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Today Hear His Voice: The Minor Prophets Speak

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Harding University's 70th Annual
Bible Lectureship

*Today Hear His Voice:
The Minor Prophets Speak*

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Harding University's 70th Annual
Bible Lectureship

*Today Hear His Voice:
The Minor Prophets Speak*

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FOREWORD

The apostle Paul instructed us that "whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." (Rom. 15:4) The apostle Peter said:

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men *moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God* (2 Pet. 1:20-21, emphasis mine).

For too long, we have neglected the teachings of the prophets. During this lectureship we will focus our attention on the messages of these inspired men of God, particularly, the twelve minor prophets Hosea-Malachi. The minor prophets span a period of over three hundred years of Israel's history. They were the "best of times, and the worst of times." Their messages are eternally contemporary as they faced religious and moral issues as current as today's. They are called "minor" prophets simply because their writings are briefer than those of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel.

The lectureship committee has chosen over thirty speakers and teachers to address themes vital to the church today. Their greatest compensation will be your attendance in their classes and your careful reading of this book.

I express my gratitude to my secretary, Marilyn Dowdy, for her efficient work in typing the manuscripts for this book and for the myriad of details she efficiently handles in preparation for this program. David Crouch and the staff in the Public Relations Office did their usual fine job in preparing the brochures and advertising for the lectureship.

I thank them as well. Also, I express my gratitude to Professor Rod Brewer for proofreading the manuscript.

It is my prayer that this lectureship will be a blessing to you who attend and read this book.

Don Shackelford
Lectureship Director

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MORNING DEVOTIONALS

POLLUTED PEOPLE OFFER POLLUTED WORSHIP

Jim Bill McInteer

It is not very pretty--but it is true. It is one of history's oldest lessons: a departing people offer a deviant worship. That is sad--worship must be in truth and when the people are not, it is not. The "do your own thing," the "pluralism is King" attitude wreaks havoc with the purity of praise.

God called this painfully to the attention of a people wandering away from the path of truth. Hear him:

A son honoureth his father and a servant his master:
if then I be a father, where is mine honor? and if I
be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of
hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name.
And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name?
Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say,
Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The
table of the Lord is contemptible. And if ye offer
the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer
the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto
thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept
thy person? saith the Lord of hosts. And now, I pray
you, beseech God that he will be gracious unto us:
this hath been by your means: will he regard your
persons? saith the Lord of hosts (Mal. 1:6-9).

Let us see what we have, please.

In life a son honors his father. If he does not, it is a most unnatural arrangement. To emphasize, the Holy Spirit uses a tense to show it happens again and again. The word

"honor" is interesting--its parent thought is "heavy." The son acknowledges his father's "weight."

Increasingly today, headless homes with absentee dads are hurting. The father needs to be there, and children must be taught to obey.

Second, servants honor their master or King. It is the rightful respect in a proper economic circle; else it is anarchy.

God rightfully asks--if these arrangements are proper and since I am God, where is my honor? Where is the reverence, respect, adoration, service, worship due him?

God then moves to explore this hideous situation. He charged that priests despised his name. Their lives denied what their lips professed. Service to God was not a joy but a thing of contempt. Elwell wrote, "We despise the name of the Lord by a slovenly attitude and shoddy service."

But, as is typical of the Malachi message, the people have a rebuttal: "Wherein?" They profess to be unconscious of the accuracy to the accusation.

God had his proof and returned a quick answer saying you "offered polluted bread" on his altar. They act as though it is *their* altar, not his. They do what they like and find satisfaction in doing--please self, not God.

How was the bread polluted?--not in the content of the product but in the selfish, non-scriptural matter of its presentation. Scott is right when he writes, "Worship must be from a right principle and in the right manner."

The attitude that says "anything will do for God if we keep some form of his word--it does not have to be exact but convenient as we bow on the altar of change" is a dangerous thing.

To be expected, the people resisted this charge and asked "wherein have we polluted thee?" It is hard for some folk to see the light and tailor their return to truth.

God answered this one too--you have made the table (the altar) "contemptible." You do it by offering the blind--a thing that was forbidden (Deut. 15:21; Lev. 22:19-25).

It is well to stop and see that a cheap religion that costs the offerer little is rejected by God. Henry reminds all, "If we worship God ignorantly and without understanding, we will bring the blind for sacrifice."

When it came to lambs, they brought the inferior and saved the best for themselves. How would we answer God when he asks "Is it not evil?" One translation has it, "Is it not bad?"; another, "Is it not wrong?" That gets the idea strongly embedded--to alter what God said about his altar is alternately wrong, bad, evil! Stop it! But their consciences were so dull they felt nothing even when violating God's word. He challenged them, "Try it with the governor and see if he is pleased." Instinctively you know this is wrong.

But the question comes--in view of the exposure of your error--will you change? Will you return to the truthful path? There is time for this to be done if there is the disposition to do it.

For each of us today the question comes--am I in any way weakening the law of the Lord or do I earnestly seek to follow his will? Do I not believe his mercy will meet my repentance? Simeon warned as he wrote, "Some prefer their own ease to God's service, their own will to God's precepts, their own interest to God's honor." Is he describing me? Just remember: "a polluted people offer a polluted worship." This is unacceptable.

THE CONTINUING PRIESTHOOD

Jim Bill McInteer

One cannot read his New Testament and fail to see that Christians today are priests. Whether it is the "royal priesthood" of 1 Peter 2:9 or the glorious identification of Revelation 1:6, an awareness comes relative to the nature of the saints' responsibilities.

No, it is not Levitical. Disciples today will not wear priestly robes, offer animals or incense, nor sprinkle the ashes of a red heifer on an audience. There will be no earthly tabernacle to enter and count the bread on the table--but there will be universal duties he will exercise.

