup>82</sup> Henry, p. 1253

<sup>83</sup> John Calvin, *Amos*, p. 330

**Verses 7-9**

But the patience and longsuffering of God has its limits. God is holy, and mercy must one day give way to justice. God will not sacrifice one milligram of his holiness to maintain a nation immersed in sin. The third vision is of the Lord standing by a wall holding a **plumb line** against a wall. A mason's plumb line was used to determine the accuracy of the wall as to whether it was "plumb" to the ground or exactly perpendicular—the standard of building excellence. The standard of perfection was the Law of God and Israel had not lived up to that standard; therefore, Israel would be judged according to the standard of God's law. Though He had shown restraint in judging them, He would show restraint no longer. The illegitimate high places and sanctuaries would be destroyed and Jeroboam's house (his family) would be destroyed (2 Kings 10: 30; 2 Kings 15: 8-10).

**Verses 10-17**

Every false religion has its "priests", and Amaziah the priest of Bethel reports to King Jeroboam that Amos is stirring up popular opinion against the king and predicting the exile of Israel and the violent death of Jeroboam. With these words Amaziah attempted to stir up the King to put Amos to death or to put him in prison. Amos had not said that Jeroboam would die by the sword; for had he said this, he would have been a false prophet (cf. 2 Ki. 14: 28-29). What he said was that God "would rise up against the *house* of Jeroboam with the sword" (v. 9b). Jeroboam died of natural causes, but his son Zechariah was assassinated (2 Ki. 15: 10).

Amaziah's livelihood depended on the promotion of false religion and he was not willing to sit idly by while Amos destroyed the illegitimate worship in Israel and, worst of all, his income (See also 1 Kings 22; Acts 19: 24-29). Rather, he would seek the power of the sword, the civil magistrate, to put an end of Amos and his prophesying. It is not indicated that the king even listened to Amaziah, for there is no communication from the king mentioned in the text, and there are no orders from the king to kill Amos or put him in prison. Amaziah, without a response or authorization from the king, tells Amos to take his preaching somewhere else—to Judah where he could be paid as a prophet and "eat bread". Amos' "kind" was not welcome in Bethel where the king owned a palace and where he worshipped in the sanctuary. The king's court required the refined speech of more educated men who wore silk rather than shepherd's clothing.<sup>84</sup> As king, Jeroboam could worship wherever and however he pleased simply because he was king. Thus, Amaziah pulled out the "divine right of kings" argument which had always been assumed by pagan nations and which has been the scourge of nations since the beginning of man's history. The king mistakenly believes, "As the head of a nation, I can do as I please." This is Satan's temptation to Adam and Eve, "You shall be as God."

Now that Amaziah has had his say, Amos responds. He is not a full-time prophet like Isaiah his contemporary,<sup>85</sup> nor was he educated in the schools of the prophets ("sons of the prophets" were not biological sons but spiritual sons who were disciples of other prophets—1 Ki. 20: 35; 2 Ki. 2: 3-5). He made his living as a shepherd and a fig-grower. This demonstrated two things: First, that he could "eat bread" anywhere he wished because his living did not depend on the charity of others. Second, since he was not a professional prophet or a disciple of the prophets, his calling is all the more extraordinary evidence that God had sent him. He did not need any *credentials* to prove to himself or anyone else that God was speaking to him; a powerful and eloquent message from an uneducated shepherd proved that he had received his message from God (See Acts 4: 13). Thus, Amos' response was not designed to show humility, but to support his contention that he was divinely called. This is

<sup>84</sup> Henry, p. 1258

<sup>85</sup> Compare Isaiah 1:1 with Amos 1: 1

proven in **vv. 16b-17** in which he proceeds to prophesy again under the Lord's authority. Because Amaziah has resisted the authority of the Lord's prophet, his wife will be forced to become a prostitute in Samaria when the nation is conquered.<sup>86</sup> Those who survive the carnage will die on foreign soil. (The abuse of conquered women by murderous and rapacious men has been common throughout the history of man until this day. The Congolese army as well as the rebels who fight them all practice rape as a method of warfare. Their future condemnation is just.) The people of Israel will die by the sword and its land divided as the spoils of war.

The passage has much to teach us, and I can only comment on the most obvious lessons:

(1) First, the leaders of the religious establishment often desire to silence preachers who fearlessly proclaim a gospel of repentance. In this case, Amaziah represented a religious establishment which was apostate, similar to the religious establishment before the Reformation which put godly men like William Tyndale, Jon Hus, and countless others to death for preaching the truth. But often even leaders of the evangelical church do not approve of the prophetic voice of preachers who call attention to obvious shortcomings within the church. In churches which are locally autonomous (self-governing), pastors are often hindered by elders and deacons who don't wish to stir up the members with bold preaching. Consequently, much of the preaching in the US has become therapeutic (see above)—a means of soothing the hurts and pains of its members without calling attention to the sins which are often (though not always) the *source and cause* of these pains. To be sure, there is a need for Biblical counseling and preaching which “comforts the afflicted”, but there is at least as much need for preaching which “afflicts the comfortable”. “Faithful are the wounds of a friend” (Prov. 27: 6), and “It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Thy statutes” (Ps. 119: 71). The Bible gives us balance, and our preaching should reflect that balance however difficult it is to achieve.

In churches with a hierarchical structure, like the Church of Uganda, the silencing may come from the top down to the bottom—from bishop to lay reader. Bold, evangelical preaching calling for repentance can be very unpopular with the masses, and if enough members of a congregation get enough of it and publish their displeasure to the bishop, archdeacon, or other leaders, the pastor may find himself being moved unexpectedly to another parish. A pastor or lay reader has to decide whether he will be the slave of Christ or the slave of men, for these are the only two options—“For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ” (Gal. 1: 10). The passage does not in any way teach us to be unkind or arrogant with the truth (a temptation we often face), but it does teach us that if God has called us to preach, we dare not withhold anything God would wish to say through us which would be beneficial to the congregation—even if it may be offensive. (The best way to do this, however, is to preach through the text of whole books of the Bible rather than selecting texts, thus attracting the accusation of “riding hobby horses”—i.e. picking texts which suit your personal preferences.)

(2) Secondly, throughout the history of the church, those preachers who have derived only part of their living or none of it from the church have often been most instrumental in blessing the people of God and preserving the church from extinction. This does not mean that an unpaid ministry should be the norm—far from it. Being paid for ministry is the right of anyone who labors in the word of God (1 Tim. 5: 17-18; Gal. 6: 6; 1 Cor. 9: 3-14), and it is a reproach to any church which does not

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<sup>86</sup> Perhaps not as a professional, paid prostitute, but as one who is repeatedly raped by foreign soldiers

shelter its pastor from the worry of financial concerns (Gal. 6: 7-8). Nevertheless, paid pastors—especially well-paid ones—often succumb to the temptation of “walking on eggshells” around their flocks for fear of offending anyone, especially influential members, and losing their jobs as a consequence. And while it is good not to be unnecessarily offensive from the pulpit or in private conversation, pastors are often too cautious to be any good to their congregations who desperately need correction from the word of God. While bi-vocational ministry (having two incomes, one from the church and another from a separate job) is difficult, it does free the pastor from the worldly financial concerns which often shut their mouths in the pulpit.

It is clear from this passage and from the example of Paul that being paid is not a requirement for being called as a pastor. Our calling is from God, not from man—if indeed we are called at all—and our obligation rests in God alone. If we are faithful to this calling and represent His interests, He will see to it that we and our families are cared for (2 Kings 4).

(3) It is abundantly clear from the text that Amos’ preaching is relevant not only to the common man but to the *leaders* of the nation—king, religious leaders, judges, and all alike. He spared no one. Moreover, the rich and powerful received the brunt (hardest part) of his accusations. Could it be that corruption in high places (namely, the government) in any country exists partially because preaching has been primarily directed only to the common man and not to leaders? Do preachers lack the courage to condemn political and economic abuses of governmental offices particularly if government officials come often to their services? Wealth and power can be very intimidating as well as seductive. On the African continent, is it possible that corruption is widespread because for over a century the preaching in Africa has primarily consisted in the simple gospel message of believing in Christ and going to heaven *without the requirement of repentance*? It is clear from *Amos* that God was not interested in giving Israel *pardon* from sin unless they were willing to *turn* from sin (**5: 14-15, 24**). The message of repentance is the only message our Lord authorized to be preached to *all* the nations (Lk. 24: 47).

## *Chapter 8*

### *Verses 1-3*

God continues to speak to Amos in visions throughout the remainder of the prophecy. The vision in *chapter 8* is the vision of summer fruit. As summer fruit is ripe for eating, so Israel is ripe for destruction.<sup>87</sup> Henry has noted that the Hebrew words “summer fruit” (*qayits*) and “end” (*qets*) are almost identical, thus creating a play on words.<sup>88</sup> The warning of **7: 8** reoccurs in **v. 2**, “I will spare them no longer.” In **v. 3** he accentuates his vivid description of carnage and bloodshed which he uses in **6: 10**. In that chapter, the uncle is able to bury his brother’s or sister’s family, but as the massacre continues there will be too few survivors to give victims a decent burial at all. The dead bodies will be thrown into mass graves in silence without the normal tradition of loud lamentations and mourning for fear of provoking the enemy. The king’s palace, normally a place of comfort, culture, and festivities will instead be a place where the court singers are reduced to mourning.

### *Verses 4-6*

Amos once again turns his attention to the rich and powerful, particularly businessmen who maximize their profits through dishonest means. It was against the law to conduct business on the

<sup>87</sup> Calvin and Matthew Henry

<sup>88</sup> Henry

Sabbath or the New Moon; therefore, those who were greedy for gain impatiently waited for the worship of God to be over—much like businessmen in our day who attend church worship, but while the service is being conducted they are thinking of more ways to make money. Moreover, the businessmen Amos has in mind are those who craftily devise ways to cheat their customers, many of whom are poor, **by making the bushel smaller and the shekel bigger**—that is, by using differing weights and measures for buying and selling, thus cheating their suppliers and their customers. Thus, they reduced the poor to such straits that they could easily be bought in their destitute condition for a little money or for a pair of sandals (see comments on **2: 6**).

### ***Verses 7-10***

Amos describes the destruction coming upon Israel as the flood which comes upon the Nile River Valley on an annual basis, but the destruction coming upon Israel will not be predictable but unexpected, like the sun going down in the middle of the day. All celebration and song will be turned to mourning and lamentation; people will put on sackcloth and will shave their heads (**baldness on every head**) as traditional signs of mourning.

### ***Verses 11-14***

The worse kind of judgment will be the famine of the word of God when God withholds the message of his prophets from the land of Israel. Amaziah the priest has said that **the land is unable to endure all his [Amos'] words (7: 10)**, but the time will come when Israel will not be able to endure the Lord's silence. As is often the case, we sometimes recognize the goodness of God only when it is taken away from us. Those in Israel who despise the word of the Lord through Amos will be the same people who hunger for some communication from God later (**v. 12**). Perhaps this prediction was fulfilled when the people were taken into Assyrian exile and longed to hear some comforting word from God's prophets in a foreign land. After its exile, the southern kingdom of Judah was blessed with Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel; but there were **no known prophets given to the northern kingdom** of Israel during the long years of exile. Later, the Judean exiles in Babylon under the regime of Cyrus were given permission to return to the Land of Palestine to rebuild the temple and were given the prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. From the time of Malachi, for 400 long years, God gave the land not a single prophet to hear his word.

Famines of food and water are terrible times when people of any age die for lack of the necessary ingredients to sustain physical life. But the greater tragedy is when people have no communication from the Lord. There are millions living today who have never heard of the hope of everlasting life in Jesus Christ. They are starving for spiritual food and don't even realize it. These will not only suffer physical death, but everlasting death in hell. "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4: 4).

## ***Chapter 9***

### ***Verse 1***

The last vision is that of the Lord standing by the altar. The Lord calls for the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem, not the false altars at Dan and Beersheba as we would expect in this context.<sup>89</sup> Amos has already prophesied against Judah earlier (**2: 4-5**), and now he clearly includes all of Israel and Judah into the same lump of dough. The temple of God stood for the kingdom of God, and as

<sup>89</sup> For a detailed defense of this position, see Keil and Delitzsch and Calvin. There were no known temple structures in Dan and Bethel (Zondervan NASB Study Bible, 1999).

long as this temple stood it was a false hope to all of Israel that their future was secure. Through this vision, Amos now takes this security away from both Israel and Judah who are trusting in their religious rituals to avoid God's judgment. If God will destroy His own temple, He will surely destroy them.

### **Verses 2-6**

There will be no place to hide from this judgment because of the nature of the one who judges (**vv. 5-6**). Whether they hide in Sheol, the heavens, the top of Mt. Carmel, the bottom of the sea, or in the nation of exile, God is omnipresent (everywhere) in judgment (**vv. 2-4**).

### **Verses 7-10**

Israel can take no comfort in being the elect nation *because they have violated covenant law*. Their status is no better than Ethiopia, Philistia, or Aramea whose people the Lord also transferred from one place to the other and delivered from destruction.<sup>90</sup> God never gave Israel a blanket promise of blessing without faith which leads to obedience (Rom. 2: 9-11). Nevertheless, He will not **totally destroy the house of Jacob**. Those who are true kernels will survive when God shakes the nations of the world. This is a reference to the judgment upon the Israelites while exiled to different nations. God will shake the nations like wheat and chaff is shaken; the true Israelite is shaken the same way as the false Israelite (the chaff). Both must suffer the pain of exile (like Daniel, Shadrack, Mesheck, and Abednego) but God will not allow the true seed of Abraham to perish with that which is false (**v. 10**).

### **V. Restoration and Blessing (9: 11-15)**

The last of Amos' prophecy is a word of hope to the remnant of Israel who trust in the Lord. O. Palmer Robertson calls attention to this section as being the only part of Amos' prophecy in which "may be found a certain hope for the nation."<sup>91</sup> God will raise up the fallen booth of David, the rightful king of Israel, and all the nations—including their arch-enemy Edom—will be incorporated into the kingdom of God.

The **fallen booth** of David is contrasted to the magnificent **house** David built for himself (2 Sam. 5: 11) as well as the kingdom God had built for him (2 Sam. 7: 11). With the failed administration of Rehoboam following Solomon's apostasy, the kingdom had been divided, with only two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, following the Davidic line. The other ten tribes were ruled by men who were not of the lineage of David, all of whom were wicked men following in greater or lesser degree the idolatry of Jeroboam I of Israel. But things would get worse for the house of David since many of the Davidic kings of Judah would also be idolaters leading the whole nation into apostasy and ruin. Materially, the kingdom of Judah enjoyed much of the former greatness of David and Solomon under King Uzziah, but when Judah is taken into captivity by Babylon, the house of David became nothing but a "booth" or "hut".<sup>92</sup> Thus, by describing David's kingdom as a **fallen booth**, Amos is predicting the destruction of the southern kingdom of Judah along with the northern kingdom of Israel. History would demonstrate that the demise of the southern kingdom would occur 135 years later.

The humiliation of David's house would not continue because of God's promise to him that he would not lack a man on the throne of Israel (1Ki. 2: 4) and that his throne and kingdom would be

<sup>90</sup> Zondervan NASB Study Bible

<sup>91</sup> Robertson, p. 156

<sup>92</sup> C. F. Keil, *Amos*, pp. 329-331

established forever (2 Sam. 7: 16). However, the kingdom of Israel never again recovered its former splendor as a material, earthly kingdom, after the exile; and the northern and southern kingdoms were never politically reunited into one nation. How can this be reconciled? Amos is speaking of a Davidic kingdom *better* than the one before<sup>93</sup> and his prophecy is similar to the Messianic promises found in Isa. 2: 1-4; 9 and 11 in which the Messiah comes as a ruler, not of the Jews only, but of the *nations*. It should be duly considered that Amos is prophesying to the northern kingdom of Israel which had not had a Davidic king for 170 years, and would never have one. Therefore, the very mention of the restoration of the Davidic kingdom implied that the two divided nations would be reunited under one king from the line of David. The only king who could fit this description is the Messiah, Himself.

But what is meant by taking **possession** of Edom (v. 12)? Edom had been condemned earlier in Amos' prophecy (1: 11), but here it is not Edom who will be possessed, but the **remnant of Edom**. Edom is mentioned in distinction to any other nation because of its peculiar blood relation to Israel and the heinousness of its hostility to Israel, hostility which is condemned by the prophet Obadiah. They had been conquered by King David but had obtained their freedom when the Davidic kingdom waned (lost strength). But now Amos is promising that the Davidic kingdom will once more take possession of Edom—one of its fiercest enemies—along with **all the other nations who are called by My name**. The clause, **who are called by My name** gives us the clue to the meaning. Amos does not imply that the revived kingdom of David will militarily conquer Edom, but that the remnant (elect) of Edom will be saved along with the *elect Gentiles* of other nations.<sup>94</sup> God had promised Abraham that he would be a father of a multitude of nations (Gen. 17: 5), and Isaiah, a contemporary of Amos, would soon prophesy that all the nations would stream to the mountain of the Lord to hear His law (Isa. 2: 2-3). In the council of Jerusalem, James interprets Peter's successful mission to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile, as the fulfillment of Amos' prophecy that God was taking **possession** of the nations by subduing their hearts through repentance and faith in the gospel (Acts 15: 13-18).<sup>95</sup>

What follows in vv. 13-15 is a description of abundant prosperity for the people of God in which the harvest will be immediately followed by planting in an ideal agricultural environment. Those who are captives will return and rebuild the ruined cities of Israel never to go into exile again. These conditions depict (present a picture of) the renewal of covenant blessings and the reversal of the covenant curses which would later become a stark reality during the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles (Deut. 27-28). On the surface, this prosperous condition may appear to be partially realized in the return of the exiled Jews in 536 B.C. However, only a remnant returned to the land, and these were from Judah. Furthermore, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD resulted in the Jews either being killed or expelled from Jerusalem for many years before they could return, thus calling into question the fulfillment of v. 15b, **And they will not again be rooted out from their land which I have given them**. In addition to these discrepancies with a post-exilic return, the return took place long before the widespread incorporation of the Gentiles into the Messianic kingdom (v. 12).<sup>96</sup> Thus, Amos' prophecy is realized—as James interprets it—in the kingdom of Christ on earth through His church; yet, the realization goes beyond the church age to the consummation of the realized kingdom of God on earth at the return of Christ. Keil offers the following comprehensive interpretation:

<sup>93</sup> Calvin, *Amos*, Lecture LXVIII, p. 407

<sup>94</sup> Keil, p. 332

<sup>95</sup> Keil, p. 332; Robertson, p. 156

<sup>96</sup> Keil, p. 335



We have not to seek for the realization of this promise in the return of Israel from its captivity to Palestine under Zerubbabel and Ezra; for ***this was no planting of Israel to dwell for ever in the land***, nor was it a setting up of the fallen hut of David. Nor have we to transfer the fulfillment to the future, and think of a time when the Jews, who have been converted to their God and Saviour Jesus Christ, will one day be led back to Palestine [according to Dispensationalism's teaching concerning the earthly reign of Christ in Jerusalem during the thousand-year Millennial kingdom]. For, as we have already observed at Joel 3: 18, Canaan and Israel are types of the kingdom of God and of the church of the Lord. The raising up of the fallen hut of David ***commenced with the coming of Christ and the founding of the Christian church*** by the apostles; and the possession of Edom and all the other nations upon whom the Lord reveals His name, took its rise in the ***reception of the Gentiles*** into the kingdom of heaven set up by Christ. The founding and building of this kingdom continue through all the ages of the Christian church, and will be completed when the fullness of the Gentiles shall one day enter into the kingdom of God, and the ***still unbelieving Israel shall have been converted to Christ***. The land which will flow with streams of divine blessing is ***not Palestine, but the domain of the Christian church, or the earth***, so far as it has received the blessings of Christianity. The people which cultivates this land is the Christian church, so far as it stands in living faith, and produces fruits of the Holy Ghost. The blessing foretold by the prophet is indeed visible at present in ***only a very small measure***, because Christendom is not yet so pervaded by the Spirit of the Lord, as that it forms a holy people of God. ***In many respects it still resembles Israel***, which the Lord will have to sift by means of judgments. This sifting will be first brought to an end through the judgment upon all nations, which will attend the second coming of Christ. ***Then will the earth become a Canaan***, where the Lord will dwell in His glorified kingdom in the midst of His sanctified people.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Keil, p. 336

## ***XI. The Prophecy of Hosea***

The second prophetic book we will examine is *Hosea*. For two reasons: First, he was a contemporary of Amos whose ministry came shortly after Amos. Second, he was ***one of only two writing prophets sent specifically to the northern Kingdom of Israel***, Amos being the other. (Micah prophesied to both kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and although there are references to the sins of Judah in Hosea, his primary focus was Israel.) The next prophets we will look at will be Isaiah and Micah because they prophesied concurrently (at the same time) to the southern kingdom of Judah. They were contemporaries (living within the same time frame) of Amos and Hosea. Notice the first verses of each prophetic book to discover the historical setting. The lists below will help. (See also *Introduction to the Old Testament*, R.K. Harrison and *Eerdman's Handbook to the Bible*. There are differences of opinion among scholars concerning the correct dating of these prophecies, and in many cases, an exact date cannot be determined.)

### ***Kings who Reigned during the Prophet's Ministry (Given in verse 1 of each Prophetic Book)***<sup>98</sup>

<u><i>Amos</i></u>	<u><i>Hosea</i></u>	<u><i>Isaiah</i></u>	<u><i>Micah</i></u>
763 B.C.	753(?)BC-722 BC	740-690 (680?) BC	739-700 BC
Uzziah—Judah	Uzziah—Judah	Uzziah—Judah	
Jeroboam II—Israel	Jotham—Judah	Jotham—Judah	Jotham—Judah
	Ahaz—Judah	Ahaz—Judah	Ahaz—Judah
	Hezekiah—Judah	Hezekiah—Judah	Hezekiah—Judah
	Jeroboam II—Israel	(See below for	(See below for
	(See below for others)	kings of Israel)	kings of Israel)

***Amos***—Since King Uzziah (or Azariah) became king in Judah during the 27<sup>th</sup>(?) year of Jeroboam II, Amos' ministry as a prophet may have taken place sometime after the 27<sup>th</sup> year of Jeroboam II. More likely, the ministry of Amos began much sooner. The text of 2 Kings 15: 1 is disputed and Keil estimates the enthronement of Uzziah (Azariah) in about the fifteenth year of Jeroboam I (cf. Keil, *2 Kings*). Amos prophesied when ***both*** of these two kings were on the throne; otherwise, he would have included Amaziah, father of Uzziah, in v. 1. Remember that Amos was a shepherd and farmer and not a professional prophet. Some scholars believe that his prophetic ministry was a very short one, even a few days.

***Hosea***—Notice that Hosea prophesied during the reigns of four kings of Judah and during the reign of Jeroboam II. But he must have also prophesied during the reigns of many other kings of Israel since his ministry extended into the reign of Hezekiah of Judah. Jeroboam II's reign lasted 41 years (2 Kings 14: 23); therefore Hosea's ministry began at about the end of Jeroboam II's reign in 753 B.C.<sup>99</sup> Between the reigns of Azariah (also called Uzziah) and Hezekiah of Judah were the reigns of the following kings of Israel: Zechariah (38<sup>th</sup> year of Azariah (Uzziah)—2 Kings 15: 8), Shallum (39<sup>th</sup> year of Azariah—2 Kings 15: 13), Menahem (39<sup>th</sup> year of Azariah—2 Kings 15: 17), Pekahiah (50<sup>th</sup> year of Azariah—2 Kings 15: 23), Pekah (52<sup>nd</sup> year of Azariah—

<sup>98</sup> In this brief summary, I have relied on three major commentaries on *Hosea*—John Calvin, C. F. Keil, and David Allan Hubbard, as well as the Zondervan NASB Study Bible, 1999.

<sup>99</sup> Harrison, p.860

2 Kings 15: 27), and Hoshea (20<sup>th</sup> year of Jotham, son of Azariah [or Uzziah]—2 Kings 15: 31). Hoshea was the last king of Israel when Assyria deported the last of the Israelites from their homeland (2 Kings 17: 6; 722 B.C.). Hezekiah of Judah became king in the third year of Hoshea's reign and was king of Judah when Israel went into exile. Thus, Hosea prophesied during the last year of Jeroboam II's reign (753 B.C) until Israel went into exile (722 B.C.), a period lasting about thirty years (but some scholars say much longer, even forty years or more).

This list of kings and the time of their reigns is very informative of the political turmoil that was going on during Hosea's ministry, not at all like the political stability which prevailed during Amos' short ministry. Jeroboam II reigned 41 years (2 Kings 14: 23); his son Zechariah reigned six months and was assassinated by Shallum (2 Kings 15: 8-10); Shallum reigned one month and was assassinated by Menahem (15: 13-14); Menahem reigned 10 years (15: 17), died a natural death and was succeeded by his son Pekahiah (15: 22); Pekahiah reigned two years and was assassinated by Pekah his chief army officer (15: 25); Pekah reigned 20 years and was assassinated by Hoshea (15: 30). In a space of time less than the reign of Jeroboam II, Israel experienced six kings and four assassinations. While Israel believed it was secure during the long, prosperous reign of Jeroboam II, they did not realize what unsettling times lay ahead.

**Isaiah**—His ministry also extended from the time of Uzziah into the reign of Hezekiah of Judah (1: 1). From Isa. 6: 1 and 8 we learn that Isaiah received his commissioning as a prophet in the year of Uzziah's death which was about 740 B.C.<sup>100</sup> From 2 Kings 15: 32 we learn that Jotham became king in Judah in the second year of Pekah; thus, Isaiah was prophesying during the reigns of Pekah and Hoshea of Israel.

**Micah**—This prophet served concurrently with Isaiah except that his ministry did not start until Jotham of Judah took the throne. He was not only a prophet to Judah but also to Israel as is noted in Micah 1: 1 (“which he saw concerning Samaria and Israel”).

### ***I. Yahweh's Unfaithful Wife (1: 2—3:5)***

#### ***Chapter 1***

##### ***Verse 2***

Hosea is a very puzzling book simply because of this unusual command of God. Some commentators have even considered the book non-historical and only symbolical because of this command. However, if the book is not historical, it loses its dramatic effect upon the Jewish audience to whom it is addressed. Besides, we do not escape the confusion even if the book is only allegorical. Hosea was commanded by God to marry a prostitute. Whether actual or symbolic, the command stands. Most evangelical scholars do not question its historicity. Notice also that **v. 2** can be interpreted in two ways. Hosea is told to take a wife of harlotry, but it is not said that Gomer was actually a practicing harlot at the time he married her. She possibly became a harlot afterwards. Nevertheless, it was God's intention for him to marry someone who would become repeatedly unfaithful in order to highlight the unfaithfulness of Israel; and Hosea likely chose a woman of dubious character and reputation to accomplish the Lord's intention.

<sup>100</sup> Eerdman's Handbook to the Bible, p. 376

**Verse 3-4**

The first child is not a child of harlotry but is Hosea's son. He is named Jezreel for the reason that God will punish the house of Jehu for the slaughter he committed at Jezreel when he had 70 sons of Ahab put to death by Jehu's conspiracy (2 Kings 9-10). You will notice from 2 Kings 9: 1-7 that Jehu was anointed by one of the sons of the prophets sent by Elisha to punish the house of Ahab for the blood of the prophets shed by Jezebel. This is another one of those interesting cases in which God judges the person for carrying out the orders God had given him. Why should God judge someone for doing what he ordained for him to do? "Why does [God] still find fault? For who resists his will?" (Rom. 9: 19) In the case of Jehu, the slaughter he organized was not in the interest of fulfilling the will of God **to the glory of God**, but in the selfish interest of consolidating his personal kingdom. Although Jehu eradicated Baal worship from Israel, he continued to walk in the sins of Jeroboam I by supporting the calf worship instituted by Jeroboam I (2 Kings 10). By failing to go all the way with the Lord in obedience, he proved that the slaughter of Ahab's house was for his own selfish purposes and not for the Lord.<sup>101</sup>

**Verses 5-11**

The second child is a daughter named **Lo-ruhamah (she has not obtained compassion)**, to symbolize that God will no longer have compassion on Israel. This prophecy was not credible (believable) to the people, for at the beginning of his prophecy, Jeroboam II was still on the throne with undisputable military and economic success; and even toward the end of his prophecy some 30 to 40 years later, the people of Israel thought Hosea was a fool (9: 7).<sup>102</sup> He will have compassion on Judah, at least for now, but 150 years later they will fall as well. Verse 7 may be a reference to the 185, 000 Assyrians put to death by the angel of the Lord in response to Hezekiah's prayer (2 Ki. 19). The third child, a son, is named **Lo-ammi (for you are not my people)**. Therefore, the second and third children are illegitimate, born of whoredom.

In spite of the fact that God is rejecting his covenant *people*, he will not renounce his *covenant*. There will be a restoration of his people, both of Judah and Israel in which they will have a common ruler. The main question is: ***When did this restoration take place?*** Some would interpret the fulfillment during the return of the exiles in the days of Zerubbabel the governor of Judah and Jehozadak, the priest, in 538 B.C. under the orders and protection of Cyrus. John Murray applies the verse strictly to Israel, but also says that Paul applies it to the influx of elect Gentiles in Rom. 9: 25-26. In the same way that the Gentiles were not the people of God in the Old Covenant they shall be called the sons of God in the New Covenant. ***The restoration of fallen Israel was a type of which the calling of the Gentiles into favor is the antitype.***<sup>103</sup> Calvin, Henry, and Keil, on the other hand, apply the passage in *Hosea* to the calling of both elect Jews and Gentiles into the church and not to the restoration of Israel as a nation<sup>104</sup>. Just because God has cast off his people does not imply that his covenant promise has fallen to the ground. God never intended to save the whole physical nation.

But *it is* not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel" (Rom. 9: 6).

<sup>101</sup> Calvin, *Hosea*, pp. 49-52

<sup>102</sup> See notes on *Amos* who also prophesied during Jeroboam's reign

<sup>103</sup> Murray, *Romans*, Vol. 2, p. 38

<sup>104</sup> Calvin, *Hosea*, p. 64; Henry, *Hosea*, p. 1123; Keil, *Hosea*, p. 49

This last interpretation is supported by the reference in **v. 11** to the **one leader** who would only be poorly represented in Zerubbabel (see *Haggai*) but abundantly fulfilled in Christ. Also, the number of Israelites returning to Jerusalem in 539 B.C. was relatively few (see *Ezra*), not corresponding to **the sand of the sea which cannot be measured or numbered**.

## Chapter 2

### Verse 1

The promise which begins in **v. 10** does not conclude in **v. 11** but actually continues in **chapter 2: 1**. Notice that the “Lo” (which in Hebrew means “not”) is removed in **v. 1** so that the names of the children are read “my people” and “she will have compassion”, just the opposite of the names given in **vv. 6** and **9**. This is **a reversal of God’s rejection**. Yahweh’s stubborn determination to bless His people is vividly demonstrated in Hosea’s marriage to an unfaithful woman. Gomer has forfeited her right to be Hosea’s wife and receive his benefits and affections; and by law she is worthy of death (Lev. 20: 10). Yet, the people of Israel watch in amazement (possibly amusement) as Hosea stubbornly pursues this unfaithful wife and brings her back home. By all appearances, his actions appear foolish, but the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men (1 Cor. 1: 8-25).<sup>105</sup> By virtue of their unbelief the northern kingdom of Israel has forfeited its right to be the people of God and receive His compassion and covenant blessings. The curses of the Mosaic Covenant were now operative (effective) in the corporate punishment of the nation soon to be demonstrated in the Assyrian exile.

Yet, God still loves His unfaithful nation even as Hosea loves Gomer, and one day Israel will once more be called the people of God (**Ammi**) and receive His covenant mercies (**ruhamah**) (**2: 1**). Thus, at the very beginning of Hosea’s prophecy of judgment, there is also hope for the future. The nation will not be permanently uprooted and rejected, but will return to covenant favor at an undisclosed time in the future. But **when** does the return to favor occur? Commenting on the fulfillment of this prophecy, C. F. Keil remarks,

So far as the fulfillment of this prophecy is concerned, the fact that the patriarchal promise of the innumerable multiplication of Israel is to be realized through the pardon and restoration of Israel, as the nation of the living God, shows clearly enough that we are not to look for this in the return of the ten tribes from captivity to Palestine, their native land. Even apart from the fact, that the historical books of the Bible (*Ezra*, *Nehemiah*, and *Esther*) simply mention the return of a portion of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, along with the priests and Levites, under Zerubbabel and Ezra, and that the numbers of the ten tribes, who may have attached themselves to the Judaeans on their return, or who returned to Galilee afterwards as years rolled by, formed by a **very small fraction** of the number that had been carried away...; the attachment of these few could not properly be called a union of the sons of Israel and of the sons of Judah, and still less was it a fulfillment of the words, “They appoint themselves one head.” As the union of Israel with Judah is to be effected through their gathering together under one head, under Jehovah their God and under David their king, this fulfillment falls within the Messianic times, which furnish a pledge of their complete fulfillment in the last times, when the **hardening of Israel will cease, and all Israel be converted to Christ** (Rom. 11: 25, 26).<sup>106</sup>

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Michael Card’s *Gomer’s Song* concerning Hosea’s prophecy

<sup>106</sup> Keil, *Hosea*, pp. 48-49; emphasis mine

Hubbard argues for a four-stage fulfillment.<sup>107</sup> The *first stage* of fulfillment takes place in the *return from exile* beginning in 539 B.C. with the decree of Cyrus and continuing for almost a hundred years until the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. That this post-exilic return is not a complete fulfillment of Hosea's prophecy in **1: 10—2: 1** is evident from the lack of a royal leader (**v. 11**) and the lack of numerical expansion found in v. 10. Such a description of the expanse of Israel is not fulfilled in the relatively small numbers which returned from Babylon in 536 BC, only about 50,000 Jews (Ezra 2: 64-65). Even the post-exilic prophets Malachi, Zechariah, and Haggai speak of better days in the future when the promises of renewed prosperity and restoration will occur (Haggai 2: 6-9; Zech. 14; Mal. 4).

The *second stage* of fulfillment takes place in *the birth of Christ* when believing Israelites would be united under their Messiah.

The *third stage* of fulfillment takes place in *the formation of the church*. Both in 1Peter 2: 10 and in Romans 9: 25-26 the apostles Peter and Paul use the last names of Gomer's second and third children as typical of the Gentiles who are incorporated into the church. While Peter's usage may also be applied to the Jews who were cut off for disobedience, Paul seems to limit its application to the Gentiles.<sup>108</sup> Robertson makes note of this remarkable application,

Quite striking is the apostle Paul's application of the message of Hosea to the new covenant circumstance. God has made known the riches of his mercy to a number of people, "not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles...."

But how could it be? How could Paul legitimately apply a prophecy about the restoration of Israel to encompass the inclusion of Gentiles in the current gospel era? Has Paul twisted an old covenant prophecy to suit his own ends?

Not so! The apostle's development of the significance of this old covenant prophecy illumines several factors crucial to a proper understanding of the message of the prophets. On the one hand, it indicates the radical significance of Israel's exile. *Through this judgment of the Lord, Israel actually became Lo-Ammi, just as Hosea had said....By the judgment of the exile, they were returned to the status they had held before God's calling of Abraham their father.* At the same time this application of Hosea's prophecy by Paul to the influx of the Gentiles in the present day indicates the significance of the inclusion of Gentile peoples. They have become a legitimate part of the Israel of God [cf. Gal. 6: 16]. Believing Gentiles are God's people just as much as believing Jews have been and continue to be God's people. Still further, Paul's appeal to this passage from Hosea indicates the precise time of Israel's restoration. Their return is not to be viewed as though it were some movement that will occur among ethnic descendants of Abraham in the distant future [but see comments below]. Instead, this restoration of Israel already is occurring as Jews and Gentiles together are reconciled to God by the working of his grace.

So although the prophecy of Hosea arises out of a concrete circumstance in the past history of the nation of Israel, it speaks directly to the redemptive events of the present day. Jew and Gentile together are being formed into the new covenant people of God, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Hosea.<sup>109</sup>

The *fourth stage* of fulfillment is *the return of Christ*. Hubbard seems to include the **grafting in again** (Rom. 11: 23) of the Jews as part of Christ's return.<sup>110</sup> This brings up an interesting

<sup>107</sup> David Allan Hubbard, *Hosea*, pp. 70-71

<sup>108</sup> McNeill, *1 Peter*

<sup>109</sup> Robertson, pp. 153-154; emphasis and words in brackets mine

<sup>110</sup> Hubbard, p. 71

question which is introduced in the last part of the quotation of Keil above, and briefly noted by Robertson. The promise of 1: 10—2: 1 may, in *part*, be fulfilled in the *re-incorporation of national Israel* into the olive tree of God's people presented in Romans 11: 1-32. Time will not permit an explanation of this passage, but the weight of the evidence suggests that there will be a spiritual revival among the national Jews in which the overwhelming majority of the ethnic nation turns in faith to their Messiah.<sup>111</sup> In Hubbard's words,

Paul seems to say that, though the bright promises of Israel's future can be broadened to embrace Gentiles within the church, the formation of the church *does not exhaust* these promises. Something will be left over as an experience of redemption for the original covenant people.<sup>112</sup>

## Chapter 2

### Verses 2-13

Hosea contends with Gomer as a picture of God contending with Israel. He speaks to the children to reason with their mother to put away her adultery. If not, he will send her away with nothing (**strip her naked** as she was when she was born as a nation in the land of Egypt when she had nothing), along with her children of harlotry (**v. 4**). Israel's lovers are her false gods, particularly Baal, the fertility god they perceived as the source of all earthly good. They believed that Baal had given them all the blessings of food and drink that Yahweh alone had given them (**vv. 5-8**).

The same kind of spiritual adultery takes place when professing Christians resort to African traditional religion to make their crops grow. If God fails to give them the success they want, they resort to other so-called gods or spirits. Western Christians may resort to dishonest business tactics to get what they want—the false gods of wealth and power which promise happiness and satisfaction. Either way, the Christian faith becomes syncretistic—mixed with false religion.

### Verses 14-23

God is gracious and compassionate and will not forsake his idolatrous nation forever—a very strong statement of restoration which follows the one in **1: 10—2: 1**. As to its fulfillment, Keil contends that it is fulfilled, not in restored Israel, but in the church. He applies the same fulfillment here as in **1: 10—2: 1**.<sup>113</sup> Following the destruction of Israel in 587 B.C., there has been *no period* of the history of the northern Kingdom which can honestly compare with the words of consolation and encouragement found here. This is not to say that these words were not meant for the *faithful remnant* of Israel who otherwise would have found the exile an unbearable punishment borne for the sins of others. They, like faithful Abraham, were not seeking a complete fulfillment of their longings in a physical country, but were **looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God** (Heb. 11: 10). Their faith in spiritual rather than physical fulfillments of prophetic promises is the only way we can explain how these promises could be genuine promises to people who never actually experienced them in their life-time. In this sense, the restoration promises of the prophets, one of which is found here, are similar to the promises to Christians of eternal life and the restoration of all things in Christ (e.g. Eph. 1: 18; Rom. 8: 18-25). They are genuine promises which will one day be

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<sup>111</sup> John Murray, *Romans*

<sup>112</sup> Hubbard, p. 71; emphasis mine

<sup>113</sup> Keil, p. 66)

realized in the lives of all believers living before and after the first coming of Christ. As such they give us true comfort, as well, knowing that we will experience these promises in the life to come, although we will most likely not be living when Christ returns.

### *Chapter 3*

Gomer's condition had degenerated to such a terrible state that she had been sold into slavery. A male or female slave was worth 30 shekels of silver (Ex. 21: 32). Hosea purchases Gomer for half the price in silver plus the other half in produce. But notice that in Hosea's action toward Gomer, the love of God toward wayward Israel is highlighted—**Go again, love a woman who is loved by her husband.** Israel is still loved by God, her husband. Yet Israel loves things like raisin cakes which were offered to Baal as a thanksgiving for the harvest.

Gomer was bought and returned to Hosea's house. How should we interpret the words, **nor shall you have a man?** This phrase may be parallel with **You shall not play the harlot**, but in context with v. 4, **For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince**, it may mean that Hosea would not have sexual relations with Gomer for some time. As his relationship with Gomer had been broken by infidelity, so God's relationship with Israel had been broken by infidelity. They will be without king and prince and without ritual worship. This is fulfilled in the time of their *exile* when their king is taken captive by foreign powers and their temples demolished. This broken relationship continued until they received God's favor in the return from exile and in the appearance of their Davidic king in the person of Christ. The four-fold stage of fulfillment presented by Hubbard would apply to this prophecy as well. Many in Israel came **trembling to the Lord and to His goodness in the last days** as they repented of their sins during the ministry of Christ, but especially at the preaching of Peter on the Day of Pentecost.<sup>114</sup>

Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the LORD and to His goodness in the last days. (Hosea 3:5 NASB)

The reference to David is symbolic since David represented the rightful line of Israelite kings, none of whom reigned in Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom. Hosea foresees a day when Israel will submit to a Davidic king as a symbol of their spiritual restoration. But v. 5 brings up perplexing questions which are not so easily answered. The southern kingdom of Judah returned from exile in Babylon in 536 BC after the decree of Cyrus, but when was the northern kingdom of Israel ever restored to the land of promise? There is no record of such, since the list of people returning are from Judah. Robertson maintains that the ten "lost tribes" of Israel were just that, *lost*. That is, they were *fully assimilated* into the Gentile nations. The Assyrians dislocated conquered nations from their homeland, thus facilitating the biological decimation of hostile nations through intermarriage with other peoples. Over time, the northern ten tribes ceased to be full-blooded Israelites. Nevertheless, in a very indirect way, the northern kingdom is restored to favor along with other Gentile nations who were once considered "not-my-people" but who are now the people of God through faith in Christ. Therefore, the northern tribe "became in effect Gentiles" who were later reclaimed in company with other Gentiles. Thus, Hosea 2: 23 and 3: 5 are fulfilled in the manner Paul reveals in Romans 9: 25-26.<sup>115</sup>

<sup>114</sup>For "last days", see your exhaustive concordance. It is a phrase used often in the prophets.

<sup>115</sup> Robertson, *Christ of the Prophets*, pp. 198- 200



## Chapter 4

This chapter primarily highlights the moral and spiritual failing of the general inhabitants of the land. Later in **chapter 5** he pinpoints the errors of the priests and king. The primary problem is that there is no knowledge of God, particularly his law. **Verses 1-2** are references to particular commandments found in the **Ten Commandments**. In **v. 2**, the deception, murder, violence, bloodshed, theft, and adultery are rampant in the whole society, but may also refer to the political intrigue taking place in the palace courts. In a relatively short period of time, four out of six kings had been assassinated. One political coup (overthrow) followed another. The ungodly kings coming into power were true representatives of the ungodly population as a whole. It is not unfair to say that political leaders usually **duplicate** the sins of the whole population. But we must not limit these sins to the leaders. They were sins characteristic of the whole society, both leader and common man alike.

**Verse 4** indicates that reproof was useless. They were like those who challenged the verdicts of the priests who acted as judges of the people (cf. Deut. 17: 12-13). When the priest's verdict was despised and not heeded, the despiser was punished with death. So it will be for the people of Israel who despise the judgment of God—they will be destroyed. The people and their false prophets are destroyed for lack of knowledge—a reference to the spiritual and literal destruction of the people (**v. 6**). Spiritually they are already destroyed, and this spiritual destruction will be followed by their literal destruction at the hands of Assyria in Hosea's lifetime. Man is created body and soul, and if he suffers spiritually this will inevitably result in physical suffering. Thus, all suffering in this life is, in the final analysis, the result of spiritual degeneration. That is, we either suffer for our own sins or the sins of others. Whole cultures have disappeared from the face of the earth due to sinfulness. Destruction can take place due to subjugation by other nations as in the case of the Aztec Indians in South America—who practiced human sacrifice—by Spanish conquerors. Destruction may also take place as the result of natural disasters—earthquakes, volcanic eruptions—as in the case of Sodom, Gomorrah and Pompey, all of which were totally annihilated by pyroclastic blasts of super-heated gases containing rock fragments from volcanic eruptions. Whether by other nations, natural disasters, famines, etc. all destruction takes place at the hands of a sovereign God offended by idolatry and immorality.

In Israel's case the **spiritual adultery** of worshiping other gods took **literal** form. The temple prostitutes of Baal worship were available to the men for the purpose of reenacting the sexual relationship of Baal with his consort (wife) Anath. Thus, the pagan worship of the Israelites included having sex with prostitutes. Dale Ralph Davis explains the religion of Baal in more graphic detail.

In Canaanite theology (and agriculture) the fertility of the land depended upon the sexual relationship between Baal and his consort. The revival of nature was due to sexual intercourse between Baal and his partner. But the Canaanite faithful didn't simply sit back and say, "Let Baal do it." There was no "let-go-and-let-Baal" thinking among them. Instead their watchword was: Serve Baal with gladness, all ye glands. Hence the Canaanites practiced "sacred" prostitution as a part of their worship. A Canaanite man, for instance, would go to a Baal shrine and have intercourse with one of the sacred prostitutes serving there. The man would fulfill Baal's role and the woman Ashtart's [or Anath]. The idea was that the copulating of the worshiper and of the holy whore would encourage the divine couple (Mr. and Mrs./ Ms. Baal) to do their thing and thus the rain, grain, wine, and oil would flow again. Through sacred prostitution it was possible to assist, encourage, and bring on the great orgasm

of Baal in the sky, thus Baal would make “all things new.” However, nothing would happen unless the fertility powers were properly worshiped. (Here, incidentally, is the great divide between paganism and biblical faith; in paganism the gods must be coerced rather than trusted; see Matt. 6: 7-8).<sup>116</sup>

Baal worship required a continuous supply of women to fill the ranks of sacred prostitutes, including Israelite daughters and future Israelite brides (v. 13). But when these daughters later committed harlotry, or when brides later committed adultery, in the traditional sense (i.e. not in association with Baal worship), God would ignore the self-righteous insistence of their fathers or husbands to punish them according to OT Law. Why? Because the fathers and husbands had committed adultery repeatedly through sexual intercourse with temple prostitutes (v. 14). Generally there is a double standard in every culture—Western, Asian, African, or any other—that men should be allowed more moral license than women. Men think they can go whoring anytime they please with impunity (freedom from consequences), but their women must abide by a much higher standard of sexual purity. God does not accept the hypocrisy of a double standard.

### Chapter 5

Now Hosea specifically attacks the civil and religious leaders of the people. A higher social, religious, or political position renders one *more responsible* for his sin (Lk. 12: 48). If the people as a nation were perishing for lack of the knowledge of God, it stands to reason that the priests were derelict (negligent) in their duties to instruct the people in the law of God. The king was also derelict for he was supposed to set the example of a shepherd who ruled the people in the fear of God (2 Sam. 23: 3-4). It should be kept in mind, however, that Hosea is not addressing priests and kings who were appointed from the legitimate lines of Levi and David. Since the northern kingdom had long departed from the legitimate kingship of David’s descendants, it would be unnecessary to assume that they were more scrupulous (morally careful) in their selection of priests, especially when the idolatries of Baal worship and the bull cult of Jeroboam I prevailed. Nevertheless, if men presume to fill such exalted religious and political positions, they will be forced to carry the burden of this responsibility whether they are legitimate leaders or not.

Ephraim, the chief tribe of Israel, and Judah, the chief tribe of the southern kingdom, are singled out as representatives of both kingdoms. **Verse 8** indicates that invaders are imminent (soon to come). Both nations had depended upon other nations to deliver them from trouble. Ephraim appealed to Assyria (to no avail since Assyria finally destroyed them) and to Egypt who fell to Assyria (**7: 11**). This appeal for help from other nations is important since it highlights the habit of many nations who need help to make an appeal for foreign aid from other countries rather than dealing with the internal moral and spiritual problems within the nation. Many African nations including Uganda have been forgiven of its debts by the G-8 Summit of nations, but the governments of these forgiven nations refuse to deal seriously with internal corruption. It is assumed that foreign aid solves everything, but it doesn’t.<sup>117</sup> International aid simply defers, side-tracts, or sabotages effective solutions which are not external, but moral and internal. Thus,

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<sup>116</sup> Davis, *Judges—Such a Great Salvation*, pp. 32-33; words in brackets mine

<sup>117</sup> See Dambisa Moyo, *Dead Aid*

rather than repenting and seeking God's help, solutions are sought from other quarters which are short-sighted and impermanent.

### Chapter 6

The proper appeal should be to God alone who has the power to wound and to heal. The appeal in **vv. 1-3** (stated as if it were coming from the people) is only a shallow call to repentance not grounded upon a genuine desire to change. It is like Saul's false "repentance" which desires instant results and a return to the status quo (compare **v. 6** with 1 Sam. 15: 22). Israel's loyalty to God is fleeting—like a morning cloud that soon vanishes in the sun or the dew which soon evaporates. She expects instant results and a return to God's favor without a genuine change of heart and renunciation of idol worship.<sup>118</sup> Through the messages of His prophets, God has cut Israel to pieces by the words of his mouth (the **sword of the Spirit**). It is not religious ritual that he desires but the spiritual reality behind the ritual—loyalty, knowledge of God, faithfulness to the covenant (**vv. 5-7**; see Amos 5: 21-24). Even the false priests (not from the tribe of Levi) lie in wait for travelers to rob and to kill if they meet with resistance. This could be a reference to a specific event<sup>119</sup> but since these priests could have been selected from the dregs of society (most worthless members),<sup>120</sup> it is not unbelievable that they would use their religious positions as an advantage for murder and theft on a regular basis.

### Chapter 7

This chapter is a continuation of the general condition of the people. Notice how the king and princes are pleased with the sins of the people (**v. 3**). They are emboldened (encouraged) to further sinfulness because they will not be held accountable by the people. It works both ways—the people will be emboldened by the corruption of their leaders to become more corrupt themselves.

And this place ought to be carefully noticed: for it often happens that some vice creeps in, which proceeds from one man or from a few; but when all readily embrace what a few introduce, it is quite evident that they have no living root of piety or of the fear of God. They then who are so prone to adopt vices were before hypocrites; and we daily find this to be the case. When pious men have the government of a city, and act prudently, then the whole people will give some hope that they will fear the Lord; and when any king, influenced by a desire of advancing the glory of God, endeavours to preserve all his subjects in the pure worship of God, then the same feeling of piety will be seen in all: but when an ungodly man succeeds him, the greater part will immediately fall back again; and when a magistrate neglects his duty, the greater portion of the people will break out into open impiety. I wish there were no proof of these things; but throughout the world the Lord has designed that there should exist examples of them.<sup>121</sup>

A reference to the multiple assassinations (four kings in 20 years) in the nation is made in **v. 7**, "All their kings have fallen." Through all of their rebellion, God would still **redeem them (v. 13)**, but the whole nation is deceitful. They cry to the Lord not from the heart, but just for the sake of receiving his material blessings, the grain and new wine (**v. 14**). The "cake not turned"

<sup>118</sup> Zondervan NASB Study Bible, 1999

<sup>119</sup> Zondervan NASB Study Bible

<sup>120</sup> Keil, *Hosea*, p. 102

<sup>121</sup> (Calvin, *Hosea*, Lecture XVIII, p. 247)

(v. 8) may be a reference to foreign policy decisions which have not been thoroughly examined.<sup>122</sup>

### Chapter 8

Another reference to the covenant is found in v. 1. Israel is a covenant breaker defined as one who has **rebelled against My law**. As a covenant breaker, she has no right to the benefits of the covenant, but only its curse. Notice in v. 4 that the kings of Israel that have reigned were not chosen by the Lord. None were from the line of David; and, therefore, none were legitimate. The **calf** mentioned in v. 5 is a reference to the calf worship established by Jeroboam I which was still practiced when Jeroboam II was in power and beyond. Sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind is a reference to foolish foreign policy decisions (also vv. 9-10). They had sought the help of Assyria against other nations, but Assyria later turned on them. Even as Hosea speaks, much of the nation (with the exception of Ephraim) had been reduced to the status of a vassal paying tribute money to Assyria. They had been **swallowed up** by the nations (v. 8). Although Hosea is sent primarily to Israel, he predicts not only the fall of Israel but the fall of Judah (v. 14).

### Chapter 9

The chapter begins with the summary statement of God's case against Israel. Like Hosea's wife, Gomer, Israel is a whore who forsakes her husband and goes after other lovers (v. 1)—namely, other gods and other nations. During the harvest season, men would sleep at the threshing floor to protect the grain from theft. They stayed there 24 hours a day until the grain was fully threshed and gathered into bins. Prostitutes would come frequently to the threshing floors where they knew there would be a large number of customers.<sup>123</sup>

Because of his predictions of destruction, Hosea is considered a fool by the inhabitants of Israel (v.7), but the exile of Samaria (mentioned six times in *Hosea*) by Assyria is a certainty even though Samaria is strongly fortified and strategically placed. The return to Egypt (v. 3) is a reference to their former slavery in Egypt. Just as they were once slaves in Egypt, they will be slaves in Assyria. The depravity of Ephraim is likened to the infamous debauchery of Gibeah recorded in Judges 19—21 in which a Levite's concubine was gang-raped in Gibeah and her body cut in pieces and sent throughout the territory of Israel (v. 9). (For Beth-Peor, see Numbers 25.)

Gilgal (v. 15) was the place where Saul was chosen as king (1 Sam. 11: 15) and also where he rejected Samuel's prophetic leadership (1 Sam. 13: 8-9). It was likewise the place where Saul failed to follow the Lord's command to completely wipe out Agag and the Amalekites. Putting all this together, **Gilgal symbolizes Israel's rejection of Yahweh as king** over His people and their lust for a king like themselves (Saul) who rebels against Yahweh and attempts to establish his own kingdom. For this reason God says that he came to **hate them there** [at Gilgal]. The entire history of the kings of Israel, not one of which was a godly king, illustrates the fact that the northern kingdom of Israel had rejected God's kingship (See also **13: 10-11**). Hosea says earlier, **They have set up kings, but not by me (8: 4)**. It is difficult to estimate the devastating effect of

<sup>122</sup> Zondervan NASB Study Bible

<sup>123</sup> ZNASB Study Bible

ungodly rulers over a nation. This is especially true when the nation is a theocracy (or is supposed to be) under Yahweh. Ungodly rulers make life difficult for the godly. Even leaders like Jeroboam II, who led Israel into economic prosperity, failed to help the poor. The gap between rich and poor actually grew during his reign (See comments on *Amos*). This is what happens in many less-developed nations in which the rich are growing richer and the poor are becoming poorer. The poor have no political voice, and the small middle class prospers primarily on the basis of its allegiance to the existing political power.<sup>124</sup>

### **Chapter 10**

As riches often do, the wealth of Israel has actually driven it farther from God (**v. 1**). They had also trusted in the calf-worship instituted and continued from the time of Jeroboam I 200 years earlier, but their altars would be torn down and their king, whom God did not choose, would be worthless to them. The calf idol itself will be taken to Assyria as a spoil of war (**vv. 2-8**). Everything, including the altars, will be torn to the ground and the people will call for the mountains and hills to fall of them (an OT reference which John uses to describe the terrible coming of the Lord upon the wicked at the last day—Rev. 6: 16).

As a cow trained to serve its master in threshing the grain and allowed to eat while threshing (Deut. 25: 4), Ephraim (as representative of Israel) had been allowed by God to eat the fruit of the ground. But happy days were now in the past and a heavy yoke will now be placed on her neck, a yoke of hard labor and bondage (**v. 11**).

A call to repentance comes in **vv. 12-13**. Thus far they had sown unrighteousness and reaped the fruit of lies and injustice. The fallow ground (uncultivated land) should now be plowed with a view to sowing righteousness and justice and allowing the rain of God's righteousness to soak in. No longer should they trust in their large armies (**v. 13**).

### **Chapter 11**

The heart of God yearning for his wayward people comes out forcefully in this passage. Undoubtedly the passage is influenced by Hosea's relationship with his wayward wife, Gomer. Through his sorrow Hosea, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is able to express God's sorrow concerning his people Israel.<sup>125</sup> **Verse 1** is quoted in Matthew 2: 15. Just as God protected Israel from the idolatrous influences and military might of the Canaanites by sending them to Egypt for 400 years, God protected the "new Israel", Christ, by sending him to Egypt away from Herod who sought to kill him. The difference lies in the response. Israel responded to God's love and protection by rebelling against him while Christ was pleasing to the Father in every way, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" (Matt. 3: 17).

Israel's rejection of God's prophets is mentioned in **v. 2** and parallels Israel's rejection of Christ in the days of his sojourn on earth—"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling" (Matt. 23: 37). In spite of Israel's rebellion God longs for her, **All my compassions are kindled (v. 8)**. The promise of **v. 9, I will**

<sup>124</sup> Moyo, *Dead Aid*, p. 58

<sup>125</sup> Hubbard, p. 186

**not destroy Ephraim again** does not remove God's temporal punishment of Israel, for Israel's exile, begun in 732 B.C., was complete by 722 B.C. The references of **vv. 9-11** must refer to God's restored favor to Israel during the return of the exiles, the incarnation of Christ, the church, and the consummation at the return of Christ (See the four stages of the promise mentioned above).

### *Chapter 12*

The last verse in **Chapter 11** seems better suited to **chapter 12** since there is an abrupt change from **11: 11** to **11: 12**. Israel needs to learn to trust in the Lord rather than in deceiving nations like Assyria who later betray her trust. (Notice that alliances had been made with Assyria—**covenant, v. 1**). Jacob once trusted in his own human scheming to rob his brother Esau of God's blessings until he wrestled with God (Gen. 32). In that encounter, Jacob prevailed with God in prayer and God blessed him, but as a result he limped because of the dislocation of his thigh. Through the laming of his leg Jacob was made to recognize the strength of God's power (2 Cor. 12: 10b—**For when I am weak, then I am strong**). The appropriateness of this reference to Jacob is understood from the context of Gen. 32—33. Jacob feared the revenge of his brother Esau. His cunning could not save him in this instance, for he was completely at the mercy of God; and he sought God's mercy in prayer. Israel then must imitate the example of Jacob their father by struggling with God in prayer who will then demonstrate his strength through their weakness. They must learn to rely on His strength rather than their own; in humility they must weep and seek his favor (**v. 4**).

But the history of Israel proved that they had done otherwise. Their wealth during Jeroboam's reign had given them a false sense of self-sufficiency (**v. 8**). God had blessed them with his covenant word through the prophets (**v. 10**), but the prophets had been ignored in spite of the fact that their deliverance from Egypt had been through the agency of the prophet Moses (**v. 13**). In this arrogance they had forgotten their humble origins: Jacob who had to tend sheep to earn a wife, a fugitive from his brother Esau; and Moses, a prophet but also a fugitive from Egypt who also tended sheep forty years in the wilderness. There was nothing in the history of Israel which should have produced arrogance.

### *Chapter 13*

The sins of arrogance and idolatry will be Israel's downfall. Picking up on Ps. 1, Hosea describes Israel as the chaff separated from the wheat; they will be blown away in the wind (**v. 3**). The goodness of God in the wilderness wanderings had been forgotten and the blessings bestowed by God, which should have generated gratitude, have been long forgotten. Instead, the material blessings of God had produced pride, as is often the case with those who have them (**v. 6**). God will respond by becoming their enemy—a lion or a leopard waiting for prey; a bear robbed of her cubs. The kings they trusted instead of God will not be able to save them, and God once more reminds them of the sin of Gilgal in which they demanded a human king to rule them instead of Yahweh (**vv. 9-11**).

Ephraim is like a child lingering in the womb of his mother who is laboring to give him birth. God wishes to give Ephraim a new birth, but he has no desire to be reborn (**v. 13**). There is a difference of opinion among translators as to whether the first two sentences of **v. 14** are

interrogatives (questions) or declaratives (statements of fact). The NASB (1977 and 1995) translate them as questions while the KJV, NKJV, and NIV translate them as statements. As statements they fit in better with the immediate context of the next two questions: “O Death, where are your thorns [plagues—NKJV]? O Sheol, where is your sting [destruction—NKJV]?” *Since* God will, indeed, ransom Israel from death, *then* death has no thorns and sheol no sting. This is the way the verse appears to be interpreted by Paul in 1 Cor. 15: 55-57. But how does this abrupt word of consolation and comfort fit in with the broader context of **v. 13**, the last clause of **v.14**, and **vv. 15-16** which are clearly judgmental and not restorative?

Translated as questions they fit better with this broader context. The stubbornness of Ephraim to be reborn by grace is followed by the rhetorical questions of **v. 14a** demanding a negative answer: “No, I will not ransom them from Sheol or redeem them from death.” These questions can then be justified from this context as a summons from God for Death and Sheol to do their worst:

Bring it on! Let your smiting, stinging scourges do their work. I am at my tether’s [rope’s] end. Having rejected my intent to redeem him, Ephraim can now bear the full brunt of your assault, O Death and Sheol.<sup>126</sup>

Such an interpretation does not do violence to the application of the text found in 1 Corinthians 15 since belief in the gospel reverses the situation of stubborn rebellion and unbelief found in Ephraim.

When summoned now, they [Death and Sheol] come not as marauders to terrorize but as vanquished enemies to be mocked.<sup>127</sup> This appears to be the most plausible interpretation which demands the interrogatives of **v. 14a** and the translation of the NASB. The interrogative form fits in much better with the context of continual judgment in **chapter 13**. Death and Sheol coming as invaders to punish Israel flows with the context of little Israelite children being dashed to pieces and pregnant women being ripped open (**v. 16**), terrible realities of Assyrian invasion which does not fit with the concept of redemption and ransom (**v. 14**).

### ***Chapter 14***

The word of hope and promise of restoration, only briefly mentioned in other chapters, comes to full expression in this chapter. God still loves his sinful people and desires their repentance. Had Israel repented, Samaria, at least, would have avoided exile. God would not do for his elect nation any less than he did for Nineveh. The sad reality is that they never repented, and Assyria continues to oppress them until the land is completely conquered and Israel taken into exile.

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<sup>126</sup> Hubbard, p. 222, words in brackets mine

<sup>127</sup> Hubbard, p. 223

## ***XII. The Prophecy of Jonah***

### ***Introduction***

We know the approximate date of the book from 2 Kings 14: 25. Jonah prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II; therefore, his prophecy falls within the time frame of Amos and the first part of the prophecies of Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah. Jonah's distinction as a prophet lies in the fact that he did not prophesy to Israel but to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. Like Amos, the prophetic work found in Jonah appears to be of short duration, perhaps a month or two although we don't know exactly the length of his travels in his attempted escape from the Lord's call. Scholars date the book at about 760 B.C. or about 150 years before Nineveh fell to Babylon in 612 B.C.

Assyria was a rising world power at the time Jonah wrote, but Israel's fall to Assyria was not until 732 to 722 B.C. There is no internal evidence from the book itself that Jonah could foresee the exile, but Alexander has deduced that Jonah's reluctance to preach to Nineveh was due to his foreknowledge that one day Assyria would become strong and destroy the nation. Consequently, he did not want to see God spare Nineveh, thus facilitating Israel's fall. To Jonah, it did not make sense that God would spare Assyria and destroy his own people.<sup>128</sup> Thus, Alexander argues that *Jonah* is a ***theodicy***, a defense of God's actions with respect to any people or nation. God is sovereign in judgment and mercy, and His dealings with the nations are beyond correction and reproach. No nation is deserving of His mercy, and if He wishes to show mercy on the undeserving nation of Assyria by granting them repentance and acquittal from judgment, that is His prerogative.

The Israelites reading Jonah's story later could not miss the fact that Israel ***had not deserved God's grace any more than sinful Nineveh***. Jeroboam II was king in Israel at the time Jonah prophesied, and the spiritual life of the nation was a disgrace (see *Amos*). They should have interpreted the book as a rebuke for their lack of repentance at the preaching of Amos, Hosea, and Micah. This is precisely how Jesus uses the book himself.

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You."<sup>39</sup> But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet;<sup>40</sup> for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."<sup>41</sup> "The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. (Matthew 12:38-41 NASB)

### ***Chapter 1—The Unwilling Prophet***

We need not be concerned about those who deny the factuality of this story. If we believe in an omnipotent (all-powerful) God, we will also believe that He could allow Jonah to be swallowed by a big fish and survive in its belly for three days and three nights (1: 17). Impossible? Yes, if God is ***not*** omnipotent, but quite possible if He ***is***. Does God do this sort of thing often? This is the only recorded time in history that a man was allowed to survive such an ordeal, but it

<sup>128</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, *Jonah*, pp. 89-91; see also *Habakkuk*, which has the same theme with regard to Babylon.



happened with Jonah. As the reference to Matthew 12 above indicates, Jesus believed the story was historically factual. If He was only appealing to *Jonah* as a convenient allegory about His future death, burial, and resurrection, then He also proves that His resurrection could also be interpreted *allegorically* and *non-historically*; but the Apostle Paul concluded that a non-historical (i.e. non-factual) resurrection rendered his faith and ours useless (1 Cor. 15: 14). Furthermore, Jesus told the unbelieving Jews that no sign would be given to them but the sign of Jonah. If Jonah's prophecy had been interpreted by the Jewish community only as an allegory, they would have taken the sign as no sign at all. It would have served no purpose as a genuine warning. Those parts of the O.T. most embarrassing to the modern secular mind are the ones which Jesus found the fondest and which He often quoted (Matt. 24: 37-39, the flood). It is surely curious to think that Jesus would use a fictitious story as a stern warning to those who would one day stand in judgment.