The Scriptures teach that things written aforetime were written for our learning. The shadow of the Old Testament gives way to the sunlight of the new. Figures become form--but a grasp of the shadow aids in understanding the sunlight.

Thus one goes to Malachi 2:5-9 and sees the duties of the old priesthood in order that he might grasp more fully the principles of the new one. The examination of these instructions will enlarge the grasp of duties, in principle, of today. Thus a priesthood continues, and you as a child of God are a part of it.

Read these words:

My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name. The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found

in his lips; he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity. For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the Lord of hosts. Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law (Mal. 2:5-9).

What are the salient features here? First, there is a covenant relationship between God and man. A mutual engagement has been entered into by two parties. It was God's grace that gave it; it is man's volunteer submission and obedience that enjoins it. It is an agreement--but parties keep their pledge, and the results are moving.

It is a covenant for "life and peace," and it is enacted via reverence and adoration on the part of man. What higher calling than for you to have a "contract with the Lord."

Second, the "law of truth was in his mouth." The Torah means to point with the finger, to be ready, capable, motivated, guided. All teaching must come from the word of God, not the genius of man. No false doctrine or perverse judgement is to be found in him. He does not handle the word deceitfully.

Third, no "iniquity was found in his lips." There, then, nor now is to be two standards of morality--one for preacher and one for pew. As Pusey writes, "Don't teach well and live ill." Convictions and practices are agreeable to doctrine taught.

Fourth, that priest--and so must we--walked with God in peace and equity. One said, "Teach correctly so that they

may thus frame actions properly." Consistency is the order of the day--he walks with God. Enoch did (Gen. 5:24), Noah did (Gen. 6:9), so must we. The constant intercourse with God must be maintained.

Peace and fairness--nothing akin to division and nothing devoid of justice is to be practiced. Union with the Lord is ever maintained.

Fifth, he will be an arresting servant as he turns "any away from iniquity." He does not maintain the status quo--he changes the day. Evangelistically he pursues holiness and alters the course of those who walk an evil path.

Sixth, his "lips keep knowledge." He is a truth storehouse. He studies the will of God, knows it and imparts it. All know they can depend on him to know the truth of the Lord.

Seventh, the populace will "seek the law at his mouth." The world comes to him knowing he knows Heaven's way. He is that walking Bible. It is not his opinions but God's truths he imparts.

Finally, he knows who he is and that is most electrifying. He is the "messenger of the Lord of host." Serving so magnificent a Master, he dare not soil his name.

Do we today enact these principles as a priest of God?

MALACHI AND MARRIAGE

Jim Bill McInteer

Since it is the "talk of the town" with everyone stating his piece about marriage and family relationships, would it not be wise to ask Malachi his views? The inspiration of the Holy Spirit was his as he wrote; thus, his teachings as to how "God Witnesses Marriage" is very important. The words we will use come from his writings, Malachi 2:14-17.

Obviously, if evil companions corrupt good morals, surely improper morals and worship corrupt good marriages.

We turn now to Malachi's words. One has called this "the most elevated view of marriage in the Old Testament." Another writer reminds us that "God is vitally interested in our private lives." Malachi states:

Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the Lord hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou has dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the Lord of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously. Ye have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet ye

say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment? (Mal. 2:14-17).

Along with the marrying couple, God, in substance, also sees and "signs our marriage licenses." He sees our purpose, he also sees our sinful failures. God beautifully is served by our fulfilling our family obligations. I like the thought that no marriage should be consummated that God cannot bless.

Did you see God as a witness at your marriage? Does he see you "bear and forbear" in family matters today? Did you notice that he considers the casting off of one a breach of promise?

Strong is Heaven's plea for man to "keep the wife of your youth."

In youth, affection is strong--keep the fire ablaze. She is not like a piece of machinery--now old, "I'll get rid of this one and trade for a new one." Just remember, brother, you are no spring chicken yourself. Learn to enjoy the aroma of liniment as well as perfume!

A charge is made: "You dealt treacherously." In the absence of spirituality we degrade ourselves into carnality. Sin is a downhill journey. One violation is the invitation to another. These men were divorcing legitimate wives and marrying heathen women. They broke hearts with their actions. Divorced women came weeping to the temple. God saw the tears of the oppressed, not the sacrifice of the oppressor! Those offended folk did not want false worship accepted--who prays against us today? What principles are we violating and gaining the disgust of mankind--any?

Here's how God sees marriage:

First, your wife is your companion--not slave, not inferior, nor boss. She is your equal. No company that you enjoy should be equal to that of your wife. You took an

oath for life--don't trifle with it. How can a man of conscience divorce his companion! It needs be added though, "Companion behave yourself."

Second, the wife is your covenant. Some "forgot" the covenant of their God (Prov. 2:17). They are to cleave indissolvably--unbreakably. God had enough "breath" left to make another Eve--but he made just one.

He made Eve, not Robert, for Adam's companion, please remember. The one original pair is the example for all time--one pair from whom all the rest proceed.

Third, by the union with the wife of your youth "godly seed" is sought. How can you have false marriages and a holy posterity? You give the children a mountain to climb when before them you could stretch a plain. Make your plans for a pious marriage and children that will be blessed by it.

In all this remember God said, "He hateth putting away" (verse 16). It is a feeling of continuity--"I am hating"--it goes on and on. He equates it with violence! Man seeks to cover it with a garment but nothing is hidden from the Lord.

What is the consequence of all this? Remember that all the time they were splattering rightful marital relationships they were still splattering blood on God's altar of sacrifice. And so he said, you "have wearied the Lord." God gets tired of men seeking to justify their own sinful practices. Strange is it not?--he holds all this universe in place by the power of his word, but I make him "tired" with my actions. We put his patience to the test. Disobedience, skepticism, and discontent make God "tired." (I want him well rested with me, don't you?) They unbelievably said, "Everyone that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord and he delighteth in them." Can you imagine greater confusion?

Evil is so subtle--"we want to do wrong and begin to wish it were not wrong. Next we begin to doubt it is wrong, and finally it is wrong only on certain circumstances" as a writer noted.

We face family, social, personal decisions daily. Have we lost our sensitivity to evil? Do we know what is good anymore? Do you not know the Devil is pleased with this perplexity?

The next step is failing to ask, "Where is the God of judgment?"

Has he withdrawn, has truth lost the battle? Is righteousness a waste of time? Does God no longer punish? Has hell been air-conditioned?

Nothing could be farther from truth than to envision a disinterested Deity. God is there--he sees, he hears, he blesses, he punishes. Keep him uppermost in your thoughts and manner. Heaven awaits those who walk with him. May the Lord strengthen us all in so doing, and may our marriages reflect the knowledge that God "signed our licenses."

Jim Bill McInteer is president and publisher of the *21st Christian*, *Power for Today*, and *20th Century Graded Bible Lessons*. He serves on the board of trustees of Harding University and is chairman of the Harding Graduate School Committee. He formerly served as minister for the West End church of Christ in Nashville for thirty years before his retirement.

THEME LECTURES

WHEN WORSHIP IS NOT WORSHIP! MALACHI

Ian A. Fair

INTRODUCTION

The topic for my lesson today is "When worship is not Worship!" The text out of which I will be working will be Malachi 3:6-12.

An African Parable. A number of years ago, early in the 1970's, while working with a group of missionaries in South Africa, we received a letter from a man in the nation of Botswana requesting that we visit him to tell him the "story" of the church of Christ. While visiting in the area where we worked, he had apparently picked up a tract that we had written on the subject. We were delighted since we had for some time been planning to plant the church in that nation. Making the 1500 mile journey was a fascinating story in itself! We arrived in the area of Gaberones, Botswana, late one Saturday evening, located the man, and settled in for the night.

The next morning we arrived at the local school building of a small tribal city for the church service at which we were to speak. The service began in typical African style with no time set for the opening, little structure as we have come to expect it, and extremely informal. The informality and cultural factors of the service created several problems for one of the American missionaries working with us. He simply could not distinguish

between the form of worship with which he was accustomed and the function of worship.

Worship: A Timeless Topic. Similarly today, with American culture going through major shifts and adjustments, especially with the polarization and segmentation of generational groups, we too struggle with distinguishing between the form and function of worship. Worship is one of those timeless practices, fundamental to all religions, which is constantly threatened by secular interests. Every age is confronted with the task of contemporizing its faith in the face of secular challenges. In a world going through profound shifts, we are faced today with the serious task of articulating the timeless gospel of an unchanging Christ in a changing society. We must address a community today often frustrated by change which thinks and acts in a radically different manner from our roots, traditions, and comfort zones. In doing this it is imperative that we maintain our commitment to the inspired Word of God and biblical understanding of the church. At the same time we must address this changeless message to a generation that has lost confidence in traditional structures. The implications for worship are profound!

Those of us coming from an older generation are comfortable with formal traditions and structures. Younger generations (commonly referred to today in certain sociological constructs as "boomers" and "busters") are more interested in *function* than they are in *form*.

For obvious reasons much of our contemporary church life is structured more along rural lines with strongly established traditional ties to form, than along contemporary metropolitan or urban society's fluid needs. Younger urban Christians, most often without personal memory of roots in

rural America, have difficulty understanding, or accepting, these traditional forms.

It is not uncommon for younger Christians to confuse formality with a lack of spirituality and informality with spirituality. Without surrendering our commitment to biblical principles, we must recognize that the younger generations need greater opportunity for more informality and emotional expression. I do not intend to segment generations beyond reality, but it may be possible to conceive of younger generations being more "right brained" emotional than older generations who might be more "left brained" rational!

The Overall Scope of Worship. Several factors must be considered when discussing Christian worship. A primary one would be our church of Christ "worship" terminology. For instance, to my knowledge what takes place in the assembly on Sunday we call the "worship" service. The New Testament simply does not specifically and exclusively call this service *worship*, but uses several Greek terms for *worship* in a broader context, often referring to the lifestyle Christians should adopt. This does not imply that worship is not to be used to refer to the Sunday assembly, only that the term has broader applications.

Another term we use is *Bible Class* or *Sunday School*. Neither of these terms was used in the New Testament to refer to the practice of the New Testament church.

Because our terminology has been shaped by several centuries of Christian practice, we often experience difficulty in applying New Testament or biblical principles to traditional sociological or cultural constructs in the Christian experience.

As in every generation, but perhaps more acutely today since generation segmentation has become so deeply

entrenched in contemporary society, Christians must struggle to resist the full impact of demands for secularization of sacred practices! On the other hand, the challenge before the church is intensified since it is imperative that Christians seek constantly to make the Gospel of Christ and its implications relevant to changing and different cultures.

The Appropriateness of Malachi as a Text for Worship.

With these concerns and remarks introducing some of the challenges we face in defining, or articulating, appropriate Christian worship, Malachi becomes a meaningful vehicle for addressing the topic "When worship is not worship!"

I must request from you certain indulgences at this point! The topic is far greater than we can adequately or fully address in one sermon! I hope, therefore, to identify certain principles that must be considered and to propose certain alternatives. At the same time I hope to raise certain *flags* of caution!

What are some of the principles I find in Malachi that point to problems in Israel's worship? I see three primary concerns: 1. A stereotyped worship form; 2. A misunderstanding of the true function of worship; and 3. A lack of appropriate direction in worship.