Is it possible to understand a reference like this [Matt. 12: 38-41] on the non-historic theory of the book of Jonah? The future Judge is speaking words of solemn warning to those who shall hereafter stand convicted at his bar. Intensely real he would make the scene in anticipation to them, as it was real, as if then present, to himself. And yet we are to suppose him to say that *imaginary* persons who at the *imaginary* preaching of an *imaginary* prophet repented in *imagination*, shall rise up in that day and condemn the *actual* impenitence of those his *actual* hearers.<sup>129</sup>

Jonah's experience in the belly of the fish has far-reaching theological significance both for the nation of Israel soon going into exile and as a type for the expansion of the gospel to the Gentiles.

For the disobedient prophet, being exiled from the presence of God means that he sinks to the bottom of the sea, wrapped in the cords of death. Separation from God can mean no less than the end of life. Correspondingly, restoration to God means resurrection to newness of life. This restored life means a second chance to serve the Covenant Lord, the God of Israel....Having experienced in a figure both death and resurrection, Jonah serves as God's instrument in bringing salvation to the Gentiles. In this case, the life experience of Jonah prophetically anticipates the day in which restoration will mean the worldwide expansion of God's saving activity among all the nations of the world: "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12: 40). Having experienced exile from the Father in his death, Jesus rises in restoration to commission his disciples that they go and make disciples of all the nations (Matt. 28: 18-20).<sup>130</sup>

The chapter also suggests many practical lessons. For one, God has a call upon our lives, and it is impossible to escape it without severe consequences. God will not likely send a fish to swallow you up or anything similarly sensational, but the story suggests that God will discipline you when you fail to acknowledge His sovereign purpose. We do not own our lives, and we cannot dictate to God what we are willing or not willing to do with them. If we refuse to comply with His wishes, we should not be too surprised if life becomes bumpy along the way.

Notice also from the text that since God has called Jonah to be His witness, He will accomplish His purpose with him in spite of his sinfulness. Through the storm Jonah testifies of the

<sup>129</sup> T. T. Perowne, quoted by John W. Wenham in *Inerrancy*, Norman L. Geisler, ed., p.8, emphasis and text in brackets mine).

<sup>130</sup> Robertson, pp. 160-161.

greatness of God. “I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land.” In other words, “You sailors can pray to whatever you please, but the one controlling this storm is the God that I serve who made everything.” Sometimes our most powerful witness is in spite of ourselves. We may be living in temporary rebellion, but since it is God’s purpose to reveal himself to others through His people, He will do so with either our positive testimony or our negative example. Jonah’s testimony to the greatness and universality of God came at the point of willful disobedience (**v. 9**). At least we can give Jonah credit for being concerned for the welfare of the sailors and for telling them the truth about God. Perhaps there may come a time in our lives when we must admit to others, even unbelievers, that we are under the God’s judgment for some known disobedience. This admission may be the very thing which brings them to repentance (**vv. 14-16**).

### *Chapter 2—Jonah’s Prayer of Repentance*

This is a good chapter for those under God’s judgment. When we are unsuccessful in avoiding God’s call, repentance is always a safe course to follow—provided it is sincere. God is never so far off that He *cannot* hear us, nor is He ever so displeased with us that He *will not* hear us. God delights in repentance and is never too tired of hearing prayers of true repentance. Notice, however, that repentance involves the activity of *doing* what the Lord had called him to do—“That which I have vowed I will pay.” That is, “I’ll do what you told me to do in the first place; I’ll go to Nineveh.” Ironically, he also says, “Salvation is from the Lord.” He gives thanks to God for saving *him*, the same salvation which makes him angry later when applied to the *Ninevites*. His attitude later suggests that Jonah is not yet in the same boat with God, but God accepts his prayer anyway. Our repentance does not have to be *perfect* to be accepted. There is no such thing as perfect repentance, for we are always holding on to sin in some form or another.

### *Chapter 3—Jonah’s Preaching and Nineveh’s Repentance*

The chapter is fairly straightforward. Jonah preaches the judgment of God against the city, and the king, his noblemen, and the common people repent in sackcloth and ashes. There has been much discussion about whether their repentance is genuine. Alexander claims that nothing in the text dictates the conclusion that the Ninevites became worshipers of the true God of Israel. The name of Yahweh occurs in the text in connection with the faith of the sailors (see **vv. 14-16** where “Yahweh” occurs four times), but not here. In **3: 5-10** the word **Yahweh** does not occur and only **Elohim** is used which is a more general name for God. Furthermore, the preaching of Jonah may not have had a lasting effect upon Nineveh. We know for certain that they later became a superpower returning to ruthless methods of warfare and exile.<sup>131</sup>

At the same time, we should consider the possibility that this could have been genuine repentance for a long period of time, perhaps a generation or more. Each generation must experience repentance. Just because there is much apathy toward God in Uganda today does not prove that the revival of the 1930’s was false. There is much spiritual life today in Uganda which has its foundation in the revival of the 1930’s. But a society cannot live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century on the spiritual capital of a revival occurring more than 70 years ago. In fact, society cannot thrive

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<sup>131</sup> Alexander, p. 125

spiritually on a revival which occurred even 20 years ago. Thus, the argument that the repentance of Nineveh was not real because it did not last is not a convincing argument.

Further, we must return to Jesus' analysis of Nineveh's repentance in Matthew 12: 41. Jesus claims that the men of Nineveh repented, and He uses their repentance as a rebuke to the Jews in His day who would not repent. If their repentance was not genuine, He would not have used it as a positive example. Furthermore, the men of Nineveh could not stand at the judgment and condemn the Jews for lack of repentance and faith which they never experienced themselves. Rather than speculate about the genuineness of Nineveh's repentance, would it not be better to accept it as the text presents it?

Whatever position we take, God accepted their repentance and did not destroy the city. This does not mean that God in infinite wisdom had decided to destroy the city but found that he was mistaken in His judgment. Jeremiah 18: 7-10 indicates that prophetic pronouncements can be *conditional* upon the response of those who hear it.

At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy *it*; *if* that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it. Or at another moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant *it*; *if* it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then I will think better of the good with which I had promised to bless it.”

Notice the **if**'s in the above verses. A change in course is not lack of omniscience or wisdom on God's part, but faithfulness “to his own immutable nature” to do what he has always promised to do—bless obedience and punish disobedience.<sup>132</sup>

#### ***Chapter 4—Jonah Rebuked***

God is pleased to accept Nineveh's repentance, but Jonah isn't. This is the last thing Jonah wanted, as indicated in **v. 2**. He was afraid all along that this would happen. His hypocrisy is equal to his anger. He rejoiced that God was merciful and gracious when he was in the putrid-smelling belly of a fish, but he will not rejoice when the benevolence of God is directed toward his enemies and the enemies of his people. God's grace is good when *we* receive it, but not when *our enemies* receive it!

But Jonah was not alone in this attitude, and some of the purpose of his prophecy is to expose the hypocrisy of the Jews who *should have been a light to the nations* but had failed. Instead, Israel had become the frozen chosen, a nation preoccupied with itself and careless of other nations. This should not have been their attitude since the blessing of Abraham from the beginning was intended to be a blessing to the *nations* (Gen. 12: 3), and throughout the history of Israel God had included Gentiles like Uriah the Hittite, Ruth the Moabite, and Rahab the harlot from Jericho. God is gracious not only to the Jews but to the Gentiles and desires their salvation, a fact which Jonah knew all too well (**v. 2**). Selfishly, he begs for death as a better alternative than seeing Nineveh spared (**v. 3**). It is doubtful that he is truthful in this request, either, since he was more than happy to be delivered from the fish.

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<sup>132</sup> Alexander, p. 124

God continues to be gracious to Jonah and appeals to his sense of reason by asking, **Do you have good reason to be angry?** In other words, “Think about this more carefully, Jonah. Are you angry because I am gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents of sending calamity upon people—the only reason *you* are alive?” Jonah gives no reply but goes out from the city, makes a shelter for a comfortable place to watch the city. Rather than changing *his* mind, Jonah hopes God will change *His* and destroy the city anyway (v. 5b; **until he could see what would happen in the city**).

His hypocrisy is further exposed in the incident of the plant. He is angry about God’s mercy to Nineveh but **happy about the plant (v. 6)**. Then God took it away and Jonah is pouting again. God again appeals to him, **Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?** Jonah is adamant, **I have good reason to be angry, even to death.** Not only is Jonah not thinking clearly, he is clearly ludicrous (ridiculous). He loves the plant but not the people of Nineveh, 120,000 people, including many children who are not old enough to know their right hand from their left hand (or this may be a reference to the moral “infancy” of the Ninevite culture). Jonah, as a representative of Israel, had not learned to love his enemies; but it is clear from God’s response that He was concerned for those standing outside the covenant umbrella of Israel. He was not content to save a few Uriah’s, Ruth’s, and Rahab’s, but desired the salvation of whole cities of pagans as well. God is a God of second chances.

As the Lord determined to be merciful to Jonah his disobedient servant and give him a second chance, so he may also choose to be merciful to a city of brutality such as Nineveh if its people should repent.<sup>133</sup>

But let’s face it; Jonah also reminds us of...well, *us*, the church—self-centered, egocentric, culture-centric in the West, ethnocentric in Africa, materialistic, self-righteously and hypocritically desiring mercy for ourselves but divine justice and retribution for others who get in our way. We are often infected with the elder brother attitude (Lk. 15: 25-30), and in the affluent West we are prone to complain at the least little inconvenience (the death of a pet animal, ink on a white shirt, the car that won’t start, the double bogey on the golf course). Meanwhile, millions are going to a Christ-less eternity simply because we don’t care enough about them to send them the good news of Christ.

On the other hand, Alexander’s thesis, if correct, is well-taken—that Jonah foresees the destruction of Israel by Assyria and is angry that God is making him an instrument of their salvation and at the same time, Israel’s destruction.<sup>134</sup> But who is Jonah to instruct God about the proper objects of mercy? Neither Jonah nor we have the right to counsel God on whom He should love and bless with repentance. Are we envious because God is generous (Matt. 20: 15)? We should rejoice in the fact that *anyone* receives forgiveness since none deserve it or earn it.

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<sup>133</sup> Robertson, p. 157

<sup>134</sup> Alexander, p. 131

### ***XIII. The Prophecy of Isaiah***

#### ***Introduction***

Isaiah was a contemporary of Micah and prophesied at about the same time from 740 BC to 700 BC during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah. Although Micah prophesied both to Israel and Judah, Isaiah concentrated his ministry in and around Jerusalem and had ready access to the royal court.<sup>135</sup> According to **chapter 6**, his prophecy began in the year of King Uzziah's death (**vv. 1 and 8**). Modern scholarship has attempted to divide the book into parts which were written during various periods of Israel's history by different authors before and after the exile. Conservative scholarship has adequately answered any higher critical arguments for multiple authorship before and after the exile.<sup>136</sup> For our purposes, *Isaiah* was written *solely* by Isaiah, son of Amoz, during the time frame mentioned above. The historical context for *Isaiah* is found in 2 Kings 15-20 and 2 Chronicles 26-32.

#### ***Chapter 1—The Wickedness of Judah***

Prophesying some 15-20 years after Amos and Hosea, we are not surprised that Isaiah condemns some of the same sins in Judah which also plagued the northern kingdom of Israel—sham religion (**vv. 10-15**), injustice in the courts, oppression and lack of concern for the poor, the orphan, the widow and the helpless (**v.17**; cf. **3: 14-15**; **5: 23**), corruption among the nation's leaders (**v. 23**). The covenant blessings and curses are set forth in **vv. 18-20**. There was no need for Israel and Judah to go into exile. What they needed to do was repent and bring forth deeds demonstrative of repentance; yet, the problem of internal depravity rendered the nation incapable of producing repentance (cf. **Chapter 6**). Hope is presented in these verses and in **v. 27** for the remnant who repent, but transgressors will be crushed (**v. 28**).

#### ***Chapter 2—God's Universal Reign over the Nations and Judgment upon the Proud in Heart***

**Chapter 2: 1-4** reads like Micah 4 (refer to your notes on that chapter). The call for Jacob (Judah) to walk in the light of the Lord is set in stark contrast with the prophecy that many peoples or nations will one day stream to the mountain of the Lord to learn His ways. While the nations will desire to learn **God's** law, His own people desire, rather, to learn the pagan ways of the **Gentiles** which led to their expulsion from the land of Canaan.<sup>137</sup> This is an explicit foreshadowing of the calling of the Gentiles into the Christian church to enjoy the blessings of the covenant promised to Abraham at the very inception of the Abrahamic promise (Gen. 12). It is also a foreshadowing of the temporary passing-over (cf. Rom. 11) of the Jewish nation following their rejection of Jesus, the Messiah. Their persistent rejection of Christ's ministry resulted in the **continuation of the covenant curses** while at the same time opening the door to the in-gathering of the Gentiles. Jesus warned them that this would happen, "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it (Matt. 21:43 NASB).

<sup>135</sup> See the historical context in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles and Isa. 7: 37—39

<sup>136</sup> Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*, abridged version, pp. 187-197. Or consult the unabridged version for a more extended argument. Also see John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah, New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 1, pp. 17-28.

<sup>137</sup> John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah*, p. 122

According to Isaiah, Judah's fundamental sin was "the exaltation of mankind"<sup>138</sup> which resulted in the transfer of trust in Yahweh to trust in the idols of military strength, foreign alliances (Assyria and Egypt), and material wealth. Is there anything new under the sun? Judah resembles modern nations trusting in trade alliances, military arsenals, money, and the ability to borrow money. Idols abounded on every street corner. The land of Judah was filled with idols (**v. 8**). Notice from 2 Chronicles 27: 2 that although Uzziah did right in God's sight, the chronicler adds, "But the people continued acting corruptly" (2 Chr. 27:2 NASB). Men make gods of their own choosing and then bow down to the gods they have made (**v. 22**).

In the final analysis, trust in idols is nothing but trust in man whose heart is an "idol factory" (Calvin), for idols are the "the work of their hands, That which their fingers have made" (**v. 8b**). But a day of reckoning is coming for all who put their trust in men, and one day all men, great and small, will hide themselves in the rocks from the terror of the Lord (**vv. 9, 19**; cf. Rev. 6: 16). Man's misplaced pride will melt with the fierce heat of the wrath of God, and he will be humbled before the exalted Lord who will be acknowledged as King of kings and Lord of Lords (Phil. 2: 10-11). What then, should Judah do in light of the coming judgment? The answer is plain to anyone who would listen, "Stop regarding man, whose breath *of life* is in his nostrils; For why should he be esteemed?" (**v. 22**)

### *Chapter 3—The Coming Exile*

**Verse one** identifies the target of Isaiah's prophecy—Jerusalem and Judah. **Verse 22** of the previous chapter is a transition into **chapter 3** in which God promises to remove the men of Judah—the mighty man and the warrior, the judge and prophet, the diviner and elder, the captain of fifty, the counselor, the artisan, etc. None will be left until the nation is forced to rely on the inexperience of **youth** to lead them (**v. 4**)—a curse, not a blessing. The Assyrians and Babylonians usually took first into exile the leaders, the educated, and the skilled, which explains why Daniel and his three friends ended up in Babylon in 605 BC, eighteen years before the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC. The resulting void in the leadership produced anarchy (**vv. 4-7**).<sup>139</sup> As the judges and elders of the people had judged unjustly, God will now stand in judgment upon them (**vv. 13-15**). The elders and judges of Judah are appointed to protect people's freedom, but they use their power to crush and oppress the powerless. One can see the relevancy of Isaiah's prophecy to many countries in the world where citizens are tyrannized by their governments.

What follows in **vv. 16-23** is an amusing satire poking fun at the "prissy" women of Jerusalem who are preoccupied with their own looks and sex appeal (cf. Amos 4: 1). The prophet is not condemning the desire of women to look good, but their pride in external appearance to the exclusion of internal holiness. Thus, the pride of women in their external beauty and adornment is compared with the pride of men in military strength in the previous chapter. They were also not concerned for the poor which seems to be implied by the multiplication of jewelry (**vv. 18-23**). Furthermore, the women were flirtatious and seductive (**v. 16**) which gives evidence that they were using their good looks for the wrong reasons. These women will one day be abandoned as their men will fall by the sword during the invasion of Babylon (**v. 25**).

<sup>138</sup> Oswalt, p. 122

<sup>139</sup> Edward J. Young, *Isaiah*, Vol. 1, p. 136. See also 2 Kings 24: 14.

**Verses 24-25 of Chapter 3** lead naturally to **v. 1 of chapter 4**. Since the men of Judah will fall in battle, there will be few left to marry.

#### *Chapter 4—The Branch and Remnant of Israel*

**In that day** occurs again in Isaiah's prophecy (**2: 11, 17, 20; 3: 18**). It is a day of both judgment and salvation<sup>140</sup> characteristic of the salvation of God's people and the destruction of His and their enemies in past events (the flood; the crossing of the Red Sea, etc.) as well as the judgment at the end of the world in which God will save His people and destroy His enemies.

The **Branch** (**Isa. 11: 1; Jer. 23: 5**) is none other than the Messiah Himself who is the true beauty of Israel in contrast to the ostentatious (showy) beauty of her flirtatious women (**3: 16-23**). **He who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem** is the remnant of Israel, the holy remnant who believes and who properly represents God's purpose in electing Israel—that they should be a holy nation (Ex. 19: 6; Deut. 28: 9).<sup>141</sup> Notice that this remnant is **recorded for life** (i.e. eternal life—Rom. 9: 27; 11: 5; **Isa. 10: 22**).

For though your people, O Israel, may be like the sand of the sea, *Only a remnant within them will return*; A destruction is determined, overflowing with righteousness. (Isaiah 10:22 NASB)

Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, "THOUGH THE NUMBER OF THE SONS OF ISRAEL BE LIKE THE SAND OF THE SEA, IT IS **THE REMNANT THAT WILL BE SAVED** (Romans 9:27 NASB)

Paul interprets the return in **Isaiah 10: 22** in Romans 9: 27 as salvation. Salvation for the remnant is described as salvation from "filth" and from "bloodshed" (**v. 4**) and is reminiscent of the exodus from Egypt (**v. 5**).

#### *Chapter 5—Parable of the Vineyard; Woes for the Wicked of Judah*

God planted Israel as a vineyard which he attended diligently. As a result of all His labor, God expected His vineyard to produce good fruit, but all He received was bad fruit. He looked for justice but got bloodshed; He looked for righteousness but only heard the crying of the oppressed (**vv. 1-7**). Six woes follow: **vv. 8, 11, 18, 20, 21, 22** corresponding to Jesus' woes to the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 23).

Once again as in *Amos, Micah, and Hosea*, the prophet reproaches the extravagance of the wealthy, not because they are wealthy but because they are *careless of the poor*. Possibly much of this land acquisition took place by fraudulent legal maneuvers like the one in 1 Kings 21 (Jezebel's scheme). Or they could have taken place because the poor Israelite became so destitute that he had to sell his assets to survive. The land should have been returned to the original owner in the year of Jubilee (Lev. 25: 10-16), but there is no evidence that the nation consistently practiced this law. Dispossessed from the land, poorer Israelites became progressively poor. Nevertheless, God will not be mocked. The fine homes of the careless, oppressive rich will become desolate and without occupants (**v. 9**), and their extensive land

<sup>140</sup> Young, *Isaiah*, Vol. 1, p. 173

<sup>141</sup> Young, p. 180

holdings unproductive (v. 10). Drinking parties were common (vv. 11-12), but the exile will be no party; and instead of eating and drinking there will be thirst and hunger (v. 13). The people go into exile for lack of knowledge (v. 13, compared to Hosea 4: 6)—not merely intellectual knowledge of the word of God but lack of the practical application of the word. The Hebrew understanding of knowledge was not theoretical (the Hellenistic or Greek mindset) but applicatory (Prov. 1: 7).

The judgment coming was not only upon the rich but the common man as well (v. 15). The whole population was corrupt. The way of the wicked is like a man dragging a heavy cart behind him, struggling to take the next step (v.18). The nation as a whole is characterized by moral relativity which changes the meaning of good and evil so that people do not know the difference between the two (v 20). Evil is called good and good is called evil. This reminds me of those who defend homosexuality and abortion in the US. Anyone who takes a stand against homosexuality is called a “homophobe”, one who fears homosexuals; or he is accused of hate. The pro-life advocate is accused of hating women because he wishes to protect the life of the unborn child. Pro-abortionists herald themselves as those who care about the rights of women to decide what to do with their own bodies; thus, they are the “good” people. This is nothing but “wisdom in their own eyes” (v. 21).

For this perversion God will come in judgment by sending another nation to destroy Judah (vv. 26-30). A standard was a large pole with emblems at the top representing the nation—like the flag of a country—which were raised above the armies as a rallying point. God is now rallying the nations of Assyria—the northern kingdom had not yet fallen to Assyria—and Babylon against Israel and Judah respectively (in that order).

### *Chapter 6—The Vision of Isaiah and His Call as a Prophet*

This is a very familiar chapter in Isaiah which is quoted by Christ to explain why he preached in parables (Matt. 13: 14). But it is also a brilliant description of God’s holiness and the fear and trembling with which Isaiah undertook his prophetic ministry. In this passage Isaiah describes his vision of the Lord which John the apostle identifies as a vision of Christ (Jn. 12: 37-41). It is a timely vision. With the death of Uzziah in Judah and the death of Jeroboam II in Israel, both of whom together extended the boundaries of Israel and Judah to their original limits (as in the days of David and Solomon), the prosperity and peace of both nations was coming to an end, never to return.<sup>142</sup> Thus, the vision given to Isaiah was preparation for a ministry during troubled times. What did he need for this preparation? He needed a *clear vision* of the sovereignty, glory, and holiness of God in contrast with the failure of human kings.<sup>143</sup>

To appreciate the vision of Isaiah, some knowledge of the historical context is necessary. The pride of Judah (vv. 11-17) is the result of much prosperity and the build-up of military power (v. 7). Uzziah’s reign was the second longest reign of any king in Judah (52 years) exceeded only by Manasseh’s reign (55 years). His military exploits and building projects are mentioned in 2 Chronicles 26: 6-15. As a general rule, he was a good king who **did right in the sight of the Lord** but this approval is qualified by a reference to his father Amaziah who **did right in the**

<sup>142</sup> Young, p. 235, and footnote

<sup>143</sup> See the summary of Robertson’s analysis below



**sight of the LORD, yet not with a whole heart** (2 Chr. 25:2 NASB). Thus, when the Chronicler writes, **He did right in the sight of the LORD according to all that his father Amaziah had done** (v. 4), he is giving him only a qualified approval, not full approval. Other qualifications include: (1) that Uzziah continued to seek the Lord in the days of Zechariah and (2) that God prospered him as long as he sought the Lord, implying that later—after Zechariah’s death—he did not seek the Lord (v. 5).<sup>144</sup>

When God had given David great success all around him, he became proud, thinking he could take another man’s wife and get away with it. But he was mistaken. Likewise, Uzziah’s success made him proud and led him to think he was qualified to assume the office of priest by offering incense in the temple. For this unauthorized act, God struck him with leprosy (or some kind of skin disease) the rest of his life, forcing him to rely on his son Jotham as the co-regent (2 Chron. 26: 16-23; see Timeline for their overlapping reigns). He would never again enter the temple complex because of his uncleanness. Even the best of human kings fall short, including Uzziah, and even David. Israel and Judah’s salvation would require a *divine* Savior-King who would not fail.

In the vision of Isaiah, even the angels attending the Lord covered their eyes and feet in reverence for His glory. The primary attribute resonating on their lips was one of holiness: **Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory**—a glory represented by the train of his robe filling the temple so that there was no room for any to stand, not even the angels who were hovering in the air (v. 2—“with two [wings] he flew”). This is the vision of the Lord needed by those who preach the gospel—not one of “Love, love, love” but **Holy, holy, holy**.

This does not suggest that God is not love. **God is love** (1 Jn. 4: 8, 16), and His love is essential to the message of the gospel. Yet, if God is not presented as holy, His love is superfluous (unnecessary) since men don’t need to be saved from a God who does not demand holiness. If our understanding of God is not one of His overwhelming holiness, we will not feel compelled to warn men to flee from the wrath of God against sin (Col. 3: 5-6; 2 Cor. 5: 11). It should be evident from all the prophets that the *primary attribute* of God they consistently presented was absolute holiness. The love of God was also manifest in the prophetic message, but ethical holiness *dominated* this message, and it made the proper impression on Isaiah who uses the designation **the Holy One of Israel** twelve times in **chapters 1-39** and fourteen times in **chapters 40-66**, giving us his signature for the entire unity and authenticity of the book.<sup>145</sup>

Unlike many preachers who claim to have visions of God and brag about it to their audiences, Isaiah is filled with fear and trembling (v. 5). He recognizes that he is a sinner living in a sinful nation, yet standing in the presence of a holy God. The words **I am ruined** can be paraphrased as “I am dead” for Isaiah knew that **no man can see God and live** (Ex. 33: 18-20).

God did not disagree with Isaiah’s bleak assessment of the situation, but responds with grace. One of the angels takes a burning coal from the altar and touches his mouth declaring that his sin is forgiven. Isaiah is not clean, but the Lord *declares* him to be clean as a sovereign act of his mercy, an OT illustration of justification as a *declarative act of God*. This is what the altar of the

<sup>144</sup> Richard L. Pratt, *1 & 2 Chronicles*; pp. 547-548

<sup>145</sup> Young, p. 244

Lord stood for, the holiness of God and the mercy of God. The Israelite should not have trusted in his ability to keep the Law. Certainly Isaiah, one of the most righteous men in Israel, saw himself as a hopeless sinner in the light of God's holiness expressed in the Law, but he was cleansed of his sin by grace, not by keeping the Law. Men only believe they can be saved by law-keeping if they have little understanding of God's holiness; therefore, both the teaching of the law *and* the gospel are needed. Side by side in this passage we see both law and grace.

Only when a man has been convicted of sin and has understood that the Redeemer has borne the guilt of his sin is he willing and ready joyfully to serve God, to go wherever God may call him. Does our day and age have any greater need than the preaching of the law, that men may know of their sin, and the gospel, that they may look to Him who has turned aside their iniquity and pardoned their sin? <sup>146</sup>

Isaiah then hears a voice from heaven with the call for someone to take his message to Israel (v. 8). **Us** may be a reference to the Trinity, for the Lord is thrice holy. The message of the preacher was not an optimistic one, but one of despair. Although the people had seen the miracles of the Lord when they came out of Egypt, they nevertheless rebelled against the Lord. Even so in the present context, they would not perceive or understand Him (v. 10 compared to Deut. 29: 2-4).<sup>147</sup> Seven hundred and forty years later, the nation heard the word of life from Jesus Christ and did not understand so that the words of the Isaiah would be fulfilled in Jesus' day to a nation of rebellious sinners (Matt. 13: 13-15). Repentance is a gift, and that gift is withheld from the people by the Lord Himself.<sup>148</sup>

In this passage the sovereignty of God in election and reprobation is emphasized while in Matthew's gospel the responsibility of the people is emphasized—**they have closed their eyes** (Matt. 13: 15) as opposed to **Render [you render]...their eyes dim, lest they see with their eyes (Isa. 6: 10-11)**. The full truth is found in the balance of the two passages. The first (primary) cause of Israel's reprobation is the sovereign will of God (Rom. 9), and the secondary cause is found in the hardness of peoples' hearts. It is a mystery which will always remain with us.<sup>149</sup> This hardness toward Isaiah's message will continue until Judah is laid in ruins and all its inhabitants are carried away into exile (vv. 11-12). But a remnant shall remain, a **tenth** which shall also be subjected to affliction (v. 13). This is ultimately fulfilled in the church.<sup>150</sup>

Robertson argues that Isaiah's commission in **chapter 6** forms the framework of his entire prophetic ministry consisting of six key elements, summarized below.<sup>151</sup>

**(1) "The exaltation of the Lord as king."**

At the very beginning of Isaiah's ministry, the rule of God is set in contrast to the rule of man. As we have seen with Uzziah (see above), the best of Israel's human kings were flawed with sin. Yet, there is hope because the true God of Israel is not limited by human weakness and continues to rule from His exalted position in heaven (**6: 1**). Further, God will provide a king for His people supernaturally through the virgin birth who will not be limited by sin (**Isa. 7**). The "ideal Davidic king" is the unifying theme of **chapters 2-11**.

<sup>146</sup> Young, p. 254

<sup>147</sup> Cf. Young, p. 256

<sup>148</sup> Young, p. 258

<sup>149</sup> Young, pp. 258-261

<sup>150</sup> Young, 265

<sup>151</sup> Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*, pp. 173-187

**(2) “Holiness as the defining characteristic of Isaiah’s Lord.”**

The cry of the Seraphim, **Holy, holy, holy (6: 3)**, initiates Isaiah’s designation of the Lord as **the Holy One of Israel**, used 26 times in Isaiah but occurring elsewhere in other prophetic writings only twice (Jer. 50: 29; 51: 5). God’s name, His Spirit, His arm, His day, the city of Jerusalem, His house, His mountain, His people, the highway leading to Zion—everything associated with God—is holy or, by definition, set apart for His exclusive purpose (**Isa. 56: 7; 57: 13, 15; 63: 10-11, 18; 58: 13; 52: 10; 11: 9; 48: 2; 62: 12**; etc).

**(3) “The universal character of the Lord’s domain.”**

While the gods of the nations are presumed to have authority in limited locations, Isaiah’s God rules over the entire world which is filled with His glory (**6: 3**). He is the **Creator of the ends of the earth** (Isa. 40: 28) and the Maker of all mankind (**Isa. 17: 17; 27: 11**). From **chapter 13 to 23**, Isaiah prophesies God’s judgment over all the nations—Babylon, Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Syria, Ethiopia, Egypt, Edom, and Phoenicia. Judgment upon the nations assumes God’s authority and sovereignty over the nations. He will do with them as He pleases according to the standard of His law.

**(4) “The sinfulness of God’s own people.”**

Isaiah identified himself as a sinner living among sinners (**6: 5**). No individual or people can stand in the presence of this holy God because of their sinful defilement, but God has made provision for their sin by the cleansing of His grace (**v. 7**). Yet, God cannot simply overlook sin while being consistent with His holiness. Sin must be atoned for, and later on Isaiah more clearly reveals God’s provision of grace through His servant who will be crushed for the iniquities of God’s people (**Isa. 53**).

**(5) “The inability of the people to hear the word of the Lord.”**

Before he even begins his ministry, Isaiah is informed that no one will listen to his message (**6: 9-10**). The deafness and blindness of the nation will continue until the cities are emptied of their inhabitants and the land is left desolate (**v. 11**)—the prophecy of the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles. Yet, the certainty of the nation’s curse is balanced by the equal certainty of blessing. One day the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf will be opened, and they will hear and see the salvation of God. Particularly, the land of Zebulun and Naphtali will be blessed with salvation. These were the Israelite lands which were particularly vulnerable to foreign armies attacking from the north, and they were the first lands of Israel falling into the hands of the Assyrians who populated them with other conquered Gentile peoples. According to the predictions of **Isa. 9: 1**, they became **Galilee of the Gentiles** in which Jesus concentrated His earthly ministry of preaching and healing (**Isa. 35: 5**; cf. Matt. 11: 5-6). The lands which seem despised by the Lord would one day be the most favored land in the whole land of Palestine (**Isa. 8: 22**; Lk. 16: 15; Matt. 4: 12-17).

**(6) “The exile of the people and their restoration to the land.”**

Isaiah prophesied from 740 to either 700 or 690 BC, both *before* and *during* the exile of the northern kingdom of Israel. Thus, his ministry included forewarnings of both the Assyrian and the Babylonian exiles (for the Assyrian exile, see **Isa. 7: 16-20; 8:4**; for the Babylonian exile, see **Isa. 13: 1-6; 39: 6-7**). The restoration of Israel is only faintly mentioned in 6: 13,

Yet there will be a tenth portion in it, And it will again be *subject* to burning, Like a terebinth or an oak Whose stump remains when it is felled. The holy seed is its stump.

When the tree is cut down, the stump remains; and even though scorched with fire, the stump gives birth to a new shoot (cf. **Isa 11: 1**). Though all hope seems to be extinguished, hope yet remains for God's covenant people. Furthermore, the restoration is comprehensively expanded in *Isaiah* to include not only the Jewish nation but also the Gentiles (**Isa. 2: 3; Isa. 11: 10; 14: 1; 18: 7; 25: 6-8; 40: 3, 5; 49: 6; 42: 6; 55: 5**).

The influx of the Gentiles, attached in *Isaiah* so regularly to the theme of the return from exile, represents a new phase in the development of the concept of Israel's restoration....By this process, the very idea of a people of God is redefined to include peoples from all the nations of the world.<sup>152</sup>

Another new eschatological dimension associated with restoration to the land is the creation of the new heavens and the new earth in which the harmful effects of sin upon the earth will be reversed, and the earth will once again manifest its intended purpose (**Isa. 65: 17-18, 21, 25; 11: 6-9; 66: 22-23**). Yet, the exile must come before the restoration, the humiliation of Christ before His resurrection and ascension, and the suffering of the church before her enjoyment of a restored universe at the consummation. The exalted Lord of **Isaiah 6: 1** is the same suffering servant of **Isaiah 53** and **52: 13**; thus, God's people—following the pattern of Christ—should expect tribulation before the realization of the consummated kingdom of God.<sup>153</sup>

### ***Chapters 7—War against Jerusalem by Israel and Syria; The Prophecy of Immanuel—God with Us***

The northern kingdom of Israel led by Pekah and Aram led by Rezin wage war on Judah during the reign of Ahaz, son of Jotham (see also 2 Kings 16: 36-38). Isaiah is sent by the Lord to assure Ahaz that Pekah and Rezin will not prevail against Israel. In 65 years, the northern kingdom (**Ephraim** as its representative tribe) will cease to exist as a nation (**v. 8**). While only 13 years or so remain until the exile of the northern kingdom, Isaiah predicts the assimilation of the northern tribes into the Gentile nations. This would be achieved through the policy of Assyrian kings to relocate conquered peoples into other lands (cf. Ezra 4: 2). Gentile relocation into Palestine resulted in intermarriage between the Gentiles and the Jews who were allowed to remain in the land by their Assyrian conquerors. The offspring of these mixed marriages would become known as the *Samaritans* who were hated by the Jewish nation as much for their syncretistic religion as their mixed blood. Furthermore, when the exiled Jews were taken away into other lands, they intermarried with other Gentiles. After 50 years of intermarriage, the northern tribes lost their distinctive identity.<sup>154</sup>

Ahaz is instructed to ask for a sign which will assure him of the truth of Isaiah's prediction. His refusal to ask for a sign is not from true piety, but unbelief and the mistaken conviction that Assyria, not Yahweh, will save Judah from the Syro-Ephraimite alliance between northern Israel and Syria. He had even built an illegitimate altar patterned after the Syrian altar he saw in

<sup>152</sup> Robertson, p. 183

<sup>153</sup> Robertson, pp. 180-187

<sup>154</sup> So also F. Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, vol. 1, pp. 211-212

Damascus (2 Kings 16: 7-18). Fearing the threat of Pekah and Rezin to enthrone Tabeel as king over Judah in his place (**Isa. 7: 6**), he completely sets aside as insignificant God's promise to David that he would not lack a man on the throne of Israel (1Kings 8: 25).

A sign will be given to him nevertheless—a virgin will be with child and bear a son named Immanuel. Before the lad is old enough to know the difference between good and bad, Israel and Syria will be overthrown, implying a period of two or three years. Thus, the time of this confrontation with Ahaz is about 735 BC since Damascus fell to Assyria in 732 BC.<sup>155</sup>

The sign given to Ahaz has been the topic of much debate. Young insists that the word for virgin (*almah*) cannot be used of a married woman, nor would Isaiah have referred to an unmarried woman who conceives an illegitimate child out of wedlock, for this would have been an inappropriate sign. “On the other hand,” Young says,

“if the mother were a good woman, then the birth was out of the ordinary, an unusual birth. The mother is both *unmarried* and a *good* woman. When this fact is understood, it becomes apparent that in all history there is only one of whom this can be predicated, namely, Mary, the mother of the Lord...In light of the fact that the birth is to be a sign and also in view of the unusual character of the mother, *we cannot regard the child as a contemporary.*”<sup>156</sup>

That the person of Christ is the *distant* fulfillment of the prophecy cannot be denied, but for this to be a legitimate sign to Ahaz, there must have been a *proximate* (near) fulfillment. In other words, how can the birth of Christ 735 years later be a legitimate sign to *Ahaz* that Israel and Syria would be destroyed? This has caused other conservative scholars to insist that Isaiah had reference to a virgin living within his own time-frame who later marries and gives birth to a son who is called Immanuel. But then, how can a normal birth be a legitimate sign to Ahaz?

Oswalt asserts that *almah* can be interpreted in more than one way while the word *betulah* is used unambiguously of a virgin. Motyer disagrees, noting the qualification of *betulah* in Genesis 24: 16. If *betulah* unambiguously referred to virgins, why the explanation, **and no man had had relations with her?** Motyer says Isaiah does nothing to resolve the tension between the immediacy of the prophecy and its remoteness<sup>157</sup>

Another possibility of removing the difficulty is to interpret the sign (the virgin with child) in context with the birth of Isaiah's son in chapter 8. Isaiah's wife conceives and he is instructed to name him Maher-shalal-hash-baz, **Swift is the booty, speedy is the prey.** And before the boy is able to cry **my father** or **my mother**, Damascus and Samaria will fall and their possessions (booty) will be taken by Assyria (**8: 4b**). The parallelism of **7: 16** and **8: 4** may be significant. In **7: 16**, the fall of Damascus and Samaria is predicted **before the boy knows right from wrong**—i.e. right and wrong from the simple perspective of a child who knows it is wrong to disobey mother and father. This would be two years or so, equivalent to time it takes a child to say **mother** or **father**. Following each statement is the announcement of Israel's and Syria's defeat. *This* would be a sign that Ahaz could see fulfilled in *his* lifetime, and it is sufficiently similar in appearance to the virgin birth announced in **7: 14** that he could understand it. But if

<sup>155</sup> Young, p. 304

<sup>156</sup> Young, pp. 288-290; emphasis mine

<sup>157</sup> J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah*, pp. 85-87

the sign is still vague—and it is—it is his own fault for not asking for a sign he could fully understand.

The problem with this view is that Isaiah already had one son named Shear-jashub, effectively disqualifying his wife as a virgin (**7: 3**). The way around (?) this problem is to postulate that Isaiah's first wife had died and that he takes a second wife, a virgin *at the time of their marriage*. This, of course, requires introducing into the text something which is not specifically there, making a very weak argument. As stated above, we have no difficulty seeing the ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy in the person of Christ 735 year later, the only truly virgin birth in human history; but the continuing difficulty and seemingly endless differences among commentators centers around the question of the *proximate* (near) fulfillment which would have made sense to Ahaz as a sure sign of the defeat of the Syro-Ephraimite alliance against Judah. Yet, this assumes that God wanted to give him a clear sign, an assumption that may not be warranted.

According to Young, the natural birth of Isaiah's son and the length of time predicted for Israel's and Syria's fall would be a confirmation of the virgin birth of Jesus 735 years later<sup>158</sup> As sure as these two nations fell to Assyria, the believing remnant could look forward to the virgin birth of the Messiah. Thus, the believing remnant of Israel reading the prophecy of Isaiah during the ministry of Jesus—and being familiar with the mysterious “rumors” concerning his birth (rumors which happened to be true)—would be able to rejoice in the realization of their promised Messiah. On the other hand, the majority of the nation would pass over this passage without the faintest understanding.

### *Chapter 8—The Assyrian Invader*

The invasion of Assyria is predicted in **vv. 7-8**, an invasion which fails only because of divine intervention. It is described as an overflowing river which reaches to the neck (**v. 8**) symbolic of the fact that Jerusalem is barely saved only at the last moment, like a man up to his neck in water just about to drown. It is possible that by the time Sennacherib's general Rabshakeh harasses Hezekiah the Assyrian armies had already captured 46 cities in Judah (cf. 2 Ki. 18: 13).<sup>159</sup> Despite the Assyrian threat, **Immanuel**—“the Lord is with us”. Because of Him the nations will be **shattered** (used three times in one verse). The nations will plan for the total destruction of God's people, but their plans will come to nothing because **God is with us** (Immanuel). The proximate fulfillment is the salvation of Jerusalem from the jaws of Assyria (2 Ki. 19: 35), but since both Israel and Judah are eventually taken into exile, the ultimate fulfillment must be the consummate salvation of the church, the elect people of God including both Jew and Gentile.

As it turns out, Ahaz's fear is misplaced. He is afraid of the wrong thing, Israel and Syria (representing the fear of man) rather than God. If Israel and Judah had feared the Lord throughout their history, there would have been no need to fear anything or anyone else. **He shall be your dread (vv. 12-13)**. The Lord will be a sanctuary, a place of safety to those who fear him but a stumbling stone to those who don't (**vv. 14-15**). One cannot be neutral in regard to God. He is either a rock of refuge or a stumbling block. God's elect people, including Isaiah and his two sons, were for signs and wonders of God's protection of His true people. In 1 Pet. 2:

<sup>158</sup> Young, pp. 303-304

<sup>159</sup> VanGemeren, p. 251

8, Peter applies this passage to Christ who is the precious cornerstone chosen by God to complete His building, but rejected by men.

**Verse 19** condemns consultation with mediums and spiritists who attempt to discern the will of God through communication with the dead (1 Sam. 28). Such practices were condemned from the beginning of Israel's history (Deut. 18: 9-22). *Instead, the people were to listen to the prophets whom God ordained to be his spokesman.* And if a person did not listen to His prophets, God would **require it of him**. If a prophet spoke presumptuously what God did not tell him, he would die. If they do not speak according to **the law and to the testimony**; that is, **according to his word it is because they have no dawn**; that is, no light in them (**v. 20**). They will be like Saul who had been abandoned by God and could not receive any communication from God. Finally their unbelief turns to anger and they curse God for their abandonment.

### *Chapter 9: 1-7—The Coming Messiah*

Zebulun and Naphtali (later known as upper and lower Galilee<sup>160</sup>) were the two northwestern tribes of Israel west of the Jordan River who were the first to be taken into exile by Assyria (2 Kings 15: 29). Thus, Isaiah says that they were **treated with contempt (v. 1)**. In the future, however, the light of the gospel will shine on these two tribes when Christ begins his Galilean ministry (**v. 2**; Matt. 4: 15-16). It is Christ who will **break the yoke of their burden and the staff on their shoulders (v. 4)** by taking their yoke of sin and giving them his yoke which is easy and his burden which is light (Matt. 11: 28-30).

The child to be born is easily identified as the Lord Jesus Christ, but His role as world ruler must be clarified (**vv. 6-7**). In His incarnation and earthly ministry, Jesus sets up His rule in the hearts of believers, and as believers and their influence throughout society spread like leaven (in this case, a beneficial leaven), society begins to change for the better and godly law is instituted. The freedoms of a democratic society are the fruit of the gospel no matter where democracies are found. Not all societies are equally just and free, but only those which have “imported” the ideals of freedom from the Christian world-view. The flow of refugees from around the world is always from oppression to freedom—generally from east to west since more western cultures have benefitted from a Christian world-view than eastern (something which may change in the future). Thus, we should not limit the governmental and political rule of the Messiah to the second coming of Christ when He will consummate (complete) His kingdom. The whole world has benefited from the reign and rule of Christ in the hearts of His people.

On the other hand, the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy is the second coming of Christ and the consummation of His kingdom in which every wicked person will be cast out of His kingdom (Matt. 25) thus implementing world peace.

This kingdom is not the earthly millennium of dispensationalist theology since it begins when Christ is born and has no ending after a thousand years.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Young, p. 323

<sup>161</sup> Young, p. 343

**Chapter 9: 8-21—Israel’s Arrogance**

The nation believes that whatever calamity that comes upon it, they can rebuild (v. 10). Both great and small, head and tail (v. 15) are involved in sin, and the Lord takes no delight in elders, young, orphan or widow. The whole society is corrupt. Not only is there a feud between the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom, the northern tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim (the chief tribes of Israel) are at each other’s throats producing internal strife (v. 21).

**Chapter 10: 1-19—Israel’s Sin and Assyria’s Arrogance**

Isaiah prophesies against the legal administrators and judges of the land who **deprive the needy of justice, and rob the poor of My people of their rights...**(v. 2). Sound familiar? It should, since Isaiah prophesied at the same time as Micah (Micah 3: 1-4). When God comes in judgment, what will they do and where will they go, for there is no place to go (v. 3).

Assyria has been appointed by God as Israel’s executioner (v. 5). but Assyria believes that by its own power it has conquered all the nations (vv. 7-11; compared with 2 Kings 18: 33-35). This is the same as an ax or saw boasting over the one wielding the ax or saw, as if either implement could do anything without the one using it (v. 15). When God is through using Assyria to accomplish His purposes, He will also destroy Assyria (See Ps. 2). The **wasting disease** of v. 16 could be a reference to 2 Kings 19: 35 in which 185,000 Assyrian soldiers were killed by an angel. This may have been a plague used in a miraculous way.

**Verse 7** is an interesting verse in that God holds Assyria responsible for destroying Israel for the wrong motive—to exalt itself rather than for the glory of God. There is no evidence that God appeared to the leaders of Assyria and told them of His plans, but they are responsible nonetheless. We are reminded of Romans 1: 18-32 in which Paul declares all men responsible for worshipping the true God because of the light of God revealed in creation. Assyria had no excuse for their ignorance of God. Although the nation had not been the *continuing* recipient of special revelation, it had nevertheless received the prophecy of Jonah just 25 years previously in the city of Nineveh. It also had the general revelation of creation (Rom. 1: 18-32).

**Chapter 10: 20-34—Only the Remnant will return to the Land of Promise**

God had promised Abraham that his descendants would be like the sand on the seashore, but Israel had misinterpreted the promise to include anyone born from Abraham by *natural* generation. Here, Isaiah refutes this false claim to the promises of Abraham and reserves those promises only for the remnant according to *faith*. Thus, the *physical remnant* of Judah left in Jerusalem becomes typical of the *spiritual remnant* according to faith (cf. Rom. 9-10).

The remnant who lives in Zion (Jerusalem) should not fear Assyria which would fall (vv. 24-25). Lebanon of v. 34 is another designation for Assyria (Ezek. 31: 3).<sup>162</sup>

**Chapter 11—The Righteous Branch**


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<sup>162</sup> Young, p. 377



This is a continuation of the thoughts that are expressed in **chapters 7 and 9**. The kingly line of David had been reduced to a stump, but a small shoot would spring up from Jesse (the father of David) (Isa. 6: 13). In contrast to much of the corruption plaguing the nation, this ruler would bring justice and righteousness especially for the poor and oppressed who had not received their fair share of justice (**v. 4**).

While universal peace among men is emphasized in **chapter 2: 4** and **chapter 9**, in this chapter universal peace is extended even to the animal world. What is the significance of this? Before the fall, Adam named the animals, and there is no indication that animals exhibited any fear of man. Noah was able to place two of each kind of large animal on the ark and there is no mention of hostility between man and beast until Genesis 9: 2. The fall eventually caused radical changes to take place in the physical universe which will be reversed in the new heavens and new earth (Rom. 8: 15-25). There is an emphasis here in **Isaiah 11** upon the material universe restored to its original condition before the fall, a condition in which a wolf eats with a lamb, a leopard with a young goat, and a lion with a calf. We are reminded of God's command in Genesis 1: 30 that every green plant was given to the beasts of the earth for food, a hint that there were no predatory animals in the original creation.

The extent to which this restoration will take place is presented in the picture of children playing with venomous snakes (**v. 8**). This picture represents a complete *reversal of the enmity* between man and beast brought on by the temptation of Satan in the garden who took the form of a serpent.<sup>163</sup>

A reversal of this magnitude can only take place when **the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (v. 9)**, hardly a situation which exists today. The nations resorting to the root of Jesse (**v. 10**) is similar in expression to **Isaiah 2: 1-4** and also corresponds to **v. 12**.

Isaiah continues describing this event (**on that day**) in language discernable to his audience (**vv. 11-16**). Although Israel had not yet been dispersed to this many nations during Isaiah's day, they would be scattered to many different nations in the future (cf. Acts 2: 8-11). The remnant of Israel will be gathered together from the nations and will have victory over them, indicative of God's warfare with the world which ends in victory for God and His people. The unity between Judah and the northern kingdom (Ephraim) will be restored and they will conquer their enemies together (**v. 13**). We should not force a wooden literalism on the text in which the Philistines, Edom, Moab, and Assyria are still in existence when the Messiah establishes universal peace, nor should we force the text to imply a military conquest just before the end of the world in which Judah and Ephraim fight it out with the nations. The main point is that the believing remnant will return from exile and will be victorious.

### ***Chapter 12—Thanksgiving***

This is a continuation of **chapter 11**, for it is tied to the events of that chapter with **on that day** (see **11: 11**). In light of what the Lord will do for Israel, his remnant people will give him thanks.

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<sup>163</sup> Young, p. 389

### ***Chapters 13—14 —Prophecy Concerning Babylon, Medo-Persia, Philistia***

God will summon Babylon to punish his people (vv. 1-16) and afterward God will punish Babylon by using the Medes and Persians (vv. 17-22). God uses nations like a chess player manipulating the pieces, using them however and wherever He wishes. Isaiah was writing in the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> Century about events which would not happen until the latter part of the 6<sup>th</sup> Century 200 years later. During Isaiah's day, Babylon was struggling to survive and Assyria was the undisputed world power. The Medes were not enemies of Babylon, but allies with it against Assyria. Babylon is always represented as the symbol of worldly power, arrogance, and evil of all kinds.<sup>164</sup> Its arrogance is depicted in chapter 14: 12-14, and is both literal and symbolic of the pride of man who wants to be his own god, ascending to heaven above God and raising his throne to heaven and making himself **like the Most High**. **Nevertheless, God says, you will be thrust down to Sheol, to the recesses of the pit (v. 15).**

Some of the church fathers interpreted these verses as a veiled reference to the fall of Satan from heaven according to Lk. 10: 18. Satan was a created angel who somehow fell from his proper, subordinate role to God and rebelled against His sovereign rule. Scholars during the Reformation denied this interpretation and applied it to the *pride of man*, specifically the pride of Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon.<sup>165</sup> The immediate context would support this interpretation. God is not talking to Satan, but to *man*. We need not concern ourselves with questions about how Satan fell from his proper domain in heaven, about which God has chosen to tell us nothing. What we should be concerned about is man's desire to be his own God.

In Revelation 14: 8 we read, **Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality** (See also **Isa. 21: 9**). The city is represented in *Revelation* as the great harlot of the earth whom the Lord destroys at the end of time. Rome is given the designation of **Babylon** in the Revelation to John.

Liberal scholars deny that Isaiah could have written so accurately about the emerging power of Babylon and the subsequent subjugation of Babylon to Medo-Persia. But for those who believe in a sovereign, omniscient God who speaks to His prophets, the prediction of events far into the future presents no problem.

### ***Summary of Chapters 13-23***

Beginning in **chapter 13** and continuing through **chapter 23**, Isaiah prophesies against the nations: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Assyria, Philistia, Moab, Damascus, Ethiopia, Egypt, Edom, Arabia, and Tyre. God has a court case against the nations and will judge the nations for their rebellion. In these passages we see clearly that God is not merely the God of Israel; He is the God of the nations, and the nations are under obligation to obey him. If they do not obey him, he will come in swift terror and might to destroy them. The nations mentioned are not intended to be an exhaustive list, but are representative for the *whole earth* with Babylon in the forefront of the prophecy as the epitome of worldly power and arrogance.

<sup>164</sup> Young, pp. 409-415

<sup>165</sup> Oswalt, pp. 320-321; so also Young, p. 441 and Delizsch, vol. 1, 311-313

In **Chapter 24: 1**, Isaiah says, **Behold, the Lord lays the earth waste, devastates it, distorts its surface, and scatters its inhabitants.** It is not just the nations listed, but the whole earth against which God is coming in judgment. In the prophecy of *Daniel*, when king Nebuchadnezzar realized that he had been mentally insane for 7 years because of God's judgment against his pompous arrogance (Dan. 4: 28-33), he arose in his right mind and said,

“But at the end of that period I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom *endures* from generation to generation. And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, ‘What hast Thou done?’” (Dan. 4: 34-35).

This will one day be the testimony of every earthly king and every single person on earth whether willingly or by coercion, for every knee will one day bow before the throne of Christ (Phil. 2: 9-10; Rom. 14: 11).

In **chapter 22**, Jerusalem is included in the prophecy about the **Valley of vision**. Although it is the city of God, it is identified and grouped with pagan nations. Why? Because Jerusalem has looked in hope to **worldly power** (*RealPolitik*) rather than to God, thus allying herself with the nations of the world rather than the kingdom of God.

For this reason, Jerusalem has in effect become like the worldly powers; and she, too, must be included in the list of oracles....When the city of God seeks help from the city of paganism [for Ahaz had sought help from Assyria—2 Kings 16: 7], she will soon be controlled by the city of paganism [for Jerusalem finally fell to Babylon].<sup>166</sup>

Thus, since Jerusalem **resembles** Babylon, she will be **controlled** by Babylon. Analogously, if the church resembles the world, she will eventually be controlled by the world. Isaiah may be using **valley of vision** sarcastically, since vision is the one thing Jerusalem surely lacked.

The jubilant people cannot **see** the inevitable destruction that waits them; the leaders cannot **see** that God the Sovereign Creator is a better defense than arms and fortifications....In fact, then, the people of Israel are no better off than the Gentiles around them. Their perspective is the same as the world's and therefore they fall under the same judgment as the world.<sup>167</sup>

Consequently, **chapter 22** is the prophecy of the final destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon in 587 BC.<sup>168</sup> When Jerusalem is delivered from the Assyrian king Sennacherib in 701 BC, there is rejoicing in the streets. It becomes an **exultant city** (v. 2). But its rejoicing will be turned to mourning when the city is finally destroyed by Babylon.<sup>169</sup> As God judges Jerusalem, He will also judge the church. Like ancient Jerusalem, the church often assimilates the same pagan

<sup>166</sup> Young, pp. 87, 89; words in brackets and emphasis mine

<sup>167</sup> Oswalt, pp. 405-406; emphasis mine

<sup>168</sup> Young, p. 88

<sup>169</sup> Oswalt, pp. 405-408

world-view as unbelievers—dependence upon money, politics, and power rather than God—and by doing so, resembles the world rather than the people of God. If the church visible insists on trusting in worldly systems and solutions, she quenches the Spirit and, eventually, will be abandoned them. For all practical purposes the visible church in most of Europe and in much of the US has been all but abandoned by God for unbelief and apostasy. In Europe, seemingly only a remnant remains, like the remnant of Israel. It is a vain hope for the church to believe that it enjoys immunity from punishment while imitating pagan belief systems which inevitably lead to pagan behavior. God is not only at war with the world, but even with His own church when it imitates the world.

### ***Chapter 24—God’s Covenant Law-suit against the World***

God has a case against the nations in **Chapters 13-23**, including his own people (**chapter 22**). Beginning in **chapter 24**, the Lord lays out his law-suit against the whole earth (**v. 1**). Notice in **v. 5** that the earth is **polluted by its inhabitants, for they transgressed laws, violated statutes, broke the everlasting covenant**. This gives evidence of the fact that the whole earth is in covenant relationship with God. Not Israel only, but the whole world of men is responsible for keeping his law. Which covenant have they broken? Is this the Noahic Covenant which was made with all man-kind (Gen. 9)? But the Noahic Covenant was an unconditional covenant whereas this is a covenant with stipulations and conditions—laws and statutes.

The giving of the Law to Israel is a *paradigm* or model for all humanity. The Mosaic legislation codified or formally promulgated a *universal moral law* which was already in existence from creation and already binding on man’s behavior. This is illustrated in the murder of Abel by his brother Cain. God said to Cain, **And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you cultivate the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you; you shall be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth**. Cain is now cursed, but there can be no curse unless there is violation of the law (Rom. 4: 15). There must, then, be a law against murder from the time of Adam and Eve, a law which brings a curse if violated. Commenting on **Isaiah 24: 5**, Young says,

The Law was not specifically revealed to the Gentiles as it was to the Jews at Sinai. Nevertheless, according to Paul, the Gentiles do by natural instinct those things which are prescribed by the Law. In so doing, they show that, by reason of what is actually implanted in their nature, they reveal the Law of God unto themselves; and this fact shows that the work of the Law is written on their hearts. In transgressing those things prescribed in the Law, however, it may be said that the Gentiles are actually transgressing the Law itself. Here the plural is used to show that the Gentiles had transgressed divine commands and ordinances, and also that their sins were many and varied. We may say that the Gentiles transgressed specific items of the Law, a thought which the plural form of the noun would also support....

Isaiah uses the language which is characteristic of the Mosaic legislation, and thus describes the universal transgressions of mankind....

Inasmuch as the inhabitants of the earth have transgressed, they too are to be regarded as violators of the law, and consequently deserving of the punishment that must come to those who transgress.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Young, pp. 157-159

This interpretation agrees with Paul's description of both Jews and Gentiles in Romans 3: 9-18 with the conclusion in 3: 19,

Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God....

Because of the violation of the **everlasting covenant (v. 5)**, the curse devours the earth (**v. 6**). What we have in the remainder of **chapter 24** is a description of world-wide destruction. People are going about their business as usual enjoying revelry, strong drink and music (**vv. 7-13**). The language is similar to what Christ says about his second coming.

“For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so shall the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matt. 24: 37-39).

**Verse 18** uses language reminiscent of the flood. Compare this verse to Genesis 7: 11,

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the same day all the fountains of the great deep burst open, and the floodgates of the sky were opened.

**In that day (v. 21)**, the host of heaven (fallen demonic forces) and the kings of the earth will be gathered together and punished (**v. 21-22**). It is on that day that the Lord of hosts will reign on Mount Zion in Jerusalem. This is strongly reminiscent of Psalm 2 in which the kings of the earth defy the crown rights of the Lord and take their stand against him. But they will be terrified by the anger of the Lord and will have to submit to his reign whether they like it or not. The Lord reigning in Jerusalem may be a reference to the reign of Christ on earth in the New Jerusalem in which there is no need of the sun by day or the moon by night, for the glory of the Lord will be brighter than either sun or moon, thus making them “abashed” and “ashamed” (Rev. 21: 22-24). The reference to **elders** may have some comparison with Revelation 4: 4, 10; 11: 16 and other citations of **elders** in *Revelation*.

### **Chapter 25—27:1—Salvation for God's People**

**Chapter 25** is a continuation of the salvation of God's people introduced in **24: 23**. In this salvation the Lord **will swallow up death for all time** and **will wipe tears away from all faces (v. 8)**—to be compared with Revelation 7:17 and 1 Corinthians 15:54.

for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them to springs of the water of life; and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes,

But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “Death is swallowed up in victory.”

John and Paul both borrow the imagery of Isaiah and apply this imagery to the same eschatological salvation of which Isaiah speaks in **Chapter 25**. Thus, the passage in Isaiah is interpreted for us *1 Corinthians* and *Revelation*.

**Chapter 26** is a continuation of the salvation celebrated in **chapter 25—in that day**. God’s people will be safe and secure in the **strong city** (v. 1), and the gates guarding the city will be opened for the one who **remains faithful** and **trusts** in the Lord (v. 3; cf. Rev. 22: 14-15). Isaiah is prophesying for the faithful remnant of Israel who will witness the destruction of Jerusalem. We must always remember the immediate application Isaiah’s words had for believers facing the ruin of Israel and Judah. If they remain **steadfast** in faith and trust in the Lord’s deliverance, they will be safe and secure even in the midst of the storms which will inevitably come upon Jerusalem. This is the immediate fulfillment. Even if the remnant Israelites die in the destruction of their nation, their death is not final; there is also the resurrection of the dead. Two of the clearest statements of the resurrection of the dead in the OT are found in **25: 8** and **26: 19**.

The distant fulfillment is that all of God’s people can take refuge in the **strong city** of the Lord’s protecting grace. No matter what happens to us we are safe, for Jesus tells us,

“But you will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and **they will put some of you to death**, and you will be hated by all on account of My name. Yet **not a hair of your head will perish**.” (Lk. 21: 16-18)

Some will be put to death, but not a hair of their heads will perish—a seeming contradiction, but understandable in light of the resurrection. Though the resurrection from the dead is not as clear in the OT as the NT, there is evidence for it here and in other OT texts, enough evidence to evoke Jesus’ rebuke of the Sadducees who denied it (Matt. 22: 29 and context).

While the Lord hides his people in their rooms behind closed doors (v. 20), the Lord comes out of his place (heaven) to punish the whole world of the wicked for their sins (v. 21). Considered within the context of the Assyrian invasion of Judah in which 46 cities had already been captured, these words offered great consolation to the physical remnant of Judah remaining in the besieged city of Jerusalem. From a broader context, the blood of those who have been murdered (especially the righteous who have been martyred for their faith) will cry out from the ground (see Gen. 4: 10-11) for vengeance upon those who have shed innocent blood. **In that day (27: 1)**, God will defeat all His enemies and the enemies of His people symbolized by a fierce serpent which is also called the **dragon**. In *Revelation* John sees the vision of a serpent whom he also calls a dragon (Rev. 12; 20: 2), and in Revelation 13: 1 one of the beasts comes up out of the **sea**.

So close is the similarity of this section with the book of *Revelation* that Arnold and Beyer call **Isaiah 24: 1—27: 13** “The Little Apocalypse”.<sup>171</sup> God is at war with the nations—and with the apostate church—for the sake of the elect.

### **Chapter 27: 2-13—God’s Vineyard Will Produce**

This chapter should have begun in **verse 2** (Remember that chapter divisions are not inspired by the Holy Spirit). Yet, it is still **in that day**. Isaiah returns to the vineyard theme of chapter 5, but this time with a more optimistic outlook. This time the vineyard produces the fruit God intended, and Jacob takes root and sprouts (v. 6). Judgment is coming (v. 8), but not a judgment which will result in total annihilation. Israel will be banished, but their iniquity will be forgiven

<sup>171</sup> Bill T. Arnold and Bryan E. Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament*, p. 363

(v. 9) and they will be gathered from foreign lands for the purpose of worshipping the Lord in Jerusalem (v. 13).

### **Chapter 28—The Captivity of Ephraim , the Northern Kingdom of Israel**

Since the captivity of Ephraim is in view, the date of the prophecy must be before 722 BC and the fall of Samaria. (Isaiah began his prophecy about 740 BC.) The wealth of Ephraim is described in the early part of this chapter as well as the decadence (moral decline) of the priests, prophets, and judges of the people (vv. 6-8; see notes on *Amos*).

It is difficult to determine when the prophet turns his attention away from Ephraim and toward Judah. Jerusalem is mentioned in v.14, but the ridicule of Isaiah must have come directly from the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for this is the place where he prophesied. The people ridicule the prophet's message as inappropriate for anyone but babies weaned from their mothers' breast (v.9).<sup>172</sup> They say, **For he says, 'Order on order, order on order, line on line...'** (v. 10). In other words his teaching is a monotonous routine of moral commandments which have no coherence or meaning. Isaiah responds by saying that because they have despised the word of the Lord, the Lord will now speak to them in a foreign language, the language of their Assyrian captors (v. 11). Thus, the foreign language of the Assyrians was a sign of Israel's judgment. Paul alludes to this judgment in 1 Corinthians 14.

In the Law it is written, "BY MEN OF STRANGE TONGUES AND BY THE LIPS OF STRANGERS I WILL SPEAK TO THIS PEOPLE, AND EVEN SO THEY WILL NOT LISTEN TO ME," says the Lord.<sup>22</sup> So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy *is for a sign*, not to unbelievers but to those who believe. (1 Corinthians 14:21-22 NASB)

In **verse 13**, the prophet turns their own ridicule against them. They had mocked the prophet's words in v. 10 as monotonous hum-drum, so now the word of the Lord as moral statutes will come back to them in judgment causing them to stumble backward and be taken captive into Assyria and Babylon (v. 13; 2 Chron. 36: 15-16). No one can despise the word of the Lord and get away with it. It will always accomplish the purpose for which God sent it whether in blessing or cursing (Isa. 55: 11; 2 Cor. 2: 14-16).

A familiar messianic prophecy comes in v. 16 which Peter quotes in his defense before the Sanhedrin in Acts 4: 11. It is appropriate that Peter uses this quotation before the **rulers and elders and scribes** in Jerusalem (Acts 4: 5) since Isaiah in **chapter 28** is now addressing the rulers of Jerusalem who are **scoffing** at his words (v. 14). The nation of Israel throughout its history has been a nation of scoffers who reject the word of the Lord. From Isaiah's day down to the ministry of Christ they would not repent at the preaching of the prophets. Stephen addresses this impenitence just before he is stoned to death saying, **You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did** (Acts 7: 51). Not much had changed in Israel since the days Isaiah prophesied in the streets of Jerusalem. The cornerstone laid by Yahweh also became a stone of stumbling to the Jews. In Romans 9: 33, Paul weaves together Isaiah 8: 14 and 28: 16 and applies both passages to Christ. The cornerstone laid as the foundation for Israel's faith actually became a

<sup>172</sup> Young, p. 276

rock for the Jews to stumble over. The identification between the Messiah of **28: 16** and the Lord of hosts in **8: 14** should not be missed. Jesus the Messiah is God.<sup>173</sup>

The scoffing of Israel is like a person observing agricultural practices which he knows nothing about (**vv. 23-29**). All the steps and procedures the farmer uses make no sense to someone ignorant of farming, but make perfect sense to the farmer. The rulers of the nation accuse Isaiah of nonsense, but only because they are ignorant of God's ways and statutes. The rules of agriculture come from the Lord. In the same way, wisdom and counsel comes from the Lord (**v. 29**).<sup>174</sup>

### *Chapter 29*

Ariel is another name for Jerusalem. The judicial blinding promised in Isa. 6 has now become a reality in Judah (**vv. 9-10** compared to **Isa. 6: 9-10**). Nevertheless, the nations which afflict Judah will themselves be afflicted (**vv. 5-8**).

God's prophetic word to Judah was as a sealed book to the learned, or it was as a book which could not be read by the illiterate (**vv. 11-12**). It is the same in most nations—a book which is ignored and despised, yet the same book that can give the knowledge which leads to life (2 Tim. 3: 15).

False worship is condemned in **v. 13**. Even under Hezekiah's reforms (2 Chron. 29-31), the people themselves had not thoroughly repented; religion was merely an outward form. They obviously did not understand who God was or His attributes; otherwise, they would not have believed that their evil deeds done in secret were hidden from God (**v. 15**). But they turned things upside down. They were not the ones in control even when they were sinning against the Lord. God was the potter and they were the clay (**v. 16**), and for them to believe that he could not see what they were doing is just as absurd as a piece of pottery saying about the potter, "He did not make me." Paul uses this passage in Romans 9: 19-21 in answer to the objection to God's sovereign ways with men.

You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?"<sup>20</sup> On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it?<sup>21</sup> Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? (Romans 9:19-21 NASB)

After the discipline of Judah will come blessing, for the deaf will now hear his words and the blind will see (**v. 18**)—a reversal of **Isaiah 6: 10**. The afflicted will be delivered from their oppressors, including dishonest judges (**vv. 19-21**).

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<sup>173</sup> Murray, *Romans*, p. 45

<sup>174</sup> Young, pp. 295-301



*Chapters 30-31—Warning against Alliance with Egypt*

Ahaz had turned in vain to Assyria as an alliance against Syria and Israel. Now that Assyria has turned against Israel and Judah, there are many who wish to form an alliance with Egypt. This alliance is condemned as distrust of God who had delivered Israel from Egypt long ago. Salvation is not in Egypt but in **repentance, quietness, and trust (v. 15)**. Nevertheless, God is gracious and will show compassion to his people. Their enemies will be destroyed (**v. 28, 31**).

*Chapter 31* begins the same way as *chapter 30* with a warning not to depend on Egypt as security against Assyria. It is not Egypt but the Lord who will defend Judah against Assyria (**vv. 4-5; 8-9**), but his people must put away their idols (**vv. 6-7**). It turns out just as the prophet predicted for God alone defeats Assyria miraculously without the help of Egypt or Judah (**Isa. 37: 36**).

*Chapter 32—The Future of Israel under a Righteous King*

This is a prediction of the Messianic kingdom when sight and hearing are restored and when wisdom prevails (**vv. 1-8; 15-18, 20**). Nevertheless, before this kingdom comes, judgment must come first, a judgment for which the **daughters** of Judah must prepare (**vv. 9-14; 19**). The transition from judgment to blessing comes in **v. 15**.

*Chapter 33—God’s Power against Assyria*

The background for this chapter is 2 Kings 18.<sup>175</sup> Sennacherib, king of Assyria, had demanded 300 talents of silver and 30 talents of gold from Hezekiah as tribute money. Hezekiah responded by giving him all the silver found in the temple and the king’s house, etc. (see 2 Kings 18: 15-16). From **v. 8** of chapter 33, it appears that this was the agreed upon amount, but Sennacherib was still dissatisfied. This led to breaking the covenant (the peace treaty—**v. 8**). Thus, because the ambassadors of Judah had failed to broker the desired peace agreement, they go weeping in the streets (**v. 7**).

But God is not alarmed at all. Now that Assyria has acted treacherously by violating the agreement (covenant), God will arise from his seat and take action so that his name will be exalted before all the people (**v. 10**). Far and near he wants everyone to acknowledge what he will do (**v.13**). But the sinners in Jerusalem are terrified of God, asking, **Who among us can live with the consuming fire**, that is, in the presence of God? The answer comes in **vv. 15-16**—one who walks righteously. Assyria will be no more (**v. 19**), but Zion will endure (**v. 20**) because the Lord defends her (**v. 21**) as judge, lawgiver, and king (**v. 22**). Even the lame will be able to partake in the spoils of war when the Lord judges the enemies of Israel (**v. 24**).

The ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy is the protection the Lord gives to His church. Thus, Assyria is a type of all the enemies of the Lord. In its apparent weakness, the salvation of the church from such formidable foes seems hopeless, but no enemy can stand against the sovereign Lord. The church is besieged on all sides. Satan, his legions of demons, and their human

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<sup>175</sup> Young, p. 411

accomplices—the seed of the serpent—attempt to destroy her (Rev. 12), but the Lord arises from His seat to protect the church and put an end to Satan and all His enemies.

### ***Chapter 34—God’s Indignation against the Nations***

God will discipline His people by using the cruelty of other nations, but woe to the nations who hate the people of God. The picture is that of a battlefield in which the corpses of those slain by the wrath of God are rotting in the fields (v. 3). We have similar pictures of God’s vengeance in Revelation 14: 14-20 in which the men of this world are gathered like grapes to be placed in the winepress of the wrath of God. Edom, the relative of Israel who became her arch-enemy, is singled out as only one example of what will happen to those who oppose God’s people (v. 5). Moab, Egypt, Ethiopia, et al have been dealt with earlier in **chapters 13-23**. Moab’s land shall become desolate, a place inhabited only by wild animals (vv. 9-17).

### ***Chapter 35—Return from Exile Predicted***

Although a partial fulfillment of this prophecy takes place in the return of the exiles to Jerusalem, the ultimate fulfillment is the new heaven and new earth in which the negative effects of the fall upon the earth are reversed. Much of the earth has become an uninhabitable desert because of man’s sin.<sup>176</sup> (I have heard that the Sahara desert in northern Africa is gaining about one mile per year southward. The trees in Uganda are being cut down faster than they are being replanted, causing climate changes which produce less rain. Will Uganda be a desert in 200 years?) But even the desert will one day blossom so that man can fulfill his obligation to fill the earth and have dominion over it (Gen. 1: 28).

The eyes of the blind will be opened, the deaf will hear, and the lame will leap. The healing ministry of Christ was a *partial* fulfillment of this prophecy (Lk. 7: 22), but it is all too evident that Jesus did not heal everyone, and the desert did not bloom. His first coming was the down payment of the final consummation of this kingdom in which the whole earth will enjoy renewal and the freedom from the futility of sin forced upon it through man’s sin. Romans 8: 18-25 gives us the NT commentary on this passage in Isaiah. Water, a symbol of salvation, will be in abundance. The Garden of Eden in Genesis is described as a place where there was an abundance of water (Gen. 2: 10-14), and the new Jerusalem has a river flowing through the center of the city (Rev. 22; cf. Ezek. 47: 1-12).

Notice that a highway will be in the desert, a highway of **holiness** which may not be traveled by the unclean or unholy, symbolizing the fact that the new heaven and earth will not be inhabited by the wicked. It is the way Jesus describes when he says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” In Revelation 21: 37 we read of the new Jerusalem that **nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life**. Only the redeemed (v. 9) will walk on this highway in the desert which is now blossoming with vegetation because of the water of life which is flowing through it.

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<sup>176</sup> Young, p. 446

**The ransomed of the Lord will return** is a reference to the exiled Jews who return to the land, but they are *typical of all the redeemed* who have been ransomed by the blood of Christ and who will inherit the new heaven and earth. **Sorrow and sighing will flee away** as God wipes away all tears (Isa. 25: 8).

### *Chapters 36—37—The Arrogance of Assyria*

**Chapters 38—39** are the narrative sections of *Isaiah* which form a connecting link between the first and second parts of the prophecy. Isaiah deals with the period of Assyria's superiority and world power in the first part of Isaiah (**Chapters 1—39**) with only limited treatment of the coming world power of Babylon (see **chapters 13—14**). **Chapters 36—37** deal with Assyria's king Sennacherib, the last great king of Assyria. Babylon is introduced to us in **Chapter 39**. These two periods—the superiority of Assyria followed by the superiority of Babylon—form the background of Isaiah's ministry<sup>177</sup>

The genre of this portion of Isaiah is narrative, not poetry. Sennacherib, king of Assyria, has sent his chief general to intimidate Hezekiah into surrendering Jerusalem. Hezekiah has already complied with his demand for tribute money, but Sennacherib has reneged (gone back) on the agreement (see commentary on **Chapter 33**). For more context, see 2 Kings 18—19 which is essentially the same as **Isa. 36—37**. In his attempt at intimidation, Rabshakeh oversteps his limits and blasphemes the name of God by comparing him to the false gods of the other nations that Assyria has already conquered. Rabshakeh represents the arrogance of man who believes all religions to be equal, but man's power superior to all of them. For his arrogance and blasphemy, the fate of Assyria is sealed. The humiliating defeat of Assyria on the doorstep of Jerusalem in 701 BC is the beginning of the end of Assyria as a world power. Assyria falls to Babylon in 612 BC.

In the midst of the crisis, Hezekiah seeks Isaiah's help and, most importantly, the face of God (**Chapter 37: 15-20**). In his prayer he acknowledges what Rabshakeh refused to admit, that the God of Israel was not like the gods of the other nations, which were no gods at all but the work of men's hands (**37: 19**). God responds to Hezekiah's prayer through Isaiah in **vv. 21-29**. He also responds to Rabshakeh's blasphemy by killing 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in one night (**v. 36**). Sennacherib returns home in disgrace and is murdered by his own sons, succeeded by his son Esarhaddon. The destruction of Sennacherib's army is the beginning of the end of Assyria as the world power, and through this prophecy (**37: 30-35**), Isaiah provides a confirmation of future predictions of Babylonian exile. Thus, the latter prophecy concerning Babylon finds confirmation in the proximate (near) prophecy of Assyrian defeat.

Sennacherib's assassination takes place about 20 years after his return to Nineveh from Jerusalem. God never gets in a hurry, but His judgment is sure. No one ever knows when it will happen. Notice the irony of his death. Just as Hezekiah had prayed to the Lord, so Sennacherib prays to his god, but the outcome is quite different. Yahweh delivers Hezekiah, but Nisroch does not deliver Sennacherib even from his own murderous sons.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Young, p. 457

<sup>178</sup> Young, p. 506

The events in **Chapters 36—37** take place *after* the events of **chapters 38—39**. The same reversed order is given in 2 Kings 18—20 in which chapter 20 is essentially the same as Isaiah 38—39 and occurs *before* 2 Kings 18—19.

### **Chapter 38—Hezekiah Healed**

We find Hezekiah praying for his life—a prayer he prays before he begs for the Lord’s help against Assyria. He has been put on notice by Isaiah that he will die, but he pleads to the Lord for an extension of time. God hears him and gives him 15 more years (**v. 5**). A sign is given to him to assure him that God will keep this promise of an additional 15 years—the shadow of the sun going backwards (**v. 8**). Young has cautioned against judging Hezekiah too harshly in comparison to Paul’s optimistic view of death in Philippians 1: 23. Hezekiah lived before the coming of Christ, and his understanding of life after death was much less informed than that of the Apostle Paul. Furthermore, the notification of his impending death may have come before he had an heir to inherit the throne which would have marked the end of the Davidic dynasty. His desire to live may have been for the Lord’s sake as much or more than for his own sake.<sup>179</sup>

It is difficult to determine what Hezekiah means in **vv. 18-19**. Does he have hope in the resurrection of the dead (see notes on **Chapter 25**)? Does he believe that the soul sleeps until the resurrection from the dead? Young answers these questions in the negative and says that Hezekiah “is concerned with the question of one’s sins depriving him of the privilege of praising God”<sup>180</sup> For similar expressions, see Ps. 115: 17.

The dead do not praise the Lord, nor *do* any who go down into silence.

If we wonder what Hezekiah means, we also have to wonder what the Psalmist implies, as well. Delitzsch believes we must interpret Psalm 115: 17 in the light of the limited information the OT saints possessed concerning the never-ending praise of the departed saints in heaven.<sup>181</sup> Spurgeon comments that the promises given to the OT saints were described primarily in terms of the land and that their understanding of the after-life was very limited<sup>182</sup> On the other hand, we must remember that Abraham was looking for a city whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11). His understanding of the promises may have gone beyond even that of Moses who wrote about Abraham. It is difficult to come to any conclusions about Hezekiah’s—and the typical Israelite’s—understanding of the after-life. We may conclude that it was not nearly so developed as our understanding based on the NT literature. Progressive revelation has helped us understand and hope for the coming resurrection from the dead and the never-ending praise, worship, and service of the believer in the new heaven and new earth. We should not be surprised when we find statements from the OT writers which appear deficient in theological development. God did not reveal himself all at once, but in stages.<sup>183</sup>

<sup>179</sup> Young, pp. 509-510

<sup>180</sup> Young, p. 527

<sup>181</sup> Delitzsch, *Psalms*

<sup>182</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Psalms*

<sup>183</sup> However, see comments on **chapters 25 and 26** and **Daniel 12: 2**.

**Chapter 39—“Yahweh is all you need! Or is he?”**<sup>184</sup>

Young points out that the events of **chapters 38—39** took place *before* the events of **chapters 36—37** in which Assyrian troops are destroyed by the direct intervention of God. This would explain why Hezekiah is so willing to show the king of Babylon his treasures (**chapter 39**). In this way, he was forming a future alliance with Babylon against Assyria which is still a threat to Judah. Visible treasures would assure Babylon that Judah could pay its tribute. If this is the case, then Hezekiah was making the same mistake as Ahaz who forms an alliance with Assyria against Syria and Israel (2 Kings 16). In so doing, Hezekiah was trusting in the arm of flesh rather than the arm of God.<sup>185</sup>

Davis agrees with Young and points out from the text of 2 Kings 20: 6 and 13 that the threat of Assyria has not yet been removed when Hezekiah falls ill; and, secondly, that the treasury of Hezekiah was still *full* at that time. This would not have been the case if he had paid the tribute to Sennacherib before the events of **Isaiah 38—39**. The writer is not so much interested in the chronology of events than in “[setting] forth the contrast between walking by faith and walking by sight.”<sup>186</sup>

If we understand the correct chronology of 2 Kings 20 and **Isaiah 38—39**, then we can see that Hezekiah’s faith in **Isaiah 36—37** and 2 Kings 18—19 is contrasted with his lack of faith in **Isaiah 39** and 2 Kings 20 *before* God destroys the Assyrians in 2 Kings 19 and **Isaiah 37**. As the Israelite reader plunges into the story of Hezekiah’s display of wealth, he readily sees the folly of *Realpolitik*. God doesn’t need Babylon to protect His people. He can do that all by Himself. Both Babylon and Egypt are defeated by Assyria by the time Hezekiah falls on his knees to seek the Lord’s help in 2 Kings 19 and **Isaiah 37**. Desperation is a great stimulation to our prayer life, and God does not despise the desperate sinner who repents.

Much later in history Babylon gains the upper hand and defeats Assyria. Jerusalem will dodge the Assyrian threat, and there will be peace in Judah all the days of Hezekiah (**v. 8**), but in 587 BC Judah will fall to Babylon. Notice from Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Daniel 2 that it is Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar that is the head of gold, not Assyria. Beginning with Babylon we see the emergence of the great competitor to the kingdom of God—the kingdom of man—which opposes God and the people of God.<sup>187</sup> For this reason, Babylon represents the quintessential (most representative) enemy of God’s people in the book of Revelation.

**Chapter 40—“Take comfort in your great God.”**

Isaiah presents a vivid contrast between the majesty of God and the frailty of man. **Verses 1-11** provide a *foundational prologue* to the entire second half of Isaiah from **chapter 40** through **chapter 66**.<sup>188</sup>

<sup>184</sup> Ralph Davis, *The Power and the Fury—2 Kings*, p. 291

<sup>185</sup> Young, pp. 507-508, 532, 534-535

<sup>186</sup> Davis, pp. 291-293

<sup>187</sup> Young, p. 17

<sup>188</sup> Arnold and Beyer, p. 373

**Chapter 39 ends with the prophecy that Judah will be taken into exile by Babylon.** For that reason, the prophecy of **chapter 40** is great consolation to the present remnant of Israel—but **only** to the remnant since they are the only ones listening to Isaiah’s message. The great God who takes them into exile is also the same God who will deliver them. But the deliverance may not look exactly like what they expect. The bondage Israel will endure is not primarily the bondage of exile in another country. This was only the external manifestation of a much worse bondage—the bondage to sin. Thus, **the voice** of the one calling in the wilderness to clear the way for the Lord is a prediction of the ministry of John the Baptist who prepares the way for the Lord Jesus Christ (**vv. 3-4** compared to Matt. 3: 3). In Christ, **the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh will see it together (v. 5)**. Mortal man cannot look upon God and live, but God clothing himself in human flesh allows man to gaze upon His veiled glory and live.<sup>189</sup>

The transitory (temporary) nature of man’s earthly existence is here contrasted with the eternity of God’s existence. The word of the Lord—the word by which he created the world and the word which became flesh—**stands forever**. There may be some allusion here to the incarnate word of God in Christ since there is a definite contrast in the immediate context between the greatness of God and the weakness of human kings (**vv. 23-24**; cf. Ps. 2). Furthermore, God’s greatness is contrasted to the nations which **are like a drop from a bucket and are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales** (i.e. nothing at all). They are **less than nothing and meaningless (v. 17)**. Individual inhabitants of the earth are likened to **grasshoppers (v. 22)**. Compared to God, we are insects. This thought should keep us in our proper place.

Therefore, it is vain to trust in idols which mere men have made for themselves (**vv. 19-20**). There is nothing on earth to which we may liken God (**v. 25**) who knows our every deed and thought (**v. 27**), who never gets tired (**v. 28**). Those who wait for God will gain new strength (**v. 31**). These words, spoken some 130 to 150 years before the Babylonian exile, would comfort the remnant of believers who would be taken there. They would also comfort the present remnant who did not know when the exile would take place, but believed that Isaiah was speaking the truth. They will also comfort believers today who live in a very uncertain world of Islamic terrorism and continual war. To the mere human eye, the world seems like a place where chaos reigns, but the same God who controlled the world during the terror of Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Greece, and Rome, still controls the world today.

### **Chapter 41—Prediction of the Medo-Persian Empire**

Who is the mysterious one from the east? Calvin identifies him as Abraham.<sup>190</sup> Delitzsch identifies him as Cyrus, the future king of the Medo-Persian Empire. Media was north of Babylon (**v. 25**) and Persia was east of Babylon (**v. 2**).<sup>191</sup> Matthew Henry accepts both theories as possible.<sup>192</sup> Young identifies him as Cyrus and gives the reasons why some expositors like Calvin interprets him as Abraham (including the fact that the Targum identifies him as such).<sup>193</sup> The best interpretation is that the one from the east is **Cyrus** who is only briefly and vaguely

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<sup>189</sup> Young, pp. 30-31

<sup>190</sup> Calvin, *Isaiah*, p. 246

<sup>191</sup> Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, pp. 158-159

<sup>192</sup> Henry, *Isaiah*

<sup>193</sup> Young, *Isaiah*, pp. 75, 106-107

introduced in **chapter 41** but is actually named in **44: 28** and **45: 1**. The Medo-Persian Empire defeated the Babylonians in 539 BC; thus, Isaiah is speaking prophetically of events which will not happen for another 170 years or so, depending on when he uttered these words. For this reason, many liberal scholars who do not believe in supernatural prophecy of future events attribute this section of Isaiah to one who lived much later than Isaiah. For those who believe that God is omniscient, declaring the end from the beginning (**Isa. 46: 10**), prophecy of future events is not problematic.

Beginning in **v. 4**, Isaiah makes a contrast between Yahweh who is the first and the last and the idols which men have made (**vv. 6-7**). Israel, on the other hand, is the servant of Yahweh and should trust in none other than the Lord who will deliver her from all those who wage war with her (**vv. 8-16**). Yahweh will accomplish salvation for his people (**vv. 17-20**), and then He challenges the false idols to prove what they can do (**vv. 21-24**).<sup>194</sup> Can they declare what will happen in the future? Of course not, and everyone who chooses to worship them is an abomination (**v. 24**).

In **v. 25** Isaiah returns to the subject matter of **vv. 1-4**. An invader will come from the north. In **v. 2** the invader was from the east. There is no contradiction since Media was in the north and Persia in the east. Young maintains that the east was the place of origin while the north was the direction from which the invasion actually occurred.<sup>195</sup> At any rate, only God can predict the future, and all idols are false (**vv. 27-29**).

### **Chapter 42—God’s Servant**

The servant of **chapter 41** has been identified as Israel. The words **my servant** in Isaiah can have the meaning of Israel (**45: 4**) or Christ (**53: 11**; see a concordance for many other references). Most of the **my servant** references are to Israel but some refer to Christ, including here. The immediate context must determine the reference. God puts His Spirit upon His servant who will bring justice to the nations (**vv. 1-4**).<sup>196</sup> In **vv. 19-22** the servant is Israel who is blind and deaf to the message that God is sending her through Isaiah.

*Christ the servant is the fulfillment of Israel*, the servant, since He is the descendant of the Jews. He is the *idealized Israel*, the fullness of what Israel should have been as God’s light-bearers, but wasn’t. Whereas the Jews failed to bring salvation to the nations, Christ succeeded.<sup>197</sup> He would not only bring justice to the oppressed of Israel, but to the oppressed people of every nation. The gospel has accomplished many political and social freedoms throughout the world wherever its teaching has been applied. Although Jesus did not do this directly during His first advent, He left this responsibility to the church whose teaching affects many benevolent social and political changes throughout any society.<sup>198</sup> Nevertheless, the ultimate fulfillment awaits the return of Christ and the consummated kingdom of God on earth.

<sup>194</sup> Young, p. 95

<sup>195</sup> Young, p. 101

<sup>196</sup> cf. Isa. 9; Matt. 12: 18-20, a quotation of Isa. 42. See also Isa. 61: 1 which Christ applies to himself in Lk. 4: 18-19

<sup>197</sup> *Eerdman’s Handbook to the Bible*

<sup>198</sup> See commentary on Isa. 9

**Chapter 43—Israel is Redeemed but Ungrateful**

God will redeem his people, bringing them from the lands of exile back to the land of Palestine. This is fulfilled ultimately in the gathering of the people of God from every corner of the earth in the great evangelistic harvest of people from every tribe, tongue and nation (cf. **Isa. 2**). Israel has been chosen to be a witness to all the nations of the earth that only Yahweh is God (**vv. 8-13**), but Israel failed in this task.

**Verse 14** is a prediction that Babylon, which is not yet a world power, will be destroyed. God will deliver His people from Babylon even as He delivered his people from Egypt by making a way through the sea (**v. 16**—i.e. the Red Sea). But God is going to do something far greater than delivering them from Egypt. He is going to do something **new (v. 19)**, something which will affect the whole earth, even the deliverance He accomplishes in His son, Jesus Christ<sup>199</sup> Here, again we find symbols of a new heaven and earth in which even the animal world glorifies God (**v. 20**; cf. **11: 6-9**) and rivers are found in the desert (**Isa. 35**). The coming of Christ in His first advent is a foreshadowing of the new heaven and new earth which will reverse the curse upon the ground and the alienation between man and creation.

Yet, Israel has not sought the salvation God has to offer them, but has wearied him with her iniquity (**vv. 22-24**). If Israel can prove otherwise, God now gives her an opportunity to defend her case if she can (**v. 26**). Israel cannot prove that God's case against her is unjustified; therefore, she is sentenced to destruction (**v. 28**).

**Chapter 44-45—God's Invitation to Salvation; Cyrus Chosen to Deliver Israel**

Many times throughout the book of *Isaiah* God invites his people to faithfulness and salvation. Is there any God like the one true God who can declare the events which are going to take place (**vv. 6-8**)? It is on this basis—the ability to declare the future—that Yahweh *distinguishes Himself from false gods*, the work of men's hands (**vv. 9-20**).

Once more Israel receives an invitation to return to the Lord who is her redeemer (**v. 21**). In this passage, Cyrus of Persia is named as the one who will rebuild Jerusalem. This is a reference to the return of the Jews from Babylon during Cyrus' reign (cf. 2 Chron. 36: 22-23; Jer. 25: 12; 29: 10; Ezra 1: 1-4).

God has anointed Cyrus to subdue the nations for the sake of Israel (**45: 4**). Thus we see that *the whole world is a stage upon which the redemptive drama for God's people is played*. All things occur for the sake of God's chosen people. By naming Cyrus 170 years before his rise to power, God would prove that there is no god besides Him (**v. 6**). Thus, it is foolish to strive with God to whom one day every knee shall bow and tongue confess that He is the Lord (**vv. 8-25**; cf. Phil. 2: 10). Furthermore, the decree of Cyrus to rebuild the temple in 539 BC would be a confirmation to the *exiled Israelites* that Isaiah's prophecy was true and that God's word to them through the prophets could be trusted. Consequently, they could also be assured that the exile would not last longer than the 70 years predicted by Jeremiah (Jer. 29: 10).

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<sup>199</sup> Young, p. 156



**Chapter 46—47—The Downfall of Babylon**

The Babylonian gods are Bel and Nebo which will bow before Yahweh even as Dagon, the god of the Philistines, fell prostrate before the ark of the covenant (1 Sam. 5: 3). Again God reminds his people that *He shares no likeness* with the gods of the nations but is unique (**vv. 6-11**). His plans cannot be frustrated; whatever he sets out to do he will accomplish (**v. 10**) including calling Cyrus from the east (**v. 11**). Particularly in **vv. 6-7** He ridicules (mocks) those who attempt to fashion a god from gold (**cf. 44: 9-20**). Such a god cannot declare the end from the beginning (**v. 10; cf. 44: 7**).

The satire (mockery) of the false gods found in **chapter 46** is still appropriate for liberal theologians. Many insist that the predictions of Babylonian exile and Babylon's fall must have been made, not by Isaiah, but by a postexilic writer *after* these events occur. But their arguments, if they could prove anything, would prove far too much. If it were *impossible* for Isaiah to make such accurate predictions 170 years before the fact, how then is Isaiah's God any *different* from the false gods he ridicules? Robertson's analysis gets to the heart of the matter.

The whole context of Isaiah 40—48 appears as a highly structured “challenge to prophecy” in which the one and only creator God and redeemer of his people does what no other supposed god can do; he predicts the future in a manner than only someone who controls the courses of nations could do. Any of the various gods of the nations might offer an impressive analysis of political prospects. Given a situation later in Israel's sixth-century exile, *just about anyone* might have an inside line on the fact that Cyrus would reverse certain policies enacted by the Babylonians, resulting in Israel's return from exile. But what deaf and dumb idol could match the climactic prediction of Isaiah, writing in the eighth century B.C., who names the conqueror of Babylon as the deliverer of his people 170 years before he appears on the scene of history! In the minds of many, not even god himself could have that kind of knowledge, much less the necessary control of human history that could guarantee its occurrence.

This distinctive prediction as it appears in its canonical context is actually the point at which the faith of many stumbles, leading to a denial of Isaianic authorship. But for an evangelical, this prophecy could hardly be regarded as more spectacular than Isaiah's anticipation of Jesus the messiah, his sufferings, and his glory, delivered *seven hundred years* before his birth....

*The plea that this question not be made a test of orthodoxy must be considered with great care.* For it is not a light thing to recite the testimony of the Lord and his gospel writers, and then to brush their uniform witness aside as though it were irrelevant to issues of faith and life today. Numerous ecclesiastical communities that have accepted negatively critical perspectives on questions such as the authorship of Isaiah have ended in bankruptcy regarding matters of faith and morals within a generation or two....

If the integrity of the book of Isaiah is lost, any force of the truth that might be felt from a legitimate unity of the book must inevitably be dissipated. *For how can this Holy One of Israel expect truthfulness from his worshipers when a massive portion of the Isaianic material presents itself as predictions of the future arising in the eighth century B.C. when actually these predictions appeared after the fact of their fulfillment in the sixth century B.C.?* A God who is presented as intending to consummate history by the restoration of primal blessedness loses his credibility when his message is announced by a prophet whose God cannot clearly demonstrate that he controls time-bound history by anticipating its future even as he has laid down the gauntlet for the other gods [challenged the other gods]. No legitimate expectation can remain for the appearance of a predicted prince of peace who will establish righteousness in the earth, or a suffering servant of the Lord who

will willingly suffer in himself the righteous judgments of the thrice-holy God in the place of his people, if the prophet is denied the possibility of anticipating the future.<sup>200</sup>

In **Chapter 47** God chastises Babylon for not showing mercy to his people (**v. 6**). She is likened to a virgin daughter who has never known a man, but her nakedness will be exposed when God judges her for her sins against His people (**v. 3**). Babylon's sorcerers and astrologers will not be able to save her from ruin (**vv. 12-13**).

### *Chapter 48—Israel's Faithlessness*

God declared the future things so that Israel in its disobedience would not be able to attribute the fulfillment to idols (**vv. 3-5**). Nevertheless Israel has been a "rebel" (transgressor) from birth (**v. 8**). God restrains His wrath for the sake of His own praise and His own name (**v. 9**), and the afflictions He sends on His people are for the purpose of purification and sanctification. However, Israel is not like silver when God tests them with affliction, and they do not come out of the fires of affliction like silver from a furnace—purified (**v. 10**). Instead, they come out of the affliction just as rebellious as they went in. God's testing produces no good results in Israel. Sometimes God's testing produces no results in individuals, and they come out of the testing having learned nothing, only to have to repeat the same testing later. God will continue to afflict individual believers and the church with similar trials until the proper lessons are learned. Nevertheless, God continues to act in behalf of Israel to prevent his name being profaned among the heathen who would say that God was not able to save his people (**v. 11**). Likewise, God strives with his wayward people today, for he is committed to us for the purpose of salvation and sanctification. God's ultimate purpose is not to make us comfortable but to glorify Himself through our transformation from sinfulness to holiness.

God has loved Cyrus for the specific purpose of delivering His people from the bondage of Babylonian exile (**v. 14**). It was the policy of Babylon to take conquered people into exile and to force them to worship false gods, particularly the false god in the image of the king (Dan. 3). Persia, in contrast, allowed some freedom of religion. We must remember that the heart of the king is in God's hands (Prov. 21: 1).

Obedience to the commandments would have resulted in the enjoyment of God's blessings and the fulfillment of His promise to Abraham in the form of Jewish descendants (**vv. 17-19**). As it turned out, God fulfilled His promise to Abraham not by making the *physical nation of Israel* as innumerable as the sand, but, ultimately, by making *believers* as innumerable as the sand. In spite of their disobedience, God will redeem Israel from Babylon (**v. 20**) just as he did from Egypt (**v. 21**). From neither country—Egypt or Babylon—did the people deserve their redemption.

### *Chapter 49—God Sends His Servant to Israel*

The servant in this passage is not Israel since Israel is identified in **v. 5** as **Jacob** whom the servant must bring back to the Lord. The servant in this passage will become a **light to the nations so that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth** (**v. 6**). Simeon applied this

<sup>200</sup> Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*, pp. 191-194; emphasis and words in brackets mine

verse to Jesus when he was presented to the Lord according to the Law (Lk. 2: 32), and the apostle Paul applied it to his ministry of the gospel in presenting Christ to the nations (Acts 13: 47). Thus, the servant in this passage is Christ. It is **too small a thing** for God to limit the saving work of Christ to the Jewish nation alone. He will also make Christ a light to the Gentiles so that salvation will reach the end of the earth, a recurring theme in *Isaiah*.

The humiliation of Christ is alluded to in **v. 4**.<sup>201</sup> For all His suffering and self-denial for His people, He was despised and rejected of men (also **v. 7**; cf. **Isa. 53**). Nevertheless, one day kings and princes will recognize Christ for who He really is and will bow down to Him, a prophecy fulfilled in the history of the church with the conversion of many world rulers to the Christian faith. It is ultimately fulfilled at the return of Christ when every knee shall bow (including world rulers) to the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords (also **v. 23**).

In **vv. 8-13** the return from exile is depicted in which the remnant returns from various parts of the earth. God cannot forget His chosen nation, however sinful it is. Conceivably a mother may forget her **nursing child**, but God cannot forget Israel (**vv. 14-15**). Israel will once again produce offspring which will be so numerous that there will not be enough room in the land for them (**vv. 19-21**), a prophecy partially fulfilled in the return of Israel to Palestine but ultimately fulfilled with the evangelistic advance of the gospel to all the nations. God multiplies His people through the gospel to such an extent that Palestine is much too small for them. They are spread out over the entire globe.

### *Chapter 50—The Lord Upholds His Servant*

God has not sent Israel away divorced, but Israel herself has abandoned God. Keep in mind that Hosea prophesies about Israel as a faithless wife a little earlier than Isaiah. Instead of divorcing Gomer, Hosea brings her back home. God wishes to do the same with faithless Judah.

The servant begins speaking in **v. 4**, and from **v. 6** we may identify him as the Lord Jesus Christ who gave His back to those who beat him and His face to humiliation and spitting (Matt. 26: 67; 27: 30; Mk. 14: 65; 15: 19; Lk. 22: 63; Jn. 19: 1).<sup>202</sup> Throughout His crucifixion, Christ entrusted himself to the Father who helped Him (**v. 7**).<sup>203</sup> He was judged by men as a sinner but there was none who could justly condemn him (**v. 9**).<sup>204</sup> As Jesus entrusted Himself to God, so also Isaiah, through the words of the servant, invites Israel to entrust *herself* to God (**v. 10**).

### *Chapter 51—52: 12—Exhortation and Encouragement for Israel*

If Israel will repent and turn to the Lord, blessing will come. This is proven from the past history of Israel as they trace their roots back to Abraham and Sarah (**v. 2**). Joy and gladness will come from obedience to the law (**vv. 3-4**; cf. 1 Jn. 5: 3). Heaven and earth will pass away, but the salvation of God through His word will last forever (cf. Lk. 21: 33).

<sup>201</sup> Young, p. 272

<sup>202</sup> Check the margins of your study bibles for these references

<sup>203</sup> Cf. 1 Pet. 2: 23, “and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously”.

<sup>204</sup> cf. John 8:46a—“Which one of you convicts Me of sin?”

Even as the Lord delivered them from Egypt (**Rahab**) by letting them pass through the sea, He will also deliver them from exile (**vv. 9-16**); therefore, Israel should not fear men (**vv. 7, 12-13**). The fear of God and the fear of men are mutually exclusive. Your life cannot be controlled by the fear of men and the fear of God at the same time.

Jerusalem should rouse herself; she should wake up. There is none to lead her, meaning that godly leadership was lacking in the nation. God encourages Jerusalem by saying that he will take away the cup of his anger and make others drink of it.

**Isaiah 52: 1** is another exhortation to wake up and claim the promises of God for His people. The chains of their captivity will be thrown off (**v. 2**). They have been redeemed, not by money but, we now know, with the precious blood of Jesus Christ (**v. 3**). Israel has been oppressed by Egypt, and now by Assyria, so that the name of God is blasphemed among the heathen nations. It is a dishonor to God for His people to be taken away into exile (**vv. 4-5**), yet He will allow it in order to discipline them for holiness. In the same way, it dishonors God for us to suffer for our sin, but God allows it for our good. Although the exile has not yet taken place, Isaiah speaks as though it had already happened. Paul's use of this verse in Romans 2: 24 is appropriate because in that context, he was scolding the Jews because they had the law but did not keep it. And because they did not keep the law, God's name was blasphemed among the Gentiles because of the ungodly behavior of the Jews. In the context of *Isaiah*, the meaning is the same. The Jews are ungodly, and because they are ungodly they are taken away into exile. In both situations, God's name is reviled through the sinfulness of his people.

**Verse 7** is also quoted in Romans 10: 15, proving that the good news of salvation by grace through faith was available to the Jews in Isaiah's day. The problem was not that the gospel was not available, but it was a message which was not heard (**53: 1**). In spite of their predicament in exile, God does not cease to reign on his throne.

Just as the exile is spoken of as already existing, redemption from Babylon is also referred to as an accomplished fact (**vv. 9-11**). In the interpretation of such prophecies there is always a literal and a figurative meaning. The ultimate fulfillment is always the spiritual redemption of His people which took place when Christ released His people from their bondage to sin. Given the terrible suffering of the unbelieving masses of Jewish people throughout history (including the Nazi holocaust during which 6 million Jews were executed), it would be difficult to interpret the deliverance passages merely in terms of physical deliverance. Christ brings deliverance in ways that transcend the suffering and misery of this world.

### ***Chapter 52: 13—53: 12—The Suffering Servant***

Paradoxically (an apparent contradiction), the deliverance of the people of God will come from the suffering servant. His exaltation is proclaimed by Isaiah in **52: 13** before his humiliation in **chapter 53**. The disfigurement of Christ in His torture before the crucifixion is alluded to in **52: 14**. Those who have seen the movie, *The Passion of Christ*, by Mel Gibson have been astonished to see how much Christ suffered in His execution. He was truly **marred more than any man**, and those who knew Him well may not have been able to recognize Him because of the severe beatings. As He was tortured, and as He hung on the cross, Jesus **sprinkled** many nations with his cleansing blood. His blood was the blood of atonement which the high priest formerly and

symbolically sprinkled on the altar as atonement for the sins of the nation (Ex. 24: 6; Lev. 8-9—where the sprinkling of blood is mentioned five times).

But who has believed the prophet's message (**53: 1**)? The answer comes in the Hebraic parallel statement following: **And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?** No one is able to believe the message of salvation unless it is revealed to him from above—from God. When Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, Jesus did not congratulate him for his discernment but said, **Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven** (Matt. 16: 17). Jesus declared on another occasion,

“I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from *the* wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes.” (Matt. 11: 25 NASB)

The Apostle Paul also agreed that the knowledge of salvation was a gift of grace.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God. (Eph. 2: 8 NASB)

Thus, if we have believed the message of salvation, it is only because the **arm of the Lord** [*his mighty salvation*] **has been revealed** to us.

**Isaiah 53** is one of the most explicit descriptions of the humiliation of the Lord Jesus Christ when He took upon himself the weakness of sinful flesh yet without becoming a sinner. **Verse 2** does not necessarily describe the outward appearance of Christ, but it implies that there was nothing extraordinary about His earthly appearance or His earthly circumstances. Saul was tall, and both Saul and David were handsome men (1 Sam. 9: 2; 1 Sam. 16: 12); but nothing is said about Christ being handsome or tall. There seemed to be nothing about His outward appearance which drew others to Him. The prophet's apparent meaning is that Christ was highly underestimated by everyone.

He himself was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrow and grief. He grieved because His rejection would result in spiritual devastation for His people. When men rejected Him, it was a sign of their destruction. The suffering Servant bore our grief on the cross (**v. 4**); He was pierced because of our sins, crushed by God the Father for our iniquities. The judgment of God for our sins fell on Him and by His crucifixion we are healed of our sins (**v. 5**). We were straying sheep going our own way, lost and without a shepherd; but God was pleased to lay our iniquity upon Christ. When He was led through the streets of Jerusalem carrying His cross, He uttered no threats or curses, but was like a sheep before His shearers; nor did He resist His executioners in any way even though He could have called to His aid 12 legions of angels (Matt. 26: 53).<sup>205</sup> He was buried among the wicked but also with the rich since a rich man buried Jesus in his private tomb (**v. 9**; cf. Matt. 27: 57-60). He had done nothing to deserve death (**v. 9b**), but Yahweh was pleased to crush Him as our guilt offering (**v. 10**). Christ will see His spiritual offspring (Heb. 12: 2; also **Isa. 53: 11**).<sup>206</sup>

<sup>205</sup> A legion consisted of 6,100 foot soldiers and 726 cavalymen; thus Jesus could have summoned more than 72,000 angels, even when only one angel would have been necessary to destroy those who were crucifying Him.

<sup>206</sup> As God was satisfied in the first creation and said, “It is good”, so Christ will be satisfied in His church, the new creation (2 Cor. 5: 17; Gal. 5: 16).

Though put to death, God will prolong His days, for Christ is the eternal God over whom death cannot have the ultimate victory (**v. 10**). Through the knowledge of Himself which Christ gives others, He will justify many (**v. 11**).<sup>207</sup> Because Christ humbled Himself to the point of death, God will highly exalt Him and give Him a name which is above every name (**v. 12**; cf. Phil. 2: 9-11).

### ***Chapter 54—The Expansion of the Church***

The Apostle Paul applies this passage to the church, the ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy (Gal. 4: 27). Isaiah indicates that Israel will once more flourish and prosper. In Babylonian bondage she is like a wife abandoned by her husband (**v. 1**). Because of her sins, God has abandoned Israel to the consequences of the covenant curse, and she lies desolate in Babylon. But she will **shout for joy** since the servant has suffered for her afflictions and interceded for her transgressions (**53: 12**).<sup>208</sup> She will now bear *more* children than she did when she was **married** to God in the theocratic kingdom before the exile. The partial fulfillment of this prophecy is the return of Israel from Babylonian exile under Cyrus in 536 BC. When the Jews return from Babylon, they settle down, plant vineyards, build houses, and have children. We know from Paul's use of the passage in Galatians 4 that its *ultimate fulfillment* is the missionary expansion of the church in which the number of God's people multiplies beyond anything possible under the theocracy of Israel.<sup>209</sup>

Notice in **v. 2** that the church is told to **enlarge the place of your tent**. Tents are impermanent dwellings, the habitation of Abraham who was **looking for a city whose builder and maker is God** (Heb. 11). God's people live in this world as **aliens and strangers** (1 Pet. 2: 11) knowing in their hearts that "home" is no particular place on earth but only in the new heaven and earth where God dwells. In the expansion of the church in the gospel age, the promises to Abraham to make him a great nation are fully met in Christ, not in physical descendants but spiritual **descendants who will possess nations** (**v. 3**). We should not limit this promise of fertility to the Gentiles coming into the church. Paul seems to teach in Romans 11 that there will be a spiritual reformation among ethnic Jews sometime in the future in which they will embrace Christ in large numbers. This has yet to happen, and it will be a glorious event when it does happen.

Notwithstanding our impermanent dwelling on earth, the Lord will build for His people a lasting, permanent dwelling, a city whose foundations and walls are made with precious stones (**v. 11**; cf. Rev. 21: 12,19; 21: 18). Thus, the city that God will make for us is the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21, an idealized city representing the kingdom of God on earth.

God will protect his church from harm (**vv. 14-17**), a promise that Paul reflects in Romans 8: 35-39.

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?<sup>36</sup> Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED."

<sup>37</sup> But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am

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<sup>207</sup> Young, p. 357

<sup>208</sup> Young, p. 361

<sup>209</sup> Young and Calvin

convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,<sup>39</sup> nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35-39 NASB)

### ***Chapter 55—The Summons to Repentance and Faith***

If anyone has any doubts about the availability of God's grace to His Old Covenant people, this chapter is sufficient by itself to remove all doubt. In Galatians 3, Paul tells us that the Law was given as a disciplinarian to lead men to grace. It should have accomplished this task first for the Israelites to whom it was given at Sinai. To **buy wine and milk without money and without cost** was an invitation to receive salvation as a gift of God's grace. From passages like this one we can better comprehend the message of *Hebrews* concerning ancient Israel.

For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard. (Hebrews 4:2 NASB)

This gracious call is not limited to the Jews only but is extended to the Gentiles. The **everlasting covenant (v. 3)** is offered to a nation which the Messiah (**David**, who is a witness to the peoples—**v. 4**) did not **know** intimately (as he did the Jews) who will **run** to him for salvation (**v. 5**).

The exhortation is given to seek the Lord while he may be found and to call upon Him while he is near (**v. 6**). The opportunity of salvation will not be extended to men forever. There is a day of reckoning for every human being, and no one knows when that day of reckoning will be. We must come to Christ in repentance (**v. 7a**) and believing that with the Lord there is abundant compassion and willingness on His part to pardon our sin (**v. 7b**). Such belief in the abundant grace of God is not something we ourselves can understand apart from grace, for God's thoughts and ways with men are beyond our understanding (**v. 8**). He is truly incomprehensible to us unless he makes himself known to us by his condescending grace (**v. 9**). The word of God—like the word of the gospel found here—never fails to accomplish His purpose in sending it. It will accomplish **salvation** for the elect and **judicial hardening and condemnation** for the reprobate (**vv. 10-11**). No neutrality is possible when we hear the word.

Notice that as the people of God respond in repentance toward sin and faith in His word, the effects of the curse upon the created world will be broken. Instead of thorns and thistles dominating the fields, there will be lush vegetation (**vv. 12-13**; cf. Rom. 8: 18-25). This is yet another verse pertaining to the new heavens and new earth.

### ***Chapter 56: 1-8—The Call to Righteousness for All People***

While the emphasis in **chapter 55** is the grace of God, the emphasis in **chapter 56** is man's responsibility to respond to this grace in obedience.<sup>210</sup> The righteousness of God is coming, and those who are practicing righteousness when he comes will be blessed (cf. Lk. 12: 42-43). This is not a salvation by works, but merely the same teaching we find in James 2, that faith without works is dead. The invitation is once again not limited to national Israel but to foreigners who

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<sup>210</sup> Young, p. 388

have joined themselves to God's covenant people (v. 3, 6). In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile.

**Eunuchs** (castrated males) were excluded from God's assembly (Deut. 23: 1), but in the salvation that God will inaugurate in the future, such restrictions will be null and void. Many of the civil laws of Israel will then become obsolete and must give way to a new and better covenant built upon better promises (Heb. 8: 6). Although the eunuch cannot father children and extend his family name—possibly the reason for his exclusion from the assembly—he will be given an everlasting name better than the physical descendants of sons and daughters (v. 5). Thus, here we learn a principle taught in more detail in the NT, that having *physical* descendants was not God's ultimate goal for His people, but producing *spiritual* descendants who keep His law, **who hold fast My covenant and who keep My sabbaths** (v. 4). The Ethiopian eunuch of Acts 8 is a NT fulfillment of this passage.

**Even those** (v.7) refers to the foreigners, those who were formerly **far off** (Acts 2: 39) and **excluded from the covenants of promise** (Eph. 2: 12). These will be invited into the **house of prayer for all the peoples** (cf. Matt. 21: 13). God will gather the dispersed Israelites (v. 8a), but there are **others** He will also gather (v. 8b), even the Gentiles which Jesus refers to as **other sheep** who are either elect Jews or elect Gentiles (Jn. 10: 16).<sup>211</sup>

#### *Chapter 56: 9—57: 21—No Peace for the Wicked*

**Verses 9-12** of **Chapter 56** appear to go better with the context of **Chapter 57**. The **beasts of the fields** are the foreign nations who will devour Israel while her **watchmen** and **shepherds** (false prophets) are pre-occupied with their own lives and material comforts.<sup>212</sup> The prophets are spiritually **blind** and are like **dumb dogs** (v. 10) which cannot bark at the approach of an intruder, thus the people of Israel are not being warned by their prophets of the wrath of God to come. They are lazy **dreamers** who like to sleep. Such is the deplorable condition of those who should have been standing side by side with Isaiah in warning Israel of her sins, but instead, they were part of the problem. So it is with preachers who should be exercising their prophetic function in the church faithfully preaching the word of God, inviting people to repentance and faith, and warning sinners of the wrath of God coming upon the impenitent. But just like the unrepentant sinners in their congregations, they are preoccupied with worldly things (vv. 11-12). They are lazy in their study of the word of God and; therefore, just like dumb dogs who cannot bark, they are incapable of preaching. They are more interested in money than they are in fulfilling their role as shepherds of the sheep.

Many righteous people living in Jerusalem will die peacefully in their beds (**57: 1-2**) before the coming destruction at the hands of Babylon. On the other hand, there is no peace for the wicked (v. 21).

As the people had mocked the words of the prophet in **chap. 28: 10**, they do so here while inflaming themselves with idolatrous worship likened to harlotry (v. 5). They even sacrificed

<sup>211</sup> Young, p. 394

<sup>212</sup> Young, pp. 395-396. The term "shepherd" in the OT is often a reference to kings, but here it refers to the task of shepherds who protect the sheep from harm.



their own children as part of their idolatrous worship. Baal worship is mentioned in **vv. 7-8** which involved ritual sexual intercourse with temple prostitutes.<sup>213</sup>

Beginning in **v. 9**, Isaiah condemns the flirtation with the heathen nations including Ahaz's flirtation with Assyria<sup>214</sup> The nation feared other men but they did not fear God (**v. 11**), and when they need help God will tell them to call upon the idols they had collected from the foreign nations (**v. 13**). The inheritance of the land will belong to the one who takes refuge in the Lord rather than in man or the power of man.

Healing for the nation is promised, for God will not be angry with His people forever (**vv. 14-21**).

### *Chapter 58—False Worship Condemned*

The people of Israel seek the Lord daily with their hypocritical worship as though they were living righteous lives, but the Lord does not honor their worship (**vv. 1-2**). Therefore, they complain to God that he has not noticed their worship (**v. 3**). But the reason God has no regard for their worship is that it is not sincere. Even in their fasting they are pursuing their own pleasure by making all their servants wait on them hand and foot (**v. 3**). The Sabbath was supposed to be a day of rest for *everyone* including male and female servants, even including one's animals (Ex. 20: 10). For the people to rest while others had to work for them was pure hypocrisy. Instead of producing piety and godliness, the hunger from fasting produced contention among themselves (**v. 4**).<sup>215</sup>

Externalism is not the fast the Lord calls for (**v. 5**). Rather, the fast the Lord wants consists of *practical deeds* which flow from the fruit of righteousness—to loosen the heavy burden of the poor and the oppressed by giving them justice in the courts (**v. 6**),<sup>216</sup> to feed the hungry, house the homeless, and clothe the naked (**vv. 7, 10**). These are deeds of kindness which distinguish the sheep from the goats on the Day of Judgment, and Jesus possibly alludes to Isaiah in Matthew 25: 31-46. If they will do these things, then they will prove that they are truly fasting and not simply going through the vain motions of external religion. The result will be that the Lord will hear their prayers (**v. 9, 11-12**).

Likewise, when they observe the Sabbath, they should observe it for the Lord's sake and not their own by allowing their servants to rest rather than serving them (**vv. 13-14**). In so doing they will be seeking the Lord's "pleasure" (**v. 13**) rather than their own (**v. 3**).

### *Chapter 59—Sin Brings Separation from God*

Israel has not yet been saved from foreign oppression—not because the Lord is incapable of saving her, but because her sin has separated her from God. The list of sins reminds us of those

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<sup>213</sup> Young, p. 403

<sup>214</sup> Young, p. 406

<sup>215</sup> Young, p. 418

<sup>216</sup> Possibly a reference to the law which demanded that Hebrew slaves be set free every seven years, a law which was not practiced faithfully (Ex. 21: 2).

in *Hosea*, *Amos*, and *Micah* and some of the verses are quoted by Paul in his vivid description of man's depravity in Romans 3 (**vv. 7-8**), a depravity applied to both Jew and Gentile.

When Isaiah surveyed the land he could find no one who could intercede for the people (**v. 16**), but God brought salvation for Israel by his own arm. This is a reference to Christ who alone is able to save his people from their sins (**v. 20**). The armor he uses is the same armor we must use against the spiritual forces of darkness (Eph. 6).

### ***Chapter 60—The New Jerusalem***

This chapter describes the glorified Jerusalem which God will create at the end of time—a symbol of the new heaven and earth (Rev. 21: 1). The chapter should be compared with Revelation 21—22 in which some of the symbolism of this chapter is repeated there.<sup>217</sup>

### ***Chapter 61—The Jubilee Year***

The blessing to Zion in **chapter 60** comes through the Messiah in **chapter 61**<sup>218</sup> The first few verses are familiar to us because Christ applies them to himself in the early part of His ministry (Lk. 4: 18-19). The favorable year of the Lord was the year of Jubilee in which land sold due to poverty was returned to its original owners and in which Israelites sold into slavery to other Israelites (again, for reasons of poverty) would be freed (Lev. 25: 10). Thus, Jesus interprets the fulfillment of the Jubilee Year as the coming of the Messiah in which He will release the poor and the captive from something far worse than physical slavery—slavery to sin.

Those whom the Lord redeems from the bondage of sin will be a kingdom of priests (**v. 6**) who will **rebuild the ancient ruins** and **repair the ruined cities**. This could be a reference to the benevolent influence of Christianity upon the whole world. God's people are recognizable (**v. 9**) because they stand out from the masses as those who practice righteousness. They are salt and light in the world of rottenness and darkness.

### ***Chapter 62—God's Zeal for His Church***

This chapter is very similar to that of chapter 60. It is possible that the Lord himself is speaking this way of Zion (Young, p. 467). Whether it is the Lord speaking or Isaiah, the meaning is the same. The Lord will not rest until He has made the new Zion, His church, glorious in the sight of all the nations (**vv. 1-3**). The description reminds us of Eph. 5: 27 in which Paul says that Christ will sanctify His church "that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless." Even as Israel had appeared forsaken of God in the eyes of the world (**v. 4**), the church throughout history has at times appeared forsaken of God and helpless to affect any benevolent influence on the world. But things are not as they often appear. Christ is sanctifying His church and making her spotless and blameless through various afflictions and persecutions. Moreover, He has set watchmen on the walls of His church—pastors and teachers—who guard the church against false teaching (Young, p. 470). There are also other watchmen in the church who pray for the purity

<sup>217</sup> Compare vv. 19-20 with Rev. 21: 23; v. 20b with Rev. 21: 4b; vv. 3 and 5 with Rev. 21: 24, 26; v. 11 with Rev. 21: 25; v. 21 with Rev. 21: 27; 22: 14-15.

<sup>218</sup> Young, p. 458

of the church, watchmen who will not rest and will give God no rest until he makes His church the praise of all the earth (vv. 6-7).

**Chapter 63: 1-6—The Destruction of God’s Enemies**

Zion will be saved, but all who oppose her or oppress her will be destroyed. So it was with Edom, the near relative of Israel, the descendants of Esau who hated Israel and afflicted her whenever possible. The theme of salvation for God’s people is generally accompanied by the companion theme of destruction for her enemies, for there can be no lasting peace for the church until God has removed all those who hate and oppose the church. Edom represents all worldly powers who oppose the church<sup>219</sup>. The enemies of God are like grapes trodden down in the winepress (Rev. 14: 19). The vengeance upon the nations, represented by the destruction of Edom, corresponds to **Chapter 34**, the judgment upon the nations. **Chapters 61-62** correspond to **chapter 35** describing the blessing of God upon Zion<sup>220</sup>

**Chapter 63: 7—64:12—The Mercy of God Remembered**

God has been good to Israel but she rebelled against Him. Consequently, God turned against his own people (vv. 7-10). The mercy of God remembered in vv. 7-14 is the basis upon which Isaiah prays for new mercies in v. 15 continuing into **chapter 64**<sup>221</sup>

There is nothing about Israel to commend herself to God, for the whole nation has become like one who is unclean (v. 6). Even their righteous deeds are like a **filthy garment**. Young translates this verse from the Hebrew as “a garment of times”, the garments of women who are having their menstrual period. It is a filthy, blood-stained garment unfit to be presented to anyone, least of all God. Women going through their menstrual periods would be considered unclean for a period of time (Lev. 15:1, 20, 24, 25, 33; 18: 19). Thus, the prophet is emphasizing the unfitness and uncleanness of any deeds we perform, even ones we would consider as our best deeds. We **wither like a leaf** before the righteousness demanded by the law of God, and our sins **take us away** like wind blowing away withered leaves. We have no personal righteousness to commend us to a holy God who demands perfect righteousness. If a man comes to this assessment of his own righteousness, he is then ready to forsake any trust in his own righteousness and accept the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ. The problem with the Jewish nation in Isaiah’s day, at Christ’s first advent, and to the present day is that they seek a righteousness of their own. The nation is an object lesson for the rest of mankind who do the same.

For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. (Romans 10:3-4 NASB).

The remainder of the chapter continues the prayer of repentance.

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<sup>219</sup> Young, p. 476

<sup>220</sup> Young, pp. 479-480

<sup>221</sup> Young, p. 486

**Chapter 65—God Makes a Distinction between His Chosen People and the Wicked**

In the previous chapter, the question is asked, **Will you restrain yourself at these things, O Lord? Will you keep silent and afflict us beyond measure?** (64: 12). According to Young, **verses 1-2 of Chapter 65** answer this question.<sup>222</sup> God will show grace to a people who did not even seek him—the Gentiles—but will come in judgment upon the rebellious nation of the Jews to whom he has stretched out his hands all day long for them to come to him in repentance and faith. Yet, they had not come, but had remained stubborn and rebellious. Jesus encountered the same unbelief and rebellion during His earthly ministry.

"I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline *at the table* with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven;<sup>12</sup> but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 8:11-12 NASB)

In that passage, the many from the east and the west are the Gentiles (see the context). The sons of the kingdom are the Jews who will be cast out of the kingdom of God for their unbelief. The Apostle Paul encountered the same resistance from the Jews on his missionary journeys. As the Jews in the synagogues rejected his message, he did what the Lord Jesus had told His disciples to do when they encountered unbelief—he shook the dust off his feet and took the gospel to the Gentiles (cf. Matt. 10: 15 with Acts 13: 46).

For the better part of 40 years Isaiah had been preaching to a recalcitrant (rebellious) nation. As the representative of God, he is now shaking the dust off his feet. They refuse to listen, and they will have to pay the consequences of ruin and destruction. They are destined for the sword (**v. 12**).

On the other hand, not everyone in Israel is recalcitrant. As in Elijah's day, God has a remnant according to His gracious choice (Rom. 11: 5) who believe in him and who are repentant (**vv. 8-16**, esp. **v. 8b**, **in order not to destroy all of them**). God will single them out for blessing and not for curse. This was His purpose all along, for the promises of God to Abraham cannot fall to the ground. He never intended to save the whole physical nation, but only those who were the true children of Abraham by faith. As Young asserts, "The Jewish nation and the elect people can no longer be considered identical; the tragic subsequent history of the Jewish nation is that of a people that does not have its God."<sup>223</sup>

For His own glory and for the sake of his elect, God will create a new heavens and a new earth (**v. 17**; cf. **Isa. 35, 60, 62**). The descriptions which follow describe the Messianic age which is characterized by long age (**v. 20**) and prosperity (**v. 21**). It is here in **Isaiah 65** that we encounter a problematic passage concerning the timing of the fulfillment of this prophecy. Up until now, the texts in Isaiah promising new heavens and earth or a new glorified Zion appear to present a *consummate* fulfillment. Death itself is swallowed up in **Isaiah 25: 8**; and in **Isaiah 35** the desert fills with water and blossoms with vegetation—a symbol of the earth's restoration that we find in more detail in Romans 8: 18-25. The wealth of the nations coming into a glorified Zion (**60: 3-5**) appears to be the same event as that in Revelation 21: 24-26 which speaks of the end of

<sup>222</sup> Young, p. 502

<sup>223</sup> Young, p. 511

the age with the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven as a dwelling place for the people of God. This New Jerusalem will have no need of the sun and moon for the glory of God will be its light (cf. **Isa. 60: 19-20** with Rev. 21: 23), and in that day the wolf and the lamb will lie down together and the lion shall eat straw like the ox (compare **Isa. 65: 25** with **Isa. 9: 6-10**).

Yet, when we come to *Isaiah 65* we have mixed evidence about the timing of the prophecy. Is Isaiah talking about the new heaven and earth in which death will be abolished, or is he talking about a literal millennial age in which the peace of Christ's government prevails upon the earth—a day when evil men will be subdued but *not altogether banished* from the earth? While long life is prolonged in the period described in **chapter 65**, whatever that period is, death is not totally abolished. **The youth will die at the age of one hundred and the one who does not reach the age of one hundred shall be thought accursed (v. 20)**. In other words, in the age of **vv. 17-25**, death is still present, even though the effects of the fall upon the longevity of life seem to be reversed so that men are living longer. Furthermore, evil men are still present in this age since the one who does not reach 100 will be thought **accursed**, something which cannot be said of anyone in the final consummation of Christ's kingdom in the new heavens and earth, a place that sinners will not be able to enter (Rev. 22: 14-15). Yet the **new heavens and new earth** is the designation given to this period of time in **Isaiah 65**.

Delitzsch believes that this passage is speaking of *the millennial reign of Christ on earth* before the final destruction of the wicked, a period which is characterized by world peace established by Christ's reign. He recognizes the objection to this interpretation; namely, that Isaiah calls this period the **new heavens and a new earth** which is the consummation of the kingdom of Christ after the Final Judgment. He answers this objection by pointing out that

...the Old Testament prophet was not able to distinguish from one another the things which the author of the Apocalypse [Revelation] separates into distinct periods. From the Old Testament point of view generally, *nothing was known of a state of blessedness beyond the grave*. Hades lay beyond this present life; and nothing was known of a heaven in which men were blessed. Around the throne of God in heaven there were angels and not men. *And, indeed, until the risen Savior ascended to heaven, heaven itself was not open to men*, and therefore there was no heavenly Jerusalem whose descent to earth could be anticipated then. Consequently in the prophecies of the Old Testament the eschatological idea of the new Cosmos does unquestionably coincide with the millennium. It is only in the New Testament that the new creation intervenes a party-wall between this life and the life beyond; whereas the Old Testament prophecy brings down the new creation itself into the present life, and knows nothing of any Jerusalem of the blessed life to come, as distinct from the new Jerusalem of the millennium.<sup>224</sup>

I would seriously question Delitzsch's view that in the OT **nothing was known of a state of blessedness beyond the grave** and that **until the risen Savior ascended to heaven, heaven itself was not open to men**. How can Delitzsch account for the appearance of Moses and Elijah on the mount of transfiguration (Matt. 17: 2) or the fact that Abraham was looking for a city whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11: 10)? Furthermore, we have already noted how Jesus rebukes the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection from the dead, by telling them that they did not understand the Scriptures or the power of God (Matt. 22: 29). He is, nevertheless, correct in saying that the prophetic view often combined multiple events into one

<sup>224</sup> Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, pp. 491-493

event, something we have seen in Isaiah's prophecy of the first and second advents of Christ in **Isaiah 9**.

I prefer not to press the details of **Chapter 65** too rigidly but to interpret the chapter the same way we have interpreted **chapters 9, 35 and 60** as the restored heaven and earth after the judgment with the kingdom of Christ fully consummated.<sup>225</sup>

#### *Chapter 66—A New Royal Priesthood from the Nations*

The prophet once again condemns sham religion which regards God as being confined to the temple made with men's hands (**v. 1-2**). God will not have regard for religious formality which brings in animal sacrifices (**v. 3**), but he will have regard for the one who is humble and contrite, the one who trembles at his word (**v. 2**). The people are being religious, but they are not listening to the words of his prophet (**v. 4**). Nevertheless, Zion will give birth to a nation of believers, the Gentiles (**vv. 7-9**). The figure of Jerusalem in **vv. 10-14** is the church of Jesus Christ in whom alone comfort can be found. In Galatians 4 Paul says that the Jerusalem above is our **mother** producing children who are **free**. To all others will come the terrible judgment of the Lord (**vv. 15-18**).