THE SETTING OF MALACHI

Malachi was a fifth-century prophet to an Israel struggling to find itself after the restoration under Ezra and Nehemiah. The temple had been restored, but not to its former grandeur. Israel had restored a form of worship, but not the true spirit and function of worship. Israel's life was out of focus, and the priests were corrupt. Hence, Israel's worship had lost its effective leadership, leading to a loss of the true focus and purpose of worship.

Malachi was sent as "God's messenger"--the meaning of the word Malachi--to proclaim a "John the Baptist" call for repentance. True worship can only flow out of a penitent heart, broken in the presence of the holiness of God. The failure of the priests to bring the people before the holiness of God resulted in a formalism and condition in which worship in the absence of penitence was not worship.

MALACHI AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

It is customary to see Malachi as a messianic precursor to the New Testament. Malachi certainly contained several messages with obvious Messianic implications (Mal. 3:15, for example). Since New Testament writers obviously saw Christian implications in Malachi, what then are some of the messages in Malachi that might relate to worship for a church struggling with sociological change in the closing days of the 20th century?

First, I would emphasize that Messianic faith is characterized by repentance, by a truly penitent spirit; one broken at the foot of the cross of Jesus. Messianic faith is certainly not driven by an emotional self-interest focused solely on personal feelings. Messianic, or New Testament worship must be shaped by our focus on God's holiness and work in Christ, rather than by the personal feelings and emotional needs of a secularized society.

Second, Messianic faith is characterized by true or genuine worship (Jn 4:23, 24). Genuine worship is defined in Scripture, both in Malachi and the New Testament, as worship on God's terms, not ours, and worship that flows toward God from the depths of hearts deeply committed to the love and service of God. The direction of worship is God's, not man's needs.

APPLICATION

Sociologists inform us that we are living in perhaps the most significant decade in two centuries. Some argue that the 21st century, in fact, began in the 1970's! Peter Drucker argues that the 1970's were like a Brenner pass in the Alps in Europe, a pass dividing one culture from another. According to some, Drucker among them, we are experiencing more change, and faster change, than at any other period in history. Our 20th century mindset has difficulty accepting a 21st century that should not begin for another 7 years, but which has already been around for some 15 years! This is especially true in regard to the church. Changing culture, with major sociological shifts and swings, will always pose challenges for conservative people, and we are by choice and conviction a conservative people!

But sociological changes also present positive new challenges and opportunities for service to those communities who will struggle with these challenges. As never before, our rapidly moving and shifting society is in desperate need of social, ethical, and moral stability. We believe that the eternal, changeless gospel provides the only real hope for a nation struggling to find its identity and direction in the face of radical socioeconomic and geo-political changes.

Corporate worship, which for all religious people functions as the core of their confession, in this matrix of contemporary shifts and changes becomes both the *lightning-rod* for criticism and reconstruction. But it can also become the *lighthouse* for a Christian solution to the insecurity of a generation urgently in need of direction and stability!

Our challenge today is to shape our worship experience to where it is meaningful to people who see life through a different generational or cultural lens, and yet at the same

time to do so in a manner that will call this generation back to a genuine sense of, and direction for, worship.

In this lesson I would like to distinguish between three poles to worship: the *form* of worship, the *function* of worship, and *direction* of worship. All three are essential to genuine worship, yet for "worship to be worship" they must be held in dynamic tension. When, however, one or more becomes polarized, or when they are allowed to get out of balance, then "worship is not worship!"

If we learn one valuable lesson from Malachi, we learn that it is a simple matter for God's people to slide into a frame of mind where "worship is no longer worship" and where form dominates both function and direction. We see in our text a people for whom the profane (secular) has risen to dominate or shape worship and whose worship has consequently degenerated to the lowest common denominator of that which is most pleasing or convenient to the worshiper. What, then, are some of the factors we must consider in maintaining an attitude of genuine worship which would also serve as warning signs for a generation struggling with the secular?

Distinguish Form and Function. We must be able to distinguish between the form of worship and the function of worship. There is nothing wrong with concern for proper forms of worship, but when the focus is more on the form of worship, or when traditional or cultural forms of worship are confused with genuine biblical forms, form inhibits or destroys genuine worship. The people of Malachi's day were following a legal or "correct" form of worship, but not the proper function of worship. They were returning a gift to God in the form of a "tithe," but the spirit, purpose, or function of their gift was not genuine (Mal. 3:6-12). Amos, likewise, spoke to a similar situation in Israel (Amos

5:21-24). When form dominates and diminishes function, then "worship is not worship!"

Distinguish Function and Direction. We must be able to distinguish between *function* and *direction* in worship. When a misdirected function in worship shapes worship to meet felt or emotional needs, or when worship is designed with a direction toward the worshiper's emotional satisfaction, then function dominates both form and direction, and worship becomes a sociological or psychological exercise in group dynamics rather than genuine worship.

Distinguish between Form-Function and Appropriate Direction. We must distinguish between the *form-function* tension in worship and the appropriate *direction* in worship. We must be sensitive to the holiness of a sovereign God as the proper direction of worship as opposed to a self-centered, needs-oriented function in worship. Throughout its history, Israel repeatedly lost sight of the genuine direction of its worship, preferring to see worship in the context of its own situation and felt needs. Idolatry was a typical early example of this tendency in Israel as it lost its proper direction for worship. In Malachi's day of famine and hardship, Israel and its priests were drawn more to their personal needs and personal concerns than to worshipping before the sovereign holiness and glory of God. They followed the proper form, offering sacrifices and tithes, but focused on their own poverty and need, thus "robbing God" (Mal 3:8). When worship is intended to be predominantly satisfying to the worshiper or preferably to meet the worshiper's felt-needs or perhaps to be comfortable to the worshiper, then function is confused with the appropriate direction in worship. Christian worship must always be

directed toward the sovereign Lord and God (Eph. 5:19, 20; Col. 3:16, 17).