The **survivors** (the remnant) of God's judgment upon the Jewish nation will be sent into exile among the Gentile nations; and, while living there, they will bring the Gentiles to faith in the God of Israel (**v. 19**). Until the Jewish exiles were forced into these distant nations, none of the Gentiles had heard of the greatness and glory of the Lord (**v. 19**). The converted Gentiles will be, as it were, a grain offering to the Lord from the evangelistic remnant of His Jewish people who tell them about the God of Israel (**v. 20**). God will then make of these Gentiles priests and Levites (**v. 21**). Peter describes the church as a holy nation and a royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2: 9). God's purpose in producing a holy nation will not be frustrated. If His Jewish people will not worship Him in truth, He will raise up another holy nation from all the nations of the world and make them a kingdom of priests.<sup>226</sup> Everyone else who has transgressed against Him will be punished forever in hell (**v. 24**).

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<sup>225</sup> For more explanation, see Oswalt, p. 658

<sup>226</sup> Young, pp. 532-533

## ***XIV. The Prophecy of Micah***

### ***Introduction***

From the first verse we can determine that Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah and Hosea, for he prophesied during the kingdoms of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah. Hosea prophesied somewhat earlier since he also prophesied during the reign of Uzziah of Judah. Some scholars estimate the time of Micah's ministry from 739 B.C. to 700 B.C.; therefore, his ministry was before and after the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. His message is not for one kingdom only, but for Samaria and Jerusalem as the representative capitals of the northern and southern kingdoms.

It is very similar to that of Hosea and Amos, for the sins which had infected the northern kingdom were also in abundance in the southern kingdom of Judah—insincere religion, dishonesty in business, oppression of the poor, etc. The hope of a restored future for Israel and Judah comes out more forcefully in Micah than in Amos and Hosea, especially in the fourth chapter which is almost word for word the hope expressed in **Isaiah 2**. The prophecy is divided into three distinct addresses introduced by **Hear (1: 2; 3: 1; and 6: 1)**.

***I. First Address—“Hear, O peoples, all of you; Listen, O earth and all it contains.”***

### ***Chapter 1***

God's judgment is described as the Lord treading upon the mountains like a giant under whose feet the mountains melt (cf. Amos 4: 13). Samaria will be ruined first because the idolatry of calf worship began first in Samaria. Idolatry also spread to the southern kingdom and even godly kings like Asa, his son Jehoshaphat, Amaziah and his son Jehoash, were not fully successful in abolishing the illegitimate sites of worship known as **high places** (1 Kings 15: 14; 22: 43; 2 Kings 12: 3; 2 Kings 14: 4). Jerusalem and Samaria are singled out among the two kingdoms as the primary centers of idolatry and responsibility—the religious and governmental centers of the kingdoms. If Micah were alive today and sent to Washington, D.C., he would prophesy against the judicial court system of the U.S. which has allowed abortion to continue unabated (uninterrupted) throughout the land. Fifty million unborn children have been slaughtered in the U.S. since the Roe versus Wade decision of 1973. Leaders of nations will surely be held accountable for their promotion of evil.

The harlot's wages of **v. 7** could be literally the earnings of temple prostitutes since the northern kingdom was immersed in Baal worship during this time, a religion involving cult prostitution. Whether literally meant or not, Micah is likening the religious offerings of the people as the wages of a prostitute since the whole idolatrous worship in Samaria was whoring after other gods. To call attention to his message, he strips naked down to the loincloth and walks through Samaria (cf. Isa. 20: 2). The **incurable wound** of Samaria (the Assyrian invasion) would also come to Jerusalem (**v. 9**) and will spread over Judah's cities (**vv. 10-15**). Only through God's mercy and miraculous intervention was Jerusalem spared (2 Kings 19).

### ***Chapter 2***

Men with power (**v. 1**) lie awake at night scheming how to confiscate (steal) the property of

others through *legal* means, like Ahab and Jezebel who hired false witnesses against Naboth (1Kings 21). Notice the words of v. 2, **They covet fields and then seize them, and houses, and take them away. They rob a man and his house, and man and his inheritance.** Ahab reigned in the northern kingdom from about 875 B.C. to 853 B.C., twenty-two years in all (1Kings 16: 29). Micah prophesied from 739 B.C. to 700 B.C.; thus, he began his ministry well over 115 years from the time Jezebel put Naboth to death. The significance of this is that the practice of land seizure by the rich and powerful was probably common since the time of Ahab and before. The oppression of the poor denounced by Micah, Hosea, and Amos was *nothing new* to Israel. Israel was a nation ripe (like summer fruit) for destruction (Amos 8: 2), and God had patiently persevered with his people for over 200 years since the time Jeroboam I established bull cult worship in Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 12).

Seizing fields in v. 2 corresponds to **apportioning fields** to the apostates (the Assyrians) in v. 4. Scheming iniquity in v. 1 corresponds to **I am planning calamity** in v. 3. God will pay Israel back *in kind* for every infraction of his law—an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.<sup>227</sup>

Like Israel during Amos' prophecy, the false prophets attempt to silence the true preaching of Yahweh (v. 6). Like Amos, Micah is considered too harsh and does not take due consideration of the long-suffering of the Lord—**Is the Spirit of the Lord [within Micah] impatient?** But it is Micah's theology which is the correct one for the word of God assures Israel that covenant loyalty and repentance are not optional extras to receive the Lord's approval and security.<sup>228</sup> How can Israel expect the Lord's blessing when they do the things they do? Women are evicted from their houses by rich land-grabbers (v. 1); travelers are robbed on the highways of the land (v. 8).<sup>229</sup> The only prophets whom the people listen to are those who prophesy good to the people, like those who predict an abundance of wine (v. 11).

Abruptly, Micah interrupts judgment with words of hope for the remnant of the people of Israel. God will not utterly forsake His people, but will preserve a small portion even as He did during the days of Elijah (1 Kings 19: 18). Keil speaks of the fulfillment of this prophecy during the preaching of Jesus<sup>230</sup>; Waltke, following Allen, during the deliverance of Judah from Assyria<sup>231</sup>, thus illustrating the broad difference of opinions that can arise in interpreting the prophets. In support of Keil, the passage in Micah does not refer to Judah exclusively, who alone survives Assyria, but to **Jacob** and **Israel**, words which represent the whole nation.

## ***II. Second Address—“Hear now, heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel.”***

### ***Chapter 3***

Having denounced the rich schemers of the land in **chapter 2**, Micah now turns his attention to the rulers and false prophets. The OT prophets direct their harshest attacks against the religious and civic leaders of the nation. Jesus' words ring in our ears,

<sup>227</sup> Bruce Waltke, *Micah, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, D.J. Wiseman, General Editor, p. 157

<sup>228</sup> Waltke, p. 159

<sup>229</sup> The verse could refer to the taking of the outer coat from the poor as a pledge for loans.

<sup>230</sup> Keil, *Micah*, pp. 448-449

<sup>231</sup> Waltke, pp. 160-161



And from everyone who has been given much shall much be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.” (Lk. 12: 48 NASB)

Privilege implies increased responsibility and accountability; it should therefore not be surprising that the rich and powerful and the religious and civic leaders of the nation (and of any nation) will shoulder most of the responsibility for spiritual failure. As watchmen on the wall, ministers of the word have a solemn duty to perform. If a nation fails spiritually while preachers have been given freedom to speak out—and they don’t speak out—the blood of the nation will stain their hands (Ezek. 33: 4-8).

Micah’s description of corruption and oppression is graphic—like peeling the skin off the poor, chopping them up and preparing them as a meal to be eaten (**vv. 2-3**). But when Assyria comes and they cry out for deliverance, God will not answer their prayers. He will, instead, hide his face from them because they are evil covenant-breakers (**v. 4**).

The prophets are next in line for Micah’s condemnation, for they prophesy peace **when they have something to bite with their teeth** but war when they are not paid well. They prophesy only for money (like Balaam—Num. 22: 7, 17).<sup>232</sup> When the Assyrian invaders come, these prophets who are resisting the warnings of Micah will be ashamed in the midst of Israel as they are taken off into exile. In that day they will truly seek a word from the Lord, but He will not answer them (**vv. 6-7**).

In contrast, Micah is filled with the power of the Holy Spirit to tell Israel just how it is (**v. 8**). The true prophet doesn’t stick a wet finger in the wind to see which way public opinion is blowing. He just tells the truth. The true prophet (and the true preacher) is not affected by money or the promise of money; he fears only the Lord. The truth is that Israel’s leaders are corrupt. The sins mentioned remind us of the prophecy of Amos—the perversion of justice in the courts through bribery, teaching and prophesying only for a paycheck (**v. 11**), like Amaziah the priest (Amos 7). Added to this are judicial murders like the one involving Naboth (**v. 10—violent injustice**).

The judges could not have possibly seized on spoils on every side, without being bloody, that is, without pillaging the poor: for the judges were for the most part corrupted by the rich and the great; and then they destroyed the miserable and the innocent. He then who is corrupted by money will become at the same time a thief; and he will not only extort money, but will also shed blood”<sup>233</sup>

The difference between Micah and Amos is found in their audience. Amos prophesied only to Samaria, but Micah’s preaching applies to both Samaria (Israel) and Jerusalem (Judah). Jerusalem (Zion) is specifically singled out for destruction (**vv. 10, 12**). The same corruption which plagued the northern kingdom plagued the southern kingdom as well. Consequently Judah, like Israel, will be punished. Notice that Micah’s warning of **v. 12** is quoted in its historical context in Jeremiah 26: 18 during the reign of Jehoiakim of Judah (608 BC to 597 BC). Hezekiah reigned from 726 BC to 697 BC, ending his reign roughly 90 years before Jehoiakim’s began. From the context of Jeremiah 26 we learn that King Jehoiakim, the priests, and the

<sup>232</sup> Waltke, p. 163

<sup>233</sup> Calvin, *Micah*, p. 238

prophets were planning to kill Jeremiah for preaching against the city of Jerusalem. Preaching was a dangerous business in both Israel and Judah for most of their history. Some of the officials and elders of the city counseled the king and the people not to kill Jeremiah but to listen to what he was saying (26: 13); namely, that if the king and the people repented of their evil ways the Lord would relent and **change his mind** concerning the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon (26: 13). To support their argument they quote the prophecy of Micah (Jer. 26: 18; **Micah 3: 12**) made some 100 years or so earlier during the reign of Hezekiah, a warning which was heeded by Hezekiah and which prevented the destruction of Jerusalem by Assyria. Exactly when Micah made this prophecy (**v. 12**) is impossible to determine, but he made it during the reign of Hezekiah who was a good king. And when Assyria was rampaging through the northern kingdom, God was pleased to spare Jerusalem from Assyrian invasion during Hezekiah's reign.

Important questions arise from this passage in Jeremiah. First, was the prophecy of **Micah 3: 12** concerning the Assyrian threat or the Babylonian threat? Second, was the prophecy conditional upon Judah's repentance, as the opinion of the officials and elders of Jeremiah 26 indicate? Third, was the opinion of Micah's prophecy found in Jeremiah 26 the correct interpretation of Micah's prophecy? The passage is historical narrative and there is no necessity from the passage to assume that their interpretation of Micah is the correct one.

Keil makes a lengthy defense against the interpretation that Micah's prophecy of **3: 12** was conditional upon repentance or that it referred to the Assyrian threat. He gives several reasons for this assertion, the most important being the following: (1) There is no evidence from *Micah* that he was referring only to the Assyrian threat. (2) There is no evidence from the prophecy of *Isaiah* in **chapters 28—32** leading up to the Assyrian invasion that the people of Judah had repented of sin and had mended their ways before the Lord. Therefore, deliverance from Assyria was not based on nation-wide reform but upon Hezekiah's intercession and God's grace. The opinion of the elders recorded in Jeremiah 26 is, thus, a mistaken opinion. (3) Micah's prophecy goes hand in hand with the prophecy of *Isaiah* which predicts the exile of Judah. From the immediate context of **3: 12** compared to **4: 10**, it would seem strange indeed that the calamity of **3: 12** would be averted by Hezekiah's repentance—the interpretation given by the elders in Jeremiah 26—but the exile of **4: 10** was not avoided. Thus, it seems altogether likely that Micah is referring to the Babylonian captivity in 3: 12 and not the Assyrian invasion which Israel escapes.<sup>234</sup>

#### Chapter 4

This passage is almost word for word the prophecy of Isaiah 2: 1-5, and there is much debate about its authorship. We will take the position of Waltke that *Micah wrote it first* and that Isaiah used Micah's words in his prophecy.<sup>235</sup> It is not impossible that the Holy Spirit inspired both prophets independently to say the same thing; but since the wording is so similar, and since the Holy Spirit worked through the individual personality and background of every writer, this is unlikely. When the context of *Micah* is compared with *Isaiah*, the text in *Micah* appears to flow more smoothly with the remainder of **chapter 4**; therefore, it appears that Isaiah uses Micah's prophecy as an introduction to his exhortation beginning in 2: 5.

<sup>234</sup> Keil, *The Minor Prophets*, pp. 466-471

<sup>235</sup> Waltke, p. 175

For **last days** consult the following verses: Isa. 2:2; Jer. 23:20; Jer. 49:39; Ezek. 38:16; Hos. 3:5; Mic. 4:1; Acts 2:17; 2 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 1:2; Jas. 5:3; and 2 Pet. 3:3. Upon examining the NT passages, it is clear that the NT writers believed that the days they were living in (the days following the resurrection and ascension of Christ) were the last days. Comparing Peter's statement in Acts 2: 17 with the prophecy from Joel 2: 28-32, we understand that Peter interprets the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost as the sign that the last days had arrived. The words **last days** do not actually appear in the prophecy of Joel, but Peter borrows from the book of *Isaiah* or *Micah* and identifies the **after this** of Joel 2: 28 with the "**last days**" of *Isaiah* and *Micah*.

The blessing foretold in **chapter 4** is not limited to the Jewish nation but will belong to the **nations** and the **peoples** streaming to the mountain of the Lord at Zion. The **He** of **v. 3** is unmistakably the Lord Jesus Christ who teaches the nations His law, and judges and renders decisions for all peoples (cf. Isa. 7 and 9). As to the fulfillment of this prophecy, once again we are to think in terms of partial and multiple fulfillments. When Jesus was incarnated in human flesh, He began executing judgments upon the nations with His teaching. Particularly in the Sermon on the Mount, He demonstrated His authority as the new law giver greater than Moses whose authority went beyond Moses and deeper than Moses: **You have heard that it was said...but I say to you.** Thus, His interpretation and application of the law went beyond the wooden literalism of the Pharisees and also beyond the limited understanding of devout Jews living in the time of Moses.<sup>236</sup> In Jesus Christ we have the fulfillment of the Law and the divine interpretation and application of the law.

Yet, the prophecy is not complete with the first coming of Christ. Since the first coming of Christ, it can hardly be said that the nations have hammered their swords into plowshares (that is, done away with weaponry and converted it into agricultural implements). Century after century, nations and tribes have gone to war. Universal peace will only be accomplished at a future date. Premillennialists believe that peace will come during the millennial kingdom of Christ on earth, a literal kingdom in which Christ reigns on His throne in Jerusalem. This millennium is followed by one last, desperate effort of sinful mankind to overthrow the kingdom of Christ. Amillennialists believe that these days will be fulfilled at the return of Christ at the end of the age. Postmillennialists believe that the passage describes a day of unprecedented peace on earth as the result of the successful evangelization and discipleship of the world by the church. It cannot be denied that the whole world is now a better place because of the atoning work of Christ and the Christian gospel, but just how improved the world will be when Christ returns is a question still vigorously debated among evangelicals.

Whatever position is correct, such a day will be most welcome. Whatever the interpretation, the prophecy cannot simply apply to the Jewish nation apart from the blessing of God to the Gentiles. The **nations** (plural) are expressly mentioned as desiring to be taught from the word of God. This will not be a kingdom exclusively for those with most-favored status, but for the **lame** and the **outcasts** (**v. 6**). How did these become lame and outcasts? The answer is found in the same verse, **Even those whom I have afflicted.** This affliction is possibly a reference to the affliction God will impose upon the righteous remnant of the nation of Israel (**v. 7**) who must suffer the affliction of the wicked in exile. There were a few in Israel and Judah who were covenant keepers, believers who trusted in God and did not worship idols. They were taken into

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<sup>236</sup> For a thorough discussion of this point, see Vern Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*. For a condensed summary of Poythress' view, see McNeill, *Synoptic Gospels*

exile like all the rest (among them Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego who refused to worship the statue of Nebuchadnezzar at the risk of their lives). They were afflicted, but they were God's chosen remnant. In Waltke's estimation,

The remnant, that which remains after most of Israel is destroyed in judgment (v. 6), now becomes *the goal of history*. Mays...says of them: 'by reason of their nature they are a supernatural and invincible reality within world history.'<sup>237</sup>

The lame and outcasts could also be a reference to Jacob (**supplanter**) whose name God changed to **Israel (he who strives with God)** who for much of his life attempted to gain the blessings of God through his own effort but finally wrestled with God (Gen. 32) and was made lame in the hip. Only through prayer (not human effort) did he prevail with God, and his lameness reminded him daily that **God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble** (1 Pet. 5: 5; Prov. 3: 34). Jacob learned the hard way that all his fleshly attempts at winning the blessings of God were futile; he simply had to ask for it fervently: **I will not let you go unless you bless me** (Gen. 32: 26).

It is not the proud and haughty of Israel who will be the remnant **according to God's gracious choice** (Rom. 11: 5), but those who are broken by the realization of their sin and who cling to God's grace offered in the covenant promises and depicted in the sacrifices. Of these lame and outcasts God will make a great and mighty nation over which he will rule, not for a short time only, but from now on and forever (**v. 7**).

We are reminded of Jesus' advice to the Pharisees in Luke 14: 12-14 to invite **the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind** to their dinners. Following this advice a proud Pharisee sitting at the table with Jesus implies that he expects to be among those invited to the feast of God at the end of the age when the Messiah returns.<sup>238</sup> This statement is followed by Jesus' parable of a certain rich man giving a dinner whose invitations are rejected by his close friends but later given to the poor, the blind, the lame and the crippled—outcasts of society. These are the ones who eventually eat with the Lord at the feast when the Messiah returns, not the prideful Pharisees who expected to be God's favored few because of their righteousness. This is the message found in **Micah 4**, the message that God will raise up the lame and outcasts of his people (Jew and Gentile) who will humbly receive his grace.

The question of **v. 9** is asked sarcastically, **Now why do you cry out loudly? Is there no king among you, or has your counselor perished...?** Micah is asking, "Is God dead that agony has gripped you like a woman in childbirth? Where is your faith?"<sup>239</sup> Judah will definitely go into exile in Babylon (foretold also in **3: 12**), and there the nations will **gloat** over her because of her weakness. But there the Lord will redeem Judah. The nations have no understanding of the purpose of God in afflicting Judah. They believe that they alone have defeated her, but it is God's purpose to afflict her and then to redeem her. One day, Judah will arise and thresh the nations as an ox threshes the grain under its feet (**v. 13**). The verse implies world domination, a dominion expressed in military terms understandable to the average Israelite. The first installment of this dominion is provided in the utter annihilation of Assyria's army when it

<sup>237</sup> Waltke, p. 176, emphasis mine

<sup>238</sup> Geldenhuys, *Luke*

<sup>239</sup> Waltke, pp. 178-179

invades Jerusalem (2 Kings 19: 35). After Assyria falls to Babylon, Babylon falls to the Medes and Persians, and the Medes and Persians fall to Greece, and Greece falls to Rome, the epitome of all worldly kingdoms. But a stone will be cut out of a mountain without hands and will crush all earthly kingdoms (Dan. 2: 34-35). That stone, of course, is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ whose spiritual kingdom will uproot and destroy all earthly kingdoms.

That which begins as a spiritual kingdom will one day manifest itself in the world-wide kingdom of God with Christ visibly executing His sovereign rule. God's people will rule the earth as co-regents and will judge the world and angels (1 Cor. 6: 2-3). We shall also inherit the earth and its wealth (Prov. 13: 22b; Matt. 5: 5). This is the "not yet" of the kingdom of God, the part we cannot see because it has "not yet" taken place. The "now" of the kingdom of God is the spread of the gospel throughout the world in which satanic strongholds one by one are being overcome with the change brought about by the gospel (Matt. 16: 18). Whole nations which were at one time **deceived** by Satan (Rev. 20: 3) have been wonderfully evangelized in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1900 there were 8 million professing Christians on the whole continent of Africa. By 2000, there were 351 million professing Christians.<sup>240</sup>

The world of unbelievers who are enemies of Christ have long despised the apparent weakness of Christ and His church who have never enjoyed political and economic strength compared to their enemies, who seem always to have the upper hand. But the world does not understand the ways of God with His people or His long-range purpose toward them (**v. 12**). God afflicts his people through various chastisements and suffering in order to make them humble and distrustful of themselves. *The world interprets these trials as weakness, but God is using them to prepare his people for their inheritance and an eternity of service to him.* Bruce Waltke calls the suffering of God's people His "secret strategy".

Through the exile he plans Zion's liberation (vv. 9-10), and through the invasion against Jerusalem he conspires the defeat of her enemies (vv. 11-13)... 'writhe in agony' (v. 10) refers to the pains of childbirth...which figure gives hope in suffering. Zion's present suffering is not locked up in misfortune, but opens the door of hope to salvation and victory. For the remnant, as with all God's children, the punishment is not penal but remedial [corrective]. For them, suffering in the 'already' is part of the salvation in the 'not yet.' By contrast, God has so arranged history that what appears to the enemy as victory in battle leads to defeat in the war<sup>241</sup>

## Chapter 5

The chapter begins with the invasion of the Assyrian army (as the reference to Assyria in **v. 5** indicates). The prophet mentions Assyria simply because this was the prevailing power in the world at this time during the reign of King Hezekiah of Judah (see 2 Kings 18 and 19 for the context of this passage). Babylon became the world power about 100 years later which makes Micah's reference to the exile in Babylon (**4: 10**) a supernatural prediction based on foreknowledge. Smiting the judge of Israel **on the cheek** is a reference to the humiliating subjugation of Israel's kings to the Assyrian power (beginning in 732 B.C. and continuing until 722 B.C. when the northern kingdom was exiled). A remnant of Judah would avoid the Assyrian threat in 701 B.C.—although many Judean cities would fall temporarily to Assyria—but would

<sup>240</sup> *Operation World*

<sup>241</sup> Waltke, *Micah*, p. 177-178; words in brackets mine

fall to Babylon completely in 587 B.C. Some of the Israelites would be deported to Babylon in 606 B.C., Daniel and his three friends being among their number.

As a consolation to this future humiliation of the kings of Israel, Micah promises a new ruler to Judah who would be born in Bethlehem of Ephrathah, a small and insignificant city in Judah. This ruler is eternal (**v. 2**), implying that Christ did not have a beginning when He was born in Bethlehem, but was eternal with the Father in the heavens before His incarnation in human flesh.

**He (v. 3)** is Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel who **will give them [Israel] up [to ruin and destruction] until the time when she who is in labor has borne a child**. That is, God will permit His people to suffer exile and subjugation to foreign kings until the son of God is born of a woman. When that takes place, Christ will become the reigning king of His people, a reign which must be interpreted in stages. As it turned out, Christ did not come the first time in political and worldly power to reign as an earthly king. Jesus told Pilate,

“My kingdom is *not of this world*. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is *not of this realm*” (Jn. 18: 36).

This confused the Jews in Jesus’ day since they were interpreting passages such as this one in *Micah* and Isa. 9: 6-7 as predictions of a **military ruler** who would deliver them from subjugation to Rome. Instead Israel received a Messiah who was the suffering servant who would lay down his life for His people (Isa. 53). Only at His second coming will Christ bring all ruling authorities under His dominion. The prophets, including Micah, sometimes predicted the first coming and the second coming as if they were one event and not two. They did not have the same advantage as we do of interpreting the word of the Lord in light of the fulfillment of Christ’s first coming (See 1 Pet. 1: 10-11). **His brethren** is a reference to the believing Jews, including Jesus’ eleven disciples and all the 120 brethren in the upper room after the ascension (Acts 1).<sup>242</sup>

Christ will shepherd his people (**v. 4**) and **will be great to the ends of the earth**, a prediction of the proclamation of the kingdom of God through the world-wide evangelism and discipleship of the church. The greatness of this king is in contrast with the consistent failures of the northern monarchy who suffered year after year under corrupt and ungodly kings. As David was God’s choice to replace wicked and rebellious Saul, so the Messiah from Bethlehem will deliver and shepherd His people as David shepherded Israel.<sup>243</sup>

Christ (**this one, v. 5**) will be the peace of His people when Assyria invades the land of Judah. The prophets always described the future in terms which were relevant to their contemporary (present) audience. At the time Micah prophesied, Assyria was the dominant power on earth. But the application of the prophecy transcends (moves beyond) the time of Assyria or Nimrod.<sup>244</sup> The main point is that the Messiah will shepherd and protect His people from all worldly powers both during the threat of Assyria and Babylon and forever—“Do not be afraid, *little flock*, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom” (Lk. 12: 32).

<sup>242</sup> Waltke, p. 184

<sup>243</sup> Waltke, p. 182

<sup>244</sup> Possibly a reference to Babylon; see Gen. 10: 9-11

The promise does not apply to *Israel according to the flesh* which had forfeited the promises of God, but to the remnant of Israel and *Israel according to the Spirit*, the **Israel of God** who belong to God by faith (Gal. 3: 29; 6: 16). This remnant will be like a lion which **tramples down and tears**. God's people will be the most powerful force on earth for good and for the building of the kingdom of God. Though apparently weak in the eyes of the world, the church is the most powerful, influential force on earth for destroying the forces of wickedness. "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it" (Matt. 16: 18). Many dispensational theologians will interpret the greatness of the Jewish remnant as those who are converted during the millennial reign of Christ on earth during which he subjugates His enemies under his feet. There is no doubt that when Christ returns, He will return in awesome power, but Christ does not begin to reign on earth when He returns. He announced His reign on earth in His first coming saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mk. 1: 15). He also proclaimed, "All **authority** has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit..." (Matt. 28: 18-19). His authority as king is not postponed until He returns but is now present in the vested authority of His kingdom represented in His church and His "undershepherds".<sup>245</sup> In other words, the conquest of **vv. 7-9** is a *spiritual* conquest in which the kingdom of God advances through His church and the leadership of the church vested in the spiritual shepherds or leaders of God's people. His kingdom is not of this world and the sword of His kingdom is the spiritual sword of the word of God.

**In that day (v. 10)** is a reference to the whole redemption of God's people during the days of the Messiah and beyond to His second coming.<sup>246</sup> Yet, there is a present application under the Assyrian threat. Israel and Judah had trusted in their horses and chariots (military might) to save them, but Micah says that they will not save them. They had also trusted in sorcery and other illegitimate means of communication with God (see Deut. 18: 9-19), but God will cut off all sorcery from the land, all forms of idols and illegitimate worship (**vv. 12-14**). God himself will "execute vengeance in anger and wrath" not only upon Israel and Judah for their disobedience, but upon all the nations (**v. 15**), including Assyria whose 185,000 soldiers were destroyed in one night (2 Kings 19: 35). God's complaint is not only with Israel and Judah but with the whole world who will not submit to His authority in repentance and faith (Acts 17: 30-31).

### **III. Third Address—“Hear now what the Lord is saying.”**

#### **Chapter 6**

God's address to Israel in **chapter 6** is reminiscent of the covenant ceremony of Deuteronomy in which God calls the heavens and the earth as witnesses against Israel should she choose to be unfaithful to the covenant (Deut. 30: 19). In Micah's day, roughly 700 years after Moses wrote Deuteronomy God assuredly had a "case" against Israel for violating the covenant.<sup>247</sup> The scene is that of a courtroom in which God prosecutes His case against Israel. Israel had accused God of wearying her since he had not accepted her sacrifices, but God had been gracious to Israel by

<sup>245</sup> Eph. 4: 10-13 compared with Mic. 5: 5—"seven shepherds and eight leaders of men"—the number of completion plus one; see Waltke, pp. 185-186

<sup>246</sup> Waltke, p. 189

<sup>247</sup> See *Reformation Study Bible*, pp. 239-240, "Date and Occasion" of *Deuteronomy*

delivering her from Egypt and from Moab. He had done this not because of Israel's merit, but by grace.

In a series of questions, Micah pretends to be an Israelite worshipper who attempts to discover what sacrifice will win God's favor. The value of the sacrifice gets greater and greater with each question: **burnt offerings, yearling calves, thousands of rams, ten thousand rivers of oil**, and the ultimate sacrifice, **my first-born**.<sup>248</sup> God is therefore likened to the *pagan gods* whose wrath must be appeased and who must be "bought off" by sacrifices. But God could not be bought with sacrifices with mere sacrifices. Credible evidence of repentance must be demonstrated through the fruits of repentance—**justice, kindness, and humility (v. 8)**. This requirement should not have come as a surprise to Israel who is repeatedly summoned by the prophets to be this kind of people. **Justice** refers to justice in the courts which were repeatedly perverted by the bribes of the wealthy. **Kindness** refers to the disposition which those in power should have demonstrated to the weak who were dispossessed from their land and powerless to protect themselves.<sup>249</sup>

But they had not been this kind of people (**vv. 9-16**). Many of the sins listed by Amos and Hosea are covered here—unjust weights and measures in the market place (**vv. 10-11**) and deception in the courts (**v. 12**). For these sins and others God will punish Israel and Judah with the sword. Other nations will reap the crops they have sown (**v. 15**) because they have gone the way of Omri and Ahab, two notoriously wicked kings of Israel, one of which had been the most egregious (remarkably bad) example of injustice in his confiscation of Naboth's vineyard through fraud and abuse of power (**v. 16**).

### Chapter 7

The beginning of the chapter is an allegory about a vineyard which has been tended by its owner. It should be producing grapes, but there are none (cf. Isa. 5). The grapes represent the godly people of the land, but the godly people have perished because of the corruption and bloodshed of corrupt rulers and judges (**v. 3**). The watchman of **v. 4** is the prophet who warns the people of coming judgment—a nation under siege. When that day comes, the confusion and plight of the people will be so terrible that one cannot trust his closest neighbor or friend, not even his wife or children (**vv. 5-6**). Strict silence will be necessary if one is to succeed in saving himself.<sup>250</sup> When a nation is under siege and supply lines of food and water are cut off, people do whatever they can to survive, sometimes even betraying intimate friendships or family ties to save their own lives. Such will be the terrible stress of living during the siege of the Babylonian army and later of the Roman army under Titus in A.D. 70.

Nevertheless, Micah will wait expectantly for the Lord to deliver his people (**v. 7**). The rejoicing of Israel's enemies will be short-lived and will last only until the Lord has accomplished his purpose in their affliction (**vv. 8-9**). Individuals from all the nations will one day come to the sheepfold of the Lord (**v. 14**), even from the nations which once afflicted Israel—Assyria and Egypt (**v. 12**).<sup>251</sup> The nations afflicting Israel will one day be ashamed (**v. 16**), a prophecy which

<sup>248</sup> Waltke, pp. 194-195

<sup>249</sup> Waltke, p. 195

<sup>250</sup> Waltke, pp. 200-201

<sup>251</sup> See Acts 2: 9-11 for the catalog of the nations



will be fulfilled ultimately at the second coming of Christ when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord (Phil 2: 11). The unchanging love toward the remnant of His people will be evident when the Jews experience a spiritual awakening and embrace their Messiah (*vv. 19-20*; cf. Rom. 11). But the prophecy also applies to the persecuted church consisting of both Jew and Gentile.

## ***XV. The Prophecy of Joel***

### ***Introduction***

It is impossible to set a sure date for the prophecy of Joel, but the meaning and application can be established without certainty. The prophecy is made to Judah (**Chap. 3** in which Judah is mentioned six times. Even as God had sent drought and locusts upon the northern kingdom of Israel to punish Israel for her sins (Amos 4: 7-9), God was sending locusts upon Judah for the same reason. God's judgments upon His people and the nations are most often *indirect*, not direct. That is, nature is at God's disposal to punish disobedience—floods, draught, insects, plagues, earthquakes, tsunamis, etc. He does not need to send death angels to punish people. Joel sees in this event a forewarning of further judgment which he identifies as the **Day of the Lord** (1: 15; 2: 1, 11, 31; 3: 14).<sup>252</sup> The **Day of the Lord** carries with it the connotation (meaning) of judgment, primarily for the world, but *also for the people of God* including the church (Amos 5: 20; 2 Pet. 3: 10-15).

In this outstanding plague he sees the first signs of Israel's eschatological day of judgment at the hands of its covenant God.<sup>253</sup>

By sending a swarm of locusts, God prepares His people for much worse terrors which will eventually come upon them and upon the world. In Revelation 9, a plague of locusts is sent to harm all of those **who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads**, i.e. all of those who do not belong to Christ. The plague of locusts in Revelation 9 is reminiscent of the plague of locusts which comes in connection with the Day of the Lord in *Joel 1—2* and the plague of locusts upon Egypt in Ex. 10.<sup>254</sup> This is an interesting connection in that the prophecy of *Joel* is, first of all, a call to repentance for Judah, the people of God. But, secondly, it is a warning for the nations who persecuted God's OT people. Judah is called to repentance in **chapters 1—2: 17**, but the remainder of the prophecy from **2: 18** to the end is devoted to the deliverance which is promised to Judah (including the coming of the Spirit in **2: 28-29**) and the judgment of the nations for their ill-treatment of Judah. As the Apostle Peter declares, "For *it is* time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what *will be* the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?" (1 Pet. 4: 17) Characteristically, Joel begins with the condemnation and judgment of Judah and ends with a word of hope for God's people and a word of utter destruction for her enemies.

### ***Chapter 1-2: 11—The Invasion of Locusts***

Judah is being attacked by a swarm of locusts which is described metaphorically as an invading nation (**v. 6**) or army (**2: 11, 20, 25**). **Joel 2: 25** identifies the **army** definitively as the **swarming, creeping, stripping, gnawing locust**. Some commentators have interpreted the locusts as the army of an invading nation, but this verse seems to argue against this interpretation. Metaphors are used, but in the reverse sense to describe actual locusts as an invading army (**cf. 2: 4-5** in which the locusts are *likened* to horses and chariots but are not

<sup>252</sup> For further references to the "Day of the Lord" see Isa. 13:9; Ezek. 13:5; Amos 5:18; Zeph. 1:7; Zeph. 1:14; Obad. 1:15; Mal. 4:5; Acts 2:20; 1 Co. 5:5; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess.; 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:10).

<sup>253</sup> Leslie C. Allen, *Joel*, p. 60

<sup>254</sup> Robert Mounce, *Revelation*, pp. 193-194

*identified* as horses and chariots). The negative effects of the disaster are described in the text, not in terms of war and bloodshed, but in terms of agricultural ruin (cf. **1: 7, 9-13, 16-17**), and the restored blessings are described in terms of agricultural prosperity (**2: 21-26**). What is happening to Judah is a natural disaster brought by the hand of God to punish her for her sins and to bring Judah to repentance (**2: 12-17**). Nothing happens by accident; everything occurs according to the sovereign providence of God over the nations, including His covenant nation.<sup>255</sup> God will use whatever means necessary to accomplish His purposes. Severe drought described in terms of **fire** must also have been involved in Judah's discipline (**vv. 18-20**).

The reference to the sun and moon growing dark is a description of severe plagues of locusts which literally blot out the light of the sun and moon.<sup>256</sup>

### *Chapter 2: 12-17—Call for the Nation to Repent*

The prophet calls upon the nation to repent so that perhaps the Lord will relent and once again bless the nation. Notice that the blessings are in terms of agricultural abundance, another proof that the locusts are actual rather than metaphorical. The call to repentance is God-centered rather than man-centered. Joel does not wish the name of God to be blasphemed among the heathen who would be tempted to interpret the plague of locusts as the impotence of Judah's God who had no control over locusts (**v. 17—Where is their God?**).

### *Chapter 2: 18-32—The Deliverance of Judah and Material Blessings*

In response to national repentance, God is moved to restore the prosperity of the land. It will once more be fruitful and there will be plenty of grain, wine and oil (**vv. 19-26**). God will remove the **northern army**, the plague of locusts which has swept in from a northern direction. He will drive the locusts into another land or the sea and destroy it. The stench of dead locusts will fill the air (**v. 20**).

### *Chapter 2: 28-32—The Promise of the Holy Spirit and Supernatural Blessings*

But God has more in store for His people than agricultural prosperity. He will also pour out His Spirit on all mankind which will result in dreams and prophecy. We are not left in any doubt about the fulfillment of this prophecy since Peter interprets its fulfillment as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 17-21). It is clear from Peter's amazement at the Gentile Pentecost in Acts 10: 45 that he would not have expected the Spirit to be given to the Gentiles at this point in time.<sup>257</sup> However, the passage in **Joel 2: 28** does not limit the Spirit to the Jews; He is poured out on **all mankind** or **on all flesh**. We may, therefore, see the further fulfillment of this verse not only in the Jewish Pentecost in Acts 2 but in the Gentile Pentecost in Acts 10.

As to the other wonders in the sky and on earth mentioned in **vv. 30-31**, these may be attributed to the natural phenomenon (supernaturally extended) of solar eclipses which may have occurred at the time of Jesus' crucifixion. We know from Matthew 27: 45 that darkness swept over the

<sup>255</sup> Cf. Amos 4: 7-9 in which God sends drought and locusts upon Israel, the northern kingdom.

<sup>256</sup> Allen, p. 88

<sup>257</sup> Allen, p. 98

land from the sixth hour of the day until the ninth hour or from noon to 3 o'clock; but a total eclipse of the sun only lasts a few minutes, not three hours, and we are still left with a miraculous event predicted here in Joel. The full paschal moon may also have appeared blood-red in the sky that evening.<sup>258</sup> The blood of **v. 30** is to be associated with warfare and bloodshed when the Day of the Lord finally comes at the end of the world and the wicked are punished. Fire and columns of smoke are symbols of the theophany (the pre-incarnate appearance of Christ) when God led Israel out of Egypt. Just as the OT prophets often merged the first advent of Christ with the second, Peter does the same in Acts 2. When Christ returns in power and might to judge his enemies, this prophecy will receive its final fulfillment, and the miraculous phenomenon mentioned will occur.

### ***Chapter 3—Judgment of the Nations Who Oppose Judah***

The prophet mentions the exile of the Jewish people in **vv. 2-3**, but does not mention Assyria or Babylon, but Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia, nations who undoubtedly benefited from their exile and the traffic in human slaves.<sup>259</sup> God will judge all the nations for their treatment of Judah, including Edom and Egypt (**3: 19**). The nations are at first summoned to fight against God (**vv. 9-11**). This is followed by the symbol of the reaper, emerging in this chapter as he does in Revelation 14: 14-20. He is told to swing his sickle upon the nations gathering grapes which are ripe for destruction (**v. 13**). The nations will then be placed in the winepress of the wrath of God to be trodden under foot and judged.

Although Judah has been sinful, she is still God's chosen nation whom He will defend against her foes. The *antitype* of this protection is found in the invisible church<sup>260</sup>, which although sinful, is still His church. God will not allow those who persecute His church to go unpunished (**v. 21**; cf. Rev. 6: 10-11). In fact, God's judgment of any people group or nation will be largely based upon their treatment of believers living within their respective cultures.

Over a thousand years before the first of Israel's writing prophets began his ministry, God had made a promise to Abraham concerning the effect of the attitude of the nations of the world to him and his descendants. Any nation that cursed God's covenant people, the Lord himself would curse; and any nation that blessed God's covenant people, the Lord himself would bless (Gen. 12: 3; 27: 29).<sup>261</sup>

Because this promise of curse or blessing has commonly been restricted to the treatment of the *physical nation* of Israel, Robertson is careful to make the application to those who are the "true Israel of God" according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh.

It is the treatment of the *true people of God, whether Jewish or Gentile in origin*, that will be the basis for God's decision concerning the multitudes from all nations in the day of judgment.

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<sup>258</sup> Allen, p. 103

<sup>259</sup> Allen, pp. 110-111; cf. Amos: 1: 6, 9, cited in Allen. Note: this particular list of nations is one reason some scholars date the book in the ninth century—cf. Spiros Zhodiatas *Key Word Study Bible*

<sup>260</sup> The "invisible" church consists of all true believers from the beginning of mankind and extending into the future. The "visible" church consists of all those who are professing Christians, regardless of genuine faith. Just as there was a true Israel within Israel, there is a true church within the visible church. It is invisible only in the sense that no one but God can examine the heart.

<sup>261</sup> Robertson, p. 119

So the nations of the world should be alerted. Their response to the people of God scattered across the earth will be the basis for their eternal judgment. While violation of all ten words summarizing God's moral law has universal application, it is distinctively the treatment of God's people by the unbelieving world that will serve as the basis for their curse or blessing<sup>262</sup>

In Revelation 11, the two witnesses representing the testimony of Christ's disciples are slain by the beast coming up out of the sea, representing the enemies of Christ throughout the world. When the witnesses are killed, the people on earth rejoice, for they will no longer have to endure the message of repentance preached by God's faithful people. But when Christ returns, the two witnesses will be resurrected and caught up into heaven followed by the terrifying judgment upon those who hated and persecuted them (cf. 1 Thes. 4—5). Throughout the world, those who are believers receive varying degrees of persecution. In the US and much of the West, persecution can be very subtle and often imperceptible, so much so that the believer must be able to interpret it or "read between the lines" of how others are responding to him as a Christian or to the message of the gospel.

But in countries like Saudi Arabia or Pakistan, persecution is so aggressive that there is no need to interpret its existence. It can even result in death or imprisonment. Nations which provide abundant religious liberty to believers to express their faith and evangelize will be judged more leniently on the Day of Judgment than those which forbid the preaching of the gospel and actively persecute its messengers. For the objective observer, there can also be little doubt that nations which promote religious liberty also promote political and economic liberties which essentially originate from God's law and are fundamentally Christian in content.

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<sup>262</sup> Robertson, p. 122

## ***XVI. The Prophecy of Nahum***

### ***Introduction***

Nahum is a prophecy against Nineveh, the second prophecy against the mighty Assyrian Empire. One difference between his prophecy and Jonah's is that Jonah preached within the city of Nineveh whereas Nahum prophesied against Nineveh while residing in Judah or northern Galilee in the city of Elkosh.<sup>263</sup> The precise dating of the prophecy is also difficult to determine, but internal evidence indicates that Nahum prophesied after the fall of Thebes (**No-Amon—3: 8**) in 663-662 BC and before the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC. Jonah had successfully preached to the Ninevites roughly 150 years before Nahum, resulting in national repentance; but their repentance had been short-lived. Considering the fact that apostasy is only one generation away in even Christian cultures, it probably did not take long for Nineveh to resume its practice of brutal violence against surrounding nations. But he who lives by the sword will one day die by the sword (Matt. 26: 52), and the Assyrian Empire was no exception. In 612 BC it fell to the Babylonians.

By the time Nahum prophesied, the northern kingdom of Israel had fallen to Assyria (722 BC) and the Israelites had been living in exile for 60 to 100 years, assuming the accuracy of the above dates. Many Judean cities had also fallen to Assyria during Hezekiah's reign, and Jerusalem itself was also threatened (2 Kings 18: 13). God miraculously intervenes for Jerusalem to deliver the city from Sennacherib (2 Kings 19: 35), an event which took place about 701 BC. Considering the fact that northern Israel was already ruled by Assyria during Nahum's prophecy and that Assyria was the undisputed world power, we get some idea concerning the boldness of his message. Assyria had been used by God to punish Israel, but its cruelty had gone far beyond an acceptable limit. For this it would be judged.

### ***Chapter 1—A Psalm of the Greatness of God***

The prophecy begins with an introductory psalm in which God's greatness is extolled in contrast with his enemies. Assyria is a mighty power, but nothing in comparison with God. The Lord knows those who trust in him and those who don't. He is a stronghold in the day of trouble for those who do, and an overflowing flood for those who don't (**vv. 7-8**). Any plans made against the Lord are futile (**v. 9**). Assyria has plans against the people of God, and because of this Assyria will be cut off (**v. 11-12**). God is now ready to break the yoke of Assyria from Judah's back (**v. 13**), and Judah can now rejoice that the **wicked one** (Assyria) will never again pass through her (**v. 15**). Note well that the enemies of God's people are also the enemies of God (**v. 2**). God identifies Himself with His people.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> For different views on where Nahum prophesied, see Keil and Robertson. Robertson locates his ministry in northern Galilee (*The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, p. 56), while Keil locates it in Judah (*The Minor Prophets, Nahum*, p. 3). Keil also believes that Nahum was born in Galilee but that he immigrated to Judah later and prophesied there.

<sup>264</sup> For the fullest expression of this identity, see Romans 6: 1-11 in which the believer is described as one who has been crucified, has died, has been buried, and has risen again with Christ.

***Chapter 2-3—The Destruction of Nineveh***

The complete destruction of Nineveh is described in detail in these chapters. There will be none to mourn her destruction since Assyria was the most brutal of all conquering nations (**3: 19**). Her victims, especially leaders, were commonly beheaded, impaled, or burned.

## ***XVII. The Prophecy of Zephaniah***

### ***Introduction***

Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of King Josiah of Judah (640-609 BC) (v. 1). From the severity of the prophecy, his ministry must have been before the sweeping religious reforms Josiah instituted in 621 BC.<sup>265</sup> Josiah followed in the spiritual footsteps of his great-grandfather Hezekiah (715-686 BC) who was succeeded by his wicked son Manasseh (Josiah's grandfather) and his wicked grandson Amon (Josiah's father, who was assassinated by his servants; 2 Chronicles 33: 24). Josiah was only 8 years old when he became king and reigned 31 years in Jerusalem (2 Chron. 34: 1).

Nothing is said about King Josiah in Zephaniah's prophecy implying that the reforms had not yet taken place and possibly that he was still a young boy during Zephaniah's ministry.<sup>266</sup> We know from 2 Chronicles 34 that the Book of the Law was found while the temple was being repaired during Josiah's reforms. When this book was read to Josiah, he tore his robes in repentance. The discovery of the Book of the Law together with the preaching of Zephaniah possibly helped set the course for Josiah's successful spiritual reign in Judah. On the other hand, the spiritual damage done during the 55 year reign of Manasseh was irreversible (2 Kings 23: 26-27; 2 Kings 21: 10-16), and it is most likely that Josiah's repentance and piety were not shared by the people in general. This will explain why Zephaniah's prophetic ministry is severe even if he is prophesying while religious reforms are already in motion. Keil has noted that the description of moral depravity found in *Zephaniah* is similar to that found in *Jeremiah* whose ministry began in the thirteenth year of Josiah.<sup>267</sup> This is the reason Keil believes that his ministry was later on in Josiah's reign.

It was not ordinary for the prophetic books to contain the lineage of the prophet, but the lineage of Zephaniah is included in v. 1. He was the great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah which meant that it is likely Zephaniah had some of the same teachers as Josiah.<sup>268</sup>

### ***Chapter 1—The Judgment against Judah***

According to v. 4, the prophecy is against Judah and Jerusalem for Baal worship (v. 3) and the syncretistic worship of Yahweh with the worship of Milcom, the Ammonite god (v.4; 1 Kings 11: 5). The **Day of the Lord** is promised, the day which was supposed to be a day of salvation and deliverance from the enemies of Israel, but a day which will be, instead, **the day of the Lord's wrath** for the whole world and for Judah in particular (v. 18; cf. Amos 5: 18). The king's sons are mentioned for judgment (v. 8), for we learn from 2 Kings 23: 31-37 that both Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim followed in the ways of Manasseh and Amon instead of their father, Josiah. Josiah is not named for judgment because **he did right in the sight of the Lord**, and

<sup>265</sup> R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 940. For the historical background of *Zephaniah*, see 2 Chronicles 33—35.

<sup>266</sup> Harrison, p. 940. This view is not shared by Keil, *Zephaniah*, pp. 118-121

<sup>267</sup> Keil, p. 118; Jer. 1: 2

<sup>268</sup> Harrison, pp. 939-940



because he humbled himself when he heard the words of the Law (2 Kings 22: 2, 19, 20). Along with princes, the priests are singled out for judgment because of their **violence and deceit (v. 9)**, and the traders and merchants for dishonest practices in the market places (**vv. 10-13**). Once again, as in *Hosea*, *Amos*, *Micah*, and *Isaiah*, we see that God is not interested in institutional religion which has no impact on a person's life, including his business practices.

### ***Chapter 2: 1-3—Summons to Repentance***

Having warned of world-wide destruction, the prophet now summons all who will listen to repent. If they will repent, perhaps they will avoid the calamity coming upon the earth.

### ***Chapter 2: 4-15—Judgment upon the Enemies of Judah***

Judah is not the only country mentioned by name for destruction. There are others who will taste of the Lord's wrath. Four Philistine capitals are named for destruction in **v. 4**, followed by the Cherethites or Cretans in **v. 6** and the Moabites and Ammonites in **v. 8**. As usual, God's case against the nations is for their ill-treatment of his people (**v. 10**). Ethiopia and Assyria are named in **vv. 12-13**. Assyria, still the world power when Zephaniah prophesies, will become a desolate place occupied by beasts, pelicans and hedgehogs (**v. 14**). Assyria's defeat came in 612 BC at the hands of the Babylonians, and this prophecy was uttered possibly 20 years before it happened.<sup>269</sup> The arrogance of Assyria is especially highlighted as the epitome of world power arrayed in competition with the sovereign majesty of God. Note the phrase: **Who says in her heart, "I am, and there is no one besides me" (v. 15)**, an explicit claim of deity.

### ***Chapter 3: 1-8—Jerusalem Will Be Judged***

The prophet once again addresses Jerusalem, condemning princes who oppress the poor (**roaring lions**), corrupt judges who make decisions based on bribes (**v. 3**), reckless prophets who have no word from the Lord but speak their own words (**v. 4**), and ungodly priests who profane the sanctuary (**v. 4**)—men who have no shame (**v. 5**). It is not as though God did not publish His will to the people of Judah. He had made known His justice **every morning** through the word of true prophets (**v. 5**), but no one was willing to listen. He had also destroyed nations which had persecuted Judah for the purpose of helping the people **revere** His name (**v. 6**), but to no avail (**v. 7**).

### ***Chapter 3: 9-20—The Nations Converted along with the Remnant of Israel***

This passage is similar to that of Isaiah 66: 19-20. In the *Isaiah* passage, the survivors of Israel (the remnant) sent into exile will share their faith in Yahweh with the Gentiles who had never heard of the greatness of Yahweh. Here in this chapter also, the Gentiles will serve **shoulder to shoulder** with the Jews in the worship of Yahweh (**v. 9**). The **proud, exulting ones** of Judah will be removed from the faithful remnant, leaving only those who are **humble and lowly** who **take refuge in the name of the Lord, do no wrong, and tell no lies (vv. 11-13)**. God will clear away their enemies (**v. 15**) and will rejoice over His remnant people (**v. 17**). The fulfillment of this prophecy, therefore, must rest once again in the consummation of the kingdom of Christ and

<sup>269</sup> Spiros Zhodhates, *Key Word Study Bible*

His purified bride, the church, in whom there is no spot or blemish (Eph. 5: 27). Although it receives a partial fulfillment in the return of the exiles from Babylon, it can hardly be said of the returned exiles that they **did no wrong** and **told no lies**. An examination of *Haggai*, *Zechariah*, and *Malachi* will readily attest the sinfulness of the returned exiles. Nor can such a bold statement be made of the NT church which is a mixture of wheat and tares, believers and unbelievers. But it *can* be said of the church for which Christ died, the *invisible* body of true believers who tremble at His word and who love Him. It is only in this sense that Jewish believers hearing of the coming judgment could take comfort in the words of the prophet, Zephaniah. They would be taken into Babylonian exile to die there, but their faith in Yahweh would remain, and by their faith they would lay hold of the promises of salvation made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—promises repeated in vv. **12-20** of *Zephaniah*.

## ***XVIII. The Prophecy of Habakkuk***

### ***Introduction***

The prophecy of Habakkuk is written as a *theodicy*—a justification of the ways of God with men. In that sense it is very similar to *Job* except for the fact that Habakkuk maintains a very humble attitude toward God throughout the prophecy while Job gets a bit feisty. There is nothing in the introduction of the book which identifies the time in which it is written, but some scholars date the book just before the fall of Assyria to Babylon in 612 BC and before the Battle of Carchemish in 605 BC in which Egypt falls to Babylon. If this is correct, then Habakkuk prophesies about the same time as Jeremiah.

The basic message of the book is that God is going to use a nation (Babylon) more sinful than Judah as an instrument to punish Judah for its sins. This causes Habakkuk some confusion. Why would God do such a thing?

### ***Chapter 1—Habakkuk Cries for Justice and God Answers Unexpectedly***

The book begins with the prophet observing the sinful state of the nation of Judah. He calls out to the Lord **Violence!** but the Lord seems to do nothing about it (**v. 2**). The land is filled with violence, destruction, and injustice. The wicked pervert justice and ignore the law of God (**v. 4**). This condition has been so commonly described by the OT prophets that the words now evoke only a yawn—“So what else is new?” Yet, we only betray our own indifference to sin when we react this way, for God was intensely concerned about the sinfulness of His people, and He is also intensely concerned about sin in the church today. So concerned was He that He was about to do something which Habakkuk could scarcely believe (**v. 5**). He is about to raise up the Chaldeans to judge the nation of Judah (**vv. 6-11**).

Habakkuk responds to this news in **vv. 12-17**. The **Holy One** cannot **approve evil**, so how can God use such a wicked nation to punish a nation more righteous than they (**v. 13**)? It is quite possible that Habakkuk has reference primarily to the *godly remnant* of Judah who would suffer just as much as the wicked should God go ahead with His plans.

The nations are like the fish of the sea which the Chaldeans bring up with a net (**vv. 14-15**), and they attribute their success to their superior military capability (i.e. their **nets** with which they catch all their **fish**, the nations). Habakkuk’s complaint is this: Lord, how can a holy God like you allow this wicked people to continue gobbling up the nations when they never worship you or give you any credit for their success?

### ***Chapter 2—God Answers Habakkuk’s Complaint***

After laying out his complaint, Habakkuk waits for the Lord’s reply. He acknowledges at the outset that his complaint may not be justified, and that God may reprove him (**v. 1**). His attitude is contrasted with that of Job who appeared confident that on a level playing field, he could win his debate with God (Job 13: 3, 15). God begins to answer in **v. 2** and continues through **v. 20**. The summary of his answer is that *human pride will not succeed in the end*, but will utterly fail

to achieve its goals. It is the **righteous** who will finally win the day and succeed, *not by prideful human merit, but by his faith in God* (v. 4).

The immediate reference of **the proud one** is the Chaldean, and perhaps more particularly Nebuchadnezzar, the leader of the Chaldeans. We may apply the description more generally to anyone who trusts in human strength, including any of the Israelites in Habakkuk's day who prided themselves in human wealth, achievement, or military power. He is after all, speaking to the godless nation of Judah where there was no lack of sinful pride. What *was* lacking was faith in God and obedience to His law.

Like the proud man who gets drunk and overestimates his strength, Babylon overestimates its strength and reaches out to grab the nations for itself. It does not **stay at home** but marshals its troops together to collect the nations and peoples (v. 5). For the arrogance of Babylon, the Lord pronounces five woes upon it: (1) **Woe to him who increases what is not his** (v. 6)—a reference to taking the wealth of nations by force. (2) **Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house** (v. 9)—the same idea as above. (3) **Woe to him who builds a city with bloodshed and founds a town with violence** (v. 12)—a reference to material gain accomplished with bloodshed. (4) **Woe to you who make your neighbors drink, who mix in your venom even to make them drunk so as to look on their nakedness** (v. 15)—possibly a reference to the terms of the suzerainty treaties imposed upon nations when they were conquered by Babylon. Just as the nations had to drink this bitter cup filled with **venom** (harsh stipulations of the treaty), now Babylon will have to drink the same wrath from the Lord's hand. (5) **Woe to him who says to a piece of wood, "Awake!" To a dumb stone, "Arise!"** (v. 19)—a reference to Babylon's trust in idols as if her idols were the reason for her military success.

Babylon's striving is vanity and useless: **The peoples toil for fire, and nations grow weary for nothing** (v. 13). This verse is explained by Jeremiah 51: 58.<sup>270</sup>

Thus says the LORD of hosts, "The broad wall of Babylon will be completely razed And her high gates will be set on fire; So the peoples will toil for nothing, And the nations become exhausted *only* for fire." (Jeremiah 51:58 NASB)

Babylon will labor hard at war taking the wealth of nations, getting evil gain, and building its cities with bloodshed, but only to witness Babylon herself one day go up in flames and smoke. All of this striving is the Lord's doing (v. 13) who uses the vanity of men's pride to bring glory to Himself. Just as He glorified Himself through the hardness of Pharaoh's heart, He will glorify Himself through the pride of worldly powers, all who must one day fall into ruin and destruction because they dared to exalt themselves before the sovereign majesty of a holy God. The sinfulness and pride of man will not be allowed to obscure (hide) the glory of the Lord, for the whole earth will be filled with His glory when he comes with judgment and terror upon the wicked (Ps. 76: 10). Idols are nothing, the work of men's hands (including the wealth of men), **"But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him"** (v. 20).

God's warning to Babylon is a fitting warning to individuals who pride themselves in human achievement. Achievement is not inherently evil, but can be good; and we are taught in Scripture that whatever our hand finds to do that we should do it with all of our might (Ecc. 9:

<sup>270</sup> Keil, p. 86

10) and to do all our work heartily for the Lord (Col. 3: 23). However, any good thing we achieve is through the Lord's grace to us, and if we receive it by grace, we should not boast as if we achieved it through human merit independently of God (1 Cor. 4: 7). On the other hand, striving to achieve success through illegitimate means will result eventually in ruin. Many ungodly men have become very wealthy, taking things which did not belong to them through unscrupulous legal and business practices (condemned in all the prophets), even through violence and murder. One day (*The Day*) they will look behind them to see their financial empires go up in the flames of God's judgment.

This warning also applies to nations who are typified by the world-power of Babylon the Great. The great kingdoms of the world which have attempted to dominate the world for unjust gain have come and gone—Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, Napoleon, Nazi Germany, Lenin and Stalin of the former Soviet Union. The sin which characterizes such empires is greed for what does not belong to them—land and resources stolen by military force or through complicated banking transactions. But what is the benefit of all this pillage? In the end it will be for nothing. At the end of the age, the Lord Jesus will return in awesome power to burn to ashes all the heathen kingdoms and their wealth. On that day all their toil will be for the fire which consumes their unjust gain. Like Babylon, modern nations trust in their own gods (vv. 18-19—military might, wealth, and global economies), but God is in His holy temple, and men should keep silent before him.<sup>271</sup>

### *Chapter 3—Habakkuk's Prayer*

Habakkuk now has his answer, and he is humbled to pray. He says, **In wrath, remember mercy.** From v. 3 to v. 15 he exalts the power of God and His sovereign pleasure in **trampling** the nations. God will **strike the head of the house of evil**, but He does so ultimately for the salvation of His people (v. 13)—the elect remnant who must nevertheless suffer for the sins of the nation. Even the destruction of Judah itself will ultimately end in the salvation of the elect of Judah. The whole world is a stage upon which the drama of redemption is played out for the salvation of God's elect. At the end of his prayer, Habakkuk acknowledges that the news of what God is going to do makes him tremble. He waits **patiently for the day of distress**, the day in which Babylon will invade Judah (v. 16). But his trust in the Lord **will not depend on good circumstances** (vv. 17-19). Even if everything falls apart—and God is telling him that it **will** fall apart—the Lord God is my strength, and He has made my feet like hind's feet, and makes me walk on my high places (v. 19). True Christian joy (v. 18) and peace does not depend on one's outward circumstances, but in the knowledge of God and His benevolent, though often severe, providence toward those He loves. God does all things well, and even when life is

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<sup>271</sup> No doubt many would accuse the US for being one such evil empire, and one day the US may fit this description. However, no matter how one may interpret US foreign policy decisions in Iraq, Afghanistan, or elsewhere, the US has spent far more tax money (21.8 billion US dollars in 2007 alone) **helping** foreign nations than it could ever be accused of **stealing** from them. On the other hand, one may argue convincingly that the US and other western nations have become "neo-colonialists" through international aid to developing nations. Throughout the cold war with Russia, American aid to African countries was motivated by a desire to form alliances with Africa against Russia. Now that the cold war is over, such motivation is no longer applicable. Yet, neo-colonial influence still remains—clearly manifested in the present threats from Europe and the US to cut off aid if Uganda makes homosexual rape a capital offense punishable by death. But the only sure way for African countries to rid themselves of western influence is to quit accepting aid.

difficult, we know that God will work all things together for His glory and for our salvation (Rom. 8: 28). It is not the proud one who will succeed, but **the righteous shall live by his faith**. Habakkuk gives us an example of such a man.

## ***XIX. The Prophecy of Jeremiah***

### ***Introduction***

Jeremiah prophesied during the reigns of Josiah, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah of Judah. Jehoahaz, also son of Josiah, is not mentioned since he reigned only 3 months in Jerusalem until he was removed by Neco, king of Egypt, and replaced by his brother Jehoiakim (2 Chron. 36: 1-4). Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim, also is not named since he only reigned the same length of time as Jehoahaz, three months (2 Kings 24:8). Davis gives us a concise and very useful chronology of the time. The references, unless noted otherwise, are in 2 Kings.<sup>272</sup>

- Jehoahaz (23:31), 609 BC
- Jehoiakim (23: 36), 609-598 BC
  - Battle of Carchemish (cf. 24: 7), 605 BC
  - Deportation No. 1 [third year of Jehoiakim, 606 BC] (cf. Dan. 1: 1-4)
  - Jehoiakim rebels [against Nebuchadnezzar; Egypt has been defeated by Babylon] (24: 1), 601 BC (?) [precise date is in question]
- Jehoiachin (24: 8), 597 BC
  - Deportation No. 2 (24: 10-16; cf. Ezek. 1: 1-3)
- Zedekiah (24: 18), 597-587 BC
  - Zedekiah rebels [taken to Babylon] (24: 20), after 593 BC (cf. Jer. 51: 59)
  - Babylonian siege [of Jerusalem] (25: 1-2), 589 BC
  - Jerusalem falls (25: 3-10), 587 BC
  - Deportation No. 3 (25: 11-12) BC

Jeremiah was called in the 13<sup>th</sup> year of Josiah in 626 BC, and continued preaching until the eleventh year of Zedekiah until the fifth month of his 11<sup>th</sup> year (587 BC), a forty year period (vv. 2-3). He was not alone as a true prophet of the Lord, but served concurrently with Habakkuk and Zephaniah in Judah and Daniel and Ezekiel who were prophesying in the land of Babylon since the first and second deportation.

The religious reforms of Josiah's reign took place in 621 BC. Harrison believes that 626 BC, the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry, was also the year of Ashurbanipal's death (the last great Assyrian king), and that his death served as the stimulus for Babylon to begin asserting her independence under Nabopolassar, father of Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>273</sup>

***For over 200 years***, from 850 BC to the death of Ashurbanipal II in 627 BC, the threat of Assyria had overshadowed Syria and Palestine, and from 750 BC onward this threat was especially acute from Tiglath Pileser III. Samaria, capital of the northern kingdom of Israel was taken into exile in 722 BC after the rebellion of King Hoshea, the vassal king subject to Tiglath Pileser III. Judah, the southern kingdom, continued to live under Assyrian dominance—at times as its tributary or vassal—until the death of Ashurbanipal II in 626 BC and the rise of Babylon under Nabopolassar. Along with the resurgence (rising again) of Babylon, Egypt had also

<sup>272</sup> Davis, *The Power and the Fury—2 Kings*, p. 328. Additional information is in brackets. Another helpful chronology is found in *Eerdman's Handbook to the Bible*, p. 397.

<sup>273</sup> Harrison, pp. 802-803

experienced a resurgence from 664-610 BC and played an important part in the history of Judah until Egypt's defeat at Carchemish and Hamath in 605 BC.<sup>274</sup>

The capital city of Assyria (Ashur) fell to Babylon in 614 BC followed by Nineveh in 612 BC. Even after Babylon defeated Egypt at Carchemish and Hamath, there were still *pro-Egyptian elements* in the royal court in Judah who refused to submit to Babylon. The reason for this may have been Babylon's indecisive attack upon Egypt itself in 601 BC.<sup>275</sup> When Jeremiah advised them not to resist Babylon, he was taken by force to Egypt where he eventually died.<sup>276</sup> Thus, there were two kingdoms vying for dominance over Palestine after the fall of Assyria, Babylon and Egypt, with Babylon finally coming out on top and Egypt confined to her homeland in the Nile Delta (2 Kings 24: 7).