Dynamic Tension. Finally then, when form, function, and direction in worship are held in *dynamic tension* rather than being polarized, "worship becomes worship!" When form dominates function or function dominates direction, then, as in the case with Israel in Malachi's day, "worship is not worship!"

CONCLUSION

The lesson for our consideration today is that true worship is not shaped simply by form, but it must also address the appropriate function or purpose of worship. Genuine worship must go beyond mere form to where it is the spiritual overflowing of a penitent heart in genuine gratitude to God for his saving work in Christ and his cross. But function must also be shaped by the proper direction of worship. Genuine worship must be directed toward God and not the worshiper's felt or emotional needs. Worship must certainly have an emotional element as well as a cognitive rational element, but worship must flow out *of* the emotional side of the worshiper and not be *directed toward* the emotional needs of the worshiper.

Malachi calls us back to the sovereignty and majesty of a holy God as the true focus and direction of worship. Malachi challenges us to examine carefully our motivation as well as the form of our worship.

True worship "wells up" out of a lifestyle dynamically shaped by God and the cross of Christ, properly informed by the Word of God, and appropriately directed toward God.

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Cline Paden

INTRODUCTION

The book of Jonah is one of the most widely known pieces of literature in the world. This is not only true of religious literature, but of secular writings as well. If you were in London, New York, or Rio de Janeiro today and asked the first one hundred people you met to share with you something from the book of Jonah, most of them could comply with your request. Many of them would feel very comfortable about what they could say about him. Some would even likely volunteer some very interesting, though totally undocumented, "evidence" concerning a whale.

While there are many characters in the book, there is really only one central figure, and that figure is Jehovah God—not Jonah. The Ninevites, the sailors, the seaweed, the gourd, and the little worm are all but the makings of some very interesting sub-plots to the story; but the real purpose of the book is to provide an opportunity for the Lord to reveal himself as the great and gracious God that he is and that he wanted Jonah and the Ninevites and the Israelites, and all of us to believe him to be.

The book presents two distinct views of the nature of God. First, his creative genius is acknowledged. When the sailors ask Jonah to identify himself, they inquire, "Who are you? Where are you from? And what is your occupation?" Jonah replies by saying, "I am a Hebrew, and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who hath made the sea and the

land" (1:9). He tells them that his Lord is the creator of heaven, the sea and the land. What else is there besides these? Nothing. So he says, first of all, the Lord is a great and powerful creator. Secondly, though his nature is portrayed throughout the entire book, it is magnificently delineated by Jonah in chapter 4 verse 2, when Jonah confesses, "I knew thee to be a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity." These two pictures of what God is like is what the book of Jonah is all about. First of all it is about a great and powerful creator, and secondly, it is about an incredibly gracious and compassionate God who works patiently with the hearts of all the lost to bring them to repentance; and in that pursuit will even "relent" --which literally means that he would change his mind about a calamity he may have previously declared that he would bring upon the wicked. He threatens, in order to arouse to repentance, so as to spare the threatening rod.

Now, that is the incredible, unbelievable picture of God that the book of Jonah projects, and the book of Jonah is not an isolated example of that graciousness. Do you remember when Moses returned from his forty-day meeting with the Lord on Mount Sinai to find the children of Israel worshipping the golden calf and engaging in unbridled revelry? God said to Moses, "Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them, that I may destroy them" (Ex. 32:10). Here the Lord says in effect, "Stand back, Moses. It's fry time." The Lord is going to destroy Israel, but Moses intercedes, and in verse 14 of the same chapter we read that "the Lord relented and did not bring upon the people the disaster he had threatened."

That is the gracious, compassionate heart of God that Jonah only acknowledged, but never personally knew. In chapter 4 verse 2 Jonah said, "I knew that thou art a gra-

cious, compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in love...." He knew it, but he did not believe it. Oh, he believed it intellectually, but no trace of that knowledge can be found in any of his conduct. It matters little what one's theology is if his actions betray his real beliefs. Jonah could not conceive of God's wasting all that graciousness on the human slime pits of Nineveh because he did not believe what he said he knew about God. What a lesson for us! To feel the full impact of that argument, I leave you to answer the question: Do you know anything about God that your actions can prove conclusively that you do not believe?

LESSONS FROM THE BOOK OF JONAH

The story of Jonah is so well known that it does not need retelling, and because the assignment I have been given does not require that we carefully scope every portion of this little book of four chapters, we are going to concentrate on some random seed thoughts gleaned here and there throughout the entire book that will help us to see the implication of our own summons to serve.

We Need to be on God's Wavelength. The word of the Lord came to Jonah saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before me" (1:2). Jonah arose, but not to obey. He rose "to flee the presence of the Lord."

Strange--inexplicable--the conduct of this prophet (2 Kings 14:25). During the next few days he would experience what no other man in history would ever know--including a little quiet time in the belly of a fish. He would survive the strange but unquestionably true circumstances and would live to hear the Lord say to him a second time, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city and preach...."

No more than the foregoing brief remarks are needed to show the irreconcilable differences that existed between Jonah and the Lord who had called him to be his mouthpiece. The "repent or else" message which Jonah was asked to deliver to the Ninevites was totally unacceptable to him. Jonah feared that the Ninevites would accept the "repent" condition. Jonah preferred the "else" clause. It is rather evident that God and Jonah were not on the same evangelistic wavelength, and their different mindsets obviated the possibility of their ever being "fellow-laborers" in human redemption. With his attitude, Jonah could never reflect the character of God, and rather than his being "a light unto the Gentiles" as the Lord intended Israel to be (Is. 42:6), Jonah would cause the "name of God to be blasphemed among the Gentiles" (Rom. 2:24).

Sometimes we erroneously explain differences between young folks and old folks by attributing those differences to "a generation gap." I do not believe that there is such a thing. I readily acknowledge that there is an "ideal gap," but when men of seventeen and men of seventy have the same ideals, there is no gap between them. There was an ideal gap between God and Jonah, and that accounts for Jonah's abysmal failures. We must avoid his folly if we would escape his fate.