The reader will discover that *Jeremiah* is somewhat less difficult to interpret than *Isaiah*, whose prophecy ended 65 to 75 years before Jeremiah began his ministry—depending how you date *Isaiah*. There is also a great deal more historical narrative within the book to help us determine the context. I have made extensive use of C. F. Keil's commentary on *Jeremiah* for this survey.

### **Chapter 1—Jeremiah's Call and Commission as a Prophet**

Judging from his reaction, Jeremiah was apparently a young man when God called him as a prophet (v. 6), but God had chosen him before conception and had set him apart as a prophet before he was born. Though a prophet to Judah, his influence would not be limited to Judah, but would spread to the **nations** (v. 5). The terms of his calling are plain—he should speak what the Lord commands him to speak, and he should not be afraid of men as he speaks. Coming as they do in the first chapter, both commands are significant. Some of Jeremiah's fiercest opponents were the false prophets whom the Lord had not sent nor had He put His words in their mouths (**Jer. 23: 21**). Here in v. 7 it is clear that God is sending Jeremiah, and He is also giving him His words to speak to the nation (v. 9). The command to be fearless is also significant in light of the many threats to Jeremiah's life throughout his prophetic ministry. With the command comes a warning (v. 17). If Jeremiah becomes afraid of men, God will respond by giving him *reason* to be afraid, for the fear of men has one simple cause—deficiency in faith and in the fear of God.

But God assures Jeremiah that He is with him and that He will make him as a **fortified city and as a pillar of iron and as walls of bronze against the whole land** (v. 18). The kings of Judah, its princes, priests and prophets will **fight against you** but God **will deliver you** (v. 19). By way of application, if we are assured of our calling as preachers and teachers, we must ask God to deliver us from the fear of men which renders us ineffective and powerless. Faith in God and assurance of our calling drives out fear. But this is yet the more reason to make sure that our preaching is in accordance with the word of God. When we speak His word and not our own, we are given confidence that He is with us in our preaching.

Jeremiah is commissioned in a two-fold calling, to tear down and to build up; but the task of tearing down is given twice the emphasis (v. 10).

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<sup>274</sup> Davis, p. 328, footnote

<sup>275</sup> Davis, p. 328, footnote

<sup>276</sup> Harrison, p. 803-808



"See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, To **pluck up** and to **break down**, To **destroy** and to **overthrow**, To build and to plant." (Jeremiah 1:10 NASB)

Four verbs are used of tearing down whereas only two are used for building up. A casual reading of Jeremiah will demonstrate that he was primarily a prophet of judgment and not comfort <sup>277</sup>

The coming destruction of Babylon is introduced in **vv. 13-14**—the **boiling pot** from the north. This is not an error of geography as if God didn't know where Babylon was, but an indication that it would invade Palestine from the north which was the common practice of armies invading Palestine. Babylon eliminated the Assyrian occupation of northern Palestine before invading Judea.

### *Chapter 2—General Statement of the Apostasy of Judah and Israel*

God had treated Israel (the northern kingdom) with unique tenderness and blessing far above all the other nations (**vv. 2-7**). Their afflictions had but one cause—they had forsaken the Lord. Are they now in slavery (**v. 14**)? Why? Israel has done it to herself by forsaking God (**v. 17**). And now Judah was seeking help from the Egyptians (**v. 18**) against Babylon, and she will be just as disappointed in Egypt as she was in Assyria (**v. 36**; cf. 2 Kings 18-19).

Their sins are described as spiritual harlotry (**v. 20**) or as a wild donkey in heat looking for a mate (**v. 24**). The foolishness of their idolatry is satirized (ridiculed) in **vv. 27-28**. A man says to a tree, **You are my father** and to a stone, **You are my mother**. What could be more ridiculous than that? Exile is assured in **v. 37**, **From this place you shall go out with your hands on your head**.

### *Chapter 3—Judah Imitates the Adultery of Her Faithless Sister Israel*

Although a divorced woman who had remarried could not return under any circumstances to her former husband (Deut. 24: 1-4), Judah believes that she can flippantly (casually) return to the Lord after she has committed adultery with false gods, like an adulterous wife who is not really sorry for her adultery (**v. 1**). <sup>278</sup> One would think that Judah could have learned proper behavior through the negative example of her sister Israel whom God allowed to be led away in exile 94 years previously. She did not learn anything from her sister's judgment (**vv. 6-10**), but imitated her adulterous behavior. Worse still, Judah presumed that because it had been 94 years since the exile of Israel, the time of the Lord's anger and judgment had passed. <sup>279</sup> For Judah's impenitence after 94 years, Israel is judged more righteous than Judah (**v. 11**). God then provokes Judah to jealousy by calling Israel to repentance and restoration (**vv. 12-16**) which He later extends also to Judah to complete the full restoration of His people (**vv. 17-23**). A call to repentance by Jeremiah is made in **vv. 24-25** which continues into **chapter 4**.

<sup>277</sup> Keil, *Jeremiah*, p. 42

<sup>278</sup> J. A. Thompson, *Jeremiah*, pp. 190-192

<sup>279</sup> Keil

### ***Chapter 4—Summons to Repent to Avoid the Coming Invasion***

Judah is summoned to repent or else the invasion of Babylon is certain. This brings up the question of the possibility of forgiveness since other passages imply that the time for repentance was long past because of Manasseh's sins (cf. 2 Kings 23: 26; 24: 3). Even though Josiah was a righteous king, God would not relent of His anger toward Judah because of Manasseh. Perhaps a better explanation is to say that Judah's whole-hearted emersion into the sins of Manasseh **rendered her beyond the point of repentance** even though the opportunity of repentance is honestly extended by the prophet. Though physical circumcision was practiced, God was more interested in the circumcision of their hearts (**4: 4**).

The devastation of Judah is described in dramatic terms in **vv. 19-31**, including the suffering of women laboring to give birth only to deliver their newborn children to the swords of murderous soldiers (**v. 31**).

### ***Chapter 5—Judah Virtually Empty of Godly People; therefore, Judgment Promised***

The prophet searches symbolically throughout the streets of Jerusalem to see if he can find righteous people. He cannot find a single soul who does justice and seeks truth—not among the poor and common folk (**v. 4**) and not among the **great** or rich (**v. 5**). He names not only idolatry as deserving of judgment (**vv. 6-7**) but physical adultery (**v. 8**). Religious apostasy and immorality always go together, for when our gods are too small, they are no hindrance to our sin.

Because of their sins, God is sending a fierce nation to punish Judah (**vv. 15-17**), but He will not put a total end to Judah (**v. 18**). He will preserve them in their exile (**v. 19**).

Considering the fact that God is the maker of heaven and earth, Judah's lack of godly fear is truly remarkable for its senselessness (**vv. 21-25**). The people fail in every aspect of covenantal obedience to His law. They do not take care of the orphan or defend the rights of the poor (**v. 28**); their prophets prophesy falsely and their priests are corrupt—sins we have already encountered in our study of *Hosea* and *Amos* who prophesied to the northern kingdom of Israel. The whole population is complicit in all these sins. There is no difference between Israel and Judah. Thus, if God judged Israel, why should He not judge Judah?

### ***Chapter 6—The Siege of Jerusalem Predicted***

Jeremiah presents this section as if God is the general of the Babylonian army ordering the attack (**vv. 4-6**). However, no one in Israel is really listening to the prophet's warnings (**v. 10**); therefore, God's wrath will be poured out on young and old alike—the children in the street, young men, husbands, wives, and old people (**v. 11**). Corruption and greed pervades the whole land from the common people to the rich and educated, from the prophet to the priest; everyone is dishonest (**v. 13**). While this corruption continues, the false prophets are crying, "**Peace, peace**", but Jeremiah says, **But there is no peace** (**v. 14**). Yet, for all of this they are not ashamed, not even to blush (**v. 15**). Their sacrifices are worthless (**v. 20**), a familiar complaint we have found in all the prophets. Religion is no substitute for repentance and faith.

Repetitiously, Jeremiah warns again of the coming of Babylon (vv. 22-24) and once again summons Judah to repentance (vv. 25-30).

**Chapter 7: 1—8: 3—False Hope in the Presence of the Temple**

Throughout the history of the northern kingdom of Israel, the people had practiced the bull-cult worship instituted by Jeroboam I in Dan, Beersheba, and other locations. Judah on the other hand was privileged to have the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, the only lawful place of worship. In spite of their immorality and idolatry, the people felt secure from judgment knowing that the temple was still standing. Surely the Lord would honor His own temple. In response to this illusion, Jeremiah preaches his famous **Temple of the Lord** sermon (vv. 4-15) to dispossess the Judeans of any notion that the physical presence of the temple would avert God's judgment.

Once again, religious externalism is no substitute for obedience. It is clear that the people are violating His covenant law in every imaginable way (vv. 5-6; 9), and it is truly presumptuous that they would trust in the deceptive words of the false prophets saying, **This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord** (v. 4, 8) as if their immorality and idolatry did not matter as long as the temple stood upright. Foolishly, they kept saying, **We are delivered!** (v. 10) The temple itself had become a den of robbers anticipatory to the idolatrous Jews of Jesus' day (v. 11; cf. Matt. 21: 13).

To prove that their confidence in the temple was vain, God reminds them of the destruction of Shiloh where the tabernacle dwelt until the time of Eli (1 Sam. 1: 3), the **place where I made my name dwell at first** (v. 12). We have no biblical reference to the destruction of Shiloh, but we do have record of the capture of the Ark of the Covenant by the Philistines. Eli's sons were wicked men and went out of their way to profane the temple sacrifices. Thinking that Israel's armies would be safe with the ark in their midst, Eli's sons take the ark into battle. Israel is defeated, and the ark is captured by the Philistines (1 Sam. 4). This should have been a serious objection to any theory that the temple's presence would keep Judah safe (vv. 12-15). It is also a serious objection to any theory that a *well-established church* in any country will keep the people safe from judgment. If the church becomes apostate in doctrine and practice—the two always go together—it is susceptible to judgment.

For the first time, but not the last, God forbids Jeremiah to pray for Judah (v. 16), for the people were bringing sacrifices to Yahweh (v. 21), but they were also offering sacrifices to the **queen of heaven**, an Assyrian deity (v. 18).<sup>280</sup> Besides, in the initial covenantal arrangements with Israel subsequent to their deliverance from Egypt, God had not required sacrifices and burnt offerings as the condition of fulfillment (v. 22). What He had required was obedience to the covenant document, the Ten Commandments (v. 23), and the people had agreed to this condition by taking upon themselves the self-maledictory oath, **All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient** (Ex. 24: 7). It was surely a lame excuse to say that God should be satisfied with insincere sacrifices and offerings, especially when these sacrifices and offerings *were never the primary core* of the covenant obligations. Meanwhile, the people indulged in idolatry and immorality of every kind (v. 24). Commenting on vv. 22-23, Keil remarks,

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<sup>280</sup> Keil, p. 160

The purport of the two verses is accordingly as follows: When the Lord entered into covenant with Israel at Sinai, He insisted on their hearkening to His voice and walking in all His commandments, as the condition necessary for bringing about the covenant relationship, in which He was to be God to Israel, and Israel a people to Him: but He did not at that time give all the various commandments as to the presenting of sacrifices. Such an intimation neither denies the divine origin of the Torah of sacrifice in Leviticus, nor discredits its character as part of the Sinaitic legislation. All it implies is, that the giving of sacrifices is *not the thing of primary importance in the law, is not the central point of the covenant laws*, and that so long as the cardinal precepts of the decalogue are freely transgressed, sacrifices neither are desired by God, *nor secure covenant blessings for those who present them*. That this is what is meant is shown by the connection in which our verse stands. The word: that God did not give command as to sacrifice, refer to the sacrifices brought by a people that recklessly broke all the commandments of the decalogue (ver. 9 f.), in the thought that by means of these sacrifices they were proving themselves to be the covenant people, and that to them as such God was bound to bestow the blessings of His covenant. It is therefore with justice that Oehler...says, *“In the sense that the righteousness of the people and the continuance of the covenant relationship were maintained by sacrifice as such—in this sense Jahveh did not ordain sacrifices in the Torah.”* Such soulless service of sacrifice is repudiated by Samuel in 1 Sam. 15: 22, when he says to Saul: Hath Jahveh delight in burnt and slain offerings, as in hearkening to the voice of Jahveh? Behold, to hearken is better than sacrifice, etc....What is here said differs from these passages only in this: Jeremiah does not simply say that God has no pleasure in such sacrifices, but adds the inference that the Lord does not desire the sacrifices of a people that have fallen away from Him. *This Jeremiah gathers from the history of the giving of the law, and from the fact that, when God adopted Israel as His people, He demanded not sacrifices, but their obedience to His word and their walking in His ways*. The design of Jeremiah’s addition was the more thoroughly to crush all such vain confidence in sacrifices.<sup>281</sup>

Thus, Israel’s continuation in the covenant blessings promised in the law (Deut. 27—28) were *conditional*, not upon the fulfillment of sacrifices—something performed easily enough—but obedience to the laws of God enumerated in the Decalogue and the elaboration of those laws in the case laws. Continuation in covenant blessings is also conditional for the church. The church must continue to *believe* the truth of the gospel, and belief of the truth will *inevitably* lead to *practical righteousness* in the church. This practical righteousness will not be perfect, but it will be consistent on an individual or corporate level. If not, then the individual or church, or both, has become apostate.

None of the prophets sent to Israel had been heeded during the entire history of Israel from the exodus onward (**vv. 25-28**). The people had even sacrificed their infant sons and daughters on pagan altars, something God never required or accepted (**v. 31**). Human sacrifice became prevalent during Manasseh’s regime. They had repeatedly violated the covenant statutes and had thus incurred the curses of the covenant (**v. 33**; cf. Deut. 28: 26). Since the people had worshipped the sun, the moon and all the starry hosts of heaven, God would allow the Babylonians to dig up the bones of dead kings, princes, prophets and priests and lay their bones out in the open before the scorching sun and before the dishonor of the Chaldeans (**8: 1-2**). Those who are left alive in Judah will prefer death to the horrific punishments they will endure at the hands of their brutal captors (**v. 3**).

<sup>281</sup> Keil, *Jeremiah*, pp. 163-165, emphasis mine

### ***Chapter 8: 4-17—The Obstinate Rebellion of Judah***

The people refuse to repent, and like war horses charging into battle, they charge into their sinful ways (v. 6)—the religious leaders leading the charge. The scribes who interpret the law, the wise men who apply the law to practical situations<sup>282</sup>, the priests and the prophets, all of these men are **greedy for money** and mislead the people into thinking that there will be peace; but there will be no peace as long as Judah rebels against the Lord (vv. 8-11). Therefore, the doom of Judah is near and one can already hear the snorting of the Chaldean's war horses (v. 15). The **serpents** mentioned in v. 17 is a new figure of punishment and may be a reference to the serpents sent into the camp of Israel because of their disobedience (Num. 21).

### ***Chapter 8: 18-9: 26—The Lamentations (Sorrows) of Jeremiah***

Jeremiah writes a whole book, *Lamentations*, on his sorrows concerning Judah; and we have a sampling of them here. He can already hear the cries of his people in the distant land of Babylon (v. 19). The lament of 9: 1-11 is not because God is going to punish Judah, but because Judah is so wicked. The primary sin named is the violation of the ninth commandment, **You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor**. The people are utterly deceitful, and no one can trust what the other says. People say one thing but mean another. Can God refrain from punishing such a lying nation and fail to avenge himself and His law (v. 9)? He will surely punish Judah and avenge Himself (vv. 10-22). God does not delight in the false wisdom of the scribes or the riches of unjust and unscrupulous merchants (v. 23). These are things that men boasts in, but God **delights** in the true knowledge of Himself (v. 24), something which is a scarce commodity in Jeremiah's day.

Likewise, the world boasts in the learning and knowledge of educated men and the accumulated wealth of those who are "wise" in the ways of the world, but God is not impressed. He is only impressed with His own wisdom and those who possess it. He has accordingly made the wisdom of the world foolishness through the preaching of the gospel (1 Cor.).

By her sins, Judah has placed herself on the same level as the idolatrous Gentiles whom God will judge. They have proved themselves no different and will suffer the same fate (vv. 25-26).

### ***Chapter 10—The Foolishness of Idolatry***

This is a satire on the worship of idols, the work of men's hands, similar to Elijah's satire on Mt. Carmel (1 Ki. 18). Idols are like scarecrows which people put in their fields to keep the birds out of their crops (vv. 4-5), but the Lord is the maker of heaven and earth (vv. 10-13). The coming siege of Jerusalem is predicted in vv. 17-20 followed by the desperate prayer of the people beginning in v. 23.

### ***Chapter 11—Judah Has Broken the Covenant***

Because Judah has transgressed the covenant (as did Israel) God has brought upon them the curses of the covenant (v. 8; cf. Deut. 27—28; 30: 15-20). Notice in v. 10 that they had broken

<sup>282</sup> Eerdman's Handbook to the Bible, p. 400

the covenant in spite of the fact that temple sacrifices were still being offered (cf. **11: 15**; **7: 21-23**). It was not the temple sacrifices which constituted the true obedience of the people, but keeping the moral laws (cf. **7: 5-10**). But their false gods will not save them on the day of disaster (**vv. 12-13**). For the second time, Jeremiah is forbidden to pray for the people of Judah; for God will not listen to them (**v. 14**; cf. **7: 16**). Notice that Baal worship is still practiced by the people (**v. 17**).

### **Chapter 11: 18-23—Jeremiah’s Life Threatened; the Lord’s Response**

From the beginning of his ministry, God had told Jeremiah not to fear men. Were it not for this promise, Jeremiah would have had ample reason to do so. This is the first of the threats made against his life, and there would be others later. But God would not suffer His prophet to be harmed before his mission was completed. Instead, those who sought his life would be the ones harmed. In the same way, God’s people are indestructible until His purpose for their lives is accomplished. The hairs of our heads are numbered (Matt. 10: 30).

### **Chapter 12—Jeremiah’s Prayer for Vengeance Upon the Wicked and God’s Response**

Jeremiah complains of the prosperity of the wicked (cf. Ps. 73) and prays for the Lord to execute His judgment upon them (**vv. 1-4**). God responds by warning Jeremiah of worse things to come (**vv. 5-6**).<sup>283</sup> The priests and prophets have thus far opposed the prophet at every step, but it will get worse *when the members of Jeremiah’s own family* begin to oppose him (**v. 6**).<sup>284</sup> Worse still will be the chaos of Judah when the Babylonians lay siege.<sup>285</sup> If Jeremiah cannot take the heat now, neither will he be able to endure it later.

God has abandoned His people to the **shepherds** who will ruin His vineyard (**v. 10**). This is a reference, not to the prophets and priests of Judah, but to *the invading armies* whom the Lord has designated **shepherds (6: 3)**. They will encamp around Jerusalem to besiege it.<sup>286</sup> They are further identified as the Lord’s **wicked neighbors** who strike at His inheritance (**v. 14**). These wicked neighbors will also be uprooted from their land, and their judgment is the answer to Jeremiah’s problem of why the wicked prosper. God is just and will not allow the wicked to go unpunished forever. He will suffer the wicked to flourish only for a season; afterwards, they will receive the punishment which is due them (cf. Ps. 73: 16-20).

God will also restore His people and have compassion on them (**v. 15**). If the **wicked neighbors** (the heathen nations) will learn the true worship of the Lord from His faithful remnant—as faithless Israel and Judah learned Baal worship from them—then God will prosper the nations in the midst of his restored people (**v. 16**). This is a Messianic prophecy which *predicts the evangelization of the nations by the church* beginning with the early missionary journeys of Paul and continuing until today.<sup>287</sup> Those nations and individuals who refuse to be taught the ways of God will perish (**v. 17**). Thus, God punishes His people and the nations according to whether they obey His covenant, and it is the obligation of His elect people—the Israel of the OT

<sup>283</sup> Keil, p. 219)

<sup>284</sup> Keil, p. 223

<sup>285</sup> Thompson, pp. 356-357

<sup>286</sup> Keil, pp. 135-136

<sup>287</sup> Keil, p. 229

and the **new Israel of God** (Gal. 6: 16)—to publish the terms of the covenant before the nations, a covenant which now demands repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ.

### ***Chapter 13: 1-11—The Ruined Waistband***

The prophets were often instructed to preach through *object lessons* which illustrated important truth. In this chapter Jeremiah is instructed to travel **350 miles** to hide a new white linen waistband in the Euphrates River. The white waistband, worn about a man's waist as an adornment, stood for the untarnished nation of Israel which God put around His waist for His own praise and glory (**v. 11**).<sup>288</sup> The waistband is ruined in the waters of the Euphrates. By this action, Jeremiah illustrates that the people are as **worthless** as this waistband (**v. 10**), ruined by their own sins, and that they will be exiled in Babylon, the land of the Euphrates River.

I don't believe this passage represents only a vision. I believe Jeremiah literally journeys to the Euphrates River. If this is correct, it demonstrates the extent to which God will go to make a point.

### ***Chapter 13: 12-27—The Captivity of Judah***

Because Judah had acted shamelessly in her idolatrous sins, God will expose her to shame. Judah is personified as a woman stripped of her skirts and publicly humiliated (**v. 22, 26**). She has been accustomed to doing evil, and she is no more capable of doing good than a leopard is capable of changing its spots or an Ethiopian of changing his skin—a good illustration of total depravity (**v. 23**).

### ***Chapter 14—The Drought Upon Judah; the False Prophets and God's Response***

Dying by the sword was only one form of God's judgment—drought and famine was another. Despite the fact that Jeremiah has been told twice not to pray for Judah, he prays for the Lord to deliver them from the drought (**vv. 7-9**). The prophet is told the **third time** not to pray for Judah (**v. 11**) and is told that God will not hear them even when they pray and fast. He will put an end to them (**v. 12**).<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> Keil

<sup>289</sup> I do not believe, in this situation, that God was putting "holy arguments" in Jeremiah's mouth to intercede for Judah, as was the case with Moses in Exodus 32. In that chapter, it can be convincingly argued that God was giving Moses all the information he needed to effectively intercede for the people of Israel, in spite of the fact that He was telling Moses to "let Him alone" so that He could destroy them. In fact, God had no intention of destroying Israel, for this would have violated His promise to Abraham. Moses "took the hint" by repeating those arguments back to God through intercessory prayer (cf. Ex. 32: 7-13; note especially "**your** [Moses'] people whom **you** [Moses] brought up from the land of Egypt" in v. 7, and "**Your** [the Lord's] people whom **You** [the Lord] have brought out from the land of Egypt" in v. 11. Moses is saying, "Not **I**, Lord, but **You** have delivered **Your** people!" Note also the mention of God's covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac and Israel; v. 13). Although the text says that God "changed His mind", it is clear from the context that He had no intention of changing His mind about His covenant promises to the Patriarchs. But here in *Jeremiah* God had already decided to judge Judah for participating in the sins of Manasseh. God later declares through Ezekiel that even Noah, Daniel, and Job would not have been able to intercede successfully for the deliverance of Judah (Ezek. 14: 14, 16).

Evidence of drought to the contrary, the false prophets were assuring the people that they would continue to enjoy peace (**vv. 13, 15**). After all, it had been 100 years since Israel had been taken into captivity, and nothing disastrous had yet happened to Judah. These prophets were liars whom the Lord had neither sent nor had He put His words in their mouths as He had Jeremiah (**v. 14**). Today the church is also plagued by false prophets who speak soothing words to their audiences. The people leave the worship services feeling good about themselves and about life but do not realize that the judgment of God is coming upon them for their immorality and idolatry. The false teachers in the church are men and women who “run” into the ministry (**Jer. 23: 21**), but God has not sent them. They preach that everyone will be saved in the end (universalism), but do not realize that they themselves will not escape the judgment they refuse to preach (**v. 15**). Those who believe their false message will suffer the consequences, even as the Israelites who believed the false message of their day (**v. 16**).

The prophet responds to God’s message of judgment with tears and supplications: **Have you completely rejected Judah (vv. 11-16, 19)? Do not despise us, for your own name’s sake (v. 21)**.

### *Chapter 15—The People are Past the Point of Intercession; Judgment Must Come*

Though Jeremiah cries bitter tears, God *will not answer his prayers for the forgiveness of the nation*. This does not rule out future mercy and restoration (cf. **12: 15**), but it does rule out the possibility of *present forgiveness and the cancellation of judgment*. Even if Moses and Samuel were to intercede for the people, it would do no good (**v. 1**; cf. Ex. 32; Num. 14; 1 Sam. 7: 9; 12: 17-18). A four-fold judgment is pronounced—death, the sword, famine, and captivity—followed by a four-fold doom—death by the sword and the signs of covenant curse represented by their dead bodies being eaten by dogs, birds of prey, and the wild beasts (cf. Deut. 28: 26).

Once again, Manasseh is named as the reason for God’s judgment (2 Ki. 23: 26), not because Manasseh alone was sinful, but because the whole nation participated in his sinfulness (**v. 4**).

Jeremiah’s task is not a pleasant one, and self-pity would seem permissible. He *says* that he regrets the day of his birth (**v. 10**), but we all know that we say many things in self-pity that we don’t really mean. Everyone hates him—which is mostly true—but God assures Jeremiah that He will avenge him for their ill-treatment (**vv. 12-14**). Jeremiah continues his complaint in **vv. 15-18** saying in effect that his prophetic call has consumed his whole life and that it has isolated him from all the people of the land (**v. 17**). He has become a lonely figure in Israel. All of this was true.

The ministry of the word is often a lonely task. The pastor must not only deal with his own sins, but with the hatred of many who profess the Christian faith and even those who are true Christians whose lives are inconsistent to their profession—and all of us are inconsistent. The pastor’s prayers often seem unanswered, or as in the case of Jeremiah, are given a negative answer. Jeremiah intercedes for the forgiveness of Judah and God tells him “no”. Pastors pray for the revival of their congregations but nothing seems to change. Such is the common lot of even faithful pastors who labor hard in teaching and preaching. It is tempting to give up the fight and settle into a ministry which is apathetic (uncaring) to the spiritual needs of the congregation and unenergetic—just doing the least that is necessary to collect your pay check. But this is a



denial of the prophetic call of the pastor to comfort the afflicted, to afflict the comfortable, and to magnify the name of the Lord whether people listen or not. If the pastor cannot shake off his depression and get back into the **fight** (2 Tim. 4: 7), he should consider a temporary leave of absence from the ministry and counseling—anything which may help him put things back in perspective. Above all, he should consider the reward awaiting those who have built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2: 20) with gold, silver, and precious stones (1 Cor. 3: 8-14). The reward for faithful ministry will not come primarily in this life, and many pastors will have very little sense of temporal rewards. Yet, we are exhorted to be patient and wait for the reward that God will have for us in the future if we do not grow weary (Gal. 6: 9; 1 Cor. 15: 58).

Yahweh's response to Jeremiah's self-pity is far less therapeutic than the modern western mind might tolerate. He does not console Jeremiah with empty words, "Now, now, Jeremiah. It will be all right; you'll see." Instead, He rebukes him (**vv. 19-21**).<sup>290</sup> Take note of the conditional flavor of these verses. *If* Jeremiah returns and repents, *then* (implied) God will restore him to his purpose as Yahweh's mouthpiece. The verbs, **return** and **restore** are the same in the Hebrew; thus; Yahweh is playing with words: "If you **turn**, then I will **turn**; they may **turn** to you, but you **must not turn** to them." Even Jeremiah was not immune to the opinions of men, but God was not about to hold His message hostage to popular opinion. The prophet is not permitted to give up the struggle just because he is discouraged but must continue preaching. Perhaps some of the people will repent (**turn to you**), but even if they don't, Jeremiah must not **turn to them (v. 19)** by altering his message and becoming a "popular" preacher. Repeating His earlier promise, God will make him a **fortified wall of bronze (v. 20; cf. 1: 18)** and will deliver him from those who seek his life (**v. 21**). The only safe place was in the revealed will of obedience to God.

### *Chapter 16—The Coming Devastation and the Promise of Return*

Jeremiah is not allowed to marry and raise a family (**v. 2**). Family responsibilities would interfere with his ministry since the whole land will soon be devastated, thus putting his own family in danger. Thus, Jeremiah was destined to a life of loneliness. Perhaps this should be remembered whenever we are tempted to believe that God has given us a raw deal in the ministry. The Lord has the right to do with us as He pleases, and if we are faithful, we will be rewarded according to our labor and sacrifice. Later Jeremiah is taken against his will into Egypt and dies there in forced exile from his homeland. There will be such death and carnage in Judah that the bodies of the dead will not be buried but will be food for the beasts of the earth and the birds of the sky, a repetition of the covenant curse (**vv. 4-5**). No one will have the luxury of mourning the dead (**vv. 6-7**), nor will there be any merriment in weddings (**v. 9**). But God will not only be known as the God who brought up His people from Egypt but the God who brought His people back from the exile (**vv. 14-21**). Furthermore, through this return His power will be acknowledged by the heathen nations (**v. 19**) who will recognize that their gods are no gods at all (**vv. 20-21**).

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<sup>290</sup> Thompson, pp. 397-398

***Chapter 17: 1-18—The Contrast between the Wicked and the Righteous***

The sins of Judah are engraved deeply into their hearts and their altars, and they can no more forget their idolatry than their own children (**vv. 1-2**). The contrast between the wicked and those who fear the Lord is made in **vv. 5-8**, similar in part to the contrast of Psalm 1. Man's most basic flaw is the deceitfulness of his heart; it is desperately wicked and no one can know it (**v. 9**). We can scarcely know our own hearts much less the hearts of others, but God knows each heart and tests it, giving to each man according to his ways. Man is judged according to his **ways**—not his *profession*—because his **ways** will be the evidence of what is in his heart. He will inescapably live according to the dictates of his heart (cf. 2 Cor. 5: 10). While the righteous is like the tree planted by the water, extending its roots deep beneath the surface of the ground and yielding continuous fruit, the wicked who makes his money unjustly will be like a partridge (a species of bird) who makes a habit of hatching the eggs of other birds. When the eggs are finally hatched, the birds will just fly away.<sup>291</sup> It is clear where Jeremiah sees himself in this picture of the righteous and the wicked (**vv. 16-18**).

***Chapter 17: 19-27—Keeping the Sabbath***

Keeping the Sabbath was a fundamental obligation of the Israelites. Later we will see that Judah is taken into exile for 70 years so that the land could enjoy all the Sabbaths it had been deprived during the disobedient habitation of the Israelites. The Sabbath was not a day for commerce (the carrying of loads in and out of the gates of Jerusalem), but rest (**vv. 21-22**; cf. Ex. 20: 8-11). The Israelites did not keep the Sabbath and rather than trusting in God's provisions from six days of work, they continued working, buying, and selling on the Lord's Day. Because they forsook the Sabbath, they missed out on the blessings God would have given them (**vv. 25-26**).

***Chapter 18: 1-17—The Potter and the Clay***

Isaiah made use of this analogy over 100 years before Jeremiah, and Paul uses it in Romans 9 over 600 years later to illustrate the sovereign prerogatives (rights) of God over His creatures. God has the right over them as a potter has the right over the clay. It is absurd to think the clay has the right to speak and dictate its terms to the potter. So it is equally absurd for creatures like men to dictate their terms to God. Israel has forsaken God and, thus, dictated to God what she will do. God is not forced to accept her terms but can make another nation from the clay which will honor him as their maker. This is precisely what He *did* do with the Gentiles. He patiently endured the Jews until He was ready to fashion for Himself a people among the Gentiles who would be zealous for good works (Rom. 9: 22-24). Yet, He has not utterly cast off His elect nation for the sake of the fathers (Rom. 11: 28).

***Chapter 18: 18-23—Plans to Harm Jeremiah; Jeremiah's Response***

This is yet another time the people plan to bring harm to the prophet, this time through slander (**let us strike at him with our tongue—v. 18**). The prophet once again appeals to God for protection (**v. 19**) and utters an imprecatory prayer against his persecutors (**vv. 20-23**). The prophet had been forbidden three times now to pray *for* the people, so he now prays *against*

<sup>291</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *From Sorrow to Hope—Jeremiah and Lamentations*, p. 275; cf. Prov. 23: 4-5

them.<sup>292</sup> In this regard we must interpret the legitimacy of such a prayer. It is *not* strictly a prayer of personal vengeance against one's enemies, but a *prayer against those who oppose God and his kingdom*. As such, prayers of this sort

flow from the pure spring of a zeal, not self-regarding [selfish] at all, for the glory of God. The enemies are God's enemies, despisers of his salvation. Their hostility against David and against Jeremiah was rooted in their hostility against God and the kingdom of God. The advancement of the kingdom of God, the fulfillment of the divine scheme of salvation, required the fall of the ungodly who seek the lives of God's servants.<sup>293</sup>

If we wish to contrast the imprecatory prayers to the spirit of Christ in the NT (Lk. 9: 51-56; Isa. 53: 7; Lk. 23: 34), we are erecting a wall of separation between Christ and the Psalmists who exalted Him and worshipped Him; and we are creating an unnecessary divide between the Spirit of the OT and the NT. Christ did not come into the world to condemn the world but to save it (Jn. 3: 17), and for that reason His message often was more weighted on the side of salvation than condemnation. However, He clearly differentiated between the common people who were like sheep without a shepherd and the scribes and Pharisees who were supposed to be shepherds but were wolves (Matt. 7: 15; 15: 7; 22: 18; 23: 14; Lk. 12: 56). Furthermore, He did not shy away from warning all people from the wrath of God to come (Lk. 13: 1-5; Matt. 5: 22, 29-30; 10: 28, etc.). When it came to the apostles, there was no hesitation to announce judgment upon those who resisted the work of God in drawing men and women to Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 8: 20; 4: 23-31; Gal. 1: 9; 5: 12; 2 Tim. 4: 14). Thus, if we relegate Jeremiah and the imprecatory Psalmists to a lower level of spirituality, we will have to do the same for Paul and Peter, as well as Christ Himself.

Nevertheless, we must be careful to maintain a careful balance of zeal and compassion. As Christ loved His enemies and prayed for the Lord to forgive them, so we also must love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us that we may behave like sons of our Father in heaven (Matt. 5: 44-45; Rom. 12: 14).

### ***Chapter 19—The Broken Jar***

Another object lesson is taught in **chapter 19**. Jeremiah is instructed to buy a **potter's earthenware jar** and take it to the valley of Ben-hinnom along with some of the elders and senior priests (**v. 1**). There he must preach against the idolatry of the nation including the worship of Baal and the heinous practice of human sacrifice to the god Molech (**v. 5**) which had occurred in Topheth (cf. 2 Kings 23: 10; **Jer. 7: 31-32**). Topheth was also the place where garbage and refuse were dumped and burned and became a symbol of eternal hell.<sup>294</sup> Topheth will be given a new name, **the valley of Slaughter** where thousands of Israelites will be slain in battle (**v. 6**). For the sixth time in his prophecy (**7: 33; 9: 10; 12: 9; 15: 3; 16: 4; 19: 7**), Jeremiah invokes the language of Deut. 28: 26—the curses of the covenant—to declare God's judgment upon the people. Another curse of the covenant is pronounced in **v. 9**, the cannibalism of sons and daughters brought on by the famine during the siege of Jerusalem by Babylon (cf. Deut. 28: 53, 56-57; Lam. 4: 10; 2: 20; Ezek. 5: 10).

<sup>292</sup> Keil, p. 304

<sup>293</sup> Keil, pp. 304-305; words in brackets mine

<sup>294</sup> E. J. Young, *Isaiah*, Isa. 30: 33).

After uttering these curses, Jeremiah broke the jar as a picture of the breaking of the people of Israel. As the jar could not be repaired, so Judah was also beyond repair.

***Chapter 20: 1-6—Jeremiah Persecuted by Pashhur the Priest***

Passhur the priest has Jeremiah beaten and put in prison for prophesying against Judah. While in prison he was put in the **stocks**, instruments of torture whereby the a man’s body could be twisted into painful positions for long periods. Jeremiah renames him **Terror on every side** as a prediction of the terror coming upon Judah from the Babylonians. Pashhur himself will be taken into exile and will die in Babylon for false prophecy. Passhur is yet another manifestation of the kingdom of God being opposed by the apostate religious establishment. The history of the Protestant Reformation and the Spanish Inquisition repeats the errors of Judah’s priests.

***Chapter 20: 7-18—Jeremiah Reaches “Rock Bottom”***

“Rock bottom” is a saying we have in the US for a man who has come to the depths of despair. Jeremiah has often complained to the Lord about his ill-treatment from his fellow countrymen. This despair intensifies in **Chapter 20** based on the beating, torture, and imprisonment in the earlier part of the chapter. He has complained about his birth earlier in **15: 10**; now he curses the day of his birth (**v. 14**). He makes up his mind to quit preaching, but when he remains silent the word of God becomes like a burning fire within him which cannot be quenched (**v. 9**). Rumors of schemes against him echo all around him (**v. 10**), and everyone waits for the prophet to fall into the hands of his enemies. Yet, in his heart, Jeremiah knows the Lord is with him because he has called him to this task (**v.11**) and has promised to be a **wall of bronze (15: 20)** about him.

After such a heartfelt expression of trust and praise (**vv. 11-13**), the prophet once more slumps into the depths of despair (**vv. 14-18**). This is common in all of us, for in one moment we may be inconsolable, followed by a resurgence of faith and trust, only to be followed by another round of distrust and despair. The prophet proves himself to be *like us*, quite human and frail. Yet notice that God does not reprimand him here as he does in **12: 5** or **15: 19-20**.<sup>295</sup> Sometimes God allows His servants to sit in silence to contemplate their troubles, seemingly alone; yet not really alone, for the Lord is near. Silence should not be interpreted as absence.

Those who cherish the notion that the gospel ministry is attended by continuous joy and the appreciation of others, should consider the life of Jeremiah. Preaching the truth, especially when the truth is not received, can be a very discouraging occupation. At the same time preachers should take courage that all the troubles they endure are not necessarily their fault—though many are. Pastors can be their own worst enemy in the way they carry out their duties; they are, after all, sinful creatures like those entrusted into their care. On the other hand, we should not shoulder the whole burden as if our lack of “success” is always the result of our own sin and inability. Here is Jeremiah, unquestionably called of God and effective in his communication of the truth, who continually suffers ill-treatment from his congregation and lack of any positive response to his message. And it is the Lord who sent him and filled his mouth with the words to speak. If we as pastors fare any better we should be thankful, but we should not presume to have it any better. Christ told His disciples that He was sending them out as sheep in the midst of

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<sup>295</sup> Keil, pp. 322-323

wolves (Matt. 10: 16), and the Apostle Paul warned Timothy, **For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires...** (2 Tim. 4: 3).

### ***Chapter 21—Jeremiah’s Message for King Zedekiah and all Judah***

The next few chapters are not given to us in chronological order. **Chapter 21** occurs during the reign of Zedekiah (the last king of Judah) in the ninth year of his reign when Nebuchadnezzar began his siege of Jerusalem (v. 4; cf. 2 Kings 25: 1; 2 Chron. 36: 11-21). **Chapter 22** is a prophecy against Jehoiakim (22: 18), son of Josiah, after he became king of Judah in place of his brother Jehoahaz (also called Shallum—v. 11) who was carried away by Neco of Egypt (1 Kings 23: 31-34). **Chapter 24** continues the prophecy against Zedekiah after the second deportation in 597 BC which included Jeconiah, son of Jehoiakim (the former also called Jehoiachin; cf. 2 Kings 24: 1-10 and the chart provided above). After preaching these messages, the prophet was inspired to edit the material to present the messages out of order chronologically.<sup>296</sup>

In **Chapter 21**, Zedekiah sends his henchmen, Pashhur and Zephaniah the priest (not the prophet), to inquire whether the Lord would deliver Jerusalem from the Babylonians. This took place during the siege of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25: 1). Jeremiah’s prophecy was anything but encouraging (vv. 4-14). Not only will the Lord not fight *for* Judah, He will fight *against* it by turning back the weapons of war in their hands (vv. 4-5). The life and death set before Israel in the giving of the Law (Dt. 30: 15) are presented now in terms of life in Babylon or death in Jerusalem. They would not submit to His Law and now are told to submit to the judgment brought against them through the Babylonian invasion. Either they submit or face death by pestilence, famine, or sword, all of which resulted from extended sieges (cf. 2 Kings 25: 3). Since no food is allowed into the city, people resort to eating rats. We know from 2 Kings 25: 1-2 that the city was under siege for about 18 months which would be sufficient time for living conditions to deteriorate considerably. The only thing which allowed Jerusalem to hold out so long is the extensive water supply flowing underneath the city wall and the city’s militarily strategic location on a hill.

Instead of assuring words of deliverance, Jeremiah once again demands *obedience to covenant law*. The king must administer justice to the poor, the orphan, the widow, the stranger, and the oppressed (v. 12), a theme which is continued into **chapter 22** but delivered to a different king, Jehoiakim, who reigned before Zedekiah (**22: 3-3**). The last three kings after the godly king Josiah (three of whom were his sons—Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah—and one his grandson—Jehoichin) were all covenant-breakers.

### ***Chapter 22—A Warning to Kings***

The message of **chapter 21** is continued in this chapter as a warning to Jehoiakim particularly but to all the kings of the earth generally. Blessing and curse are set before them in vv. 3-5 with obedience to the covenant as the basis for blessing and disobedience as the basis for cursing (v. 9). Jeremiah predicts that Shallum (Jehoahaz) will never return from his exile in Egypt, a

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<sup>296</sup> Keil, p. 324

prediction which comes true (**v. 11**; cf. 2 Kings 23: 34), further evidence that Jeremiah passes the test of a true prophet.

Woe is pronounced upon Jehoiakim who built his kingly mansion without righteousness upon the backs of his unpaid servants (**v. 13**). It is possible that the state treasuries were depleted due to the necessity of paying tribute to Egypt; therefore, Jehoiakim could not afford to pay his laborers.<sup>297</sup> Be that as it may, true leadership does not consist in splendid state buildings and palaces but in the wise administration of justice for the common people (**vv. 14-15**). If the state department hasn't got the money, it should be cutting "pork" spending.<sup>298</sup> Jehoiakim had not imitated his father Josiah who **pled the cause of the afflicted and needy (v. 16)**. To know the Lord means to do justice, but Jehoiakim's eyes and heart was on **dishonest gain, shedding innocent blood** to remain in power, and **practicing oppression and extortion** through excessive taxation and forced labor in order to make a comfortable life for himself. Does this sound familiar in the history of Africa whose rulers become rich and extravagant at the expense of their over-taxed citizens and who often maintain power through the shedding of innocent blood?

As a result Jehoiakim will not be mourned at his death (**v. 18**) and his burial will not be the elaborate burial for a king, but his body will be left in the field like a donkey's carcasse. We have no biblical record of the fulfillment of this prophecy, but we also have no reason to doubt it. Jehoiakim likely died in battle before the siege of Jerusalem which would have been the occasion for his body being exposed in the field.<sup>299</sup>

Jeremiah then prophesies against Coniah (also Jeconiah or Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim) beginning in **v. 24**. He, along with his mother, will be taken into exile in the second deportation (597 BC; cf. 2 Kings 24: 10-16) and will remain in exile until his death (**v. 26**; cf. 2 Kings 25: 27-30). He will have no descendants on the throne of Judah (**v. 30**).

Although directed to Jehoiakim and his son Jehoiachin, the warning of this chapter should strike dread into the heart of any world ruler whose administration is characterized by corruption, extravagant expenditures on personal luxury, violence toward critics, and the general oppression of his people. Just as sure as Jehoiakim is judged, so too will any king, prince or president be judged for violating his office by turning aside the covenant law of God. His administration will be weighed in the balance and found wanting (Dan. 5), and he will suffer the ruin of eternal damnation. As often happens, he may possibly suffer the ignominious (dishonorable) vilification (defaming) of history when his administration finally receives the examination of his critics who are no longer under the threat of physical violence.

### **Chapter 23: 1-8—The Righteous Branch**

**Shepherd** in the OT is generally a designation for kings. Jeremiah summarizes the oppressive reigns of the last three kings of Judah as shepherds who have **scattered** the sheep, the people of Israel. They will suffer the consequences of their oppressive regimes (**v. 2**). Beginning in **v. 3** the prophet announces the benevolent regime of the Lord through the **righteous branch** of David (**v. 5**) who will rule with righteousness and justice. Since Judah's kings will not shepherd

<sup>297</sup> Zondervan NASB Study Bible, 1999

<sup>298</sup> "Pork spending" is an American term for unnecessary government expenditures.

<sup>299</sup> Keil, p. 341

the flock, God will do it Himself. The people taken into exile will once again return to their land and will be blessed through good leaders (**shepherds**) whom the Lord will appoint over them. Partial fulfillment of this prophecy is the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua during the first return of the exiles (cf. *Haggai* and *Zechariah*) and Ezra and Nehemiah during the return roughly 80 to 90 years later (cf. *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*).

The next partial fulfillment was the *first coming of Christ* when He, like a good shepherd, healed the sick and spoke the words of salvation to the land of Israel (**Jn. 10**). The final and ultimate fulfillment will be *when Christ returns* to consummate His rule and reign over the new heaven and earth. (Another interpretation is that Christ will rule for 1000 years on earth in Jerusalem before the final judgment, an interpretation I deny.) With the rule of Christ, there will be no more despotic and corrupt rulers who are interested only in personal power and money. Christ will rule His people with justice and righteousness and there will be none who are **afraid** or **terrified** (v. 4). He will be called **The Lord our righteousness**, a fitting title for Christ **who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption** (1 Cor. 1: 30).

When Israel returns from bondage, the exile from all the different foreign nations will become the new exodus by which the Lord is known (**vv. 7-8; 16: 14-15**).

### **Chapter 23: 9-40—Condemnation of the False Prophets**

Along with the kings who scattered the sheep, the false prophets of Judah did their part to deceive the flock of Judah with flattering and deceptive words. Evil has brought a curse not only upon the people but *upon the land as well, for the land was a substantial part of the promise to Abraham*. If the people will not be faithful to the covenant, then they have no claims upon the blessings flowing from the land (v. 10). Land is productive only by God's blessing which may be withheld through drought, plague, or hail. People generally take the blessings of rain and crops for granted as being the normal course of nature, but God is above nature and in control of nature. We dare not presume upon God's grace by assuming that the produce of the land is our natural right or endowment from God apart from submission to His will.

The false prophets in Judah will be judged along with all the others, even more so because of the level of their responsibility. This is why the kings and prophets are singled out from among the people for special judgment. To whom much is given, much is required. The prophets of Judah, far from being a deterrent to evil actually **strengthen the hands** of those who were evil (v. 14). They were like liberal preachers in the US and Britain who counsel the members of their flocks to get abortions if they have unwanted pregnancies or take same-sex lovers. Or they are like pastors who obsequiously pander (submit) to the rich men in their congregations whom they know are unscrupulous in their business practices but will not confront them for fear of losing sizable contributions to the church. Rather than encouraging righteousness, they strengthen the hands of those who do evil and pollute the land with their words (v. 15). What the false prophets had were not visions from God, but vivid **imagination** (v. 16).

To boost their popularity with the people (*vox populi*), the message of the false prophets was always favorable—**You will have peace** (v. 17). God did not send these prophets into the land,

but they ran ahead anyway. Nor did He **speak to them (v. 21)** as He spoke to His prophet Jeremiah (cf. **v. 32**). Such prophets did not **furnish this people with the slightest benefit**. Let it never be said of us that our ministry to Christ's church "did not furnish the people with the slightest benefit" and that our ministry actually "strengthened the hands of evildoers" (**v. 14**). It would be better to be run out of the church by angry people than for the Lord to say this of us. The prophets were guilty of false dreams (**v. 27, 32**), pretending to hear the word of the Lord (**v. 31**), and ridiculing the words of Jeremiah, the true prophet (**vv. 33-38**), calling his words **an oracle** or a **burden**, i.e. burdensome words.<sup>300</sup>

### *Chapter 24—The Two Baskets of Figs*

We find another object lesson in this short chapter in the form of two baskets of figs, one bad and one good. The good basket represents *those who had already been taken captive* in the first and second deportation of Judah in 606 and 597 BC, Daniel and his friends included. Those who were still rebelling against the Lord and resisting Jeremiah's advice to submit to the judgment of the Lord brought by Babylon are the bad figs who will either be destroyed by the sword, famine, or pestilence or will suffer a worse fate later in exile (**vv. 9-11**). We can be confident that many of the righteous remnant were spared the suffering of the Babylonian invasion of 587 BC through previous deportation. Many of their descendants would later return to the land 70 years later in 536 BC (the 70 year period dating from 606 BC, the first deportation).

### *Chapter 25: 1-11—Prophecy of Captivity*

This chapter brings us once again to the reign of Jehoiakim, the father of Jehoiachin (Jeconiah) who in the previous chapter was taken into exile. Thus, the author is going *back in time* to the fourth year of Jehoiakim who reigned for a total of 11 years (2 Kings 23: 36). At this point, Jeremiah had been prophesying 23 years (**v. 3**) with few listening. But he is not the only prophet the Jews had not heeded, for the Lord had sent many others in the history of the nation (**v. 4**), most of whom never wrote a book and are not named in Scripture.

Seventy years are set for the desolation of Judah in Babylon (**v. 11**) after which the Lord will punish Nebuchadnezzar who has **served (v. 9)** the Lord's purposes in punishing not only Judah but the surrounding nations (**vv. 9-11; 31**). This is another example of the Lord using a nation to punish His people and then judging the nation because it did not punish His people for the right motive, His glory. Many of these nations are mentioned in **vv. 18-26** starting with Judah. Though the list includes nations of that day, they are *eschatologically* typical of all the nations of the world who are in rebellion against God—which includes every nation to some degree or another. God is **entering into judgment with all flesh** and He **has given them to the sword (v. 31)**. "**Those slain by the Lord on that day [the Day of Judgment] shall be from one end of the earth to the other (v. 33)**. The **shepherds** or kings of the earth will wail on that day, for all of them from the least to the greatest will fall (**v. 34**).

Thus, the judgment of Babylon upon Judah, beginning in the fourth year of Jehoiakim (606 BC) was the *symbolical and typological beginning of God's judgment upon the whole earth*. The 70

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<sup>300</sup> Keil, p. 365



years of exile is also symbolical and typological—the product of 7 (the “characteristic number for the works of God”) and 10 (“the number that marks earthly completeness”)— $7 \times 10 = 70$ .<sup>301</sup> One might say that the return from exile is also typical of the “return”, so to speak, of God’s chosen people to the renewed heaven and earth, a place of perfect peace and fellowship with God. Since the fall of Adam, God’s people have been “banished” to live in exile in a fallen world ravaged by sin, but when Christ returns, we will be permitted to return to the garden (the garden city of the New Jerusalem) to dwell with God in safety.

### ***Chapter 26—The Plot to Murder Jeremiah***

Once again, the author goes back in time to the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim, four years previous to the preceding chapter. Jeremiah’s life is threatened because of his harsh warning to the nation, but he is spared. Other prophets of the Lord were not spared, including Uriah who prophesied similarly as Jeremiah (**v. 20**) and had to flee for his life to Egypt. Jehoiakim’s men hunted him down and brought him bound to the king who ordered his execution (**vv. 21-23**). Acts of violence toward the true prophets of God were typological of the violent rejection of Christ during His earthly ministry ultimately resulting in His death. Christ linked His persecutors with the violent history of Israel, particularly the godless kings, prophets, and priests who murdered true prophets (Lk. 11: 47; Matt. 23: 29-36).

### ***Chapter 27—Submission to Babylon Demanded***

In the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah (597 BC), Jeremiah counsels the nation to submit to the yoke of Babylon. There were still men in the royal court who believed that Judah could shake off the yoke of Babylon and turn to Egypt for help. Submission to Babylon was the same as submitting to the judgment of God since Nebuchadnezzar was the **servant** of the Lord (**25: 9**) chosen by God to carry out the judicial punishment upon Judah. But as usual Judah’s king does not listen, nor do the members of the royal court.

### ***Chapter 28—Hananiah’s False Prophecy***

As an example of the false prophets of Judah who opposed Jeremiah, we have in this chapter the prophecy of Hananiah who prophesies peace to Judah. Jeremiah had spoken generally of such prophets who were constantly prophesying **Peace, peace** when there was no peace (**6: 14; 8: 11**). Hananiah prophesies that in two years the yoke of Babylon will be broken. All the vessels of the temple taken to Babylon earlier will be returned and the exiles restored to their homes (**vv. 3-4**). Symbolically he takes the wooden yoke from Jeremiah’s neck (worn as another object lesson) and breaks it. Jeremiah tells him that God will now replace the wooden yoke with a yoke of iron—one that cannot be broken. Babylon will destroy Judah. To distinguish between the true prophet and the false, Jeremiah predicts Hananiah’s death within the year, and his subsequent death is verification of Jeremiah’s status as the true prophet of the Lord. Therefore, the distant prophecy of 70 years exile in Babylon is confirmed by the proximate (near) fulfillment of Hananiah’s death.

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<sup>301</sup> Keil, pp. 374-375, 385).

**Chapter 29—Jeremiah’s Letter to the Exiles in Babylon**

The timing of this letter is after Jeconiah (Jehoiachin) and his mother were exiled into Babylon (v. 2). This was the second deportation of 597 BC (2 Kings 24: 10-16). It was sent to the elders, priests, and prophets already in exile (v. 1). Keep in mind that there are still Israelites living in Judah and Jerusalem under the reign of the last king of Judah (Zedekiah) before the exile. Jeremiah gives instructions to these existing exiles living in Babylon (Daniel and his three friends included). They are told to settle down in the land by building houses, marrying, and having children. They should multiply their numbers and not decrease simply because they are in exile (vv. 5-6). Moreover, they should seek the welfare and peace of the cities in which they reside so that they may peacefully multiply and prosper (v. 7).

The reason for this is that they and their families will be in Babylon for a long time, and they need not think that they will be coming home soon in spite of the message of the false prophets (v. 8-9). In the space of 70 years most of those who now reside as exiles will die in the land of their captors and will not return, but if they will obey and have children, *at least their children and grandchildren* may one day return to the land of promise according to the word of the Lord (v. 10). In spite of the Lord’s judgment upon his chosen people, His plans for them are **plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope** (v. 11). Nevertheless, the consequences for disobedience are severe, 70 years away from their homeland.

These are tender and gracious words for a rebellious and stubborn nation who deserved only the wrath of God, and they are followed by another promise in vv. 12-14.

'Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. <sup>13</sup> 'You will seek Me and find *Me* when you search for Me with all your heart. <sup>14</sup> 'I will be found by you,' declares the LORD, 'and I will restore your fortunes and will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you,' declares the LORD, 'and I will bring you back to the place from where I sent you into exile.' (Jeremiah 29:12-14 NASB)

Notice that within this gracious promise is a condition: “you will seek me and find me **when you search for me with all your heart**” (v. 13). God will remain aloof and hidden unless they seek Him, but when they seek Him sincerely, He will be found by them. Over 600 years later, Jesus repeated this invitation to their descendants.

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. <sup>8</sup> "For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. (Matthew 7:7-8 NASB)

Not many Israelites listened to either Jeremiah or Jesus, but some listened—the faithful remnant in each generation.

Those who remain in Babylon will be given to the sword, famine and pestilence (v. 17-18—the seventh and eighth time, so far, that Jeremiah has used this three-fold formula of judgment). The reason for this judgment is a repetitive refrain (v. 19; cf. 6: 19; 25: 3-4,7; 26: 5; 35: 14-16)—**Because they have not listened to my words** through His servants the prophets. The biggest problem Israel had, and the biggest problem the church has today, is that we don’t listen to what God says through His *prophetic word*, the Bible. Most of our problems in life are the direct

result of not listening and not heeding the word. Judah's worst enemy is not Babylon, but themselves, and this is usually the case with the church. Every individual Christian is his own worst enemy, for the remaining sin in our hearts keeps us from listening to the Holy Spirit who speaks to us in the word. This is also true corporately. The worst enemy of the church is not Islam or the liberal media in the West, but the church itself.

A special curse is pronounced upon two false prophets who are telling the people lies about returning soon to Jerusalem, Zedekiah (not king Zedekiah who was son of Josiah) and Ahab (not king Ahab who had been dead for 250 years). These two prophets will be roasted alive in fire by the king of Babylon (a common Babylonian form of execution; cf. Dan. 3) for their lies and for committing adultery with their neighbors' wives (**vv. 21-23**)—another illustration of just how wicked the prophets of Judah really were. Some of the adultery mentioned by Jeremiah is spiritual adultery with other gods, but some of it is sexual. Keep in mind that Baal worship was still being practiced which included temple prostitution.

Jeremiah's letter of **vv. 1-23** had aroused the indignation of Shemaiah who claimed in another letter that the Lord had made him priest in Babylon. In the same letter he had counseled others in Jerusalem to punish Jeremiah and every other **madman** who prophesies a long exile (**vv. 24-28**). Jeremiah responds to Shemaiah's letter in a second letter (**vv. 29-32**) pronouncing judgment upon him and his descendants<sup>302</sup>

### *Chapter 30—The Promise of Deliverance from Captivity*

Both Judah and Israel are promised deliverance from exile in **v. 3**. He continues to speak of both Israel and Judah beginning in **v. 4** and promises of blessing for both kingdoms continue into **chapter 31** in the promise of the new covenant. God has wounded Israel and Judah, but He will restore both of them and will utterly annihilate their enemies (**vv. 16-24**). The difference between God's loving discipline of His people and His wrathful punishment of the nations which persecute them is clearly distinguished in this chapter. The election of Israel and Judah is clearly still in effect although God has dealt with them harshly. But *He has not elected the nations* who persecute them, and He will deal with them accordingly. The judged nations typify the non-elect enemies of the people of God and not the elect Gentiles who will be drawn into covenant relationship with God in fulfillment of the promise to Abraham (Gen. 12).

### *Chapter 31:1-26—The Return of Israel and Judah*

*[see Third Mil, Lesson 9 for supplemental material]*

This chapter is a continuation of the prophecy of restoration begun in **chapter 30** with the words, **At that time (v. 1)**. The restoration is not just for Judah but for the northern kingdom of Israel (**vv. 5-6**) which had been in exile for almost 150 years (722 BC to 597-587 BC, depending on when Jeremiah spoke this prophecy). Ephraim will no longer be worshipping the false gods of Jeroboam I who established illegitimate bull calf worship in Dan and Beersheba but will call out from the hills of Samaria and Ephraim, **Arise, let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God (v. 6)**.

<sup>302</sup> Keil, pp. 415-419

Zion, (another name for Jerusalem) is the only place where the Lord established His name for legitimate worship, and this is where even the northern kingdom will worship, symbolizing a reuniting of the northern and southern kingdoms. The fulfillment of this prophecy may be explained in the same manner as Hosea 2: 23 and 3: 5. Although the northern tribes were fully assimilated into the Gentile nations, believers are joined to Christ along with other Gentiles.<sup>303</sup>

Rachel, the mother of Joseph, whose grandsons were Ephraim and Manasseh, is weeping over the loss of her children, the *ten northern tribes* represented by these two tribes (v. 15). She is comforted in vv. 16-17 with the promise of their return. Judah receives the same promise in vv. 23-25. At last Jeremiah gets some pleasant sleep (v. 26). This has been the only prophecy thus far (and the only one in the whole book) which “contains unmixed comfort” for the prophet and the people of Israel.<sup>304</sup>

### **Chapter 31: 27-40—The New Covenant**

This is the most celebrated section in the whole book of *Jeremiah* and also the most debated among Paedobaptists and Baptists<sup>305</sup> It is not our purpose here to enter this debate, but this passage has always been considered a key text.

At the beginning of his ministry, Jeremiah was commissioned to **To pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant (1: 10)**. Most of his time has been spent breaking down and destroying. **Chapter 30** has been a pleasant prophecy for Jeremiah, and the present chapter has proven no less comforting. As God has watched over His people to **pluck up, to break down, to overthrow, to destroy, and to bring disaster, so [He] will watch over them to build and to plant (v. 28)**.

In the days of building and planting, the proverb that God has unjustly punished Israel and Judah will no longer be spoken, but everyone will perceive that God has been fully justified in His judgments (v. 29).<sup>306</sup> This honest perception of God’s justice and righteousness fully agrees with the idea presented in v. 34 that all will know the Lord from the least to the greatest of His people—i.e. they will **know** that His ways with them have been just.

Beginning with v. 31, Jeremiah explains the new covenant made **with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah**. Thus, the **new covenant** is made with the *Old Covenant people of God*. In Hebrews 8: 1-13 (and throughout *Hebrews*) it is clear that the new covenant is made not only with Israel and Judah but with *all who are joined to Christ, the church*. Therefore, to whom is this covenant made, to the Jews or to Christians, or to both? We must remember that **Chapter 31** is written for the benefit of those who will be returning from exile—the remnant of Israel and Judah who typify those who will enjoy the covenant blessings of God. This does not imply that all who returned from the exile after 536 BC were true believers, but that *in comparison* with the whole nation of idolaters before the exile, the remnant had learned a few lessons about obedience and keeping the covenant. They were, by comparison, enlightened in

<sup>303</sup> See comments on Hosea 2: 23 and 3: 5.

<sup>304</sup> Keil, p. 33

<sup>305</sup> Paedobaptists are those who believe that baptism should be administered to believers and their infant children, and Baptists are those who believe that baptism should be administered only to professing believers.

<sup>306</sup> Keil, p. 35

the ways of the Lord (v. 34). For this reason the prophet says, hyperbolically (in exaggerated language), that it will be unnecessary for each man to teach his neighbor, “**Know the Lord,**” for **they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.**

Let us examine some of the points of comparison and contrast between this New Covenant and the Old Covenant.

(1) It is made with Israel (v. 31) *and* with the NT church consisting of Jew and Gentile (Heb. 8). Therefore, the remnant of Israel returning from exile must be a *type* of all believers in the NT, both Jew and Gentile. The church, **the Israel of God** (Gal. 6: 16), those who are children of Abraham by faith, is the ultimate fulfillment of the text, a fact demonstrated in Hebrews 8. Nevertheless, I don’t believe the antitype (the church) should swallow up the type (the physical nation). The Apostle Paul implies that God is not through with His OT people, but will one day restore the physical nation to the *faith* of their fathers and for the *sake* of their fathers (Rom. 11: 28-29).<sup>307</sup> It is in this sense that the fulfillment of this prophecy is literally **the house of Israel and the house of Judah**. We are also reminded that many of the Jewish people were converted to Christ on the Day of Pentecost, Jews who had been scattered over many nations (Acts 2: 9-11).

(2) The old covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, was *broken*. The new covenant; therefore, will *not* be broken; otherwise, the New Covenant would be *like* the Old Covenant. The reason that it will not be broken is the *implanting of the law into the heart* by the Holy Spirit which will ensure keeping the covenant through faith, a genuine faith which will yield a consistent, though not perfect, submission to the precepts of the law (v. 33). To the extent that our obedience is deficient, we have a better mediator of the covenant whose perfect obedience to the law is a substitute for our imperfect obedience. If the New Covenant were not *better* in the sense of being *unbreakable*, it would not be an improvement over the Old Covenant and would be so much like it as to be indistinguishable.

The obedience to God’s law which did not materialize under the Mosaic covenant shall find consummate fulfillment under the provisions of the new covenant (Jer. 31: 33)....

The new covenant therefore boasts a unique feature in its power to transform its participants from within their hearts. This uniqueness sets the new covenant apart from the previous covenantal dealings of God with his people.<sup>308</sup>

(3) Both covenants stress obedience to the law of God, but whereas the law was written on tablets of stone in the Old Covenant, it will be written on the tablets of human hearts in the New Covenant. However, the law which is written in both contexts is essentially the *same law*, and Jeremiah does not differentiate (show a distinction) between two different codes of law.

(4) The new covenant is a **better covenant** based on **better promises** (Heb. 8: 6). It is better because it has a better priesthood, the priesthood of Christ who lives forever to make intercession

<sup>307</sup> I have not read Robertson’s view of Romans 11, but I believe he rejects any wholesale re-grafting of ethnic Israel into the covenant “tree”. He would say, I believe, that individual Israelites will be saved, but that there will not be a revival of ethnic Israel in the end-time. John Murray (*Romans*), on the other hand, argues for a national revival.

<sup>308</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, pp. 275-276.

for His people (Heb. 7). It is also based on a better sacrifice, the sacrifice of Christ and not that of bulls and goats which could not ultimately take away sin (Heb. 9). Secondly, it is better because the law of God will not be written on stones but will be written on the hearts of believers (Jer. 31: 33; see comments above). God will then be their God and they will be His people. This relationship between God and His people was the *design* of the old covenant, but this design could not be accomplished through the Old Covenant because of human weakness (Rom. 8: 3). For this reason, the **first** (old) covenant was not **faultless** (Heb. 8: 7). Had it been faultless, God would not have had occasion to establish a new covenant which took its place.

Notice in Heb. 8: 8 that the writer says, **But finding fault with them**, leading many commentators to say that it was not in the *covenant* that God found fault, but in the *Israelites*. But while it is true that He found fault with the covenant people, the *message* of *Hebrews* has more to do with the Old Covenant itself than with the covenant people. The message is the superiority of the new covenant to the old and how the new has replaced the old which is **obsolete** (Heb. 8: 13). The hermeneutical demands of context have caused some expositors to adopt a variant Greek reading of the text which may be translated as follows: **for he finds fault when he says to them.**<sup>309</sup>

(5) The new covenant is also not like the old in terms of *the effusion (pouring forth) of the Holy Spirit*. This has been mentioned earlier but has an additional significance here. Through the greater and more substantial operations of the Holy Spirit, it will no longer be necessary for believers in the new covenant to be *solely dependent* upon the communication of truth from man to man (v. 34)<sup>310</sup> Everyone, from the least and humblest of the saints to the most intelligent and well-known, will **know the Lord** through the operations of the Spirit in his heart. This is not a denial that the Spirit was working in the saints of the OT. His work was essential for their salvation as well. However, Jeremiah is not speaking with respect of *persons*, but with respect to the *economy* in which they lived. While Abraham's faith is doubtless set before us as a model, he must be considered a unique specimen of faith in comparison to the multiple generations of faithless Israelites.<sup>311</sup> In the Old Covenant, God's will had to be communicated *through a human mediator*, Moses; but in the New Covenant, no human mediator is necessary.

The immediate knowledge of God by each and every participant of the covenant gives expression to the idea of the essence of the covenant relationship which runs throughout Scripture. What is the point of the covenant? It is to establish a oneness between God and his people. That oneness which was interrupted by the entrance of sin must be reconstituted through the covenant of redemption. "I shall be your God and you shall be my people," functioning as the central unifying theme of the covenant, underscores the role of oneness as the essence of the goal of the covenant.

A recognition of the goal of oneness as lying at the heart of the covenant relationship uncovers *the inherent limitation* of a form of covenant administration built on mediators. So long as the administration of God's covenant transpires through a system of intermediaries, covenant oneness essentially has been negated.

So the radicalness of Jeremiah's perspective on the new covenant hinges on his denial to a role for mediators. Contrary to the total experience of Israel under the Mosaic administration of the covenant, no series of teachers shall mediate the knowledge of God to the people of the covenant.

<sup>309</sup> Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 298; also John Brown, *The Epistles to the Hebrews*, p. 370).

<sup>310</sup> Brown, p. 373

<sup>311</sup> Calvin, *Hebrews*, p. 191

The knowledge of God shall be the immediate possession of every participation [sic] in the new covenant.

The cryptic statement of the apostle Paul in Galatians 3: 20 may be understood from this perspective. In the midst of his contrast between the promises of the covenant given to Abraham and the law mediated through Moses, Paul abruptly asserts: “Now a mediator is not of one; but God is one”....

The key to Paul’s statement resides in the essential purpose of the covenant, which is to establish oneness between God and his people. A covenant speaks of oneness. By God’s covenant with his people, he intends to achieve unity.

But “a mediator is not of one.” As long as intermediaries function in the covenantal relationship, the intention of oneness cannot be achieved.

The original establishment of Moses as mediator between God and Israel implied an absence of covenantal oneness. The people were terrified. They did not want to see God again. They pled with Moses to serve as their “mediator.” By the establishment of a mediatorial office, the gap between sinful Israel and holy God was emphasized. Moses participated in a fellowship with God which was denied the rest of Israel.<sup>312</sup>

The covenantal oneness between God and His people is now achieved through the God-man, Jesus Christ, thus eliminating any need for *merely human* mediators to bridge the gap. Oneness with Christ through the Holy Spirit is, at the same time, oneness with God. The Spirit also enables believers to interpret the scriptures for themselves, thus enhancing this oneness. Pastors and teachers in the church are still necessary in a limited sense “to assist every believer in realizing the direct oneness they now experience with God through the provisions of the new covenant.”<sup>313</sup>

Because of Jeremiah’s depiction of the New Covenant, many questions arise concerning the identity of its participants. Baptists use **v. 34** as justification of their position that the church *by definition* consists only of those who truly know the Lord and have no need of evangelism. Thus, the children of believers who are too young to understand the gospel are excluded from membership in the church until such a time when they make a public profession of their faith and **know the Lord**. This definition is readily conceded so long as we are talking about the *invisible body of believers*. However, the normal address to the church in the NT is not made to this elusive *invisible church* whom no one can know but God, but to the *visible church* consisting of those who profess faith in Christ *and their children* (Eph. 6: 1-3; Acts 2: 39). A cursory examination of the *Ephesians* text will demonstrate that Paul has no intention of excluding the children of believers from his instructions to the entire covenant community. Furthermore, the Jews listening to Peter’s words on the Day of Pentecost would not have understood the promise in any other terms than a promise *inclusive* of their covenant children according to the same paradigm as the Abrahamic Covenant. For anyone arguing that this is an argument from silence, it should be noted that any *change* in the covenant promises to Abraham would have to be explicitly published to the Jewish people; but we have no such amendment in Acts or anywhere else in the NT.

According to the interpretation given above, Jeremiah is speaking primarily about the *methodology* of the New Covenant which includes the direct communication of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>312</sup> Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, pp. 293-295; emphasis and words in brackets mine

<sup>313</sup> Robertson, p. 296

There is no guarantee that every person participating in the *external benefits* of the covenant will actually *possess* the Spirit (the Holy Spirit) of the covenant who is the promise mentioned in Acts 2: 38. This is true whether one defines the church as consisting only of believers or whether he also includes the children of believers. There are many adult members of congregations who are not regenerate, but they must be treated as covenant members until they prove otherwise (cf. Matt. 18: 15-20; 1 Cor. 5). In the same way, we treat our children as participants in the covenant, not as pagans living on the outside. There is thus no way to avoid subjectivity with either the paedobaptist or Baptist position.

There will come a time when perfect knowledge of the Lord will, indeed, become an experiential reality in the new heaven and earth. Until that time, there will always exist in the church a large contingent of those who are unregenerate and whose connection with the covenant community is merely external. Whether we are Baptists or Presbyterians, the mixed community of the church will be a reality which is unavoidable, however we may define the church.<sup>314</sup>

This brings up the question of whether the new covenant promises have been completely or only partially fulfilled in the church. Consider the promise that **they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them**". Is it no longer necessary to preach the gospel to the professing church? The NT consists of epistles in which the writers do just that. Does every professing believer in the church truly **know** the Lord? There is a **now** and a **not yet** to the fulfillment of this New Covenant. Even as the kingdom of God is **inaugurated** in the coming of Christ, **continuing** during the church age, and will be **consummated** (completed) when Christ returns, the new covenant will not be fully realized during the church age, but only at the consummation.

Like its type, Israel, the church as the antitype still consists of those who are true and false believers. Although believers in the visible church are never mentioned in the NT as the **remnant** of the church (cf. 2 Kings 19: 30-31; Isa. 10: 22; Rom. 9: 27; especially Rom. 11: 2-5), it is clear from the warnings in the gospels and epistles that many in the church will fall away in disbelief and apostasy according to our Lord's word in the parable of the sower and His predictions of the end of the age (Matt. 13; Luke 8; Matt. 24: 10-13). The command, **Know the Lord** will always be necessary until all of God's elect are safely gathered into His kingdom at the consummation.<sup>315</sup>

Only as we consider the fulfillment of the New Covenant at the consummation can we say that the New Covenant cannot be **broken** like the old one. Many professing believers in the church break the New Covenant through apostasy and unbelief. Continuing faith in Christ—a faith that produces obedience—is not optional. Christ did not promise that His sheep would never perish apart from the stipulation of hearing His voice and following Him. We know from many passages of Scripture that the continuation of our faith and obedience is guaranteed through the Spirit working in the believer (Phil. 1: 6; 2: 12-13), stimulating him to make use of the means of grace: the Scriptures, fellowship, teaching, prayer, etc. God has ordained the means as well as the end. All God's true people will be saved, but none will be saved apart from the means of saving them to the very end.

<sup>314</sup> For additional reading, see Keil, *Jeremiah*, Vol. 2, pp. 36-41, and especially O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*.

<sup>315</sup> I am indebted to Richard Pratt and Third Millennium publications for my understanding of the progressive fulfillment of Jeremiah 31.



### ***Chapter 32—Jeremiah Imprisoned but Buys a Field***

It is the tenth year of Zedekiah's reign and Jerusalem is under siege by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. Jeremiah is put in prison for all his unkind words about Jerusalem's dismal future and King Zedekiah being taken into exile (**vv. 2-5**).

While in prison, and while Jerusalem is under siege, God instructs Jeremiah to buy the field of his uncle from his uncle's son Hanamel who will transact the deal. Now, who would want to buy a field in Jerusalem, much less Anathoth which was already occupied by the Babylonian army? What good would it be to the Israelite living in Babylonian exile? Jeremiah learns of his cousin's visit before it happens, and when he shows up at the prison wanting to sell the field Jeremiah says, **Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord (v. 8)**. That is, he knew for sure that the Lord had spoken to him about buying the field.

Presumably for a very good price, he signs the paperwork and buys the field. Jeremiah seems confused about the whole thing and expresses this in the prayer of **vv. 16-25**. But the instruction to buy the field is an additional sign to Jeremiah that the nation of Israel would indeed return to the land of Palestine. Moreover, houses, fields, and vineyards would be bought and sold (**v. 15, 44**). The Lord was bringing destruction upon Judah for all its sins, but just as sure as He has brought disaster upon Judah, He will also bring **all the good that [He] was promising them (v. 42)**.

### ***Chapter 33—Restoration Promised through the Righteous Branch of David***

This chapter continues the promise of restoration begun in **chapter 32**. He is still imprisoned by the king (**v. 1**). The Lord comes to him and reveals to him **great and mighty things, which you do not know**; namely, the rebuilding of the ruins of Judah and the restoration of the Davidic Kingdom under the righteous Branch. Joy and gladness will once more fill the streets of Jerusalem (**vv. 6-11**). The whole land (**vv. 12-13**), not just Jerusalem, will enjoy full restoration (**as they were at first**).

Thus, the promises of the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7: 16 will be accomplished (**v. 17**) as sure as the covenant with day and night will not cease (**v. 25**; i.e. as sure as there will be day and night). The continuation of the Levitical priesthood is also promised in the same certain terms (**v. 21**). The Davidic kingdom and the Levitical priesthood were the two pillars upon which the OT theocracy existed.

The priesthood formed the medium of approach for the people into divine favour. The kingdom assured them of the divine guidance. Both of these pillars were broken with the destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple; the theocracy then appeared to have ceased to exist. At this time, when the kingdom, with its ordinances of justice and of grace, bestowed by God, was being dissolved, the Lord, in order to keep His people from despair, declares that these two institutions, in accordance with His promise, shall not fall to the ground, but shall stand forever. By this, God's own people received a pledge for the re-establishment and renovation of the kingdom of God. Such is the object of this promise.<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> Keil, p. 73

Partial fulfillment of this prophecy is accomplished when the temple was *rebuilt* in Haggai's day (about 520 BC) and the Levitical priesthood *restored*. However, it was subsequently destroyed again in AD 70 with the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome. Thus, the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy must take place in the coming of Christ as the righteous Branch of David and the extension of the Levitical priesthood, not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit when the Lord makes all His people to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (1 Pet. 2: 9)<sup>317</sup>

### *Chapter 34—Proclamation Against Judah for Their Treatment of Israelite Slaves*

Zedekiah had agreed to perform the covenant requirements to release all Israelite slaves after the term of six years (**vv. 8-9**; cf. Ex. 21: 2). However, he had changed his mind (**v. 11**). This legislation had been ignored for a long time, with wealthier Israelites refusing to release their Hebrew slaves (**v. 14**). This was especially heinous in God's sight considering that He had delivered them from the slavery of Egypt so they could be free (**v. 13**). In response to this particular breach of covenant God will proclaim a new **release** (cf. Lev. 25: 10)—a release **to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine** (**v. 17**).

Because they had transgressed the covenant stipulations, God would give them into the hand of their enemies (**vv. 20-22**). This is particularly bad news since the Babylonian armies had temporarily withdrawn from Jerusalem to fight against Egypt (**v. 22**; cf. **37: 5**). Of particular interest in this passage is the reference to passing between the pieces of slain animals (**vv. 18-19**) which is a reference to the particular form of the covenant that God made with Abraham in Genesis 15. However, this was not the particular form of the covenant made with Israel in the giving of the Law recorded in *Exodus*. In that covenant ceremony, the people did not pass between the pieces, but rather the blood of the covenant was **sprinkled** on the people after pledging themselves to obedience, upon pain of death (cf. Ex. 24: 7-8). Robertson has argued that the sprinkling of the blood upon the people was the equivalent expression of the same pledge to death inaugurated in the Abrahamic covenant by walking between the pieces.<sup>318</sup>

### *Chapter 35—The Example of the Rechabites*

The family of Jonadab, the son of Rechab, had been instructed by their father to refrain from drinking wine and from building houses. The family had dwelled in tents all their lives (**vv. 1-11**), 300 years since the time of Jonadab (or Jehonadab) who made an alliance with Jehu, king of Israel to rid the nation of idolatry (cf. 2 Kings 10: 15, 23). The reason for this lifestyle is not given in the text. Doubtless, Jonadab's motive was to protect his family from the corrupting influences of civilization while Israel was becoming more prosperous and increasingly given to Baal worship and immorality. The family had succeeded in protecting their descendants from idolatry and corruption for 300 years—not an insignificant achievement.<sup>319</sup>

In contrast to the Rechabites, the nations of Israel and Judah had not obeyed the voice of *their Father*, the God of Israel, by obeying Him. It is this stark contrast which is the focus of the chapter—the Rechabites had obeyed their *human* father and avoided the idolatry of Israel, but

<sup>317</sup> Keil, p. 74

<sup>318</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, pp. 131-134

<sup>319</sup> cf. Keil, p. 89

the Israelites had not obeyed their *divine* Father in heaven. For their strenuous obedience to their father's commands, Jonadab would not lack a man to stand before the Lord; i.e. the family line would not be *wiped out* like so many other families completely extinguished by the Babylonians (*v. 18-19*).

The story is a heart-warming example of a godly father who was intent on saving his family from the corrupting influences of a godless society. We should not infer (draw the conclusion) that we must adopt the same standards as Jonadab to protect our own families. That is, we don't have to live in tents and abstain from alcohol to accomplish the same goal. After all, Jeremiah set wine before them to drink, and we should not accuse him of tempting them to sin (*v. 5*). On the other hand, we should imitate his example by being spiritually astute and keenly aware of how our own particular culture is departing from the Lord and act accordingly. There are many ways in which any culture can depart from godly behavior and commitment to the law of God. For example, although money itself is not the root of all evil, the love of money *is*, and many believers have been corrupted by its influence during the course of their lives (1 Tim. 6: 10). Believers should not allow themselves to be swept into the current trends of their day or to be molded into the image of their unbelieving neighbors (Rom. 12: 2). Corrupting influences generally do not do their evil work all at once, but over a period of time, sometimes so gradually that we do not know what has happened to us and our families until the damage is already done.<sup>320</sup>

### *Chapter 36—Baruch Records the Prophecy of Jeremiah on a Scroll*

The context of this chapter is the fourth year of Jehoiakim, son of Josiah. Thus, the reader is advised again that the chronology of the book is going back and forth in time. Jeremiah dictates to Baruch all the words of the Lord which had been given to him, and the book is read in the hearing of the leading officials of Judah (*vv. 11-16*) and finally to the king himself (*vv. 20-21*). Not all the public officials were corrupt, but some listened with earnest and were willing to hide Jeremiah and Baruch from King Jehoiakim (*vv. 17-19*).

When the king heard the words of Jeremiah's prophecy, he took the scroll and threw it into the fire with contempt (*vv. 23-24*) even against the better advice of some of his officials (*v. 25*). There were no copiers or computers in those days, so Jeremiah had not backed up his work to a disc, external hard-drive, or cyberspace. But he did have the Holy Spirit—who has a very good memory—who reminded him of everything he had said thus far and added some additional information (*vv. 27-32*). Bible-burning has been tried many times during the history of the church; but God loves His word, and those who wish to translate it into many different languages always seem to find a way.

The story shows just how contemptuous Jehoiakim was of God and His word. Not content to destroy the scroll, he attempted to rid himself of Jeremiah and Baruch. But God was not finished with Jeremiah yet, and we know from the history of *2 Kings* that Jehoiakim died before Jeremiah. According to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah, Jehoiakim's son, Jehoiachin (Jeconiah) would not reign on the throne of Jerusalem but would be taken captive into Babylon after only a short reign of three months (*2 Kings 24: 8; cf. 37: 1*).

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<sup>320</sup> Judges 2:10, "And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel"

### *Chapter 37—Jeremiah Warns Against Judah’s Trust of Egypt*

In spite of all the warnings of Jeremiah which had come to pass—warnings which verified his calling as a true prophet (including the exile of Jehoiachin) Zedekiah does not listen to Jeremiah (v. 2). Zedekiah had been installed as king by Nebuchadnezzar in place of his nephew, Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim, but he had rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24: 20). In response, Nebuchadnezzar lays a siege against Jerusalem to re-establish the city under his rule. But when he heard that the Egyptian army had set out from Egypt, he lifted the siege from Jerusalem in order to fight Egypt (v. 5, 11; cf. **chapter 21**). (A single country will never have enough troops to rule the world.) There seems to be some hope on the part of Zedekiah that Jerusalem will be saved from Babylon by the Egyptians, thus the request for Jeremiah’s prayer.

Jeremiah warns that the king should entertain no hope in being delivered by Egypt (vv. 6-10). Even if the whole Chaldean army were defeated and only wounded soldiers left among them, even the wounded soldiers would rise up and destroy Jerusalem (v. 10). God can use even handicapped soldiers to accomplish His eternal purpose.

Jeremiah goes to take possession of a piece of property in the land of Benjamin, and while traveling, was arrested for treason and put in prison (vv. 11-21). Jeremiah has the opportunity to give the king what he wanted, a favorable word from the Lord to the effect that Jerusalem would be delivered. But he refuses to make up a favorable lie, speaks only the truth, and is put in prison (vv. 17-21).<sup>321</sup> This is the imprisonment of *chapter 32*.

### *Chapter 38—Things get worse for Jeremiah Followed by Deliverance*

Jeremiah had been prophesying that Judah should submit to the yoke of Babylon and by doing so people’s lives would be preserved (v. 2; cf. 21: 9). The officials of the city were not in the mood to have Jeremiah discourage all the fighting men with pessimistic predictions of defeat. To eliminate Jeremiah’s access to the ears of many soldiers in the court prison, they requested King Zedekiah to take Jeremiah out of the court prison and place him in a cistern (vv. 4-6). Jeremiah is up to his elbows in mud (v. 6).

Again we see how the Lord sometimes allows His choice servants to be treated. Outward circumstances are not the true test of whether or not a servant of God is performing his task faithfully. If it were, we would have to conclude that Jeremiah had failed God and was now reaping the terrible consequences. The truth is just the opposite. Sometimes the more faithful we are in the performance of our calling (whatever that calling may be) the worse things get for us. God has never promised believers an easy life; He has only promised that He will be with them in all their tribulations, and at the end of their journey will deliver them from all evil through the resurrection. Jeremiah had many opportunities to free himself from persecution. One good word about the Babylonian invasion and he would not have been put in prison (37: 17), but he refused to dance to the tune of Zedekiah’s desires and paid the penalty for his obedience. By doing so he practiced the Lord’s command spoken 600 years later, **And do not fear those who kill the**

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<sup>321</sup> cf. 1 Kings 22—Micaiah the prophet who was very much like Jeremiah

**body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell** (Matt. 10: 28).

Ebed-melech, an Ethiopian eunuch, intercedes with the king on Jeremiah's behalf and prevails upon him to retrieve Jeremiah from the cistern, saving him from death by exposure or starvation (**vv. 7-13**). The king once again seeks an audience with Jeremiah who repeats that if the king will yield Jerusalem to the Babylonians, lives will be preserved; but if not, the city will be burned and its inhabitants killed (**vv. 17-23**).

Fearing the reproach of his princes, Zedekiah did not follow Jeremiah's advice to surrender himself and the city to Nebuchadnezzar (**vv. 24-25**),<sup>322</sup> but having regard for the safety of the prophet—not to speak of regard for his own skin—devised a scheme to shield the prophet from further persecution from the big men of the city (**vv. 26-28**).

### *Chapter 39—Jerusalem is Captured*

According to the word of the Lord by Jeremiah, Jerusalem is captured after an 18 month siege (**vv. 1-2**). And because Zedekiah did not listen to him to surrender Jerusalem and also attempted to flee, Zedekiah's sons are slaughtered in his sight (the last thing he ever sees—**v. 7**) along with the nobles of Judah (**v. 6**), and he is brought captive to Babylon. Those who deserted to the Chaldeans (**v. 9**; cf. **38: 19**) are spared and brought to Babylon, and only the poorest people of the land are left. These are given vineyards and fields, rendering them better off financially than they were before the invasion. This was a gift from the Lord to those who had been made permanent slaves by their Jewish oppressors who refused to obey the laws concerning Hebrew slaves (cf. comments on **chapter 34**). Ironically, the kindness of Nebuzaradan to the poor is in stark contrast to the callousness of their own Hebrew kinsmen.

Jeremiah is given favorable treatment by Nebuzaradan (cf. **chapter. 20**); and Ebed-melech, the Ethiopian who pleaded for Jeremiah's life, is delivered from harm because of his kindness (**vv. 11-18**). The significance of this is that he is a *Gentile* and also a *eunuch*, and thus traditionally cut off from the assembly of the Lord (Deut. 23: 1). But the Gentile eunuch who fears the Lord receives favor when the assembly of the Jews is harshly judged for unbelief.

### *Chapter 40—Jeremiah Favored by the Gentiles*

After being maligned and mistreated for almost 40 years by his own countrymen, Jeremiah is finally given a break by Nebuzaradan, a Chaldean Gentile. The reader should not ignore the contrasts between covenant Israelites and non-covenant Gentiles. They foreshadow God's future kindness to the Gentiles. Jeremiah is given the option of going to Babylon, where he will be assured of good treatment, or staying in the land of Judah (**vv. 1-4**). He chooses to stay in Judah and settles down in Mizpah with Gedaliah whom Nebuchadnezzar appointed over the cities of Judah (**vv. 5-6**).

The commanders and their forces mentioned in **v. 7** are the dispersed armies of Judah who had been scattered here and there throughout Judah during the protracted war with Babylon. They

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<sup>322</sup> Keil, p. 115

had fled to inaccessible hideouts which had not been reached or discovered by the invading Chaldeans, and now that Jerusalem had fallen and most of the people of Judah taken into exile, they come out of hiding.<sup>323</sup> The same is true of other Jews who had fled to Moab, Edom, Ammon, and other countries (**v. 11**).

Gedaliah advises them to submit to the rule of the Chaldeans who had placed him in charge, and it would be well with them. Meanwhile Ishmael had agreed to join a conspiracy with Baalis, the king of Ammon, to kill Gedaliah. Gedaliah is warned of this conspiracy by Johanan but does not believe Johanan (or he believes this is nothing but rumor). The motive of the conspiracy is not given in the text, but the king of Ammon may have intended to remove any remaining military resistance in order to extend his territory. Ishmael's motive may have been pure envy of Gedaliah. Since he was of the royal family, he may have figured that he should have been the one in charge and not Gedaliah.<sup>324</sup>

The story highlights the utter sinfulness of the people of Judah. Not only will they not yield themselves in obedience to the Lord's prophet, but they will not submit to Babylon even after everything Jeremiah has said came true. Their hardness of heart and stubborn resistance to the Lord's will is staggering, and it *confirms the righteousness of the Lord's judgment against them*. The next chapter is a further confirmation.

#### ***Chapter 41—Gedaliah is Murdered***

Not heeding the warning of Johanan, Gedaliah is now easy prey for the ambitious Ishmael who takes ten men on an assassination mission to kill Gedaliah. They succeed in killing him as well as other Jews and Chaldeans with him. Some of the pious Jews who were descendants of those left by Assyria in northern Palestine 150 years earlier came with their grain offerings to Jerusalem to mourn the fall of Jerusalem (**v. 5**).<sup>325</sup> Ishmael and his men slaughtered these Jews as well (with the exception of 10 who exchanged more food for their lives), even though his motive for doing so is not easily determined.<sup>326</sup> The deed accomplished, Ishmael and his murderous gang round up the remaining Jews in Mizpah and cross over into Ammonite territory. Once more the wickedness of the men of Judah is highlighted for us and serves as a further justification for Judah's destruction.

Meanwhile Johanan, who warned Gedaliah of Ishmael's plot, learns of the massacre of the pilgrims near Mizpah and goes out with his armed men to fight against Ismael, also rescuing the others who are now essentially hostages (**vv. 11-14**). Ishmael escapes. Fearing the retaliation of the Chaldeans for the murder of Gedaliah, Johanan plans to flee to Egypt with the rescued hostages (**vv. 15-18**).

#### ***Chapter 42—Jeremiah warns Johanan and the Remnant not to Flee to Egypt***

Johanan and the remnant—who had escaped both the wrath of the Chaldeans and that of Ishmael—approach Jeremiah for the Lord's guidance concerning what they should do. They

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<sup>323</sup> Keil, p. 128

<sup>324</sup> Keil, p. 130

<sup>325</sup> Keil, p. 133; cf. 2 Kings 17: 24ff; 2 Chron. 34: 9; 30: 11

<sup>326</sup> See Keil, pp. 135-137, for a possible theory

were surely in a tight spot since they could easily be blamed for Ishmael's insurrection against Babylon's chosen leader, Gedaliah. They assure Jeremiah that they will **listen** and obey his advice whether the advice is **pleasant** or **unpleasant** (**vv. 1-6**). (Yeah, sure they will.) Jeremiah waits ten days for the Lord's message that declares that the people should not go to Egypt but should stay in the land of Judah. But if they flee to Egypt, the sword which they fear from the Babylonians will find them in Egypt, and they will die by the sword.

Even before they answer Jeremiah, he has already perceived from the Lord that they will not obey the advice that he has given them (**vv. 18-22**). Their judgment is now on their own head for not listening to the prophet. The story illustrates once again the *stubborn unwillingness of the people to listen to the words of Lord* even after all the confirmed predictions of the prophet.

### ***Chapter 43—Jeremiah Taken Captive to Egypt along with the Remnant***

True to the prophet's predictions, the people do not take his advice and force him and Baruch, his scribe, to go along with the remnant to Egypt. They even accuse him of lying to them in order to turn them over to the Chaldeans (**vv. 1-7**).

If Jeremiah thinks that his prophetic burden is now over, he is mistaken, for the Lord now gives him another prophecy as soon as he reaches Egypt. The people who have taken him hostage to Egypt have a false sense of security, for the Babylonians will pursue them there, destroy Egypt, and put them to death with the sword (**vv. 8-13**; cf. **44: 12**).

### ***Chapter 44—The Fall of Egypt Predicted and the Death of the Rebellious Remnant in Egypt***

Incredibly, the escaping remnant continues their idolatrous ways in Egypt (**vv. 8-11**). All of these will die by the sword in Egypt with the exception of only a few (**vv. 12-14**). Intransigent (uncompromising) in their rebellion against God, the remnant (not the godly remnant) of Jews in Egypt insists that while they were sacrificing to the **queen of heaven**<sup>327</sup> they did not have any problems. They foolishly concluded that they did not suffer from the horrors of war until they ceased worshipping Astarte. This is certainly an amazing demonstration of spiritual blindness. There is little wonder why Jeremiah occasionally regretted the day of his birth given the obstinate ignorance and intransigence of the people of Judah.

Jeremiah repeats his warnings in **vv. 20-29** followed by a more immediate confirmation of his warnings—Pharaoh Hophra will be given over into the hands of his enemies even as Zedekiah had been handed over (**v. 30**).

The last prophecy of Jeremiah is made in **chapter 44**, and tradition has it that Jeremiah is stoned to death in Egypt by those who forced him to go there. This same remnant was killed by the Babylonians during the invasion of Egypt in 568 BC,<sup>328</sup> predicted by Jeremiah in **Jeremiah 46: 13-26** (see below).

### ***Chapter 45—Jeremiah's Message to Baruch, his Scribe***

<sup>327</sup> This was the fertility goddess Ashtoreth—also called Astarte or Ishtar—whose worship involved sexual immorality (*Eerdman's Handbook to the Bible*, p. 399).

<sup>328</sup> *Eerdman's Handbook to the Bible*, p. 409-410

The book once more goes back in time to the fourth year of Jehoiakim who reigned 11 years in Jerusalem (2 Kings 23: 36) followed by the three month reign of his son Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24: 8) followed by the 11 year reign of Zedekiah (2 Kings 24: 18), the last king of Judah before the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC. Thus, the time is about 18 years before the fall of Jerusalem or 605 BC, the year that Egypt was defeated by Babylon in the Battle of Carchemish.

Baruch had been a faithful co-laborer with Jeremiah, but he was not as undaunted (unafraid) as Jeremiah or as unmoved by the threats against his life (**v. 3**). Jeremiah writes this message to encourage him. Baruch will have his life as his **booty**. That is, he will have his life as the spoils of war, but he should expect *nothing more* from his ministry with Jeremiah than the preservation of life. He need not look for a cabinet post or for riches and honor (**v. 5—But you, are you seeking great things for yourself? Do not seek them...**).

It is a very relevant message for all believers. Do we seek great things for ourselves—honor, prestige, appreciation for our labors, material wealth? “Seek them not,” Jeremiah warns us. God only promises us that he will preserve our lives (**v. 5**) and will reward us for our labors. This should be enough for us; anything more is pure presumption.<sup>329</sup>

#### **Chapter 46—The Defeat of Pharaoh Neco of Egypt**

This chapter begins the prophecies against the nations which continue through **chapter 51**. The prophecy is against Neco, not Hophra of **chapter 44**. Pharaoh Neco was the Egyptian ruler who defeated King Josiah of Judah at Megiddo in 609 BC (cf. 2 Kings 23: 29; see chart). Josiah’s son Jehoahaz is made king, but reigned only three months in Jerusalem before Pharaoh Neco deposed him and made another son of Josiah, Jehoiakim, king in his place. He then takes Jehoahaz to Egypt where he later dies.

Four years later in 605 BC Neco is defeated by Babylon in the Battle of Carchemish, and Jehoiakim is made the vassal king (“puppet king”) of Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings. 24: 1; see chart). Thus, the prophecy of **vv. 3-12** is made before the Battle of Carchemish in 605 BC (**vv. 1-2**). The prophecy of **vv. 13-26** predicts the defeat of the Egyptians in their own land in 568 BC, nineteen years after the fall of Jerusalem.

The prophecy ends with a word of comfort to Israel. God will make an end of all the nations which have punished Israel, but he will never make a complete end to Israel, although he will by no means leave her unpunished (**v. 28**), an appropriate introduction to the prophecies which follow. This catalog is similar to the one in Isaiah 13—23 followed by the summary statement in Isaiah 24: 1 to the effect that God will devastate the *entire earth*. The most obvious fulfillment of this prophecy is the destruction of the world at the end of the age and the salvation of the church.<sup>330</sup> However, we must not marginalize the importance of Romans 11 implying the

<sup>329</sup> See Calvin’s excellent discussion of this passage. *Jeremiah*, pp. 565-571

<sup>330</sup> Cf. Rom. 8: 31-39 and the entire book of *Revelation* in which the world of wicked men and nations is destroyed, and God’s people are given eternal life in the new heaven and earth, the new Jerusalem).



spiritual restoration of the Jewish nation and its widespread incorporation into the church, a partial fulfillment of vv. **27-28**.<sup>331</sup>

### ***Chapters 47—48—Prophecies against the Nations***

All of the nations mentioned had at one time or another been the enemy of Israel. Throughout these chapters the reader will find positive references to Israel which, in spite of her afflictions at the hands of God, is still His chosen nation. God afflicts his chosen people as a loving Father disciplines his children, but woe to the nation which chooses to afflict God's children (**48: 27; 49: 2; 50: 3-7, 17-20; 51: 5, 19, 24, 34-37,49**).

### ***Chapters 50—51—Prophecy against Babylon***

God used Babylon to punish all these nations which either punished Israel in the past or which took advantage of her weakened condition under the threat of Babylon. Then God turned his wrath upon Babylon which was the center of world power and the symbol of man's rebellion against God (cf. Gen. 11). In fact, in *Revelation*, even the city of Rome (sinful enough on its own) is given the designation, **Babylon**. In John's mind, Rome was just another manifestation of Babylon—the sinful pride of the human race and the mortal enemy of God's people (Rev. 14: 8; 16: 19; 17: 5; 18: 2). Therefore, it is not surprising that Jeremiah writes two very long chapters (**50—51**) prophesying against Babylon.

The prophecy against Babylon is given by Jeremiah to Seraiah, son of Neriah and brother of Baruch (**32: 12**), to be read when he reached the city with Zedekiah during the fourth year of his eleven year reign (vv. **59-64**). Thus, the scroll was to be read in the year 594 BC, seven years before the fall of Jerusalem. King Zedekiah was a vassal king of Nebuchadnezzar, and his trip to the Babylon was for the purpose of bringing tribute or receiving instructions—a humiliating obligation. This context makes the reading of the scroll on Babylonian territory all the more significant for the remnant Jews in exile.<sup>332</sup>

The scroll obviously was not read in Nebuchadnezzar's presence nor before any large assembly of exiled Jews in the city since this would have immediately incited the Babylonians against them. Rather, Seraiah gives the scroll a private reading possibly among a few people who would serve as witnesses when the whole Babylonian Empire fell into ruins. A stone was attached to the scroll, and then the scroll was thrown into the Euphrates River in a symbolic action signifying that Babylon would sink and not rise again.

### ***Chapter 52—A Further Account of the Fall of Jerusalem***

A more detailed account of the fall of Jerusalem is given in the last chapter including the execution of some of the leading men in Judah and the pillaging of the temple. Three deportations of exiles are mentioned: 597 BC, the seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar (cf. **25: 1** for the first year which is 605 BC); 587 BC which was the 18<sup>th</sup> year of Nebuchadnezzar or the tenth year of Zedekiah (**32: 1**); the 23<sup>rd</sup> year of Nebuchadnezzar or 582 BC. The very first deportation (606 BC) in which Daniel and company are taken to Babylon is not mentioned.

<sup>331</sup> John Murray, *Romans*

<sup>332</sup> Keil, p. 319

Jehoiachin, who was taken into exile in 597 BC (2 Kings 24: 8), is released from prison by Evil-merodach (“Man of Marduk”) in the 37<sup>th</sup> year of his exile or 561-560 BC. He is shown special favor by the king for the rest of his life. This episode is also recorded in 2 Kings 25: 27-30, and in contrast to the rest of 2 Kings 25 and Jeremiah 52, radiates a glimmer of hope not only for Israel but for the Davidic dynasty.<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> Davis, *The Power and the Fury—2 Kings*, pp. 337-344

## ***XX. The Prophecy of Daniel***

### ***Introduction***

A good introduction to *Daniel* may be found in the *Reformation Study Bible*, R.C. Sproul, general editor. Some of the main points of this introduction are given here. The book is divided into two main sections: (1) the historical narratives of chapters 1-6 and (2) the visions of chapters 7-12. The historical narratives are not given primarily for historical information but are written for the purpose of demonstrating the sovereign rule of God over the nations regardless of the way things appear. At the time *Daniel* is written, Israel has been in exile for over 100 years, and many inhabitants of Judah have been taken to Babylon, including Daniel. Jerusalem and the temple will lay in ruins just 20 years hence (from this time). However, appearances to the contrary, God's sovereign administration over the affairs of all nations and peoples remains intact. For this reason, the people of God should never compromise their faith in God by serving or worshipping false gods or powerful rulers who usurp the prerogatives of God (**chapter 3**), nor should they give up the ancient traditions of Covenant law (**chapter 1**). Nebuchadnezzar's dream of **chapter 2** demonstrates that world history is proceeding linearly (not in circles) to a dramatic climax concluding in the subjugation of all worldly kingdoms to the kingdom not made by man, but made supernaturally by God. Man's great experiment to be his own god and to build his own kingdom, initiated in Genesis 3, will end in utter failure. Nebuchadnezzar and other potentates will prove that man is incompetent to rule and incapable of building a just and lasting empire.

The visions of **chapters 7-12** are predictions of future events—visions so accurate that liberal scholars presupposing (assuming without proof) the impossibility of predictive prophecy have concluded that they are authored by someone other than Daniel around 170 BC, after the events took place. There is no proof for this assumption and adopting this view necessitates the discrediting of Jesus who attributes the book to Daniel (Matt. 24: 15). The predictions of this section would be especially significant to Jews living under the oppression of Antiochus (IV) Euphianes who attempted to force Hellenistic culture and pagan religion upon the Jews from 167-164 BC. Severe persecution of the Jews took place at this time, and many pious Jews were put to death for their beliefs. Daniel's prophecy would be a great encouragement to remain true to the faith and endure these hardships knowing that another kingdom (the Kingdom of God) would come and put an end to all other kingdoms emerging throughout the history of the world.

The predictions, therefore, extend beyond the time of Antiochus Epiphanes to the end of the world and the second advent of Christ; and the reader will notice many similarities with the book of *Revelation* which should be studied at the same time for optimum benefit. We will discuss some of these similarities.

As the first chapter indicates, Daniel was one of the first Hebrews deported to Babylon in the third year of Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim had been installed as king in place of his brother Jehoahaz, and served as vassal, first to Pharaoh Neco and then to Nebuchadnezzar, until he rebelled in his third year on the throne (2 Kings 24: 1-2). The first deportation of exiles is not explicitly mentioned in 2 Kings or 2 Chronicles. Daniel was possibly of noble origin and was most definitely a man of unusual intelligence, education (**1: 3-4**), and spirituality (**Chapters 1-6**). Being thus gifted, he was chosen not to prophesy among the common people of Israel in

Babylonian captivity, like his contemporary Ezekiel, but for a unique ministry in positions of government authority. This makes Daniel especially someone for Christian policy-makers and government officials to imitate.

### *Part One—Historical Narrative*

#### *Chapter 1—The Determination of Daniel and His Friends to be Faithful to Ceremonial Requirements*

Their unwillingness to compromise the food laws of the OT (Lev. 11, 17) consisted in the fact that Daniel and his friends understood the principle behind these laws. Although now living *among* pagans, God's chosen people must not live *like* them. The food laws were reminders of their individuality and distinction from all the nations of the world, and although they were subjugated to Babylon, God was still on His throne and sovereign over their lives. Compromise in dietary restrictions was not an option; otherwise, the Jews may learn to compromise *on more important issues*. Furthermore, the meat offered to Daniel and his friends had been previously offered to idols, and the Christian liberties extended to believers in the New Covenant were not yet extended to the Old Covenant people (cf. 1 Cor. 10). Centuries later during the oppressive rule of Antiochus Epiphanes, Jews were forced to eat the flesh of pigs as a symbol of their submission to Hellenistic ways. Many refused and were persecuted or killed. This story was doubtless an inspiration to those who would not yield to pagan cultural practices.<sup>334</sup>

The principle of separation is still valid for the NT church. Paul uses the OT legislation concerning the clean and the unclean to teach the principle of holiness and separation from sin (2 Cor. 6: 14—7: 1). Sometimes the area of compromise may seem small, but each time we bend the rules to accommodate to cultural expectations or our own desires we are opening the door to additional, more substantial compromise of biblical principles.

The Bible says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Prov. 1: 7), and God continues to grant Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah wisdom and knowledge in response to their obedience (vv. 19-20). Greater obedience begets greater wisdom.

#### *Chapter 2—The King has a Dream and all of Babylon is Troubled by It*

Nebuchadnezzar was no fool. If he told the wise men what the dream was, they could make up any interpretation they wanted, but by withholding the content of the dream itself, he could be assured that they were not blowing Babylonian smoke in his eyes—in other words, lying. Apparently he did not have the dream just once but many times (v. 2; **dreams**), which may account for his urgent and merciless pursuit of the interpretation (vv. 2-18). Daniel, with a lot of prayer support from his friends, pleads with the Lord for the dream and its interpretation. God provides this, a supernatural blessing which Daniel did not forget when he appeared before the king (vv. 27-30). In his prayer of thanksgiving (vv. 20-24), Daniel expresses a major theme in the book, the sovereign providence of God in the affairs of men (especially v. 21). Not only by revealing and interpreting the dream but by interceding for the lives of all the other wise men of

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<sup>334</sup>Ronald S. Wallace, *The Message of Daniel*, p. 43

Babylon (v. 24), Daniel gained a considerable amount of political clout (influence) within the realm.

The king's dream is about *four major world empires*: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. The last is characterized by legs of iron and feet of iron and clay (pottery), forming a brittle mixture with iron. This is the last kingdom upon which all the others have their foundation—a *weak foundation* symbolizing frailty and temporariness (cf. Matt. 7: 26-27). One will follow the other in succession until they all, as one composite kingdom of man, are destroyed by a fifth kingdom, a stone cut out of a mountain without hands (i.e. of super-natural origin). This kingdom will not co-exist with the others but will utterly destroy every kingdom erected in its path, grinding them to chaff and blowing them away so that nothing is left (v. 35). As I am writing this, I am reminded of a gigantic, moving ice glacier I once saw at Mount Ranier in Washington State. The glacier was miles away, but we could hear the rock being ground to dust by this moving glacier and the dust rising into the air. So will all the kingdoms of the earth be before the terrible power of the risen Christ, ground to dust in its path.

This is the kingdom of the **God of heaven** and will be a kingdom which, unlike all others, will never be destroyed but will endure forever (v. 44). Special mention is made of the stone striking the feet of the statue which is a reference to the *first* coming of Christ during the time of the Roman Empire. But it makes little difference which kingdoms are specifically identified because the statue stands and falls for all of them—for every would-be kingdom of man exalting itself against the kingdom of God in Christ. Ultimately, they will all bite the dust.

So why does God give this dream to Nebuchadnezzar, not to Daniel? One possibility is that no one would have paid attention had the dream been given to this lowly Hebrew exile (at least not at this point in Daniel's life); but when the king has dreams, everyone pays attention. The God who made the world wanted some press time, and He got it with the king. Can you imagine the “buzz” going around Babylon when people learned that Nebuchadnezzar had fallen on his face and done homage to this Hebrew (v. 46)? “The king did what?!”

Another possibility is that by giving the dream to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, the first and arguably the most infamous of world kingdoms (Rev. 17—18), God is giving His personal warning of Psalm 2 to all subsequent kingdoms of the world. God will raise up kingdoms, and He will bring them down according to His sovereign will, and woe to that king and kingdom who does not honor Him and worship Him as King of kings and Lord of lords.

The dream, like Daniel's unwillingness to compromise the food laws, contributes to the overall theme of the book—the sovereign rights of God over mankind. He not only rules over the minute affairs of men in what they should eat, but He rules over the entire world in the political affairs of nations. Kingdoms rise and kingdoms fall at His sovereign pleasure (v. 21). **Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales; behold, He lifts up the islands like fine dust** (Isa. 40: 15).

God also uses this incident to elevate His chosen vessel and his friends to high places of public office (vv. 48-49).<sup>335</sup> God has His people in every corner of the world, including places of

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<sup>335</sup> A prefect was a kind of governor over a large province in the empire.

leadership and influence. They are salt to preserve the world and a shield to protect His people and other citizens from harm (cf. *Esther*). For 16 years God placed Ronald Reagan (1980-88) and George W. Bush (2000-2008) in the presidency of the US to protect unborn children. These leaders were staunchly opposed to abortion. Much of the legal protection for the unborn has now been suspended with the election of Barack Obama who, as a US senator, supported partial-birth abortion.<sup>336</sup> One of Obama's first acts as president was to enact the FOCA (Freedom of Choice Act) facilitating abortion rights. May God give us the wisdom to elect godly leaders.

We wish we could say that Nebuchadnezzar was converted in the process (**vv. 46-47**), but the story later proves that his high estimation of Daniel's God did not go high enough (**chapter 3**). Daniel's interpretation of the dream received yet another interpretation by Nebuchadnezzar.

According to the dream, as Nebuchadnezzar saw it, the great Fifth Monarchy would be preceded by four great empires, of which he was the head, and to whom God had given "kingdom, power, and strength, and glory" (2; 37). *For God to give glory to a man meant one thing to men of antiquity, outside the Hebraic faith—to share His divinity and kingdom with the man.* It meant for them participation in the life and kingdom of God, and made them and their order a continuation of God and a manifest incarnation of Him. Thus, Nebuchadnezzar could move in the confidence, based on his interpretation of Daniel's words...that God had handed over the world to Nebuchadnezzar, His vice-regent, and made him God's power and presence to that age...History therefore was in Nebuchadnezzar's hands and derived its meaning from him.<sup>337</sup>

### **Chapter 3—The Golden Image**

Thus, Nebuchadnezzar's estimation of himself was high—very high if an image of gold 90 feet high and 9 feet wide is any indication. All the "big men" of his kingdom (**vv. 2-3**) were invited to celebrate his highness's glory, including Daniel's three friends who had proven themselves to be as equally committed to the glory of God as Daniel. The present test proves their commitment further. King Nebuchadnezzar had conquered many people groups from many nations (**vv. 4, 7**) and had characteristically given them much religious liberty. But he also deemed it necessary to unify his kingdom around one central deity, the power of the state, symbolized in the image. It is not specifically said in the text that the image was of himself, but at least everyone understood whose power was behind it. Worship of the image did not imply that one must abandon his own gods, but simply add to the pantheon of gods already worshipped. The whole affair from Nebuchadnezzar's point of view was harmless, even if the consequence of disobedience was not (**v. 6**).

The deity of the state has always been man's goal from the tower of Babel onward (Gen. 11), even before that time in the city that Cain built (Gen. 4). Man wishes to be his own god, and what could demonstrate this deification better than the *deification of corporate man in the state* which in antiquity resided in the king? The resistance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego was the same offense as that of Christians living in the Roman Empire who would later read this story and take heart in its message. The Roman emperors were not insistent that Christians could not worship Christ, but that they must worship the state as the unifying religion of the empire.

<sup>336</sup> In partial-birth abortion, the doctor-executioner inserts a tube into the base of the infant's cranium, vacuuming the brains from the cranium.

<sup>337</sup> Rousas John Rushdoony, *Thy Kingdom Come, Studies in Daniel and Revelation*, p. 21; emphasis mine).

But this is what the Christians, and Daniel's three friends, could not do. Worshipping Roman emperors was a denial of the Lordship of Christ who refused to share His deity with any man.

For three young men who refused to eat the king's food, the issue before them was unworthy of consideration. Worship of the image was blatant idolatry. There was no presumption in their answer to the king, as if God were *obligated* to save them.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter.<sup>17</sup> "If it be *so*, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king.<sup>18</sup> "But *even* if *He does* not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up." (Daniel 3:16-18 NASB)

Their defiance was a direct and purposeful contradiction of the king's arrogant statement earlier, **"And what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?"** Live or die, their mind was fixed on obedience, and their willingness to die was a clear contrast to the willful idolatry of the exiled Jews who served false gods under no external force. The story would be told by faithful Jews for centuries afterwards to their unbelieving neighbors and family members, and it has served as a fortress to millions of Christians living under persecution.

When they are thrown into the furnace, Christ appears with them in His pre-incarnate state (**vv. 24-25**) demonstrating that there was, indeed, a God who was able to deliver them from the king's hands, after all. For the time being, all of their critics were silenced (**v. 29**) and the king makes another half-hearted speech of allegiance to their God (**v. 28**) although missing altogether the exclusivity of the God of Daniel (**4: 8, 18; spirit of the holy gods**).

#### **Chapter 4—Nebuchadnezzar Learns his Limitations**

Continuous with the theme of the sovereignty of God over the affairs of men, the prophecy of *Daniel* records the vision of the king's humiliation. The purpose of this dream is found in **v. 17, In order that the living may know that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whom he wishes. And sets over it the lowliest of men** (also **v. 25b**, which is communicated to the king through Daniel. The king is then advised to repent and to demonstrate this repentance through good deeds **by showing mercy to the poor (v. 27)**. The performance of good deeds is not salvation by works, but the proof of a changed heart (Acts 26: 20; Matt. 3: 7-9).

Rushdoony observes that it was natural for Nebuchadnezzar to conceive of himself as a *tall tree* reaching into heaven, a tree which provided food for all mankind.<sup>338</sup> By revealing the dream to Nebuchadnezzar, God allowed the king to get a picture of the way he conceived of himself and his kingdom (cf. Ezek. 31), as the benevolent dictator representing God on earth, continuous *ontologically and functionally* with God and bestowing life upon his subjects. But in the dream, the tree is cut down; for no human king can take the place of God as the giver of life. Mercifully, the stump of the tree is left, a foreshadowing of Nebuchadnezzar's restoration. The depiction of a kingdom in the form of a tree also has important significance in the gospels. Jesus describes the kingdom of God as a mustard seed, small in its beginnings but developing into a

<sup>338</sup> Rushdoony, *Thy Kingdom Come*, pp. 28-29

tree providing shelter for birds (Matt. 13: 32; Mk. 4: 32; Lk. 13: 18-19). This represents the benevolent kingdom of Christ through which the world has received blessing upon blessing as the gospel has permeated political, social, and economic institutions.<sup>339</sup>

Did the king repent? He may have been merciful to the poor according to Daniel's instructions, but his righteousness was *self-righteousness* and not true godly repentance and humility.<sup>340</sup> Twelve months later he was gloating (bragging) about Babylon, the great city which *he* had made **by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty"** (v. 30). Generally speaking, this is the boast of all mankind (Gen. 11—"and *we* will make for *ourselves* a name") Men perceive that all achievement on earth is the grand demonstration of the *sovereignty of man for the glory of man*—the greatness of man as his own god. Nebuchadnezzar had taken courage (wrongly) in Daniel's previous interpretations that he was the continuation of god on earth ontologically (in being and essence) and economically (in function). It is he who would further the plans of God on earth, not as a subordinate vice-regent or vassal of God, but as an ontological extension of God incarnate in human flesh. He should have learned otherwise by now since the true God had already overruled by divine decree his claims to men's worship on the plains of Dura (**chapter 3**). His hopes of being the incarnate God had been burnt to ashes in the furnace (**3: 20**). His arrogance in **chapter 4** illustrates that these hopes are still very much alive in Nebuchadnezzar's mind. Other lessons lie ahead.

The similarity of the king's speech with the account in Genesis 1: 31 is not accidental (**v. 30**). **And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.** Nebuchadnezzar's **word** is the word of man's presumed sovereignty in creation. *He* alone has created Babylon, not by the grace of God, but by the might of his own power and for the purpose of magnifying his own glory. The glory of God is, therefore, usurped (taken unlawfully).

But while the word of human sovereignty and arrogance is still in the king's mouth, judgment is executed against him, illustrating that the word of God will endure forever, but the word of man will fall to the ground and accomplish nothing apart from the express permission of God. Again, the similarity with Genesis 11 is striking. As soon as the men of Shinar propose a kingdom independent of God, God "goes down" and confuses their languages. Analogously, Nebuchadnezzar loses his mind and becomes like the beasts of the field having no conscious understanding or allegiance to the God of heaven.<sup>341</sup> The judgment is symbolic. Man in rebellion against God imitates brute beasts. He has lost his senses and has become fatally irrational in his ambition to be his own god. He continues to do what God decrees him to do—unconsciously like an animal—but not by his own submission. Only in obedience to God and in voluntary submission to His will can man find his true and rational purpose in the universe (Rom. 12: 1-2—where the word *logikos* should be translated "rational").

At the end of his judgment, Nebuchadnezzar returned to his senses, and in his prayer of **vv. 34-35** acknowledges the truth of **4: 8** and **25b**—the Most High is the only sovereign ruler over mankind, and he bestows subordinate kingship to whomever he wishes. While Keil and Calvin deny the genuineness of his conversion, Wallace, Rushdoony, and Young affirm it. One of Young's reasons for believing its genuineness is Nebuchadnezzar's "discernible...progress in the

<sup>339</sup> Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*, p. 249; texts cited by Robertson.

<sup>340</sup> Rushdoony, p. 32)

<sup>341</sup> For the nature of his disease, "lycanthropy", see E.J. Young, *Daniel*, p. 112



knowledge of God. Cf. 2: 47 with 3: 28 and finally with 4: 34, 35.”<sup>342</sup> The reader will note that a *polytheistic* orientation is evident in the first two verses, while this orientation is lacking in the last reference. We also take note of the fact that this is the last we hear of Nebuchadnezzar in the book except as an historical reference in **Chapter 5**. Thus, the reader is left with a good impression of a man who learned his lesson and humbled himself before God. I am inclined to agree that his conversion was genuine, and that he serves as one kingly example among few who bow the knee to the “Son” and do “homage” before His wrath is fully kindled (Ps. 2, especially v. 12).

### *Chapter 5—Belshazzar Denies the Lessons of History*

Nebuchadnezzar’s repentance and acknowledgement of God’s sovereignty (**chapter 4**) is contrasted with Belshazzar’s lack of the same (**Chapter 5**). The contrast is meant to have a wide application for all the kings and rulers of the earth who should submit to God’s sovereignty before He destroys them in His wrath (cf. Ps. 2 which is a pivotal psalm for understanding the themes of Daniel).

Belshazzar is not technically the son of Nebuchadnezzar, but his grandson. It was common to refer to the ancestors as “fathers”. From other sources we know that he was the son of Nabonidus with whom he was a co-regent of the Babylonian Empire. Nabonidus was the son-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar.<sup>343</sup> While his father dwelled in Tema for a time, Belshazzar was managing the kingdom in the city of Babylon. Nabonidus is not named simply because Daniel had no dealings with Nabonidus, and not even with Belshazzar except for this one short episode.<sup>344</sup>

When the handwriting appears on the wall, Daniel is not immediately consulted, indicating that he no longer possessed the same rank he had during Nebuchadnezzar’s reign. Although Belshazzar pretends not to be acquainted with Daniel (**v. 16**), it is unlikely that he was not familiar with him and the service he rendered to Nebuchadnezzar. This record would have been recorded in the annals of the kings. Daniel himself allows Belshazzar no pretense of ignorance in these matters (**v. 22**).<sup>345</sup>

The same night that Daniel was consulted, the Babylonian Empire fell to Darius the Mede (**vv. 30-31**); therefore the date of Belshazzar’s feast must have been some time in 539 BC, the date of Babylon’s fall to the Medo-Persian Empire. If Daniel is taken to Babylon in 606 BC as a teenager, he must be close to 80 years old when summoned by Belshazzar. He is also feistier in his advanced age, **Keep your gifts for yourself, or give your rewards to someone else (v. 17)**, not something you ordinarily say to a king! But Daniel has never been a fearful prophet; and he also knew that if Belshazzar was going to execute him, he better do it quickly. He only had a few hours left before his kingdom fell to Darius.

<sup>342</sup> Young, p. 114

<sup>343</sup> Rushdoony, p. 34, citing Raymond Philip Dougherty, *Nabonidus and Belshazzar, a Study of the Closing Events of the Neo-Babylonian Empire*, p. 146

<sup>344</sup> E. J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel*, pp. 115-118

<sup>345</sup> Rushdoony, p. 35

Darius the Mede had a short reign of only two years before Cyrus the Persian took over the kingdom.<sup>346</sup> This helps understand why Cyrus is mentioned as the one who would decree the rebuilding of the temple (2 Chron. 36: 22). Another theory is that **Darius the Mede** was Cyrus' throne name in Babylon.<sup>347</sup>

So much for the context; let us now go to the text. Belshazzar has the audacity to order the vessels of the Jewish temple (seized by Nebuchadnezzar almost 70 years ago) brought in for his wives, concubines, and noblemen (**v. 2**). The feasts of ancient kings could go on and on for weeks with lavish expenditures of wine and food, not to speak of loose sex (cf. *Esther* 1). The parties were basically drunken orgies of the worst sort, and this helps set the context in which stolen vessels from the temple were used. Vessels originally set apart only for *holy* use are now being set apart for *unholy and vain* use by the most godless sort of people who were praising their false gods.

Enter **the hand!** All of a sudden a hand appears out of nowhere writing a message for the king. Like his grandfather before him, *Belshazzar can find no one who can interpret the message, no one except Daniel*. One of the major themes of Daniel was that the God of Daniel was a revealer. False prophets and wise men were reduced to foolishness before this omniscient God (cf. **chap. 2**). Although it is likely that he knew of Daniel before the queen (or queen mother) reminded him, he may have been fearful to summon Daniel because of the past interpretations he had made of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams, all of which denied the absolute sovereignty of the king before the Most High God. This was not the message he desired to hear, and he may have symbolically denied these interpretations by desecrating the temple vessels.<sup>348</sup> Nevertheless, he was left only with Daniel for an interpreter.

Daniel does not immediately interpret the message but first delivers Belshazzar a scathing sermon denouncing his arrogance even in the face of what happened to his own grandfather, events which he knew well (**vv. 18-22**). Despite his knowledge of Nebuchadnezzar's humiliation, Belshazzar has exalted himself and desecrated the vessels of the Lord's temple while praising false gods which do not see or understand. But he has not feared the God in whose hands is his life's breath (**v. 23**).

He now interprets the message (**vv. 25-28**). God has put an end to his kingdom; Belshazzar himself has been weighed on the scales of God's law and found deficient; and his kingdom has been transferred to the Medes and Persians. For a very short few hours, Daniel was once again third in the kingdom of Babylon (**v. 29**). The king was killed that evening in confirmation of Daniel's interpretation.

Even as Nebuchadnezzar humbled himself and received abundant mercies from the Lord, Belshazzar should have learned a lesson from his grandfather's history. God was not obligated to give him the multiple opportunities he had given Nebuchadnezzar. They were written in the history books, and he should have paid attention while he had a chance (Lk. 16: 27-29). He didn't, and he is now the negative example of kings and rulers who fail to do **homage to the Son** while they have opportunity (Ps. 2: 12). The Bible has now been completed for almost two

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<sup>346</sup> Keil, p. 199

<sup>347</sup> Zondervan NASB Study Bible

<sup>348</sup> Rushdoony, p. 35

thousand years, and almost every ruler on earth today has the opportunity to read it in his own language. Very few take advantage of this opportunity, and one terrible day their knees will be knocking and their hip joints slack like Belshazzar's (v. 6). The Putins of this world will no longer be strutting around their capitals.<sup>349</sup> They will appear trembling before a holy and wrathful God who will examine their dominions against the standard of His law and finding them utterly deficient in justice and righteousness. His wrath will then be unleashed.

Then **the kings of the earth** and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains;<sup>16</sup> and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb;<sup>17</sup> for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (Revelation 6:15-17 NASB)

The text in Revelation demonstrates that there will be a leveling of humanity in the judgment. Kings will be judged along with every common free man and slave. Yet, their punishment will often be greater, given their responsibility and privilege. **It is an abomination for kings to commit wickedness, for a throne is established on righteousness** (Prov. 16: 12). I believe this is the emphasis of the chapter.

### ***Chapter 6—Daniel in the Lion's Den***

The context of this chapter is the same as the previous one except that the Babylonian Empire has fallen to the Medo-Persian conquerors. Darius the Mede's reign is only 2 years long (possibly) so this episode takes place shortly after the transition of power. Daniel is about 80 years old when he is put in the lions' den.

To avoid internal corruption, Darius appoints 120 satraps over the kingdom who are in turn supervised by three commissioners, of whom Daniel is one (vv. 1-2). As always, Daniel's intelligence, integrity, and other endowments from the Lord distinguished him above the other commissioners so that the king planned to appoint him over the whole kingdom. His record was impeccable. He was "Mr. Clean", about whom no one could find even a smidgen of dirt. Out of jealousy, or in an effort to eliminate someone capable of exposing their own corruption, the other two commissioners and satraps attempt without success to find some accusation against Daniel (v. 4). Having failed to find anything, they finally lay a plan which was sure to succeed. The trap would be based upon his religious convictions (v. 5) and the religious traditions of the Medes and Persians (vv. 7-9). Quoting Klieforth, Keil summarizes the religious orientation of the Medo-Persian Empire, and ancient religion in general, an orientation which suited the purposes of Daniel's enemies:

"the object of the law [signed by Darius in v. 9] was only to bring about the general recognition of the principle that the king was the living manifestation of all the gods, not only of the Median and Persian, but also of the Babylonian and Lydian, and all the gods of the conquered nations....According to the general fundamental principle of heathenism, the ruler is the son, the representative, the living manifestation of the people's gods, and the world-ruler thus the manifestation of all the gods of the nations that were subject to him.<sup>350</sup> Therefore all heathen world-

<sup>349</sup> Putin is the present prime minister of Russia who has visions of reestablishing the former Soviet Union.

<sup>350</sup> This fact would also further explain Nebuchadnezzar's motives in chapter 3 in which all the different ethnic groups (vv. 4, 7) conquered by him were to bow down and worship the golden image. All the

rulers demanded from the heathen nations subdued by them, that religious homage should be rendered to them in the manner peculiar to each nation. Now that is what was here sought. All the nations subjected to the Medo-Persian kingdom were required not to abandon their own special worship rendered to their gods, but in fact to acknowledge that the Medo-Persian world-ruler Darius was also the son and representative of their national gods. For this purpose they must for the space of thirty days present their petitions to their national gods only in him as their manifestation. And the heathen nations could all do this without violating their consciences; for since in their own manner they served the Median king as the son of their gods, they served their gods in him. The Jews, however, were not in the condition of being able to regard the king as a manifestation of Jehovah, and thus for them there was involved in the law truly a religious persecution, although the heathen king and his satraps did not thereby intend religious persecution, but regarded such disobedience as only culpable [blamable] obstinacy and political rebellion.”<sup>351</sup>

In this same religious context we are also to understand the religious persecution of Christians during the Roman Empire. They were odious (disgusting) to the emperors, not because they worshipped Jesus, but because they refused to acknowledge the Caesars as the divine representations and manifestations of God on earth. For Christians this was *blasphemy*, for there was *only one genuine manifestation of God on earth, even Jesus Christ the Lord who was fully God and fully man with two distinct natures combined in one person*. Moreover, there was no confusion of one nature with the other, thus making Christ a “goddish man” or a “mannish God”. He was, rather, the God-Man<sup>352</sup> Darius could not be the mediator between God and man that he was assuming himself to be. God had yet to walk on earth in the person of Jesus Christ.

Aware of the king’s decree, and knowing full well that he was risking his life, Daniel continued his practice of praying three times a day in front of an open window toward Jerusalem (**v. 10**).

Not in Babylon was Daniel’s mediator, but in ruined Jerusalem, in the temple typically, in that altar wherein Christ and His sacrifice had been ritually set forth.<sup>353</sup>

Because of the irrevocable (unable to be revoked) nature of the laws of the Medes and Persians, even the king’s hands were tied so that he could not help Daniel (**vv. 12-15**). Any reversal of policy would be a fatal admission that there was no infallible manifestation of the gods in the person of the king. “As the voice of law, he could not deny himself without ceasing to be that bond of heaven and earth.”<sup>354</sup> But the inherent contradiction of Darius’ supposed infallibility is found in his anxiety for Daniel’s safety (**v. 14**). If he is the manifestation of the gods ruling on earth, and if his laws were infallible expressions of the will of the gods, then why is he anxious? The text gives us no indication that Darius was aware of the philosophical contradictions of his feelings toward Daniel, but Daniel’s prayers to the true God had contradicted all religious traditions of the day.

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different religions of the conquered peoples were supposedly consolidated together in the image of the Babylonian ruler who was the earthly representative and manifestation of all the gods. Thus, the golden image was most likely the image of the king himself.

<sup>351</sup> *Daniel*, p. 211; words in brackets mine).

<sup>352</sup> Formulated in the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD

<sup>353</sup> Rushdoony, p. 43

<sup>354</sup> Rushdoony, p. 43

God does not always deliver His people from physical harm, and we are told by the Lord Jesus not to fear those who can only kill the body but not the soul (Matt. 10: 28). But in Daniel's case, God had something he wanted to prove—*that He alone was God and that the kings of the earth could not mediate between God and man*. Prayer should be directed to God alone who would one day provide a suitable mediator in the person of Jesus Christ, His only begotten son, God in human flesh. Daniel spent the night unharmed, sleeping peacefully between hungry lions (did he use one lion as a pillow?). Was the vision of Isaiah being foreshadowed? Isaiah had predicted a world where a little boy would lead herds of lions and calves, leopards and goats, wolves and lambs (Isa. 11: 6). Daniel lives this vision as a promissory note to faithful believers who will inherit a world without violence.