It would serve us well to consider seriously whether our evangelistic activities reflect the concerns of God for the lost. Are we on the same evangelistic wavelength of the Lord?

"THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD"

I am impressed with the fact that twice in the book of Jonah, and many times elsewhere in Scripture, the expression "from the presence of the Lord" is used. And about the

only thing that is definite about the expression is the fact that it does not always carry the same meaning. Why Jonah felt the necessity to leave his country is without reason. He could have sat in lostness, in total rebellion, in the comforts of his own home, unless he had the impression, held by others, that Jehovah God was like some local deity whose wrath could not extend beyond his territory. There is no indication that he subscribed to such a theory. Adam and Eve's efforts to hide themselves from the Lord makes far more sense. Before they sinned, they were evidently fit subjects for divine association and heavenly companionship. But when they sinned, the law of congeniality was broken, and when they heard the Lord walking in the garden in the cool of the evening, they "hid themselves from the presence of the Lord among the trees" (Gen. 3:8). They were driven by an overwhelming sense of guilt, something they had never experienced before. One's conscience, as someone has said, is man's self against himself. Their flight "from the presence of the Lord" was an instinctive action of shame. But Jonah's leaving the presence of the Lord makes no sense whatsoever. David could have shown Jonah the futility of trying to flee from the reach of Jehovah God. In Psalms 139, the psalmist asks,

Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up to heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, 'Surely, the darkness will cover me'; even the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike unto thee. (vs. 7-12)

And in Jeremiah 23:23-24 the Lord asks the same rhetorical question: "Am I a God at hand, saith Jehovah, and not a God afar? Can any hide in secret places so that I shalt not see him, saith Jehovah?"

To see that there is more to the expression than mere geographical proximity, let me call your attention to the time when Moses returns from his visit with the Lord on Mount Sinai to find the people of Israel worshipping the golden calf and engaging in sexual orgies. You will remember that the anger of the Lord waxed hot against Israel, and he would have destroyed his people except for the intervention of Moses. In the course of these extraordinary events which begin in Exodus 32:32 and which conclude only at the end of chapter 33, the Lord tells Moses to go ahead, and "lead the people to the place of which I have spoken unto thee: Behold, mine angel shall go before thee." But then the Lord tells Moses that he personally would not be going with the people "lest I consume thee in the way" (Ex. 33:3). When the people heard these "evil tidings," that is, that the Lord would not be with them, "they mourned." His presence had been with them in the cloud by day and in the pillar of fire by night, and that presence had given them great comfort and security. They mourned because they were suddenly made aware of how rich they had been and how poor they had suddenly become. By comparison with the original arrangement, "an angel" would be a poor substitute for the vigilant eye of Jehovah. Moses complains to the Lord about the arrangement and asks for better representation, and the Lord responds favorably to his request and says, "My presence will go with thee." And Moses says, "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence" (Ex. 33:14, 15). My question is, what is that "presence" which Israel at first had, then lost and still later had restored to them? And is that

the same "presence" from whence Jonah fled that he might go down to Tarshish?

That there is something more than geographical proximity intended by the expression under consideration is further substantiated by Paul's remarks about a coming judgment that would bring upon the wicked "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might" (2 Thess. 1:9). Note also that when David prays for forgiveness of sins, he entreats the Lord to "cast me not away from thy presence and take not thy Holy Spirit from me" (Ps. 51:11). The Hebrew word for "presence" is *pana* which means face. In 1 Peter 3:11 the apostle Peter quotes the statement from Psalm 34:15-16 that "the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous and his ears are open unto their prayers. But the face of the Lord is against them that do evil." From these texts, and others like them, the "presence of the Lord" or "face of the Lord" indicates divine disapproval that will eventually result in eternal banishment. That is also the thought included in the word anathema (1 Cor. 16:22). Thus when the reluctant prophet Jonah rose up to flee "the presence of the Lord," he arose to disobey, and sin was already charged against him. If that is true of Jonah, is that not also true of us since we have not been entirely faithful in respect to our evangelistic chores? The similarity between Jonah's summons to serve and our assignment under the Great Commission is too pronounced for us to take any comfort in the delusion that our status will be different from his if our record of neglect is the same as his. The Lord has said to us in effect, "Arise and go to all of the Ninevehs of the world and cry against them, for their wickedness has come up before me." Our assignment is identical to Jonah's. Our response has not been vastly different to his. Have we fled the presence of the Lord in our disobedience? I will let you answer.

EACH OF US HAS RECEIVED A SUMMONS FROM THE LORD

Would it surprise you to know that God had something definite in mind when he called you into existence? You are not an accident-- you are an intent. You are not the biological mistake of your parents. They may or may not have wanted you, but God did, and you came because he called you. Someone has said there are two important days in the life of every man. The most important day in a man's life is the day the man is born. The second most important day in his life is the day he discovers why he was born. Paul declares in Colossians 1:16 that "All things are created through him and for him." Remember that. You were made for God. That is why you were born. In Mark 13:34 Jesus teaches that God has given "to every man his work." Kingdom work is assigned. One's assignment is commensurate with the "gifts" he receives from the Lord (Rom. 12:4-8). And with each gift, a "ministry" is anticipated (1 Pet. 4:10). And when those faithful ministries are performed with "the strength which God supplies" (1 Pet. 4:11), God is glorified. In John 17:3 Jesus prays to God and says, "I have glorified thee on the earth. I have finished the work that thou gavest me to do." That is the same simple formula by which the "heavens declare the glory of God" (Ps. 19:1). The stars, the sun, the moon, all give glory to God by doing what they were made to do. So do you and I.