The next day Daniel's accusers and their families suffer the same fate intended for him (**vv. 16-24**; Deut. 19: 16-21). So it will be for all who are committed to the religious traditions of *statism* where God is personified in the state, the government, or tyrants. Such unmitigated (undiminished) power separated from absolute truth and the moral will of God will eventually devour the same people who promote it—proven by the atrocities of the French Revolution of 1789 and the similar atrocities of the Soviet Union and any dictatorship of modern or ancient history.

The irony of the story is that the kingdom of man is *irreversibly and irrevocably* committed to harming the people of God. It's the law of the Medes and Persians as well as the law of humanism and the secular state. God, on the other hand, is *irreversibly* committed to blessing His people and punishing His enemies. The *Humanist Manifesto*, drafted in the US several years ago by numerous intellectual elite, declared that humanism “will bury the rotting corpse of Christianity under the monument of the secular state” (or some such nonsense. I can't remember the exact quote.) But many secular humanists, including John Dewey, the father of modern secular education in the US, have been buried since this document was drafted; and *their corpses* have rotted. The evangelical churches and seminaries in America have grown while liberal ones have shrunk. We should not be in any doubt about who will win this war. Secular humanism will win many battles, but its victory will be short-lived and the kingdom of God will endure forever.

Like Nebuchadnezzar before him, Darius does not immediately learn his theological lesson, and unlike Nebuchadnezzar, there is no evidence from the text that he *ever* did. He only decrees that the God of Daniel must be acknowledged and feared because **He delivers and rescues and performs signs and wonders in heaven and on earth (v. 27a)**. To Darius, Daniel's God is simply the first among equals in a pantheon of gods recognized by all the diverse people groups assimilated into the Persian Empire. He does not have to be worshipped exclusively.<sup>355</sup>

## ***Part Two—Daniel's Visions***

### ***Chapter 7—The Four Beasts***

With this chapter we begin a new division of *Daniel* and a different genre of literature from the historical narrative. The style is *apocalyptic*, similar to *Revelation*. For much of the

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<sup>355</sup> Young, p. 139 and Keil, p. 218

interpretation of this chapter and the remainder of the book, I am indebted to E.J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* and O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*, with more abbreviated contributions from C.F. Keil, *Daniel*, with whom Young has much agreement.

The vision of the four beasts corresponds to the vision of the statue in **Chapter 2** which is given to Nebuchadnezzar, but from a different perspective. In chapter 2, the vision was a magnificent statue symbolizing the power and glory of *human* kingdoms—Nebuchadnezzar’s perspective. But here, the vision consists of a series of *devouring beasts* opposing God and threatening his people—God’s perspective.<sup>356</sup>

The *four winds of heaven* have been interpreted<sup>357</sup> as “the heavenly powers and forces by which God sets the nations of the world in motion; and the number four has a symbolical meaning—that the people of all regions of the earth are moved hither and thither in violent commotion.” Thus, the sea is a reference to the nations or mankind. By the might of His providence (the four winds), God stirs up the nations of the world (the sea) *in the sovereign exercise of His eternal purpose*, something we surely learn from the pre-exilic prophets who predicted the fall of Israel and Judah to Assyria and Babylon. God uses the nations to accomplish His will.

Four beasts come out of the sea in succession—not at the same time—symbolizing the *successive kingdoms* of the world which have human origin unlike the kingdom which is cut out of the mountain without hands.<sup>358</sup> The first is like a lion with the wings of an eagle, a symbol which archaeologists have found among the ruins of ancient Babylon.<sup>359</sup> The *first beast* represents Babylon even as the head of gold in chapter 2 represents the same. The plucking of the beast’s wings has been interpreted as the humiliation of Nebuchadnezzar through insanity.<sup>360</sup> After his humiliation, the beastly kingdom of Babylon became kinder through the changed character of its ruler—symbolized by the beast standing on two feet and being given a human mind.

The *second beast, a bear*, is an inferior beast relative to the lion—just as silver is inferior to gold (**2: 32, 39**). This is the *Medo-Persian Empire* with one of its sides raised to indicate the emphasis upon the Persian element of the empire. The ribs are the many conquered peoples which Persia vanquished and assimilated into the empire (**3: 4, 7**).

The *third beast, a leopard* (v. 6), corresponding to the third kingdom of bronze in **chapter 2**, is not as strong as a bear but much faster and more agile, especially a leopard with four wings. The *Macedonian Empire of Alexander the Great*, who lived only 33 years, was unsurpassed in its lightning-swift conquest of the whole civilized world, including the Persian Empire. Since the number four often represents the extremities of the earth (as in **four winds** or **four corners**; Rev. 7: 1), the four heads may symbolize the incorporation of the whole world into the Macedonian Empire. Alternatively, they may symbolize the division of Alexander’s empire among four of his

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<sup>356</sup> Keil, p. 221

<sup>357</sup> Keil, pp. 222-223; cf. Young, p. 142

<sup>358</sup> I.e. without human origin—cf. comments on Chapter 2; also Rev. 13: 1

<sup>359</sup> Keil, p. 223

<sup>360</sup> Young, p. 144

generals—Ptolemy of Egypt, Seleucus of Syria, Cassander of the western portion of Macedonia, and Antigonus of Asia Minor.<sup>361</sup>

The *fourth beast* is **Rome** and corresponds to the legs of iron and feet partly of iron and partly of clay. The beast had iron teeth to devour its enemies. Rome did exactly that, extending its empire beyond anything the world had ever known, even to the limits of northern Britain, and thereby spreading its influence *over the whole earth* which continues to this very day. No people or nation could stand against the mighty power of the Roman legions. The beast had ten horns which should not be taken literally as ten distinct kingdoms arising from the Roman Empire. Young interprets the ten horns in terms of completeness as the *full number of human kingdoms* which owe their origin either directly or indirectly to the Roman Empire—not so much in terms of immediate origin as in terms of *philosophical and/or economic* origin. Included in this number could be many of the kingdoms of Europe past and present, including the US which is of European origin. Young remarks,

This is certainly not to deny that elements other than Roman have contributed to form the present European governments, but it cannot be denied that modern Europe may in a very legitimate sense have arisen from Rome.<sup>362</sup>

These ten kingdoms do not exist side by side but all of them partake of the character of the beast with iron teeth.

The *“little horn”* of **v. 8** arises out of the ten horns and plucks up three of the ten horns or kings (**v. 24**), a number whose significance is undetermined.<sup>363</sup> This is the *third period* of the *fourth beast*. The *first period* is the activity of the beast itself in **v. 7**. The *second period* is the period of the ten horns, and the *third period* or phase of this beast is the little horn which comes up among the ten horns.<sup>364</sup> Thus, the fourth beast is a *composite kingdom made up of many kingdoms* covering a large portion of world history beginning with the Roman Empire and continuing until the end of the world until the Anti-Christ. It corresponds to *the beast in Revelation 13* in its description (ten horns), activity (boasting and speaking against God and persecuting the saints), and the duration of its authority (time, times, and half a time) corresponding to 42 months of Revelation 13.<sup>365</sup>

And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore. Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns *were* ten diadems, and on his heads *were* blasphemous names.<sup>2</sup> And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like *those* of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority. (Rev. 13:1-2 NASB)

The little horn makes great boasts (**v. 8, 11**) indicating that he assumes the prerogatives which belong only to God. This is the **man of lawlessness who opposes and exalts himself above**

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<sup>361</sup> Calvin, contra Young

<sup>362</sup> Young, p. 149. We must qualify this remark by acknowledging the indebtedness of Europe and the US to the Protestant Reformation. Nevertheless, some of our governmental concepts have been influenced by Rome.

<sup>363</sup> Young, p. 150

<sup>364</sup> Young, pp. 148-149

<sup>365</sup> Assuming that a “time” is one year or 12 months—12 + 24+6= 42, but the number in both *Daniel* and *Revelation* is symbolical rather than an actual period of time.

**every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God** (2 Thess. 2: 4; read vv. 1-12 for context). He is the Anti-Christ who wages war with the saints and overcomes them until the appearance of the **Ancient of Days (vv. 21, 25)**.<sup>366</sup> The Anti-Christ will **make alterations in times and in law** thus assuming the rights and privileges of God who alone controls the times and standards of human conduct.<sup>367</sup> This gives us a hint that this little horn is some form of **human government** with legislative powers and the power of the sword to enforce its laws. The United Nations may be a faint shadow of this government, although we must say that the UN—despite its many failures and mismanagement—has accomplished much good in this war-torn world. On the other hand, the UN is just another form of ill-fated human government which proposes human solutions to spiritual problems, never getting at the root. UN soldiers have also committed many atrocities against the human beings they were supposed to protect.

Calvin believed that the little horn was symbolic of the *Caesars* of the Roman Empire who persecuted the church, but it is more likely that the revelation here refers to **the persecution of the church in any age**, including the Roman Empire represented by the fourth beast.<sup>368</sup> More Christians have been martyred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century than in all the other 19 centuries combined since the time of Christ, and the situation will probably grow worse in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>369</sup> The beast has been waging war with the church from the very beginning, and this warfare is brought to a climax in the little horn, the Anti-Christ, or **the man of lawlessness**. The **time, times, and half a time** of **v. 25** has been interpreted by many as three and a half years (**4: 16b**), but it should more likely be interpreted symbolically, not literally.<sup>370</sup> Three and a half is **one-half** of **seven**, a number indicating completion. If the saints are **given into his hand (v. 25)** for only **half** this period of time, the implication is that God will not allow his saints to be completely given over to the little horn.

The **Ancient of Days** (God the Father) now takes His seat upon the throne which is situated among other thrones (**v. 9**). The scene is that of a **courtroom** in which judgment is passed decisively upon the beast (**vv. 10, 22, 26**; cf. Rev. 4: 1-4). The beast with ten horns is slain along with the little horn (**vv. 11, 26**). The **Son of Man** (Jesus Christ) appears in the **clouds (v. 13)** to receive a kingdom from the Ancient of Days, an everlasting kingdom which will never be destroyed (**v. 14**; cf. **2: 44**; Lk. 22: 29-30; Rev. 11: 15). The text says **one like a Son of Man** possibly as an allusion to the fact that Christ has not yet appeared as the Son of Man in His incarnation on earth. The vision is speaking of events which will take place in the future and will extend from the time of Daniel until the second coming of Christ and the final judgment. **Son of Man** is in distinct contrast with the beastly kingdoms coming up out of the sea, and His coming in the clouds demonstrates **divine origin**. Christ assumed the designation, Son of Man, as His preferred self-identity during His earthly ministry rather than **Messiah**, a term laden with political overtones and misconceptions. In His final confrontation with the Sanhedrin, He assumes the identity in its fullest connotation found in **Daniel 7**, provoking the Sanhedrin's charge of blasphemy (Matt. 26: 64). Robertson also notes that nowhere in Daniel's prophecy does Christ receive the designation, **Son of David**, nor is the kingdom of God **restricted** to the

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<sup>366</sup> Young, p. 150

<sup>367</sup> Young, p. 160

<sup>368</sup> Young, p. 158

<sup>369</sup> Operation World

<sup>370</sup> Young, p. 161, who agrees with Keil



restored kingdom of Israel. It is much broader than this, embracing the whole world and all the nations of the world.<sup>371</sup>

Beginning in v. 15 the explanation of the vision is made to Daniel, some of which we have already covered. While the **Son of Man** receives the kingdom in v. 14, the **peoples, nations, and men of every language** receive the kingdom in v. 18, **But the saints [the elect people of God from every tribe, tongue, and nation] of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, for all ages to come.** This is a prediction of what Jesus told his followers, **“But seek for His kingdom, and these things shall be added to you. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom”** (Lk. 12: 31-32). In union and communion with Christ, Christians of every nation on earth will receive the kingdom bestowed upon Christ Jesus. This bestowal of the kingdom to the saints is such an important element of the vision that it is mentioned *three times* (vv. 18, 22, 27). **“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”** Christ has come into the world to restore the vice-regency of His kingdom to men who are made in His image and who willingly submit to His rule.

### *Chapter 8—The Ram and the Goat; the Persecution by Antiochus Epiphanes*

The first vision is in the first year of the Belshazzar’s reign (7: 1), and this one is in the third year of his reign (v. 1). **Chapter 7** concentrates on the *fourth* beast, the Roman Empire as the type of all the kingdoms of the world opposing the church and ending with the **little horn**, the Anti-Christ. **Chapter 8** concentrates on the *third* kingdom, the kingdom of *Greece* which conquers the Medo-Persian Empire, and one of the kingdoms which arises out of the third kingdom, the *Seleucid* kingdom from which *Antiochus IV (Epiphanes)* arises as the great persecutor of the Jewish nation.<sup>372</sup> Keep in mind that since both visions of **chapter 7** and **8** occur during the first and third years of Belshazzar (7: 1; 8: 1), co-regent of Babylon, the visions occur even before the fall of Babylon to Medo-Persia (chap. 5).

The ram is identified as the Medo-Persian Empire (v. 20) of which the *Persian* element is the most significant and powerful. *Cyrus the Persian* (the longer horn—v. 3) was a much more powerful king than *Darius the Mede* who reigned only two years. The ram butting westward, northward, and southward signifies the *directions* in which the Persian Empire spread its dominion and may correspond to the three ribs in the bear’s mouth (also Medo-Persia) of **chapter 7**.<sup>373</sup> The **male goat** is the *Macedonian Empire* of Greece from the **west** of Persia (vv. 5, 21) which conquers Medo-Persia decisively (v. 7). Its lightning-fast conquest of the whole earth is symbolized by the fact that the goat doesn’t even touch the ground, but flies (like a leopard with four wings—7: 6). *Alexander the Great* is the **conspicuous horn** between the eyes of the male goat (v. 5), a horn which is broken as soon as the goat magnifies himself. No sooner than Alexander the Great conquered the world, he dies either of malaria, poisoning, or suffocation in his own drunken vomit. Theories abound, but nothing certain can be confirmed.

After his untimely death, Alexander’s empire was *divided up into four parts* according to four of his inferiors (**four conspicuous horns** of v. 8) none of whom were ever as powerful as

<sup>371</sup> Robertson, pp. 255-258

<sup>372</sup> Young, Chapter 8

<sup>373</sup> Young, p. 168

Alexander (v. 22). The four horns have been identified as (1) Cassander of Macedonia, (2) Lysimachus of Thrace and Asia Minor, (3) Seleucus of Syria, and (4) Ptolemy of Egypt.<sup>374</sup> A small horn grows out of one of the four horns and grows toward the **south, toward the east, and toward the Beautiful Land**—i.e. toward the land of Palestine—and tramples down the sanctuary and the sacrifice **for 2300 evenings and mornings** (vv. 9-11). This is one of the successors of the *Seleucid* kingdom, *Antiochus Epiphanes*, who puts an end to the Jewish sacrifices in the temple for a period of time and persecutes the Jewish people who are faithful to God (the **stars**—v. 10; cf. 12: 3; Rev. 12: 3-4<sup>375</sup> By persecuting God's people, forbidding the sacrifice in the temple, and even later ordering the sacrifice of unclean animals, Antiochus exalted himself as God's equal (v. 11). His offenses are recorded in 1 Maccabees 1: 44-47.

And the king [i.e. Antiochus Epiphanes] sent letters by the hand of messengers unto Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, that they should follow laws strange to the land, and should forbid whole burnt offerings and sacrifice and drink offerings in the sanctuary; and should profane the sabbaths and feasts, and pollute the sanctuary and them that were holy.<sup>376</sup>

He who persecutes the people of God also persecutes God (Acts 9: 4-5). This persecution lasts 2300 evenings and mornings, a period somewhat ambiguous. Is Daniel speaking of 2300 *days* or is he adding *evenings and mornings together* in which case the 2300 may be divided by two to make 1150? This figure roughly corresponds to the 1290 days of *Dan. 12: 11* which reports the same persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes. This would render the period of persecution from 164-167 BC, three years. If 2300 actual days, the period is equivalent to roughly seven years, a significantly symbolical number, from 171 BC to 164 BC.<sup>377</sup>

The **time of the end** (v. 19) does not refer to the end of the world and the second coming of Christ, but the end of the *OT dispensation* and the inauguration of the Messianic reign of Christ and the Christian dispensation of the church. The **final period of indignation** is the latter part of the Syrian dynasty under Antiochus Epiphanes in which God allowed the Jewish nation to suffer for their continuing disobedience or **transgression** (v. 12).<sup>378</sup>

Antiochus Epiphanes is an historical type of all who persecute the church, especially government officials with the power of the sword. And although he should *not* be identified with the **little horn**, the Anti-Christ, of **chapter 7**, he is surely a foreshadowing of the Anti-Christ which persecutes the church at the end of the world. The severe persecution of the Jews at the end of the OT dispensation appears to correspond to the severe persecution of Christians at the end of the church age.

### **Chapter 9—Daniel's Prayer of Repentance in Behalf of the Nation**

The setting of this chapter is the first year of Darius the Mede who took over the kingdom of

<sup>374</sup> Young, p. 169

<sup>375</sup> Young, p. 171

<sup>376</sup> Quoted in Young, p. 172; words in brackets mine

<sup>377</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this ambiguity, see Young, *Daniel*, pp. 173-175

<sup>378</sup> Young, pp. 177-179

Babylon from Belshazzar (**5: 31**). Observing that Jeremiah had predicted 70 years of Babylonian exile (Jer. 29: 10) and that the 70 years were almost complete, Daniel sets his heart to fast and pray for his nation and the restoration of Jerusalem (**v. 2**).

Daniel could have rejoiced. Instead, he confesses his fear and grief for his people, acknowledging (vv. 1-19) that “all Israel,” both northern and southern kingdoms, deserved their captivity, but, *in spite of it, had learned nothing*. Lacking true faith, for most of them adversity had begat no healing or redeeming experience, worked no repentance, so that, Daniel feared, more captivity and punishment was their only earned destiny (Rushdoony, p. 63, emphasis mine).

It is first of all a prayer of repentance on behalf of the whole sinful nation which has broken the covenant by violating the commandments and ordinances and by refusing to listen to the warnings and admonitions of the prophets (**vv. 4-15**). His supplication comes in **vv. 16-19** in which he pleads with the Lord to turn away his wrath from Jerusalem and to restore the temple. He makes this plea not on the basis of any merit in himself or in the people of Israel, but purely on the basis of God’s great compassion for Israel and zeal for His own name. The answer to His prayer comes in **vv. 20-27** from the angel, Gabriel.

Beginning in **v. 24** and continuing through **v. 27**, Gabriel outlines God’s plan for the Jewish nation in answer to Daniel’s prayer (**v. 24; for your people and your holy city**). The interpretation of this section is quite possibly the most debated section in the whole of Scripture. I have attempted to summarize Young’s interpretation.<sup>379</sup> **Seventy weeks** have been ordained for the Jewish people for the accomplishment of six things (**v. 24**).<sup>380</sup>

Negative	Positive
1. to restrain the transgression	4. to bring in everlasting righteousness
2. to complete sin	5. to seal vision and prophet
3. to cover iniquity	6. to anoint a holy of holies

The first coming of Christ accomplished *all* these things. By His atoning death he **restrains transgressions** by making a new creation, a people who are zealous for good works. By that same atonement he **completes sin** by becoming sin on behalf of His people (2 Cor. 5: 21) and by satisfying the wrath of God against sin, the same idea as covering sin, the essential idea of atonement. He **brings in everlasting righteousness**, for in Christ the righteousness of God is revealed (Rom. 1: 17). To **seal** the vision and prophet (or prophecy) refers to the fulfillment of OT prophecy all of which finds its culmination in the person of Christ (1 Cor. 1: 20; Heb. 1: 2; Rev. 10: 4; 22: 10). In the last days God has spoken with finality in His Son, and there is no more need for additional vision and prophecy to be recorded. The NT Scriptures are not an exception to this statement in that they are but the exegesis or filling out of the revelation of Jesus’ person and work. They simply explain what has already been accomplished in Christ.<sup>381</sup> Anointing the holy of holies is either a reference to the sprinkling of the blood of Christ as the full and final sacrifice for sin (Heb. 9: 12), or if translated “to anoint the most holy”, it is a reference to the anointing of Jesus by the Holy Spirit.<sup>382</sup>

<sup>379</sup> Young, pp. 193-221

<sup>380</sup> Young, p. 197

<sup>381</sup> Robertson, p. 264

<sup>382</sup> Young, p. 201

The seventy week period is divided into segments, the *first segment* of seven weeks having its starting point in the **issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (v. 25)**. According to Young (as well as Calvin), the issuing of this decree took place in 539 BC (or 538 BC) with the decree of Cyrus of Persia permitting the Jews to return and rebuild the temple (2 Chron. 36: 22-23). The *end* of seven weeks is during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah roughly 80 years after the rebuilding of the temple.<sup>383</sup> According to Young, the numbers should not be interpreted literally but symbolically, and the appropriateness of this number is noted by Hengstenberg. The Year of Jubilee proclaiming release to Hebrew slaves was every 50 years—one year after a series of 7 years x 7 cycles or 49 years (Lev. 25: 8, 10, 13).<sup>384</sup> Symbolically, the exiled Jews are receiving their release from Babylonian bondage in the *spirit* of the Jubilee year—not 49 literal years.

Robertson takes a more literal approach to the time-frame without losing the symbolical significance. The 70 weeks of Daniel spans the period of time from the Medo-Persian kingdom to the death and resurrection of Christ. Furthermore, the context of Daniel 9 clearly connects the 70 weeks with the 70 years of exile. The seventy years of exile, in turn, is a *definite* period of time—not merely symbolical—corresponding to the Israel’s neglect of the Sabbath rest for the land (2 Chron. 36: 21). Thus, the seventy weeks “points to an *actual chronological ordering* in the purposes of God.” Robertson does not imply that the symbolical significance of the number seven can be ignored. Quite the contrary,

The perfection of sevens as embodied in the seventy sevens must speak of the movement toward the final climax of the Covenant Lord’s redemptive work in the world. The Sabbath rest that remains for the people of God must be seen as the ultimate goal of the seventy sevens (Heb. 4: 9).<sup>385</sup>

At the same time we must give due consideration to the possibility that Daniel’s prophecy is providing an accurate, though not exact, chronological sequence similar to the seventy years of exile dating from 605 BC to 536 BC. In **chapter 9** we find Daniel counting up the 70 years since the nation was taken into exile (9: 2). If he had considered Jeremiah’s prophecy of 70 years as *purely symbolical*, he would not have bothered to count. It would be natural, therefore, for Daniel to presume a *more literal period* of time for the coming of the **prince (v. 25)**. But it is apparent that seventy weeks are not literal weeks but seventy *Sabbath years* or 490 years (70x7 years) corresponding to all the Sabbath years (every seven years) during which the land was not given its rest.

It is commonly assumed that the beginning point of the seventy weeks is Cyrus’ decree to rebuild the *temple* in 538 BC, but this time-frame would reach only to 48 BC. (Robertson’s dates are somewhat different, 536 BC and 47 BC.) However, **Daniel 9: 25** does not mention the building of the temple, nor does it mention Cyrus. The text reads,

"So you are to know and discern *that* from the issuing of a decree **to restore and rebuild Jerusalem** until Messiah the Prince *there will be* seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. (Daniel 9:25 NASB)

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<sup>383</sup> Young, p. 205

<sup>384</sup> Young, p. 205; note by E. W. Hengstenberg

<sup>385</sup> Robertson, p. 260

The decree is not for the purpose of rebuilding the temple but for the rebuilding of **Jerusalem**. This occurred according to the decree of *Artaxerxes*, not Cyrus, in 445 BC corresponding to the rebuilding of the walls by Nehemiah (Neh. 1—2). Even as the Samaritans had opposed the rebuilding of the *temple* until the second year of Darius in 520 BC (Ezra 4: 1-5, 24; Hag. 1: 1), they had also opposed the rebuilding of the *walls of Jerusalem* later during Artaxerxes' reign from 465-424 BC.<sup>386</sup> Nehemiah, with God's help, had been able to persuade Artaxerxes to reverse his decision to stop the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and he is allowed to head up the efforts of restoring the walls (Neh. 2: 7-8).<sup>387</sup> I have filled out the story for the sake of the reader who is not familiar with the chronology of *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* in comparison with *Haggai* and *Zechariah*).

With the *starting point* of 445 BC (not 539 BC) the first seven weeks (49 years or 7x7) brings us approximately to 400 BC. The next 62 weeks (62x7= 434 years) brings us approximately to **30 AD**, the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ. This leaves the last week which is distinctive from the other 69 weeks in its Biblical-theological significance.<sup>388</sup> The approximations in dating are understandable in light of the fact that the symbolical sevens are necessary for understanding the typological movement of redemptive purpose from the rebuilding of the city of God, Jerusalem, to the climax of Christ's atoning work. Thus, even though Robertson's framework is more literal than others' who start from 538 BC, we should not force too rigid a chronology upon a prophetic text. While the Lord's communication to Jeremiah is in terms of **years** (Jer. 29: 10), the communication from the angel Gabriel to Daniel is in terms of symbolical sevens and Sabbath weeks. Furthermore, the Jubilee principle mentioned above deserves consideration.

After the *second segment of 62 weeks (v. 26)*, the Messiah is **cut off**, a term used for being cut off from the congregation of Israel (Ex. 12: 19; Lev. 7: 21; Isa. 53: 8, and others). This is a reference to the rejection of Christ by the Jews and the crucifixion.

"Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end *will come* with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. (Daniel 9:26 NASB)

The **people of the prince** are the Roman armies led by their prince, Titus Vespasianus, who destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70. Against the interpretation that this prince is Antiochus Epiphanes is the fact that Antiochus did not destroy Jerusalem or the temple in a physical sense during his persecution of the Jews from 171 (or 167-164 BC).<sup>389</sup> If it is argued that this takes place almost 40 years after the death of Christ (70 AD), the answer is that the text only requires that these two events—the cutting off of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem—occur **after** the 62 weeks. The two events do not have to take place at the same time.

The last week is found in **v. 27** in which someone makes (or **causes to prevail** or **confirms**) a covenant with the many. Who is this person who makes or confirms a covenant? It may appear

<sup>386</sup> Ezra 4: 6-23 is a parenthesis interrupting the story of the rebuilding of the temple.

<sup>387</sup> Robertson, pp. 261-262

<sup>388</sup> Robertson, p. 263

<sup>389</sup> Young, pp. 206-207

that the **he** of **v. 27** is the **prince who is to come**. Dispensationalists interpret this prince the ruler of a restored Roman Empire at the end of the present age. This interpretation requires the existence of a “gap” of undetermined time between the 69<sup>th</sup> week and the 70<sup>th</sup> week. However, there is no indication in the text that this gap exists.<sup>390</sup> As Young points out, the subject of the second main clause of **v. 26** is not the **prince who is to come** but **the people of the prince who is to come**. This leaves the **Messiah** of the first main clause of **v. 26** as the only other possible antecedent (noun which corresponds to the pronoun) of **he** in **v. 27**. It is the **Messiah** who makes the covenant or confirms the covenant in **v. 27**, not the prince in **v. 26**.

Young further argues that the verb of **v. 27** is not **to make** a new covenant but **to confirm** or **to cause to prevail** a covenant which is already in existence. The normal terms for making a covenant (**to cut a covenant**) are not used in the passage. Thus, in the last week of the 70 week period, Christ through his atoning work **confirms the covenant already established** between God and his people even from the time of Abraham.<sup>391</sup> He causes this covenant to prevail **with the many** which would not prevail if He did not die for their sins. The **many** is not the whole Jewish nation, but His elect people from the Jews and the Gentiles.

The timing of the Messiah’s confirmation of this covenant is also found in **v. 27**—in the **middle** of the last week. This doesn’t have to mean the exact middle but in the “midst” of the last week. The seventy weeks are not completed until Christ confirms the covenant in His blood. But when He does confirm it, His once-for-all-atoning sacrifice will put all other sacrifices (bloody or non-bloody) to an end because no longer needed (**but in the middle of the week, he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering**). It may be objected that the Jews continued making animal sacrifices until the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, but the effect of those sacrifices was null and void; and, therefore, cancelled out by the sacrifice of Christ. This is the clear teaching of *Hebrews* which shows that the Old Covenant with its inferior sacrifices is replaced by the New Covenant with the **better** sacrifice of Christ. Animal sacrifices are, at best, no longer necessary, and, at worst, an abomination to God because of the completed sacrifice of Christ who puts an end to all sacrifice.<sup>392</sup> For this reason the temple is referred to in **v. 27** as **the wing of abominations**. By their blatant rejection of the Messiah, the Jews had rendered any and all temple sacrifices from the crucifixion of Christ forward as nothing but **an abomination** before God. By saying, **on the wing of abomination will come one who makes desolate**, Gabriel is speaking figuratively of the conquest of Titus who comes over the highest point, the pinnacle (**wings**), of the temple to destroy it (**v. 26**).

It is further argued that the destruction of the temple in 70 AD was but the outward manifestation and confirmation of the end of the old order of things under the Old Covenant. Yet, this cessation of the Old Covenant was already set in motion by the death of Christ.<sup>393</sup> The last half of **v. 27** predicts the actual destruction of the temple by Titus of Rome in 70 AD and, therefore, the actual **end** of the abominable sacrifices of the Jewish people. Exegetically, this event does not have to take place **within** the seventh week, as did the cutting off of the Messiah. The only requirement of the text is that the destruction of the temple takes place **after** the 70<sup>th</sup> week.

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<sup>390</sup> Young, p. 208

<sup>391</sup> Young, pp. 209, 212

<sup>392</sup> Young, p. 217

<sup>393</sup> . (Young, p. 218).

The division of the last week into two parts makes it distinctive from the other 69. In the first half of the 70<sup>th</sup> week, Christ accomplishes the work of redemption and puts an end to sacrifice. In the last half of the week, a period of three and a half years, the events which take place are less clear. The three and a half may correspond to the **1290 days** (or **1335 days**) of persecution found in Daniel 12 and the **1260 days or time, times, and half a time** of persecution in Revelation 11—12. For this reason, Robertson views the last half-week as a longer period of time than the other 69 and one-half weeks. It ends with the destruction of the antichrist and the final consummation of this age.

### **Chapter 10—When Daniel Prays, God Shows Up**

Daniel stayed behind in Babylon when Cyrus of Persia ordered the rebuilding of the temple and the return of the exiled Jews to Jerusalem (cf. Ezra 1: 1-4, the account of the return permitted in the first year of Cyrus). It is now the third year of Cyrus (**v. 1**). In this year a message was revealed to Daniel, a message of **conflict** and one which he understood. For the context of this conflict, read Ezra 4—5: 5, a summary of which follows here. Upon the return of the exiles in 538 BC, the foundation of the temple was laid, but as soon as it was laid the exiles were approached by syncretistic Samaritans (half-breed descendants of Jews and Gentiles who had been deposited in the land by Esarhaddon of Assyria) who worshipped both Yahweh and the gods of Assyria. These long-time residents of the land appealed to the returned exiles to grant them the favor of helping them rebuild the temple. They were refused by Zerubbabel and Joshua (the political and priestly leaders of the exiles) on the grounds of religious syncretism. Their worship for nearly **two centuries** (722 BC to approximately 535 BC) had been mixed with idolatry and was therefore illegitimate. Consequently, these Samaritans had **nothing in common with us** [namely, the returned exiles] **in building the house to our God** (Ezra 4: 3).

As a result of being rebuffed by Zerubbabel and Joshua, the leaders of the Samaritans began a smear campaign against the exiles by accusing them of plans of rebellion against the Persian rulers. In this way they were able to halt the building of the temple “**all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia** (not Darius the Mede)—a period of about 14 years.<sup>394</sup> After that period, about 520 BC, Haggai and Zechariah are commissioned by the Lord to shake up the returned exiles, some of whom were living in the luxury of their own well-built houses pretending that the political obstacles to finishing the temple were too great (Hag. 1). But this comes later in 520 BC. In 536 BC, the third year of Cyrus, Daniel is not rejoicing in the return of the exiles two years earlier because he learns that the building has been halted by opposition.<sup>395</sup>

Daniel had been mourning, praying and fasting for three weeks when the vision of a man appeared to him with eyes **like flaming torches** and arms and feet of **polished bronze** (**v. 6**). The description gives away the identity of this individual who perfectly fits the description of **one like the son of man** in Revelation 1: 13-15 whose **eyes were like a flame of fire; and his feet were like burnished [or polished] bronze**.

As John in *Revelation*, Daniel is now confronted by the terrifying figure of Jesus Christ whose pre-incarnate appearance in *Daniel* is similar to his post-incarnate (after the flesh) appearance in

<sup>394</sup> C.F. Keil, *Ezra*, pp. 61-62

<sup>395</sup> Keil and Calvin

*Revelation*. (This is called a theophany.) The episode was so terrible, in fact, that the men with Daniel hid themselves from Christ even though they did not see Him or even hear Him; for Daniel falls into a deep sleep **as soon** as he hears the sound of His voice. By that time, his companions had already fled.<sup>396</sup> Thus, the glory of Christ terrifies both Daniel and the men with him. Daniel, a man who had spent the night with lions without any evidence of fear, now turns a deathly white color as the blood drains out of his head and his knees buckle from this awesome sight of his Savior. He now falls into a deep sleep as soon as he hears the sound of Christ's words.

Based on the description given of the pre-incarnate Christ in **vv. 5-6** and Daniel's response, I am inclined to wonder whether a *different individual*, and not a theophany, appears to speak with Daniel in **v. 10** through the remainder of the chapter. If he is still the incarnate Christ rather than a created angel, did Christ modify His appearance to calm Daniel's fears? Somewhat in favor of the position that Daniel is still talking to Christ is the fact that **v. 16** speaks of **one who resembled a human being** and **v. 18** speaks of **one with human appearance**, both descriptions corresponding to the vision of a **man** in **v. 5**. There is also no further explanation of the figure of **v. 11** which would lead us to believe that he is a different figure from **v. 5**.<sup>397</sup> Yet there is some ambiguity in the descriptions of **vv. 16** and **18** which are employed by expositors with a different view from Keil. Ronald S. Wallace acknowledges the ambiguity but interprets the figure of **vv. 10-21** as "another heavenly being" and "a fellow angel along with Michael".<sup>398</sup>

The one talking to Daniel came in response to Daniel's prayers from the first day he began to pray but was opposed by the prince of Persia for **twenty-one days**—corresponding to the three weeks of Daniel's mourning, fasting and praying. The **prince of Persia** is another angelic being at the disposal of Satan as the **guardian angel [demon] of Persia**.<sup>399</sup> But, we might ask, is a demonic prince of Persia any match for Christ so that he can prevent Christ from coming to Daniel's aid for three weeks? Moreover, why does Christ need Michael, **one of the chief princes (v. 13)** to come **help** him? Does God need any help from angels, or does He simply choose to use angels in the prosecution of His plans? For that matter, does God need Daniel's prayers, although assuredly God chooses to use the prayers of His people to accomplish His will?

We understand that the created angelic beings like Gabriel, Michael, and others need our prayers in the accomplishment of their work, and we need them in the accomplishment of our prayers.<sup>400</sup> Wallace says that in this passage "We are indeed given a remarkable revelation of the communion of heaven and earth in the cosmic conflict." The passage brings up many theological questions about the doctrine of angels and the power struggle in heaven which manifests itself in the earthly realm (Eph. 6: 10-20). The world we see with our eyes is not the only world in existence. There is another unseen world of angelic and demonic struggle which is intimately relevant to the events of current affairs and world history. We know this from **Daniel 10** and the entire book of *Revelation*. At the very least we can say that the angelic world is energetically employed in the execution of our prayers. In the words of Scripture, **Are they [the angels] not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will**

<sup>396</sup> (Keil, p. 414).

<sup>397</sup> Keil believes he is one and the same, p. 417).

<sup>398</sup> Ronald S. Wallace, *The Message of Daniel*, p. 172. See also Allan M. Harman, *Daniel*, p. 254).

<sup>399</sup> Young, p. 227; Keil, p. 416. Calvin disagrees with this interpretation.

<sup>400</sup> Wallace, pp. 178-179



**inherit salvation** (Heb. 1: 14)? We may also say that it is the good pleasure of God to work out His providential will not all at once with one terrifying word of judgment (something He is quite capable of doing), but gradually throughout human history.

The individual of **v. 18**, whoever he is, now returns to fight against the prince of Persia and is also preparing himself for yet another cosmic battle to come, the fight with the **prince of Greece**, another demonic being standing behind the coming Macedonian Empire (**v. 20**).

### **Chapter 11—12: 4—Conflicts until the End of the World**

Ronald Wallace has noted the difference in the prophecy of this chapter from the other predictive prophecies found in *Daniel*. Rather than graphic visual images of beasts and horns which possess eyes, we have only *historical narrative*. The prophecy is also notably more detailed than those of **7—9**.<sup>401</sup> **Chapter 11** is a continuation of the previous one in which the angel<sup>402</sup> is still revealing the answer to Daniel's prayers of the previous three weeks (cf. **10: 2-3, 12, 21**). Thus, not Daniel, but the angel is speaking in **11: 1** as the one who arose in the first year of Darius to be an encouragement to King Darius when he overtook Babylon (**5: 31**).<sup>403</sup>

From **vv.1-4** we have a replay of some of the events which have already been predicted with added detail. Three more kings will arise in Persia. There is some difference of opinion whether there are three more after Darius or three more after Cyrus. Then there will be a fourth (**v. 2**). The four kings have been identified as **(1)** Cyrus, **(2)** Cambyses, **(3)** Darius Hystaspis, and **(4)** Xerxes, the most powerful and the richest king of Persia. If **11: 2** is written during the reign of Cyrus, then the four kings would be **(1)** Cambyses, **(2)** Smerdis, **(3)** Darius Hystaspis, and **(4)** Xerxes. There were actually more than four kings after Cyrus, but the emphasis is upon the four most important epochs following Cyrus.

**Verses 3-4** refer to *Alexander the Great* whose kingdom was not inherited by his two sons, both of whom were assassinated. The kingdom was eventually portioned out to four generals—the **four points** (**v. 4**; cf. comments on **Chapter 8**).

Beginning in **v. 5** we are given new predictive prophecy of events which happen after the break-up of the Macedonian Empire of Alexander. The **king of the South** is *Ptolemy I* (Soter) who obtained Egypt and ruled there from 322-285 BC. **One of his princes** was *Seleucus* who was also one of Alexander's officers who received the satrap (province) of Babylonia. The Seleucid dynasty is dated from 312 BC when Seleucus defeated Antigonos who had at one time challenged his authority in Babylonia. The Seleucid dominion actually exceeded that of the Ptolemies and reached westward from Phrygia to the Indus River in the east (**who** [Seleucus] **will gain ascendancy over him** [Ptolemy Soter]).

The **kings of the South** are the Ptolemies of Egypt and the **kings of the North** are the Seleucids of Syria and Palestine who made Antioch the capital of their kingdom. Hence, the kings of the

<sup>401</sup> Wallace, p. 182).

<sup>402</sup> Or Christ, depending on how you prefer to interpret chapter 10

<sup>403</sup> For a detailed account of the historical events predicted in this chapter, see E. J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel*, from which most of the following material is derived, except where noted. For a more abbreviated account, but which sometimes gives more clarity, see Ronald S. Wallace, *The Message of Daniel*.

North were accustomed to taking the name of “Antiochus”.<sup>404</sup> In a marriage alliance designed to make peace between these two rivals (**v. 6**), one of the Ptolemies (Philadelphus) gave his daughter, Berenice, to Antiochus II. But Antiochus II was already married to Laodice who had born Antiochus two sons. Berenice’s father Ptolemy II Philadelphus died only two years later, and Berenice was divorced by Antiochus II (**But she will not retain her position of power; v. 6**) who then takes Laodice back as his wife. Not very forgiving, and fearful of Antiochus changing his mind and taking Berenice back again, Laodice has Antiochus II poisoned (**nor will he remain with his power**) and then conspired with one of her sons, Seleucus Callinicus, to murder both Berenice and her infant son. By doing so, Seleucus could now take the throne himself. These events took place around 250 BC.<sup>405</sup>

The brother of Berenice, Ptolemy III in Egypt, comes to power and avenges the death of his sister by murdering Laodice (**v. 7**). He also manages a successful military campaign in the North in which he is able to bring back much plunder to Egypt and is awarded the name Euergetes (“well-doer”) (**v. 8**).

**Then the latter** (i.e. the king of the North who is Seleucus Callinicus, the son of Laodice) marched against Ptolemy III in 240 BC but is defeated (**v. 9**). His sons, Seleucus III and Antiochus the Great, then begin a very successful military campaign which ends at the doorstep of Ptolemy III of Egypt (**v. 10**). One of the sons, Seleucus III, is killed in Asia Minor before the campaign reaches Egypt, the reason that only Antiochus the Great is mentioned in the last part of **v. 10 (he again may wage war up to his [Ptolemy’s] very fortress)**. This attack brings a violent reaction from Ptolemy III who then attacks the North and defeats Antiochus the Great at the battle of Raphia in 205 BC (**v. 11—but the multitude will be given into the hand of the former**).<sup>406</sup>

By his victory, Ptolemy III becomes proud but **will not prevail (v. 12)** because he did not follow through with his victory. Historically, he is known as a man given to a life of unrestrained immorality and leisure, leaving him little time for war.

Antiochus the Great (Antiochus III) of the North raises another army and attacks Egypt which is now ruled by Ptolemy’s son, Ptolemy IV, who is only four years old. This takes place about 218 BC (**v. 13**). **In those times** many ally themselves with Antiochus III (the Great) against Egypt, including Philip of Macedon and certain **violent ones among your people**, i.e. Jews who allied themselves with Antiochus in his campaign against Egypt. Apparently they were attempting by human means to **fulfill the vision** of certain prophecies—not necessarily biblical prophecies.

**Verses 15-16** tell of the conflict between Antiochus III and Ptolemy IV which ends in 198 BC with Antiochus III in control of Palestine (**the Beautiful Land**), thus putting the Jews in the hands of the Seleucid dynasty.<sup>407</sup> Wanting to solidify his kingdom, Antiochus III gives his daughter, Cleopatra, in marriage to the reigning Ptolemy (194 BC) in order to have her as a spy inside the Ptolemaic kingdom (**to ruin it; v. 17**), but this alliance fails because she constantly

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<sup>404</sup> Wallace, p. 184

<sup>405</sup> Wallace, p. 184

<sup>406</sup> Wallace, p. 184

<sup>407</sup> Wallace, p. 185

sides with her husband instead of her father (**But she will not take a stand for him or be on his [her father's] side**).<sup>408</sup>

Antiochus III now turns his attention westward to the **coastlands** of the Mediterranean in Asia Minor where he suffers a humiliating defeat from Rome and must return home where he must defend even his own homeland (**vv. 18-19**). In Antiochus's place comes Seleucus IV (Philopater) who attempted to levy more taxes<sup>409</sup> and was possibly poisoned by his prime minister Heliodorus, or perhaps by his own brother, Antiochus IV (**v. 20**).

At this point in the story (**v. 21**), we are introduced to Antiochus IV (*Antiochus Epiphanes*) the younger brother of Seleucus IV who was poisoned. He was the master of intrigue, a cunning, **despicable person** who was able to steal the kingdom from his brother's son (**v. 21b**), Demetrius Soter, who was supposed to be next in line (**on whom [Epiphanes] the honor of kingship has not been conferred**). The next several verses (**vv. 22-29**) describe the military and political activity of Antiochus Epiphanes particularly against Egypt. He prevails against them more than his predecessors (**he will accomplish what his fathers never did—v. 24**; i.e. what they never did in Egypt). He succeeds mostly by deception and intrigue, even gaining a following in Egypt against their own ruler (**vv. 23-26—for schemes will be devised against him [the ruler of Egypt] and those who eat his choice food will destroy him [the ruler of Egypt]**). A false truce is reached which neither the king of Egypt nor Antiochus intends to keep (**v. 27**).

**Verse 28** introduces us to the hatred of Antiochus Epiphanes toward the Jewish religion (**his heart will be set against the holy covenant**). A third campaign (*Daniel* does not mention the second) against Egypt (**v. 29**) does not go as well as the second because of the intervention of Roman ships (**will not turn out the way it did before**), and this defeat embitters him even more against the Jewish religion. He will be able to make use of apostate Jews who will help him carry out his goals (**those who forsake the holy covenant**). **At the appointed time** indicates the angel's (and Daniel's) orientation toward history as the unfolding of God's providence.

God will use Antiochus to punish the apostasy of the Jewish nation, for by this time (171 BC), the religious leaders of the nation were thoroughly corrupt, a corruption which continues to be reflected in the behavior of the priesthood in the gospel accounts of the NT.

Antiochus' rage against Jewish orthodoxy is now described in **v. 31**. His forces deceitfully guard the temple, and his army attacks Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, taking even women and children as prisoners. He sets up the statue of Zeus in the temple which the angel calls **the abomination of desolation (v. 31)**. The lawful sacrifices are discontinued. Many of the faint of heart in Israel are enticed to go along with his profaning of the Jewish laws by eating unclean foods. Others, **the people who know their God** refused to eat such food (**v. 32**), and many were put to death (**v. 33**). Any Jew found with a copy of the Torah (the Law) or any child who had been circumcised would be executed. The imposition of Greek worship and life was heavily enforced as the unifying agenda of his empire, and had he succeeded, the Hellenization of Palestine would have prevented the reception of the gospel among the Jewish people.<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>408</sup> Wallace

<sup>409</sup> Calvin

<sup>410</sup> (Robertson, p. 273).

Among the faithful Jews were the Hassideans who believed only in passive resistance, compared to the Maccabees (**a little help; v. 34**) who believed in armed revolt against Antiochus' tyranny. Their leader was *Judas Maccabeus* who was so successful for a time that he was able to attract to his cause *hypocrites* (**many will join with them in hypocrisy**) who had at first given in to apostasy but under Judas entertained a measure of hope for victory (**v. 34**).<sup>411</sup> It would be a time of trial and testing for the Jewish people, a time which God would use to purge and purify His people, separating the wheat from the chaff (**v. 35**).

Beginning in **v. 36** and continuing to the fourth verse of **chapter 12**, most commentators agree that the prophecy is *no longer* about Antiochus Epiphanes, but a **king** or kingdom which is far more powerful than his and more threatening to the people of God.<sup>412</sup> The language of **v. 36** is very similar to what Paul says of **the man of lawlessness...who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God** (2 Thes. 2: 3-4). Partly for this reason Calvin believed the passage to refer collectively to the Caesars of the Roman Empire.<sup>413</sup> But the Caesars of the Roman Empire allowed the worship of many gods while this king will show no regard for any other god than himself (**v. 37**).<sup>414</sup> It is also doubtful that the dangers threatened by the man of lawlessness expired with the Roman Empire which, along with Antiochus Epiphanes, was a suitable type of the Anti-Christ, but not the Anti-Christ himself.

**Verse 37** indicates that this king **will show no regard for the gods of his fathers**. The word translated **gods** by the NASB is *elohim* which is translated "God" by the KJV and NKJ. Young and Gabelein believe this is proof of the *Jewish origin* of the Anti-Christ as one who has abandoned the God of his fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Instead, he will honor a god of war; he will be a man given to the shedding of blood.

The final conflict of **vv. 40-45** mentions the continuing struggle against Egypt which cannot apply to Antiochus Epiphanes (whom some commentators interpret as the king in **v. 36**). Antiochus had already failed in his third campaign against Egypt because of Roman ships sent from Cyprus to protect Egypt (**v. 30**). Any other attempt would have been futile, and there is no historical record of any further attacks by him against Egypt.<sup>415</sup> Mention is also made of Moab (**v. 41**) which no longer existed as a nation by the time of Antiochus. This would give us a hint that this section is to be interpreted *symbolically* since Moab, along with Edom and Ammon—the primary enemies of the nation of Israel—are symbolic for all the enemies of God's people. Thus, the enemies of God's people escape when the Anti-Christ comes to power and overthrows them for a short time. The symbolism is further enhanced by the fact that the Anti-Christ (if indeed this is the subject of the passage) **will pitch the tents of his royal pavilion between the seas and the beautiful Holy Mountain**, i.e. Mount Zion or Jerusalem, a symbol for the people of God. God's people are his primary targets.

Exactly what is predicted about the Anti-Christ is difficult to determine from these verses except that **he will come to his end, and no one will help him**. The **time of distress such as never**

<sup>411</sup> Wallace, p. 186

<sup>412</sup> It may be helpful to read the comments on Chapter 7 along with this section.

<sup>413</sup> Calvin, *Daniel*, also Rushdoony, p. 77

<sup>414</sup> Young, p. 247, who identifies the king as the Anti-Christ

<sup>415</sup> Young, pp. 250-251

**occurred (12: 1)** reminds us of Jesus' warning of terrible times at the end of the world, **for then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall** (Matt. 24: 21). The prophetic method is also similar since Jesus' predictive prophecy of the end of the world blends with his prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD in that same chapter just as this prophecy of the end time blends with the prophecy of Antiochus Epiphanes. A very distant event is predicted at the same time as a less distant event.

The **book** is also mentioned, and everyone whose name is written in the book will be saved, a concept parallel to Revelation 13: 8, **And all who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.** The saints whose names are written in the book will be resurrected to everlasting life while those whose names are not written in the book will awake to eternal destruction (**v. 2**; cf. 1 Thess. 4: 16). Believers are likened to the stars of the heavens (**v. 3**) that shine forever and ever, a likeness which may also be found in Revelation 12. In that chapter, Satan sweeps away a third of the stars (a symbol of persecution) and the woman (the church) has on her head a crown of twelve stars (a symbol of the 12 tribes and the 12 apostles upon which the church is built). Abraham was promised descendants who will be as numerous as the stars of the heavens (Gen. 15: 5). This book is sealed up until the end of time and is concealed to all except the man dressed in linen (**12: 9**).

All such references point, not to some *type* of the end time, but to the *very end of time itself* when the Lord comes to save his people and destroy their enemies.

### **Chapter 12: 5-13—The End of Daniel's Vision**

The man dressed in linen is the same as the one in **10: 5 (v. 6)**. The length of time for all these things to be completed is **a time, times, and half a time**, the same time frame given in **chapter 7** for the saints to be worn down and given into the hand of the **little horn**. Again, this is *one-half of seven*, a number signifying completion. The time allowed for the persecution of the church **will not be complete** which would result in her utter destruction. The time will be cut short in assurance of her preservation. Speaking of **the great tribulation**, Jesus says,

“And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short” (Matt. 24: 22; cf. Rev. 12: 14).

**Verse 10** should be compared with **11: 32** which may appear to support the interpretation that **11: 35** through **chapter 12** is talking about the persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes. But given the overwhelming symbolism of the end times summarized above, it is more accurate to say that the persecution of Antiochus is a *type* of the persecution of the Anti-Christ, the *antitype*. The same can be said for all such persecution under the Roman emperors and throughout the church age. This typical relationship is supported by **v. 11** which is almost a repetition of **11: 31** a decisive reference to the persecution under Antiochus. And once again, as in **7: 25**, the period of persecution is given a definite limitation. This time, the limitation is expressed in days to highlight the fixed, limited time (although not the literal time) during which God will allow his saints to suffer extreme persecution. He will not allow us to be tried and tempted beyond what we can bear (1 Cor. 10: 13). The number of days, **1290**, is roughly equivalent to **a time, times,**

**and half a time.** To this is added 45 days making **1335 days.** It is difficult to determine the significance of the added days.

Concerning the extreme tribulation which the church will face at the end of the age, Wallace remarks,

We have to remember when we face this very terrible picture that this does not necessarily mean that everything in human history favours the side of evil, even for a limited period. The tribulation is due to the tension and fear that evil has of the triumphant and developing kingdom of Christ around it. It is the increase of goodness on earth that causes this intense reaction of evil, from the simple motive of fear.<sup>416</sup>

Quoting James Denney on 2 *Thessalonians*, he continues,

The question is sometimes asked *whether the world gets better or worse as it grows older*, and optimists and pessimists take opposite sides upon it. *Both...are wrong. It does not get better only, nor worse only, but both.* Its progress is not simply a progress in good, evil being gradually driven from the field; nor is it simply a progress in evil before which the good continually disappears: *it is a progress in which good and evil alike come to maturity*, bearing their ripest fruit, showing all that they can do, proving their strength to the utmost against each other; the progress is not in good itself or in evil itself but in the antagonism of the one to the other.<sup>417</sup>

At the end of the passage we find a benediction from the Lord himself, the man dressed in linen who is still speaking (v. 12). Christ in His earthly ministry gives us a similar benediction in Mark. 13: 13 but more in the form of a declaration, **And you will be hated by all on account of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved.**

The affliction of the saints is for the purpose of *purification*, and this is one of the central themes of the book. What must the saints do when confronted with the impending crisis of our times? The book of *Daniel* gives us the answer: God has appointed the **time**, and He is in control; therefore, keep the faith no matter what happens. There is eternal rest and reward waiting at the end for those who endure (v. 13).

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<sup>416</sup> Wallace, p. 193

<sup>417</sup> Wallace, p. 193; emphasis mine



## ***XXI. The Prophecy of Haggai***

### ***Introduction***

The year is 520 B.C. It is the second year of the reign of Darius Hystaspis (not Darius the Mede of Dan. 5: 31), king of the Medo-Persian Empire. Eighteen years earlier (538 B.C.), Cyrus the king had issued a decree for the return of the Jewish exiles to rebuild the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 36: 22-23; Ezra 1: 1). This decree was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah who named Cyrus, 150 years before he was born, as the one who would build His temple (Isa. 44: 28; 45: 1). The world empire of Babylon would fall to the Medo-Persian Empire according to the prophecy of Jeremiah 25: 12 and Daniel 2: 39. Jeremiah prophesied the return of the Jewish people from the 70 year exile in the land of Babylon (Jer. 29: 10).

After the decree of Cyrus in 538 BC, some of the Jews took advantage of the opportunity to return to the land of promise and rebuild the temple. Those who led them were Zerubbabel, the civil leader of the Jews, and Joshua the priest (Hag. 2: 2). The foundation of the temple was laid amid shouts of joy from the younger Jews who did not remember the size and splendor of the original temple, and the sound of weeping from the older Jews who remembered its former size and glory. The new temple seemed like nothing in comparison to the original one (Ezra 3: 10-13). Later in his prophecy, Haggai would encourage those who were disappointed in the new temple, informing them that the **latter glory of this house** would be **greater** than the one built by King Solomon (Hag. 2: 1-9). He was speaking prophetically of a fulfillment which even he did not fully understand—the glory of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, God incarnate in human flesh (Jn. 2: 19-21) and His church consisting of Jews and Gentiles. The temple in the OT was the symbol of God's presence with His people, the Immanuel principle—"God with us" (Ex. 25: 8; Matt. 1: 23). When Jesus came in the flesh, someone much greater than the temple was standing in the presence of the Jews as the ultimate fulfillment of the Immanuel principle (Matt. 12: 6).

For a while, the construction of the temple went well, and the **foundation** was completed in the second year of their return or about 534 B.C. (Two years elapsed from the time of the decree to the first arrivals in Jerusalem, 536 B.C.) However, no sooner than it was laid, opposition from other people living in Judea began in earnest. These colonists had been brought into the land by Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, after the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. They approached Zerubbabel to allow them to help the Jews in the construction of the temple, claiming that they had been worshipping the Lord since they had settled there (Ezra 4: 1-2). In actual fact, their worship was a syncretistic mixture of the worship of Yahweh, the true God of Israel, and a host of false gods. Because their worship of Yahweh was not genuine, Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the other elders rightly refused any help from the syncretists (Ezra 4: 2). (This would have been the equivalent of recruiting Muslims to build Christian churches.)

For this rejection, the Samaritans became fierce enemies of the Jews and did everything they could politically or otherwise to halt the work done on the temple. The work was halted for the **five years** remaining of Cyrus' reign (v. 5), the **seven years** of Cambyses' reign (527-521 BC), **seven months** of Psuedo-Smerdis' reign, and **one year** of Darius' Hystaspis' reign (until 520



BC)—almost fourteen years (Ezra 4: 4-5).<sup>418</sup> Nothing was done on the temple for the next fourteen years until the appearance of the prophet Haggai in the second year of Darius the king of Persia (520) on the first day of the sixth month, and Zechariah two months later (Hag. 1: 1; Zech. 1: 1).

Due to political opposition, the former zeal of the returnees had grown cold. According to Ezra 4: 23, it appears from the context in v. 24 that they had been *forced* to stop rebuilding the *temple*. However, v. 23 actually refers to the efforts of Bishlam, Mithredath, and Tabeel to stop the rebuilding of the *city walls* many years later during the reign of **Artaxerxes**.<sup>419</sup> Ezra 4: 7 through 4: 23 is out of chronological sequence from the rest of the story in Ezra 4. The opposition to the rebuilding of the *temple* was simply a reminder to Ezra of what happened later in the attempt to halt the building of the *walls*.<sup>420</sup>

Ezra returns with a different group of exiles in about 458 BC, almost 80 years after the return of the first exiles in 536 BC. But he is writing not only about what happened during his day but also what happened during the days of the first returning exiles, including the prophecy of Haggai and Zechariah (Ezra 5: 1). Aside from all of the political intrigue reported in Ezra 4: 5 (which occurred from 536 to 520 BC), the important thing was that God was not satisfied with *any* excuses not to proceed with the rebuilding of the temple, and his dissatisfaction is registered in the prophecies of *Haggai* and *Zechariah*.

## Chapter 1

### Verses 2-5

Whatever the real opposition which prevailed for fourteen years, the returning exiles had convinced themselves that the time was not right for the rebuilding of the temple. They believed they were providentially hindered” from continuing their efforts in the face of seemingly insurmountable political opposition. After all, were they not supposed to be subject to the civil magistrate? Had not Jeremiah commanded them to seek the welfare of their captors (Jer. 29: 7)? But Jeremiah had also told them that the Babylonian captivity would last 70 years, and these 70 years were complete. Isaiah had given them the prophecy of Cyrus who would issue a decree to rebuild the temple, and no other prophetic message had been given them to the effect that this rebuilding effort would come to an abrupt halt because of opposition. In the absence of further instructions, the Jews should have continued with the building. Opposition from others, even those in high places, is not necessarily a sign that God’s people should stop doing something, especially if it is clear that what they are doing is the will of God—as was the case here. God had clearly expressed His will for the temple to be rebuilt through the prophecy of Isaiah and Jeremiah. There was no prophetic word from anyone else that He had changed His mind, and this is perfectly clear in Haggai’s message.

The hypocrisy of the Jews in their fourteen year slumber is obvious from their actions. While it was *not* time to rebuild the temple, there was *plenty of time*, and apparently money, to pursue

<sup>418</sup> Keil, *Ezra*, pp. 61-62

<sup>419</sup> Artaxerxes reigned from 465 to 424 BC.

<sup>420</sup> Bill T. Arnold, Bryan T. Beyer *Encountering the Old Testament*, p. 266. See also *Eerdman’s Handbook to the Bible*, p. 307.

their own building programs. The **paneled houses** of v. 4 is a reference to dwellings which were not the average fare of the poor Israelite, but houses adorned with a large degree of embellishment and ornamentation. They were not only comfortable, but elegant, “placing these stately mansions in disgraceful contrast with the unroofed, unwalled foundations of that house that ought to have been the noblest in the city”.<sup>421</sup> Personal houses were going up everywhere, but the house of God lay desolate.

The sinfulness of their misplaced priorities can be understood only in the context of the significance of the temple. The temple was the symbol of the presence of God (Ex. 25: 8) and His kingdom. It was the place of worship, and its destruction by the king of Babylon was a judgment upon the wayward Jews who had failed to worship the true God. Now, the returning Jews commissioned to resurrect the true worship of God in the land were falling into the same trap as their idolatrous ancestors. If they were not concerned about rebuilding the temple, neither were they concerned about worshipping God, for God must be worshipped in the temple. They had lost their focus. Instead of preoccupation with the kingdom of God and zeal for His house, they were preoccupied with personal peace and affluence by avoiding the painful confrontations of their enemies and pandering to earthly comforts.

Another greater Prophet warns us about such preoccupation in Matthew 13 when He says,

“And the one on whom seed [of the gospel] was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful” (Matt. 13: 22).

Forgetting their dreams of the kingdom of God in the Promised Land, the returning Jews became anxious to fulfill the hopes and ambitions of their own personal kingdoms.

There should be little doubt that *Haggai* has been pressed into service for the construction of countless Roman Catholic cathedrals throughout Europe which now lie desolate in the wake of modernism, secularism, and post-modernism. Preachers in the US and Uganda will do the same to promote one building program or another, forcefully maintaining that what is being done is “the work of God.” But we cannot build the kingdom of God with brick and mortar. Europe is now spiritually desolate, and its elegant cathedrals serve as dimly lit museums of a faith lost long ago to the secular mind and liberal theology—the same mindset now threatening Uganda and the US. The temple of God was only the **symbol** of His kingdom and not the kingdom itself, and Jeremiah warned the Judaites not to put their hopes upon it (Jer. 7).

When conversing with the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus clearly said, “...an hour is coming when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem [at the temple], shall you worship the Father...But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth” (Jn. 4: 21, 23-24). Jesus, who is the fulfillment of the temple motif found in the OT (“God with us”), tells us that **where** we worship is not the issue, whether in the church or somewhere else; it is **how** we worship. Is our worship genuine worship or is it worship which is just going through the motions, performing the liturgy, or occupying a place in the pew? Is our worship from the heart? Are we worshipping Christ or

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<sup>421</sup> T.V.Moore, p. 59

something else? Whose kingdom are we building—Christ’s kingdom or our own private kingdoms?

But there is another aspect of this question for the corporate church. There are sins of commission and sins of omission. The work of the church is *mission*—the activity of seeking out people to worship the true God in Christ Jesus. Mission is not simply one *activity* of the church among many; it is the *sum total* of what the church should be doing as it imitates the incarnational ministry of Christ. Specifically, our mission is that of making disciples who obey Christ (Matt. 28: 19-20), and our resources of people and money should be directed primarily to that end. The church consisting of *disciples, not bricks*, is the temple Christ commands us to build.

### ***Verses 6-11***

The prophet’s message in this chapter would not be complete without his warning. Are there consequences for disobedience? What if the people fail to listen to the prophet? Will anything happen?

Haggai informs them that judgment *had already fallen*, but they didn’t even notice. By cheating God of their labor and money, they had only cheated themselves. The world in which they lived was not governed by blind, impersonal forces which have no relationship to God. Creation is intensely personal because it is created by a personal God. The Jews had worked and worked and worked, but all their labor had come to nothing; it had not produced the benefit they had expected. Why? Because they were cheating God. God controlled the harvest. Crops didn’t grow unless God made them grow. It only rained if God made it rain. If God’s people will not do His bidding, He will call forth the forces of nature: the sun, the rain, and the insects of the field to do His bidding.

He also controlled the hazards of life which required them to spend money they would not have spent otherwise. **He who earns, earns wages to put into a purse with holes (v. 6).** The Jews got sick and needed care. Their animals died. Their food spoiled. Their clothes got torn or rotted away. God could think of a thousand ways to put holes in their purses, and the same is true today. We often bring our money home and it’s blown away before the next day. If we have a car, it breaks down. Our shoes wear out. A member of the family needs money and we are obligated to help. It doesn’t matter what it is—God can think of a thousand ways to make us spend money, and there is nothing left for the things we really want. All the while, we never think to ask the question: “Is God trying to tell me something?” Maybe spilling ink on the new dress is no accident. Maybe the recurring sickness is related to disobedience. Why is it that there is never enough money? “Come to think of it; I haven’t given anything to the Lord’s work in a long time. Am I giving to the Lord the scraps of my life which cost me nothing?” As Moore puts it, “A careful pondering of God’s dealings with us will often indicate to us God’s will regarding us.”<sup>422</sup>

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<sup>422</sup> Moore, *Haggai*, p. 66

**Verses 12-15**

But there is also the promise for obedience. The returned Jews obeyed the voice of Haggai and bolted into action—they showed reverence for the Lord by setting themselves to the task of rebuilding the temple. The Lord responded to their obedience and faith through Haggai saying, “I am with you.” It was as if God was waiting with open arms to bless them and pardon them. And, of course, He was. He is also waiting for us individually and corporately to repent and give Him the worship of obedience he deserves. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you.”

**Chapter 2: 1-9**

We notice from **1: 15** that work on the temple resumed on the 24<sup>th</sup> day of the 6<sup>th</sup> month, only three weeks from the first preaching of Haggai. Thus, it did not take long to get the people moving again with the faithful preaching of the word. Notice, however, that God stirs up his people with the godly leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua (**1: 14**). This is the method God uses to stir up His church. He has given the church pastor-teachers who prophetically challenge the spiritual lethargy (laziness) of His people—a lethargy which afflicts all of us (preacher included) to some degree or other, even men like Zerubbabel and Joshua who themselves needed the urging of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. Sometimes He will raise up men who are not pastors but who serve a prophetic role in calling the church to repentance, men like Amos who was not a professional prophet but a sheep-herder and a farmer.

About month after the work resumed (**v. 1**), the word of the Lord came again to Haggai encouraging those who were old enough to remember the glory and splendor of the former temple (these people had to be very old since they had been in exile 70 years). Ezra 3: 12-13 notes that there was weeping mixed with cheering when the foundation was first laid, the weeping being from the older group who had noticed the smallness of the new temple in comparison with the size of the older one Solomon built (**v. 3**). The word of encouragement begins as it did when the people repented in **1: 12, I am with you...My Spirit is abiding in your midst; do not fear (vv. 4-5)**. The latter glory of the house they were building will be greater than the former one built by Solomon (**v. 9**). How so? Because God was going to **shake the heavens and the earth** of all its treasures, and **they** [the Gentiles] will come to his house [i.e. into the kingdom of God] **with the wealth of all nations (vv. 6-7a)**. Everything belongs to God, the earth and all its treasures (including the treasures of creation—Ps. 50: 10). The whole earth with all the wealth of kingdoms will one day be utilized fully in the grand demonstration of the glory of God on earth.

Hence, the whole history of Christianity is but one magnificent fulfillment of this prophecy....The kingdoms of the world are but the scaffolding for God’s spiritual temple, to be thrown down when their purpose is accomplished”<sup>423</sup>

The shaking of the nations is applied by the writer of *Hebrews* to the establishment of the kingdom of God in the NT dispensation and its ultimate consummation (Heb. 12: 26-28).<sup>424</sup> But

<sup>423</sup> Moore, pp. 77, 80

<sup>424</sup> Moore, *Haggai*, p. 72

this was the distant and ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy. There was also a more immediate (proximate) fulfillment indicated by the words **in a little while (v. 6)**. In the prophecy of *Daniel*, the rise and fall of mighty nations is prophesied. Babylon would fall to the Medo-Persian Empire which would fall to Greece which in turn would fall to Rome.

The exiles had already seen with their own eyes the fall of the Babylonian Empire to Medo-Persia, but within another 185 years, the great Persian Empire would fall to Greece. Great periods of political upheaval would occur, thus, the **shaking of the heavens and earth**. That this is the immediate application to the exiles is confirmed from his use of the phrase again in **2: 21** followed by its explanation in **v. 22** which includes the overthrow of thrones and kingdoms. This was a great encouragement to these timid Hebrews who had already ceased the building efforts because of political opposition (cf. comments above). Thus, the prophet assures them that the opposition of kings and nations will not be able to hinder them if they simply have faith and do the Lord's work. His kingdom is bigger and greater than all the nations, and He will shake and throw down any king or nation which stands in its way.<sup>425</sup>

The same encouragement is given by Haggai's prophecy to the Christian church. Two world-wars have occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and countless other regional wars. Believers on the African continent have seen their cherished hopes of political independence and material betterment dashed to pieces upon the rocks of unquenchable greed for power and money by national leaders. Is there any hope left? Indeed there is. God is still shaking the nations, and He will not stop shaking them until the kingdom of His Son, Christ Jesus, has put every one of His enemies under His feet. Until this time of consummation, we must look not at the things which are seen which are temporal, but at the things which are not seen which are eternal (2 Cor. 4: 18).

### **Chapter 2: 10-19**

Three months after the rebuilding efforts resumed, and two months after the last prophecy, Haggai preaches his **third message**, an object lesson. The flesh of an animal sacrifice will not confer holiness upon something it touches (**v. 12**). On the other hand, if a man touches a dead body, he shall remain unclean for seven days because his uncleanness can defile the sanctuary of the Lord (Num. 19: 14-22). Holiness cannot be transferred to something else, but uncleanness can. The error of the Jews had always been the assumption that the holiness of the temple could confer (give to) holiness upon the people of Israel. The pre-exilic prophet Jeremiah at one point concentrated upon this error saying, **Do not trust in deceptive words, saying, 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD'** (Jer. 7: 4), as if the presence of the temple guaranteed the peoples' safety. Knowing from their past history that the temple sacrifices could not save them, perhaps the exiles were now wondering why so much energy needed to be spent building a temple for the purpose of reinstating rituals which had failed them in the past. The prophet now wishes to explain **why** the temple sacrifices had not been accepted by the Lord or secured their forgiveness and deliverance.<sup>426</sup> Their disobedience had defiled the temple of the Lord and the sacrifices.

In the same way, their disobedience in not rebuilding the temple had defiled the land so that it was not producing the yields which they expected. **Every work of their hands** was unclean

<sup>425</sup> Moore, pp. 73-77

<sup>426</sup> Moore, pp. 82-83

because of their neglect of the temple of God, and therefore, the kingdom of God. For this reason God caused the land to produce a poor yield of food, and he sent destructive wind storms, mildew in the barns, and hail to destroy the food which was produced (**vv. 16-17**). He executed this judgment upon the returning exiles from the time the foundation was laid fourteen years earlier up to the present time (**v. 18**). They had no idea that for the 14 years preceding this that God was judging everything they did. Perhaps they thought the political opposition had been a hidden blessing in that it had given them the time and money to build their own houses, but Haggai's message is to the contrary. We can never rob God of our time and labor and benefit from the neglect. We are only robbing ourselves.

**Yet**, the Lord says, **from this day on I will bless you (v. 19)**. From the 24<sup>th</sup> day of the ninth month, the date of Haggai's last message, things will begin to change, and the Lord will respond with blessings upon them for their renewed zeal in building His temple. There are Christians who say that we should never do anything for the Lord with a view to receiving a reward in return. This, they claim, would demonstrate a mercenary and selfish spirit. The Scriptures prove otherwise: that the Lord often holds out the reward as an encouragement to obedience. This is true in the OT (here in Haggai as well as Dt. 27-28 and Mal. 3: 10 in which the blessings are included along with the curses) as well as the NT (1 Cor. 3: 14; Col. 3: 24, etc.). Looking ahead to the reward is an *act of faith* demonstrating that we truly believe that God is faithful to His promises and will actually bestow the reward promised. Lack of such belief is false piety and an affront to God.

The prophecy of Haggai proves that God is waiting to bless His people, but we presume too much if we believe He is indifferent to our misplaced priorities and apathy toward His kingdom.

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## Appendices

*Note to the Reader. The following presentations (Appendix A and B) were made to the congregations of Mbarara Church of Christ (Mbarara, Uganda) and Kambuga Presbyterian Church (Kambuga, Uganda). There is overlap in the two presentations*

### Appendix A

#### New Revelations of the Spirit—A Brief Examination of the Modern Prophecy

The Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF 1.6), *Of the Holy Scriptures*, says this about the sufficiency of Scripture:

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by **new revelations of the Spirit**, or **traditions of men**. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the **inward illumination of the Spirit of God** to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word....

I have talked about the danger of considering the **traditions of men** on the same level as Scripture or just **as important** as Scripture. Now I want to talk about “new revelations of the Spirit.”

Throughout the history of the church, some men and women have claimed to receive new revelations of the Holy Spirit which would benefit the church. Some theologians have allowed the possibility of such revelations **on the condition** that they are **not treated in the same way** as the written revelation of the Bible. Moreover, these same theologians have maintained that **no moral commandments** coming from continuing revelation need to be obeyed if such commandments are not confirmed by Scripture. Thus, **Wayne Grudem**, who believes in the **continuing gift of prophecy** in the NT church, says this:

...we must be careful never to allow (in theory or in practice) the placing of such revelations on a level equal to Scripture. We must insist that God does not require us to believe anything about himself or his work in the world that is contained in these revelations but **not in Scripture**. And we must insist that God does not require us to obey **any moral directives** that come to us through such means but that are not confirmed in Scripture. The Bible contains all the words of God we need **for trusting and obeying him perfectly** (Grudem, ST, p. 132, emphasis mine).

Let me remind you again of Paul's words to Timothy in his second epistle to Timothy.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;<sup>17</sup> so that the man of God may be **adequate, equipped for every good work**. (2 Timothy 3:16-17 NASB)

“The man of God” Paul is talking about is Timothy, but not Timothy **standing alone**. The man of God is Timothy and whoever Timothy entrusted with the word of God in the OT or the teachings of Paul. Paul says to Timothy,

The things **which you have heard from me** in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to **faithful men** who will be able to teach others also. (2 Timothy 2:2 NASB)

So, obviously, Paul does not use the term “man of God” for **some special group of NT prophets** who see visions and predict the future for other people. The man of God would include **all believers** who receive the teaching of the Bible and live by it. It is not God’s purpose for a **few** Christians in this world to be **equipped** for every good work, but for **all of us** to be equipped through the writings of Scripture, both Old and New Testaments.

What Paul is saying in these two verses is that the Bible alone is **sufficient or adequate** to provide you and me with **everything** we need for **every good work** we do. I do not need, and you do not need, some **additional prophecy** from any “man of God” to help you get through life today, tomorrow, or the rest of your life. All you need is right here in the Bible which is **illuminated by the Holy Spirit** who lives in **every** believer, not just the self-proclaimed “man of God”. Jesus told the apostles, and by extension, the whole church throughout history,

"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; <sup>17</sup> *that is* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, *but* you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. <sup>18</sup> "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. (John 14:16-18 NASB)

"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, **He will guide you into all the truth**; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose **to you** what is to come. (John 16:13 NASB)

The phrase “what is to come” does not primarily refer to predictions of the future, even though John in Revelation sees future events. We have only one book of this sort in the NT. The phrase, “what is to come” was **additional teaching that the Holy Spirit would give the apostles** concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ and instructions about living the Christian life. Other books in the NT, the **gospels**, give us information about the ministry of Christ as well as the history of the early church, the Acts of the Apostles. The rest of the books, the **epistles**, specifically give us additional Christian doctrine and how this doctrine is applied to our lives. But **all** the books of the NT, including the gospels, Acts, and Revelation have the **primary purpose** of instructing us about how to live the Christian life for the glory of God.

Well, you may be thinking, the Holy Spirit was given to the **apostles** to lead **them** into the truth, but not the **average believer**. But Jesus says in the Great Commission, “and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Jesus was not saying that He would only be with the apostles through the Holy Spirit, but with every believer. The apostles would not live to the end of the age; they would die before the end of the age arrived. You and I will also probably die before the end of the age, but we have the promise of Jesus that He will always be with the church until the end of the age. How? Through the presence of the Holy Spirit who dwells in **every believer** and who helps **every believer** understand what he reads in the Scriptures. Although the Holy Spirit was promised to the apostles in a **very special way to receive the additional revelation** Jesus wanted to teach them, He is also given to every believer to **understand** this additional revelation.

However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone **does not have the Spirit of Christ**, he does not belong to Him. (Romans 8:9 NASB)

In other words, if you don't have the Holy Spirit, you are not a true believer; you are not a Christian. Christians do not receive the words of God **directly from the Holy Spirit**, but every Christian is **led** by the Holy Spirit as he reads God's word. This is what is known as the **illumination** of the Holy Spirit which is distinct from the **inspiration** of the Holy Spirit found in 2 Tim. 3.

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. <sup>12</sup> So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—<sup>13</sup> for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if **by the Spirit** you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. <sup>14</sup> **For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.** <sup>15</sup> For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a **spirit of adoption** as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" <sup>16</sup> The **Spirit Himself** testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*. (Romans 8:11-17 NASB)

We can see from this passage that there is **no special group** of Christians who have the Holy Spirit as opposed to other **average Christians like you and me** who do not have the Holy Spirit. If we do not have the Holy Spirit, we are not Christians at all. Moreover, all who are true believers are **being led** by the Holy Spirit. How does the Holy Spirit lead us? Does He lead us by telling us new prophecies and predictions of the future? **No**. He is helping us **to put to death the deeds of the flesh**—lying, anger, sexual immorality, greed, jealousy, covetousness, theft, laziness, and every other sin. But if we are not being **led by the Spirit** in putting to death the deeds of the flesh, we **must die**—that is, we must reap the consequences of spiritual death in hell. Why must we die? Because we show by our ungodly lives that we are **not being led by the Spirit** and do not have the Holy Spirit. We are still unbelievers.

Many of the people **claiming to be prophets** are not being led by the Spirit to put to death the deeds of the flesh. They are sexually immoral, sleeping with multiple women to whom they are not married; they are greedy, feeding off the ignorance of people who foolishly believe everything they say; they are lazy, never studying the Bible but claiming that God gives them what they need whenever they get up to speak. And their laziness is obvious to anyone who knows the Bible since **their sermons have no substance and no content**; they consist of shouting and dancing, but there is **nothing there from the scriptures** helping me or you to live our lives as a faithful Christians.

**It can be demonstrated almost without exception** that wherever you see pastors who are claiming to receive direct revelation from God, there is (1) no emphasis at all on the teaching of the Bible, (2) they teach many things contrary to what the Bible teaches (Grudem, p. 132), and (3) many of these men are living immoral lives.

I don't think I need to remind you—but I will remind you—of what happened right here in Kanungu about 15 years ago. A man claiming to be a prophet told other Christians that Christ was coming on a certain day. Many such days passed without Christ coming. Many believed him for a while until it was clear that Christ was not coming. Then, as a last effort, he lured his

followers into the church building and burned the church down on top of them. One thousand people perished. You can see that believing a **lying prophet** can be dangerous not only spiritually but physically. **If Christians had been reading their Bibles** during that time, or if they had been **listening to preachers who were faithful** to the word of God, they would never have listened to this false prophet, and many of them would still be alive. What did Jesus say about trying to determine the time He was returning at the end of the age?

As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and **what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?**" (Matthew 24:3 NASB)

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.<sup>36</sup> **But of that day and hour no one knows**, not even the angels of heaven, **nor the Son, but the Father alone.**<sup>37</sup> **For the coming of the Son of Man** will be just like the days of Noah.<sup>38</sup> "For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark,<sup>39</sup> and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be.<sup>40</sup> "Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left.<sup>41</sup> "Two women *will be* grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left.<sup>42</sup> "Therefore be on the alert, **for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.** (Matthew 24:35-42 NASB)

If Jesus did not know when He was returning, how can **anyone else** know when He is returning? Speaking to the apostles, He said, "You do not know which day your Lord is coming." But in addition to this, Jesus explicitly said that **no one** knows the day or the hour of His return. Instead, as Christians, we must all be alert and prepared for His return. If the people who died in Kanungu had understood this passage, they would have known that this prophet in Kanungu was a **false** prophet. But they did not know that because they were ignorant of what the Bible said. Had they studied their Bibles, or if they had been taught by faithful preachers, they would not have died that day in Kanungu.

**But there are other errors** that are being taught by false prophets—errors that pertain to living the Christian life. I am reminded of a young woman in Canada or the US (I don't remember which) who was seduced by her pastor, twice her age, to have sex with him because "sexual sin did not apply to him." He was an apostle, he said, and he lived at a higher level than everyone else. This man had repeated sex with this young woman for nine years until he was exposed. Both he and she are guilty, but **he** most of all. I think he was married, so she is guilty of sexual adultery and for being spiritually stupid and ignorant. She should have known that a true apostle would not ask her to violate the word of God. He is guilty of sexual adultery and rape and, worst of all, **speaking false words in the name of God.**

Christians in Uganda are being deceived and led astray by men like this. So let's look at the gift of prophecy in the Bible.

### 1. The gift of prophecy in the OT (Deuteronomy 18)

In Deuteronomy 18, Moses gives these instructions to the nation of Israel.

"When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations.<sup>10</sup> "There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son

or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses **divination**, one who practices **witchcraft**, or one who interprets omens, or a **sorcerer**,<sup>11</sup> or one who **casts a spell**, or a **medium**, or a **spiritist**, or one who **calls up the dead**.<sup>12</sup> "For whoever does these things is **detestable** to the LORD; and because of these detestable things the LORD your God will drive them out before you.<sup>13</sup> "You shall be blameless before the LORD your God.<sup>14</sup> "For those nations, which you shall dispossess, **listen to those who practice witchcraft** and to diviners, but as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you *to do so*.<sup>15</sup> "The LORD your God will raise up for you a **prophet like me** from among you, from your countrymen, **you shall listen to him**. . . .<sup>18</sup> "I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and **I will put My words** in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.<sup>19</sup> "It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require *it* of him.<sup>20</sup> "But **the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak**, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.'<sup>21</sup> "You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?'<sup>22</sup> "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing **does not come about** or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him. (Deuteronomy 18:9-22 NASB)

Do you recognize any of these people? Do you know any **mediums** between the dead and the living, do you know anyone who **calls up the dead**, do you know anyone who **casts a spell** or curse upon other people, any who **practice witchcraft**? I have heard of Pentecostal pastors who are putting curses on people. God says that such people are "**detestable**" to Him. **God despises these people**. And you had better stay away from people like this. If you don't, God is going to despise you as well, and you will get what you deserve, eternal suffering in hell. Choose this day whom you will serve. You can serve Christ or you can serve your African tribal gods and religions, but you cannot serve both. So make your choice.

Several things about this passage should be emphasized:

(1) **First**, the practice of using diviners, spiritists, those who practiced witchcraft, those who communicated with the dead, was a form of determining the **will of a god** or the **gods** among pagan peoples in the OT. God said to His people, "You can't do that." **There is only one legitimate way that you can determine what my will is for your life—My Word**. But how were the people supposed to know this word? They did not have a written Bible, but God had already raised up a prophet for Israel—the man **Moses**. Moses received communication from God face to face. Moreover, God would later communicate His will through **other OT prophets** through dreams and visions, but not face to face like He did with Moses. In this sense, Moses was greater than any other prophet of the OT. But God would **finally communicate His will** through another Prophet **like Moses** who had an even closer face to face relationship with God than Moses had—**Jesus Christ**. Preaching about Christ in Acts 3, Peter says to the Jews,

"Moses said, 'THE LORD GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN; TO HIM YOU SHALL GIVE HEED to everything He says to you.'<sup>23</sup> 'And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.'<sup>24</sup> "And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and *his* successors onward, also announced these days. (Acts 3:22-24 NASB)

All the prophets of the OT, including Moses, **point to Jesus the Prophet** who was greater than Moses. In the book of Hebrews, the writer says,

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,<sup>2</sup> in these last days **has spoken to us in His Son**, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. (Hebrews 1:1-2 NASB)

The revelation of the prophets in the OT was a **partial** revelation, but the revelation of Jesus Christ in the flesh recorded in the gospels was a **final** revelation. The **remainder** of the revelation of Christ and His work was provided in the **writings of the apostles in the NT**. In these writings, nothing essentially new is given concerning the person and work of Christ. Rather, the apostles **continue to explain the final revelation** of Christ and its many applications to the life of the church. Therefore, “Nothing can be added to Christ’s redemptive work, and nothing can be added to the revelation of that redemptive work” that has not already been given to us in the NT. “Once **that redemption** is finished, and the **apostolic testimony to it is finished**, the Scriptures are complete, and **we should expect no** more additions to them” (Frame, p. 227). In other words, I don’t need any more revelation of Jesus Christ and His work other than what I already have in the Scriptures.

The same thing Paul says in 2 Tim. 3: 16-17 is also said by Peter in a different way.

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord;<sup>3</sup> seeing that His divine power has granted to us **everything pertaining to life and godliness**, through the **true knowledge of Him** who called us by His own glory and excellence.<sup>4</sup> For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become **partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. (2 Peter 1:2-4 NASB)

By the words, “partakers of the divine nature”, Peter was **not saying that we become gods**—something the Mormons teach—but that we partake of the **moral character** of Jesus Christ by paying attention to “the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord” that we find in the Scriptures.

(2) **Second**, in the OT, a prophet who makes a prediction that **does not come true** is a false **prophet**, and the Israelites did not need to listen to them. Moses was not talking about averages or percentages. He did not say, “Well, everyone has a bad day once in a while, so if the prophet is true 70% of the time, or even 60% of the time, he is a true prophet.” No. Moses didn’t say that. If the prophet is receiving communication from God, then his prophecy is accurate **all** of the time, not **some** of the time. God knows the future **all the time** because He ordained the future, declaring the end from the beginning (Isa. 46: 10). He never makes an inaccurate statement about anything, including the future; and if God is telling **you** what He knows about the future, then **you will not make a mistake**. If you do make a mistake, God has not spoken to you. The **OT prophets** recorded in the Bible were accurate 100% of the time because they were getting their information **from God**—not their own imaginations. There is a story in 1 Kings 22 about Micaiah the prophet. We don’t have time for the story, but Micaiah predicted that wicked King Ahab would not return alive from the battle with the Syrians. But King Ahab didn’t believe him. When Ahab was leaving for the battle he told the servants to lock Micaiah in prison and feed him sparingly with bread and water until he returned safely. Micaiah heard the king’s words, and here is what said:

...“If you indeed return safely **the LORD has not spoken by me.**” And he said, “Listen, all you people.” (1 Kings 22:28 NASB)

In other words, Micaiah was subjecting himself to the test of a true prophet. If his words did not come true, he was not a true prophet. The end of the story is that Ahab dies in battle just as Micaiah says he would.

We have another story in the Bible in Jeremiah 28 about a false prophet named **Hananiah** who prophesied that Judah would return from Babylonian captivity in two years. This was in direct contradiction to the prophecy of Jeremiah who said that Judah would remain in Babylonian captivity for **70 years**. Jeremiah takes Hananiah aside and says to him, “You are a false prophet, and you are leading the men of Judah astray. For this sin, you are going to die within one year.” And Hananiah dies within the year just as Jeremiah had said—proving that Hananiah was a false prophet and Jeremiah was a true prophet.

Those who **claim** to be prophets of the Lord should **beware**. If God has not really spoken through you, then you are leading God’s people astray; and, therefore, **you are heaping future judgment** on yourself. God did not say that all false prophets would die in one year. Jeremiah said this about Hananiah, no one else. Your judgment—whatever it is—may come **much sooner or much later**, but it will come because you have dared to say, “**Thus says the Lord**” when God did not speak to you.

But you may say, “Oh, but I don’t use the prophetic formula in the OT. I never say, “**Thus says the Lord.**” I only say, “**God told me.**” But could someone here explain to me the difference between “thus says the Lord” and “God told me”? I personally don’t see the difference. Now if you wish to say, “**I sense in my heart that God is telling me...**” to do this or that, or “**I believe that the Holy Spirit is indicating to me that you...**” should do this or that, I have no problem with this. You are only giving an opinion based on a hunch, and you would probably admit that you were not absolutely sure about your hunch. You are not saying that you **absolutely know** that God is saying one thing or another. If Samuel, whom I know, had some feeling from the Holy Spirit which he shared with me about my life, I would listen to him carefully. But if Samuel said to me, “God told me to tell you that He wants you to move to Saudi Arabia and be a missionary.” I would tell him, “Well, that is a funny thing, because God did not tell me this; and I think I would rather live in Uganda.”

Nevertheless, I certainly believe in the ongoing, **inward promptings** of the Holy Spirit in the heart of every Christian whereby the Holy Spirit uses the word of God to **encourage** us to do something which pleases God or to **discourage** us from doing something which dishonors God. I believe the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin and inward corruption. **Every Christian should experience these inner promptings and convictions of the Spirit.** God is active in working with His people. He did not stop communicating with His people after the first century.

I believed the Lord was leading me through the Spirit to speak at this conference. I could have refused Samuel’s invitation, but the Spirit led me to come. God didn’t audibly tell me to come, and I did not get any visions. I am not saying, “**God told me** to be here.” Yet, I believe the Holy Spirit **led me** to be here. The Spirit also **led me** to spend the next two full weeks following Samuel’s invitation **to study and prepare** for this conference. I do not expect the Holy Spirit to tell me what to say the moment I get up here in front of you. I have spent over 100 hours preparing for this **with the help of the Holy Spirit.**



I have the suspicion that some of this “God told me” business on the part of many pastors is a **cover-up for their own laziness**. The pastors who claim to get their sermons **from God** the moment they step up in the pulpit are just **too lazy to spend 20 hours the previous week** reading and studying what God has **already said** in the Bible. While they claim to love God’s word, they actually **despise** God’s word because they seldom ever read it, much less study it. But I am curious to know from these preachers **why they should presume** the Holy Spirit to give them **His words** the very moment they begin preaching when they ignore **His words** to the inspired prophets and apostles for the 1500 years the Bible was being written. Why should the Holy Spirit give you **new** words when you despise the **old** words? Writing to Timothy, Paul emphasizes the need to handle accurately the word of truth.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, **accurately handling** the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15 NASB)

What was the word of truth Timothy was supposed to handle accurately? It was the only **written** word of God at the time, **the OT**. But now we have also the **NT**, and we must handle this word of God accurately, as well. Now, if Timothy was exhorted by Paul to study and to be responsible in his handling of the word, what does that say about modern preachers?

**(3) Third**, the passage in Deuteronomy says that **God will put His words** in the mouth of the true prophet. Moreover, the prophet must speak **only** what the Lord commanded him to speak. Obviously, God would never give him something to say that **contradicted** what God had **already said**. **God never contradicts Himself**.

Moreover, if the prophet attempts to **lure the Israelites into the worship of a false god**, then they would know that this was a false prophet. This condition for prophecy is included in the phrase, “speaks in the name of other gods” (v. 20). So, if a prophet contradicted the word of the Lord previously given, he was a false prophet no matter what he did. Even if he predicted signs and wonders **that came true**, the people of Israel **should not listen to him** because he had violated the previous words of God. It did not matter whether these **signs and wonders** had actually occurred or whether they were by trickery or slight of hand; the important thing is that they appeared to everyone to be true. But true or not, the prophets **words** were not true; therefore, he was a false prophet.

"If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and **gives you a sign or a wonder**,<sup>2</sup> and the sign or the wonder **comes true**, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after **other gods** (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,'<sup>3</sup> you **shall not listen** to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is **testing you** to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deuteronomy 13:1-3 NASB)

So we see here that Deuteronomy 13 supplements what is said about the false prophet in Deuteronomy 18. A false prophet is a prophet who...

- (1) Predicts something that **does not come true**. Or...
- (2) Predicts signs and wonders that **do come true**, but he also **tempts Israel to worship false gods**. In other words, although his signs and wonders come true, his **words** are not true. Or...
- (3) Prophesies words that God did not command him to speak, words which, by deduction, **contradict what God has already said**.

Notice also **that God allows** a false prophet to appear before Israel and produce signs and wonders which come true **so that He can test Israel to see if they love Him**. This is an interesting statement in the context of sub-Saharan Africa with **so many professing Christians resorting to African tribal religions**. What do you do when your crops don't grow or when your child gets sick? You pray, and then you get your pastor and other Christians to pray for your crops or your child. What do you do if your crops **still don't grow** or your child is **still sick**? Do you go to the **witch doctor and sacrifice to your dead ancestors**? Maybe your dead grandfather is angry and you need to appease him with sacrifices.

And what happens if your crops then grow or your child gets well? What have you proved? Have you proved that the ancestral spirits and the witch doctor are more powerful than God? Is that what you have proved? No. This passage shows that **sometimes God allowed false prophets to perform signs and wonders** that came true, but that they entice people to worship false gods through their wonders. Jesus Himself even said that **false Christs** would arise in the last days and would deceive, if possible, even the elect.

"Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There *He is*,' do not believe *him*.<sup>24</sup> "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and **will show great signs and wonders**, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. (Matthew 24:23-24 NASB)

So what have you proved by going to the witch doctor and getting what you wanted—healthy crops and healthy children? **You have proved that you don't love God**. The only thing you want from God are material things—healthy children, healthy crops, and money. If you don't get these things from God, you will get them somewhere else. But who do you think allowed you to get what you wanted? Do you think the witch doctor can do anything for you without God's permission? If you think he is more powerful, you need to read the **book of Job** where Satan must ask God's permission for everything he does to Job. Satan can't do a thing without God's permission. So what you proved is that you don't love God and you do not respect God for being God.

**As we read the OT prophets**, we find that they are not primarily predicting future events or performing miracles. Many of the OT prophets don't perform any miracles at all. After Moses, Elijah, and Elisha, I can't think of a single OT prophet who performs miracles. Correct me if I am wrong. Many of them foretell future events—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Amos, Joel, et al. The main future event which they do predict is the destruction of certain countries—including Israel and Judah—for violating the Law of God given to them in the Pentateuch, including those in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. Therefore, **the prophets of the OT were constantly bringing Israel and Judah back to the Law of God and commanding them to repent for breaking His moral law**. In other words, they were preachers. They preached the demands of the law of God so the Israelites would repent and live obediently to the law of God.

Jesus repeated this emphasis upon the Law during His ministry. He spent very little of His time telling about future events—only a hand full of passages like Matthew 24, the Olivet Discourse where Jesus predicted the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD and the events surrounding His second coming. Rather, he taught about the moral law of God. The Sermon on the Mount is an exposition of OT law, how the citizens of the kingdom of God were supposed to live in this kingdom.

But I find it interesting that the self-proclaimed prophets in Uganda have **little or no interest in explaining the word of God**. They do not preach expositional sermons whereby the preacher takes a text of the Bible and explains it paragraph by paragraph. Rather, they are only interested in telling people the next thing that pops into their heads. It does not matter to me if they can heal the sick—and I am convinced that none of them can—because they do not **explain** the word of God.

## Appendix C

### Revelatory Gifts in the New Testament No Longer Continue Today

(Note to the reader: I have made abundant use of O. Palmer Robertson's excellent work, *Tongues Today?* for this presentation.)

#### **I. The tongues in the book of Acts were foreign languages (*glossa*) given to Jews, Gentiles, and Samaritans in order to incorporate all people into the church regardless of nationality or race.**

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.<sup>2</sup> And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.<sup>3</sup> And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them.<sup>4</sup> And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.<sup>5</sup> Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven.<sup>6</sup> And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language.<sup>7</sup> They were amazed and astonished, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans?"<sup>8</sup> "And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born?"<sup>9</sup> "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,<sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes,<sup>11</sup> Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God."<sup>12</sup> And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, "What does this mean?"<sup>13</sup> But others were mocking and saying, "They are full of sweet wine."<sup>14</sup> But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words.<sup>15</sup> "For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is *only* the third hour of the day;<sup>16</sup> but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel:<sup>17</sup> 'AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,' God says, 'THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND; AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY, AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS;<sup>18</sup> EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT And they shall prophesy. (Acts 2:1-18 NASB)

What should be noted here in vv.17-18 is that Peter interprets tongues as the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy in which the Holy Spirit will be poured out on sons and daughters who will prophecy. The gift of tongues at Pentecost was the gift of prophecy. The Holy Spirit had come upon the apostles giving them the ability to preach the gospel in tongues (foreign languages) they had never learned.

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message.<sup>45</sup> All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of

the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also.<sup>46</sup> For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered,<sup>47</sup> "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we *did*, can he?"<sup>48</sup> And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days. (Acts 10:44-48 NASB)

"And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as *He did* upon us at the beginning.<sup>16</sup> "And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'<sup>17</sup> "Therefore if God gave to them the same gift as *He gave* to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?"<sup>18</sup> When they heard this, they quieted down and glorified God, saying, "Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance *that leads to life.*" (Acts 11:15-18 NASB)

In this passage, the Gentiles in Cornelius' household received the Holy Spirit in the same manner as the apostles and Jews at Pentecost, demonstrating that God was uniting together both Jew and Gentile in the same church. Apostolic authority was present on both occasions. The Jewish Pentecost becomes a Gentile Pentecost.

Philip went down to the city of Samaria and *began* proclaiming Christ to them.<sup>6</sup> The crowds with one accord were giving attention to what was said by Philip, as they heard and saw the signs which he was performing.<sup>7</sup> For in the case of many who had unclean spirits, they were coming out of them shouting with a loud voice; and many who had been paralyzed and lame were healed.<sup>8</sup> So there was much rejoicing in that city.<sup>9</sup> Now there was a man named Simon, who formerly was practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people of Samaria, claiming to be someone great;<sup>10</sup> and they all, from smallest to greatest, were giving attention to him, saying, "This man is what is called the Great Power of God."<sup>11</sup> And they were giving him attention because he had for a long time astonished them with his magic arts.<sup>12</sup> But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.<sup>13</sup> Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed.<sup>14</sup> Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John,<sup>15</sup> who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.<sup>16</sup> For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.<sup>17</sup> Then they *began* laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.<sup>18</sup> Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was bestowed through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money,<sup>19</sup> saying, "Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."<sup>20</sup> But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!<sup>21</sup> "You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.<sup>22</sup> "Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. (Acts 8:5-22 NASB)

Tongues are not explicitly mentioned but it was clearly evident that the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Samaritans just as He had been poured out upon the Jews and Gentiles. Simon noticed this himself and wished to purchase the same authority as the apostles so that he could impart the gift of the Spirit, but the gift could not be bought. The Jewish Pentecost had now become the Samaritan Pentecost. The Holy Spirit was uniting Jews and Gentiles and half Jew and half Gentiles (Samaritans) into one single church. There was not to be Jewish, Gentile, and Samaritan churches, but the Christian church without national distinctions.

Therefore, if the tongues-speaking of Acts was foreign languages, this places the tongues-speaking in churches today in a completely different category from that of Acts. Today's tongues-speaking is not in foreign languages which may be translated, but ecstatic speech which may not be translated. The reason tongues are not translated in the church today is that they are not languages. No one has the gift of interpreting non-translatable, ecstatic speech. But it is clear that the gift of tongues was never meant simply for the edification of the individual tongues-speaker, but for the whole church. Yet, we will find in 1 Cor. 12—14 that the gift was meant for the edification of the whole church.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.<sup>5</sup> And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord.<sup>6</sup> There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all *persons*.<sup>7</sup> But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (1 Corinthians 12:4-7 NASB)

For this reason, the tongues spoken in the church must be translated so everyone can benefit from them.

## **II. The presence of the apostles was necessary for the bestowal of the gift of tongues by the Holy Spirit.**

Apostolic authority was the medium by which the Holy Spirit poured out this gift. This is consistent with Paul's message to the Ephesians that the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

As in Acts 2 and Acts 10, the presence of the apostles was necessary for the Holy Spirit to come upon the Samaritans. He did not come upon them when only Philip, who was not an apostle, was present. This is true even though Philip's ministry was accompanied with signs and wonders. The reason for this is that the apostles were, and are, the foundation of the church (Eph. 2: 20). It is clear from Acts 11: 15 that the manner in which the Spirit fell upon the Gentiles was the same as what happened in Acts 2.

"And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as He did upon us at the beginning. (Acts 11:15 NASB)

It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples.<sup>2</sup> He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they *said* to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."<sup>3</sup> And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism."<sup>4</sup> Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus."<sup>5</sup> When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.<sup>6</sup> And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying.<sup>7</sup> There were in all about twelve men. (Acts 19:1-7 NASB)

The same thing happens in Ephesus. These people were believers in transition between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. Being baptized in the baptism of John, they had not even learned about the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Paul, an apostle, becomes the medium by which these OT believers would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This event is important to

show that Paul was equal in stature to the original 11 apostles through whom the Spirit had come at Pentecost. When Paul lays his hands on them, they began speaking in tongues (*glossa*).

In all of these texts, especially where “tongues” (*glossa*) or languages are mentioned, the tongue is a foreign language capable of translation. This is crystal clear from Acts 2 where the people coming from foreign countries hear the gospel on their own language. There is no reason exegetically to interpret *glossa* in Acts 8, 10, or 19 as anything other than foreign languages capable of translation.

### **III. There is no evidence from the book of Acts or 1 Corinthians that the gift of tongues in Corinth was different from the gift of tongues in Acts.**

The question is now raised as to whether the tongues or foreign languages of Acts 8, 10, and 19 are different from the tongues (*glossa*) of 1 Cor. 12, 13, and 14.

For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit;<sup>9</sup> to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit,<sup>10</sup> and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another *various* kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. (1 Corinthians 12:8-10 NASB)

And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, *various* kinds of tongues.<sup>29</sup> All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not *workers of* miracles, are they?<sup>30</sup> All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?<sup>31</sup> But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way. (1 Corinthians 12:28-31 NASB)

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. (1 Corinthians 13:1 NASB)

In the verses above, the word “language” is *glossa*, the same word used in Acts 2, 10, and 19. If, then, “language” means foreign language in Acts, it is exegetically questionable for it to mean anything else in 1 Cor. 12-13. The only possible exception could be “the tongues of men and angels.” Could Paul mean some angelic language in 13: 1? However, Paul is speaking only hypothetically and hyperbolically (by way of exaggeration). The Corinthians prided themselves in their gift of tongues, but Paul says that even if they could speak in the language of angels, but did not have love, it would profit no one. He was not indicating that there was, indeed, a language of angels; moreover, every time we read about angels in the Bible, they are communicating with men in the language of men so that they could be understood.

It is also worth noting that Paul’s conversation with the Ephesian believers in Acts 19 comes chronologically after his first visit to the Corinthians (cf. Acts 18:1-19). It would appear very strange if the tongues-speaking before Paul’s visit to Corinth in Acts 2, 8, and 10, and the tongues of Acts 19 were entirely different from the tongues in Corinth without any special explanation of its difference in the book of Corinthians. In other words, if the tongues in Corinth were not foreign languages, but *ecstatic utterances* which were unintelligible and untranslatable, then why do we not have some kind of explanation in Corinthians about their difference? In fact, there is no explanation of their difference from the tongues in Acts 2, 8, and 10; and therefore,

they must have been the same phenomenon—that is, they must have been foreign languages. Moreover, Paul uses a quote from Isaiah 28 proving that the tongues being experienced in Corinth were indeed, languages.

Indeed, He will speak to this people Through stammering lips and a foreign tongue, (Isaiah 28:11 NASB)

Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be infants, but in your thinking be mature.<sup>21</sup> In the Law it is written, "BY MEN OF STRANGE TONGUES AND BY THE LIPS OF STRANGERS I WILL SPEAK TO THIS PEOPLE, AND EVEN SO THEY WILL NOT LISTEN TO ME," says the Lord.<sup>22</sup> So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers but to those who believe. (1 Corinthians 14:20-22 NASB)

In every instance of the word “tongue” or “tongues” in 1 Cor. 14, the Greek word *glossa* is used, indicating a continuity of meaning between “tongues” in Acts and “tongues” in 1 Cor. 14. Only in vv. 10-11 where the word “languages” occurs does Paul use a different word, *phone* which may be translated “voice.” Again, it is not exegetically sound to change the interpretation of *glossa* from “foreign language” to ecstatic, unintelligible speech unless there is compelling reason to do so. The tongues of 1 Cor. 14 are the same kinds of tongues found in Acts.

Moreover, we learn from Paul’s reference to Isaiah that tongues were a sign of God’s judgment upon the Jews. Even as the Jews were carried into exile by people who spoke strange languages, so the tongues at Pentecost indicated that God was now speaking His word in more than one language, Hebrew. He was speaking in every other language of the world to indicate that He was taking the kingdom away from His sinful people and giving it to the Gentiles. Thus tongues were a sign for unbelieving Jews who should recognize the sinfulness of their unbelief.

#### **IV. Interpreted tongues were the same as prophecy. They were divine revelations from God.**

Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy.<sup>2</sup> For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in *his* spirit he speaks mysteries. (1 Cor. 14: 1-2 NASB)

The word “mystery” occurs 28 times in the NT and it consistently means redemptive truth that was once concealed in the OT but is now revealed to the NT apostles and prophets. Thus, a “mystery” in the NT is a revelation from God given to His people (Robertson).

Jesus answered them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. (Matthew 13:11 NASB)

For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery—so that you will not be wise in your own estimation—that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; (Romans 11:25 NASB)

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past,<sup>26</sup> but now is

manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, *leading* to obedience of faith; (Romans 16:25-26 NASB)

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles--<sup>2</sup> if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you;<sup>3</sup> that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief.<sup>4</sup> By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,<sup>5</sup> which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;<sup>6</sup> *to be specific*, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. (Ephesians 3:1-6 NASB)

Of *this church* I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the *preaching of* the word of God,<sup>26</sup> *that is*, the mystery which has been hidden from the *past* ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints,<sup>27</sup> to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (Colossians 1:25-27 NASB)

In all these verses, “mystery” means something concealed in the OT but fully revealed in the NT. Christianity is not a mystery religion. Everything is out in the open and fully revealed and subject to examination. Therefore, the “mysteries” of 1 Cor. 14: 2 are revelatory. They are revelations of the Holy Spirit to NT believers concerning things concealed in the OT but revealed in the apostles and prophets. The person speaking in NT tongues “communicates truth that has been made known to him by divine revelation.” (Robertson).

But then, how could Paul say he speaks not to men but to God? He says this because the tongue is a foreign language that no one else but God would understand—unless someone in the congregation had the gift of interpretation. Thus the situation in Corinth was different from that of Acts 2 when there were people in the audience who actually understood the languages being spoken by the apostles. But in Corinth, no one would understand the divine revelation spoken by the tongues- speaker unless it was translated into the common language. Notice that tongues which were interpreted were equal to prophecy.

<sup>3</sup> But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. <sup>4</sup> One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church. <sup>5</sup> Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but *even* more that you would prophesy; and greater is one who prophesies than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edifying. (1 Cor. 14: 3-5).

Prophesying is a greater gift than tongues “unless” the tongues are interpreted, in which case the tongues become equal in importance to the prophesying since interpreted tongues also edify the church with divine revelation. The way in which interpreted tongues edified was the same in which prophecy edified—through the divine words of God. It was not the sensations created by the voice or the emotional experience which edified the speaker or the congregation. If the speaker was edified through the sensations of his voice or through the emotional experience of speaking in tongues, then the congregation could be edified the same way without the necessity of interpretation. However, the congregation was edified through what was being said in the interpretation; otherwise, tongues failed to build up or edify the congregation. “Once interpreted, the message spoken in a ‘tongue’ became the very voice of God to the people” (Robertson).



But how was tongue-speaking without interpretation edifying to the speaker (v. 4)? Again, tongues edified the speaker not through the sensation of the voice or through the emotional experience. They edified the speaker through the content of the message. He was edified through the revelation of divine truth or knowledge directly from the Holy Spirit. What then does Paul mean in v. 14?

<sup>14</sup> For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.

Does Paul mean that the tongues-speaker does not rationally understand the communication of truth from the Spirit? Does he not understand what he is speaking? But this is not what Paul means. There is no separation in Scripture between the mind and the spirit, as the following verse shows.

Being unable to get to Him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him; and when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying.<sup>5</sup> And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."<sup>6</sup> But some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts,<sup>7</sup> "Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?"<sup>8</sup> Immediately Jesus, aware in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, said to them, "Why are you reasoning about these things in your hearts? (Mark 2:4-8 NASB)

Jesus was rationally aware of what the scribes were thinking. There is no difference between what He knew in His spirit and what He knew in His mind. Thus, when Paul says that he prays with his spirit, he is saying he is praying rationally with his mind. However, his mind is "unfruitful" in the sense that he is not communicating what he is praying to other people who are "not edified" because they don't know what he is saying. Notice he says in v. 17,

<sup>17</sup> For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified.

In other words, the tongues-speaker is consciously "giving thanks". If he did not rationally understand what he was saying, then he could not be giving thanks. However, if he could give thanks without knowing what he is saying, it would also follow that other people in the congregation could give thanks without understanding his words. However, it is clear from the text that the other people listening cannot give thanks unless they understand. Therefore, by the same reasoning, he cannot give thanks unless he understands. What he is not doing, however, is communicating the divine revelation he has received to other people. In this sense, his mind is "unfruitful" in failing to bear the fruit of edification in the hearts and minds of those who hear his communication but have no understanding of it. This is confirmed by what follows in the passage.

<sup>14</sup> For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. <sup>15</sup> What is *the outcome* then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also. <sup>16</sup> Otherwise if you bless in the spirit *only*, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? <sup>17</sup> For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified.

On the other hand, if tongues are interpreted, they have the same value as NT prophecy which is the verbally inspired, infallible and inerrant Word of God—even as OT prophecy is the inspired

and inerrant Word of God. It is clear from the text that the tongues-speaker did not necessarily have the spiritual gift of interpretation.

<sup>13</sup> Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.

The gift of interpretation was a translation of the tongues (*glossa*) which was itself an inspired translation of the tongues. In this sense it is unlike the reliable—but non-inspired—translations of the Bible in print today which may have minor errors in capturing the exact meaning of the original Greek and Hebrew. The gift of interpretation was the gift of an exact, verbally inspired translation of the divine communication (foreign language) given to the tongues-speaker by the Spirit.

The importance of this fact cannot be exaggerated. If the translation of the tongues was divinely given to the interpreter, then the message of the tongues-speaker was a continuation of divine revelation beyond the OT Scriptures and beyond those NT Scriptures available at the time. Not only this, but this also implies that **if** the gift of tongues is a continuing gift to the church today, then these interpreted tongues, are continuing revelation from the Holy Spirit beyond the canon of the NT Scriptures (Robertson).

Therefore, we must deal with the gift of tongues today in the same way we deal with the supposed gift of prophecy. Both of them involve the gift of divine revelation directly from the Holy Spirit. But can we say that today we are receiving additional revelation from God equal to the content of the revelation in the Bible? This would mean that the Bible is not complete; there is additional revelation from God that we need which goes beyond what is contained in the Bible. This would, in turn, require the test of prophecy found in the Bible (see below).

#### **V. If there is no one to interpret, the tongues-speaker must remain silent.**

<sup>26</sup> What is *the outcome* then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. <sup>27</sup> If anyone speaks in a tongue, *it should be* by two or at the most three, and *each* in turn, and one must interpret; <sup>28</sup> but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God. <sup>29</sup> Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. <sup>30</sup> But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. <sup>31</sup> For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; <sup>32</sup> and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; <sup>33</sup> for God is not *a God* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

This command is in contrast to the practice of tongues in most churches where many people are speaking in tongues at the same time with no interpretation. But what does Paul mean when he says,

<sup>28</sup> but if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God.

Does this statement support the idea of a private gift of tongues? No, because the whole context of the passage is the edification of the whole church in the public assembly. The tongues speaker who does not have an interpreter should not speak in tongues publicly until there is someone who can interpret. Otherwise, he can speak silently “to himself and to God”. Yet, this does not imply

the private use of tongues as the normal way of employing the gift; tongues were given for the purpose of edifying the whole church. It means that the tongues-speaker, as also the prophets, should restrain himself for the proper use of his gift.

<sup>31</sup> For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; <sup>32</sup> and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; <sup>33</sup> for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

This interpretation of NT tongues runs against the experience of some people who claim to speak in tongues, but the doctrine of Scripture can never be subject to human experience. Experience must always be judged by Scripture; Scripture must never be judged by human experience. If anyone today makes the claim of speaking in tongues, let him prove that his experience is the same as that of tongues-speakers in the NT. Otherwise, others have the right to be skeptical of his experience. This means, of course, that the tongues-speaker must speak in a foreign language he has never learned.

## **VI. All prophecy in the NT and OT is the inspired word of God to which nothing can be added and from which nothing can be subtracted.**

"You **shall not add to the word** which I am commanding you, **nor take away from it**, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you. (Deuteronomy 4:2 NASB)

"Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; **you shall not add to nor take away from it.** (Deuteronomy 12:32 NASB)

Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him. <sup>6</sup> **Do not add to His words** Or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar. (Proverbs 30:5-6 NASB)

I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: **if anyone adds to them**, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; <sup>19</sup> and **if anyone takes away from the words of the book** of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book. (Revelation 22:18-19 NASB)

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! <sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel **contrary to what you received**, he is to be accursed! (Galatians 1:8-9 NASB)

Now it could be argued that many of God's words were added to the Bible **since the time Moses** wrote the first five books of the Bible. Moreover, Galatians was Paul's first epistle, and he wrote all his other epistles after Galatians. Does this mean Paul is accursed by adding to the Scriptures? No, because the only thing forbidden is the addition of words which are **not God's words**. No other words can be added to the Bible **except God's own words**, and no words of God should be subtracted from the Bible. The prophetic books of the Bible—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, etc.—were the words of God given to Israel and Judah through the prophets; and the history books of 1 and 2 Kings and so forth were also divinely inspired, as well as the wisdom books and Psalms. Jesus and the Apostles quote many portions of **most** of these books, showing that they **accepted** these books as inspired by God.

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. <sup>18</sup>  
 "For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. (Matthew 5:17-18 NASB)

Throughout the gospel accounts we read Jesus' words concerning the OT with the repeated formula, "It is written".

But He answered and said, "**It is written**, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'" (Matthew 4:4 NASB)

Jesus entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling, <sup>46</sup> saying to them, "**It is written**, 'AND MY HOUSE SHALL BE A HOUSE OF PRAYER,' but you have made it a ROBBERS' DEN.'" (Luke 19:45-46 NASB)

The apostles of Jesus use the same formula and quote the OT as the word of God.

...**just as it is written**, "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." (Romans 9:33 NASB)

...but **just as it is written**, "THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND *which* HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM." (1 Corinthians 2:9 NASB)

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, <sup>15</sup> but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; <sup>16</sup> **because it is written**, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY." (1 Peter 1:14-16 NASB)

Jesus and the apostles were constantly quoting the OT Scriptures as divinely authoritative. Peter assures his readers that the words of Scripture **did not come to us through the human will**, but had their origin from the Holy Spirit.

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is *a matter* of one's own interpretation, <sup>21</sup> for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2 Peter 1:20-21 NASB)

We also know that Peter **accepted Paul's writings** as Holy Scripture equal to the OT.

...and regard the patience of our Lord *as* salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, <sup>16</sup> as also in all *his* letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, **as they do also the rest of the Scriptures**, to their own destruction. (2 Peter 3:15-16 NASB)

Peter considered Paul's writings to be included in "the rest of the Scriptures". But Paul himself considered his own writings to be inspired of God, as well.

For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard **from us**, you accepted *it* not **as the word of men**, but *for* what it really is, **the word of God**, which also performs its work in you who believe. (1 Thessalonians 2:13 NASB)

If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that **the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment.** <sup>38</sup> But if anyone does not recognize *this*, he is not recognized. (1 Corinthians 14:37-38 NASB)

But, you might ask: Are there other books which also have the same authority as the OT and NT? I do not know of any other books that have the same authority. The Mormon Church accepts the *Book of Mormon* as divinely inspired which is the history of the Mormon Church and the revelations claimed by their prophet, Joseph Smith. The Christian Scientists say they believe the Bible but they also believe what Mary Baker Eddy wrote in her book, *Science and Health With a Key to the Scriptures*. The Roman Catholic Church believes in the inspiration of the *Apocrypha*, books written between the times of the OT and the NT and consisting of material about two-thirds the size of the NT. It is considered a mortal sin not to accept these books as equal to Scripture (Boettner). We learned earlier that Jesus and the apostles quoted the OT repeatedly, but we do not have a single quote from the apocryphal books from Jesus in the gospels or from the apostolic writings in the NT. The Palestinian Jews living at the time of Christ did not accept the *Apocrypha* as divinely inspired. In spite of these facts, the RCC ruled in 1546 that the *Apocrypha* is part of Scripture, and it is included in copies of the RC Bible. Moreover, the RCC believes in the infallibility of the pope as the spiritual descendent of the NT apostles without one shred of biblical evidence. Whatever the pope says officially as the pope is considered inspired by God. But how is this heresy any different from so-called modern prophets who claim to speak for God?

## VII. Prophecy in the Old and New Testaments was subject to various tests.

### A. The Test of Prophecy in the OT

#### 1. Moses and Some OT Prophets were able to produce signs and wonders.

How did the Israelites know that what Moses spoke and wrote was true? The answer is: Through miraculous signs.

Then Moses said, "What if they [*the Israelites in Egypt*] will not believe me or listen to what I say? For they may say, "The LORD has not appeared to you.'" (Exodus 4:1 NASB)

God's answer to Moses' question was that He would give Moses the ability to produce miraculous signs and wonders.

The LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?" And he said, "A staff."<sup>3</sup> Then He said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent; and Moses fled from it.<sup>4</sup> But the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand and grasp *it* by its tail "-- so he stretched out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand--<sup>5</sup> "that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you."<sup>6</sup> The LORD furthermore said to him, "Now put your hand into your bosom." So he put his hand into his bosom, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow.<sup>7</sup> Then He said, "Put your hand into your bosom again." So he put his hand into his bosom again, and when he took it out of his bosom, behold, it was restored like *the rest of his flesh.*<sup>8</sup> "If they will not believe you or heed the witness of the first sign, they may believe the witness of the last sign."<sup>9</sup> "But if they will not believe even these two signs or heed what you say, then you shall take some water from the Nile and

pour it on the dry ground; and the water which you take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground." (Exodus 4:2-9 NASB)

Moreover, God would raise up for Israel a prophet, like Moses, to whom Israel must submit. The ultimate fulfillment of this promise is Jesus Christ, but all the prophets of the OT were given in partial fulfillment of this promise. However, not all the OT prophets produced miraculous signs. Miracles occurred only sporadically in the history of Israel during the time of Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, and Jesus and the apostles. We might also include the miracles of Samson, but miracles were not common throughout Israel's history. The OT prophets, for the most part, were commissioned to call the people of Israel back to obedience to the Law given to Moses, the greatest prophet of the OT.

<sup>15</sup> "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him....<sup>18</sup> I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. <sup>19</sup> It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require *it* of him. <sup>20</sup> But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.' <sup>21</sup> "You may say in your heart, 'How will we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' <sup>22</sup> "When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him. (Deuteronomy 18:9-22 NASB)

From this passage and others, we may determine other tests which applied to anyone claiming to be a prophet to Israel, that is, anyone claiming to speak for God.

## 2. A prophet who makes one prediction that does not come true was a false prophet.

The Israelites did not need to listen to any prophet who made a mistake in his predictions. Moses was not talking about averages or percentages. He did not say, "Well, everyone has a bad day once in a while, so if the prophet is true 70% of the time, or even 60% of the time, he is a true prophet." If the prophet is receiving communication from God, then his prophecy is accurate **all** of the time, not **some** of the time. God knows the future **all the time** because He ordained the future, declaring the end from the beginning (Isa. 46: 10). He never makes an inaccurate statement about anything, including the future; and if God is telling **you** what He knows about the future, then **you will not make a mistake**. If you do make a mistake, God has not spoken to you. The **OT prophets** recorded in the Bible were accurate 100% of the time because they were getting their information directly **from God**—not their own imaginations.

There is a story in 1 Kings 22 about Micaiah the prophet. Micaiah predicted that wicked King Ahab would not return alive from the battle with the Syrians. But King Ahab didn't believe him. When Ahab was leaving for the battle he told the servants to lock Micaiah in prison and feed him sparingly with bread and water until he returned safely. Micaiah heard the king's words, and here is what said:

..."If you indeed return safely **the LORD has not spoken by me.**" And he said, "Listen, all you people." (1 Kings 22:28 NASB)

In other words, Micaiah was subjecting himself to the test of a true prophet. If his words did not come true, he was not a true prophet. The end of the story is that Ahab dies in battle just as Micaiah says he would.

We have another story in the Bible in Jeremiah 28 about a false prophet named **Hananiah** who prophesied that Judah would return from Babylonian captivity in two years. This was in direct contradiction to the prophecy of Jeremiah who said that Judah would remain in Babylonian captivity for **70 years**. Jeremiah takes Hananiah aside and says to him, “You are a false prophet, and you are leading the men of Judah astray. For this sin, you are going to die within one year.” What happens? Hananiah dies within the year just as Jeremiah had said, proving that Hananiah was a false prophet and Jeremiah was a true prophet. This fulfilled short-term prophecy should then have been verification of Jeremiah’s long-term prophecy that Judah would be in exile for 70 years.

Those who claim to be prophets of the Lord should beware. If God has not really spoken through them, then they are leading God’s people astray; and, therefore, they are heaping future judgment on themselves. God did not say that all false prophets would die in one year. Jeremiah said this about Hananiah, no one else. The judgment of false prophets—whatever it is—may come much sooner or much later, but it will come because they have dared to say, “Thus says the Lord” when God did not speak to them.

### **3. God will put His words in the mouth of the true prophet. Moreover, the prophet must speak only what the Lord commanded him to speak.**

“If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and **gives you a sign or a wonder**,<sup>2</sup> and the sign or the wonder **comes true**, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after **other gods** (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,’<sup>3</sup> you **shall not listen** to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is **testing you** to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deuteronomy 13:1-3 NASB)

Obviously, God would never give a prophet something to say that **contradicted** what He had **already** said. God never contradicts Himself.

If the prophet attempts to lure the Israelites into the worship of a false god, then they would know that this was a false prophet. This condition for prophecy is also included in the phrase, “speaks in the name of other gods” (Deut. 18: 20). So, if a prophet contradicted the word of the Lord previously given, he was a false prophet **no matter what he was capable of doing**. Even if he predicted signs and produced wonders **that came true**, the people of Israel should not listen to him because he had violated what God had previously spoken. It did not matter whether these signs and wonders had actually occurred or whether they were by trickery or slight of hand; the important thing is that they appeared to everyone to be true. But genuine or not, the prophet’s **words** were not true; therefore, he was a false prophet.

False prophets today do not have to blatantly tell us to worship false gods. The point of the text is that the prophet’s words were not in **conformity** to the previous word of God. So we see that Deuteronomy 13 supplements what is said about the false prophet in Deuteronomy 18. A false prophet is a prophet who...

- (1) Predicts something that **does not come true**. Or...
- (2) Predicts signs and wonders that **do come true**, but he also **tempts Israel to worship false gods**. In other words, although his signs and wonders come true, his **words** are not true. Or...
- (3) Prophesies words that God did not command him to speak, words which, by deduction, **contradict what God has already said**.

But, we may ask, how can we know whether he is saying something contrary to the word of God? We can't, unless we study our Bibles. And most Africans do not study their Bibles; they depend on people who claim to speak for God. But we must do the same thing the Bereans did when Paul spoke the gospel to them.

The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. <sup>11</sup> Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily *to see* whether these things were so. (Acts 17:10-11 NASB)

Notice also that according to Deut. 13: 3, God **allows** a false prophet to appear before Israel and produce signs and wonders which come true **so that He can test Israel to see if they love Him**. This is an interesting statement in the context of sub-Saharan Africa with so many professing Christians resorting to African tribal religions. What do you do when your crops don't grow or when your child gets sick? You pray, and then you get your pastor and other Christians to pray for your crops or your child. What do you do if your crops **still don't grow** or your child is **still sick**? Do you go to the **witch doctor and sacrifice to your dead ancestors**? You think maybe your dead grandfather is angry and you need to appease him with sacrifices.

And what happens if your crops begin to grow or your child gets well? What have you proved? Have you proved that the ancestral spirits and the witch doctor are more powerful than God? Is that what you have proved? No. This passage shows that **sometimes God allowed false prophets to perform signs and wonders** that came true, but that they entice people to worship false gods through their wonders. Jesus Himself even said that **false Christs** would arise in the last days and would deceive, if possible, even the elect.

"Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There *He is*,' do not believe *him*. <sup>24</sup> "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and **will show great signs and wonders**, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. (Matthew 24:23-24 NASB)

So what have you proved by going to the witch doctor and getting what you wanted—healthy crops and healthy children? **You have proved that you don't love God**. The only thing you want from God are **material things**—healthy children, healthy crops, and money. If you don't get these things from God, you will get them somewhere else. But who do you think allowed you to get what you wanted? Do you think the witch doctor can do anything for you without God's permission? If you think he is more powerful, you need to read the **book of Job** where Satan must ask God's permission for everything he does to Job. Satan can't do a thing without God's permission. So what you proved is that you don't love God and you do not respect God for being God.



## B. The Test of Prophecy in the New Testament

### 1. Jesus and the NT Apostles were able to produce signs and wonders.

How did the people in Jesus' day know that he was sent from God? The Answer: By the signs and wonders he performed.

Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, **observing His signs** which He was doing. (John 2:23 NASB)

this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God *as* a teacher; **for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.**" (John 3:2 NASB)

A large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick. (John 6:2 NASB)

When they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments so that nothing will be lost." <sup>13</sup> So they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. <sup>14</sup> Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, "**This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.**" (John 6:12-14 NASB)

But many of the crowd believed in Him; and they were saying, "When the Christ comes, **He will not perform more signs than those which this man has, will He?**" (John 7:31 NASB)

Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, "What are we doing? **For this man is performing many signs.**" <sup>48</sup> "If we let Him *go on* like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." (John 11:47-48 NASB)

Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; <sup>31</sup> but **these have been written so that you may believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:30-31 NASB)

"Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, **a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst**, just as you yourselves know (Acts 2:22 NASB)

From these texts, we might ask the following questions concerning modern prophets:

1. Are there any other explanations for the supposed signs and wonders these prophets are performing? When Jesus produced signs and wonders, there was no other explanation, and even His enemies could not explain them away through logical means.

2. While these modern prophets have many followers, why isn't everyone, including skeptics like me, agreeing that the signs and wonders are genuine? When Jesus healed people in Palestine, He always had crowds of people following him. Why don't we see busloads of people coming into Kampala, Eldoret, or Nairobi every day, by the tens of thousands, to get healed by these prophets? Apparently, many don't really believe that miracles are taking place.

Secondly, how did the people know that Peter, Paul, John, and others were true apostles? Answer: By the signs they performed.

Now **Peter and John** were going up to the temple at the ninth *hour*, the hour of prayer. <sup>2</sup> And a man who had been lame from his mother's womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple. <sup>3</sup> When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he *began* asking to receive alms. <sup>4</sup> But **Peter, along with John**, fixed his gaze on him and said, "Look at us!" <sup>5</sup> And he *began* to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. <sup>6</sup> But Peter said, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene--walk!" <sup>7</sup> And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. <sup>8</sup> With a leap he stood upright and *began* to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. <sup>9</sup> And all the people saw him walking and praising God; <sup>10</sup> and they were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to *beg* alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. (Acts 3:1-10 NASB)

I have become foolish; you yourselves compelled me. Actually I should have been commended by you, for in no respect was I inferior to the most eminent apostles, even though I am a nobody. <sup>12</sup> The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles. (2 Corinthians 12:11-12 NASB)

For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed, <sup>19</sup> in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Spirit; so that from Jerusalem and round about as far as Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. (Romans 15:18-19 NASB)

For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away *from it*. <sup>2</sup> For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, <sup>3</sup> how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, <sup>4</sup> God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will. (Hebrews 2:1-4 NASB)

As in the OT, so also in the NT, not all genuine prophets produced signs and wonders; but Jesus and the Apostles called attention to the truth of their ministry through signs and wonders. By these signs and by their ability to transfer miraculous gifts to others, the identity of NT apostles was established. Philip, although he was not an apostle was able to perform miracles, but was not able to **convey** the miraculous gifts to others.

## **2. NT prophecy must agree with what God has already spoken in the OT, through Christ, and through the NT apostles.**

It was not through signs alone that prophecy was tested. NT prophecy was tested for its content. As in the OT, the NT prophets were also examined.

<sup>29</sup> Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. (1 Cor. 14: 29)

If, indeed, a NT prophet was speaking for God and was speaking the inspired words of God, they must be true. If what the prophet said was contrary to apostolic tradition or the OT, the prophet

was a false prophet and would not be trusted by the church. He would never be allowed to speak in the church again, ever. He would not be given other opportunities to speak. If God was speaking through him, then he would never say something false or mistaken. By speaking one false word, he proved himself a false prophet. This is contrary to Grudem's claim that prophecy in the NT was not of the same caliber or infallibility as that in the OT. There is nothing in the NT to substantiate this claim.

**VIII. The primary purpose of prophecy in the OT was to proclaim the word of God. Prophecy has this same purpose today, to proclaim and explain what God has already said.**

As we read the OT prophets, we find that they are not primarily predicting future events or performing miracles. Many of the OT prophets don't perform any miracles at all. After Moses, Elijah, and Elisha, I can't think of a single OT prophet who performs miracles. Many of them foretell future events—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Amos, Joel, et al. The main future event which they predict is the destruction of certain countries—including Israel and Judah—for violating the Law of God given to them in the Pentateuch, including those in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. Therefore, the prophets of the OT were constantly bringing Israel and Judah back to the Law of God and commanding them to repent for breaking His moral law. In other words, they were preachers, not miracle-workers. They preached the demands of the law of God so the Israelites would repent and live obediently to the law of God.

Jesus repeated this emphasis upon the Law during His ministry. He spent very little of His time predicting future events—only a few passages like Matthew 24, the Olivet Discourse where Jesus predicted the events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD and the events surrounding His second coming. Rather, he taught about the moral law of God. The Sermon on the Mount is an exposition of OT law, how the citizens of the kingdom of God were supposed to live in this kingdom.

But I find it interesting that the self-proclaimed prophets in Uganda have **little or no interest in explaining the word of God**. They do not preach expositional sermons whereby the preacher takes a text of the Bible and explains it paragraph by paragraph. Rather, they are only interested in telling people the next thing that pops into their heads. It does not matter to me if they can heal the sick and raise the dead—and I am convinced that **none of them can**—because they have no interest in the Bible.