Paul spoke of the "ministry" which he had received from the Lord, "to preach the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). He finished his "course," and the Lord blessed him (2 Tim. 4:7, 8). It is interesting to note that when space in Paul's letter to the church in Colossae had consumed most of the parchment on which he was writing, he found room in which to record a word of warning to one

Archippus to remind him to "take heed to the ministry which thou has received in the Lord, that thou fulfill it" (Col. 4:17).

THE MESSAGE PREACHED

The message Jonah was asked to deliver was not of his own devising. He was told to "preach the preaching that I bid thee" (3:2). He was limited by the same parameters which the Lord imposed upon his apostles in his valedictory address. He told them to "preach the gospel" (Mk 16:15) and in the same breath passed identical restrictive limitations on the converts whom the apostles would make, when he said teach "them to observe whatsoever things I have commanded you" (Mt. 28:20). Neither Jonah nor the apostles were required to make their messages palatable. They were only required to make them available.

On the day of Pentecost when the apostles began to implement the commission they had received, they were guided in what they said by the Holy Spirit. They were allowed to speak only "as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). Today's gospel preacher likewise must also speak only as the Spirit gives him utterance. He does that without miraculous assistance when he speaks "as the oracles of God" (1 Pet. 4:11). In 2 Timothy 2:2 Paul writes, "The things which thou has heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also." The most important thing in this bit of instruction is that the thing delivered to faithful men must be "the same" that had been presented to him.

When Paul states in 1 Corinthians 9:19ff that he became "all things to all men that I might by all means gain some," he was not granting ecclesiastical license to alter the word preached so as to "update the church," which some moderns

feel is "woefully out of step with the times". Preaching the gospel in the nineties is no different from preaching the gospel in the first century. The gospel is timeless. A gospel messenger may change to conform to acceptable cultural mores, but the gospel message he preaches cannot be changed with impunity.

HAD JONAH ONLY KNOWN

The story of Jonah seems to be an unfinished story. It ends rather abruptly. The reader is left to conjecture how his relationship to God may have eventually ended.

Several commentators provide the student an easy way to remember the contents of each chapter. They say that in chapter one Jonah runs from God; in chapter two he runs to God; in chapter three he runs with God; and in chapter four he runs ahead of God. All of this brings to mind a provocative statement written by someone who should have shared its contents with Jonah:

**All men must know before they die
What they are running to, and from, and why.**

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"WHAT DOES THE LORD REQUIRE OF YOU?"

Kregg Hood

INTRODUCTION

Lois Cheney, in her excellent collection of devotional essays God Is No Fool writes,

They say that God has infinite patience,
And that it is a great comfort.
They say God is always there,
And that is a deep satisfaction.
They say that God will always take you back,
And I get lazy in that certitude.
They say that God never gives up,
And I count on that.
They say you can go away for years and years,
And he'll be there, waiting, when you come back.
They say you can make mistake after mistake,
And God will always forgive and forget.
They say lots of things,
These people who never read the Old Testament.
There comes a time,
A definite, for sure time,
When God turns around.
I don't believe God shed his skin
When Christ brought in the New Testament
Christ showed us a new side of God,
And it is truly wonderful.

But he didn't change God.
 God remains forever and ever
 And That God is no fool.

Those are convicting words. They also give a needed warning. And we, as Peter once put it, would also "do well to pay attention to it...."(2 Pet. 1:19). God has requirements for his people which he held in force then as well as now.

I, for one, am grateful for the emphasis, during recent years, on God's love, mercy and patience. These attributes should be heralded far and wide. But this needed emphasis should not come at the expense of respecting God's righteousness, his justice, and his willingness to bring judgment on those who take his commands lightly. God called Micah, a man from the rural town of Moresheth-Gath, to deliver a "report card" to the nation of Judah. They were about to get an "F" in several important topics.

This lesson from the Old Testament book of Micah shows us today the importance of taking God seriously. The people of Judah did not learn the lesson, and their nation was destroyed. We must not make the same mistake.

BACKGROUND

Micah's task was to answer publicly an essential question the people of Judah had apparently forgotten to ask: "What does the Lord require of You?" Both Israel, in the north, and Judah, in the south, had become socially, politically and spiritually corrupt. The people were still religious, but their hypocrisy, dishonesty, and lack of concern for people infuriated God.

Micah addressed the people during the reigns of three kings of Judah: Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. These men ruled from about 742 B.C. until 687 B.C. And while Micah did not necessarily speak during this whole time, he probably put close to thirty years of his life into this difficult effort.

Micah's personal background gave him special insights into his work for God. His hometown, Moresheth-Gath, was located on the main trade route to Egypt. This town near the border of Judah, was also in Philistine territory. Micah probably had a very objective view of the degenerating conditions present in Jerusalem. He was a common man from the country side. He also lived near some of the influential centers of pagan deities. Micah knew spiritual hypocrisy and social oppression firsthand.

WHAT WENT WRONG IN JUDAH?

Some of the events which occurred during Micah's ministry are recorded in 2 Kings 15:32-20:21 and 2 Chronicles 27:1-32:33. These texts and Micah's message show the big problems God's people continued to give in to. For example, the evils of Jerusalem are summarized by three problems facing the common folk of that day. In each case the cause of the problem can be traced back to dishonest, hypocritical leaders. It is no different today, either. When the leaders go bad, the people follow, and the country goes down the drain. Here is what God told Micah to point out.

Problem 1: Greedy Land Grabbers. Poverty was rampant throughout ancient times. But to make matters worse, the power brokers in and around Jerusalem stole what little the people had to live on. For example, Micah proclaimed:

Woe to those who plan iniquity, to those who plot evil on their beds! At morning's light they carry it out because it is in their power to do it. They covet fields and seize them and houses, and take them. They defraud a man of his home, a fellowman of his inheritance (2:1-2).

These oppressors plotted and schemed in their beds at night! They could hardly wait to get up and take whatever they wanted!

Problem 2: Idol Worship. While the people continued to worship God, they also worshiped the pagan deities. 2 Kings 15:35 illustrates the compromise which was prevalent in that day: "The high places, however, were not removed; the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there. Jotham rebuilt the Upper Gate of the temple of the Lord."

Idol worship remained rampant because Assyria, the number one geopolitical power at that time, transported their conquered subjects to Northern Palestine. These residents continued in their false religion and influenced God's people to join them. These practices then spread south into Judah. It must have grieved God to view construction on the temple while at the same time his people also worshiped other gods. True followers of God put him first with their whole hearts.

Problem 3: Corrupt Religious Leaders. The priests and judges were also partners in this spiritual deviance. The priests would "teach for a price" and the prophets would "tell fortunes for money" (3:11). Couple these evil practices with dishonest judges who took bribes and it is easy to see why God was angry.

God sent Micah into this boiling pot of sin to make something very clear: God was not pleased with their sin and his judgment was coming. Here are some of the predictions which later occurred. Samaria would be overthrown (1:6, 7). The Assyrians would carry them into exile (1:16). God would not hear their cries and prayers (3:4). Judah, Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed (3:12).

But, all was not lost. God also promised to regather a faithful remnant following this judgment (2:12-13). The influence of God would be felt again through the coming of the Messiah. God, even in his judgment, remains faithful.

WHAT DOES THE LORD REQUIRE OF YOU?

All of Micah's prophecy revolves around the familiar passage in chapter six. Verses six and seven give the typical response of people who do not really want to follow God but know they had better watch out or they will be in trouble! Verse eight, on the other hand gives the true solution to their problem.

First, God is not impressed by people who call him the "exalted God" (v. 6a) but show with their lives that his truths are not held in esteem. This is hypocrisy.

Second, God is not pleased with empty religious ritual, even if it is doctrinally correct (v. 6b). Bowing down and offering animal sacrifices does not correct the abuses of corrupt leaders. This is compromise.

Finally, God is not "bought off" with extravagant displays of religious devotion (v. 7). A person could give away a fortune, and God would still turn away if the heart were not right. Worse yet, he was appalled by the common pagan practice of child sacrifice. God detested these wicked expressions of "worship."

No, the answer to God's question did not lie with external practices of religiosity. Remember, the people still appeared to be practicing the ancient Hebrew faith while they also followed after idols.

The answer to what the Lord required of them was simple, but powerful. Micah wrote:

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (6:8).

Here are some insights from verse eight that merit special attention and consideration.

"Act Justly." God is concerned about the accuracy of his people's doctrinal practices. But correct religious actions will not offset dishonesty, especially in social concerns. The poor were being cheated by religious and civic leaders who claimed to follow God. The Lord wanted that changed immediately.

"Love Mercy." The dishonest practices would have stopped if the leaders had taken the time to see how their greed devastated the people who were affected. They just did not care.

Interestingly, this theme continues in Jesus' ministry. He came, as Luke recorded it, to "preach good news to the poor...to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and...to release the oppressed" (Lk 4:18). Jesus was quoting from Isaiah 61:1. Isaiah, incidentally, was a contemporary of Micah.

God has always been concerned about the pains, hurts and problems of people. He wants his followers to share this concern, and no amount of religious devotion can make up for ignoring the plight of the poor. They need mercy!

"Walk humbly with your God." All of Micah's concerns could be cured by a close, personal relationship with God. David illustrated beautifully this experience in his Psalms. No doubt the people had read and sung these passages of devotion in their worship. But the intimacy of these words fell on deaf ears and hard hearts. They could have experienced the kind of spiritual fellowship they, no doubt, heard about at the temple. But they were too busy with other concerns. The truth was so near and yet so far.

The people of Micah's day failed, for the most part, to answer the question posed by the prophet. But their failure may serve to educate us to do better. If so, our answer may well be found in the following applications.

APPLICATIONS FOR TODAY

The message of Micah contains a very potent message for our time today. While we may not commit the same sins to the same degree as the people of Judah, we are often guilty of similar failures. The principles remain the same. As we apply this text, here are several key principles to remember and act upon.

First, we must pay special attention to the spiritual qualities of our leaders. The corrupt leadership values and practices of many leaders in Judah led to the nation's downfall. Even though Jotham and Hezekiah were reasonably good men, their influence was not enough. We must work hard to provide the best, spiritually-minded leaders in all walks of life if our families, churches, communities, schools, and nation are to thrive during times of moral and economic uncertainty.

Second, commit to the three emphases Micah mentioned in 6:8. Christians must be concerned about justice. That forces us into the world to right the wrongs caused by a

godless society. The problems of drug addiction, alcohol abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, poverty, family violence, homelessness and more will not go away until Christians step in and seek true, meaningful justice. "Social justice" should not be a stranger to our churches. Doing good to all people and letting our light shine before men require that we do more than simply "pontificate" about the ills of society. We must feel and act with mercy. The "Golden Rule" is a far better strategy than "Gold Rules." When we really care about strangers, not just our own family and friends, we become like Jesus. When he looked at people, he felt compassion. This concern will humble us to walk with God as a co-worker in the causes which touch his heart.

Last, we must take the question, "What does the Lord require of you?" personally. What does the Lord require of *you*. Do not worry about what someone else should do. Think about yourself. The Lord may be pleased with your doctrine; is he pleased with your compassion? Read books and articles about the needs of hurting people in your community. The cities of America and the world are crying out for people who will help them break the cycle of poverty and hopelessness.

Get involved with the ministries in your congregation that force you to "get your hands dirty." Register to vote and get involved in local, state, and federal issues which relate to these issues. Reach out across racial, cultural, and "comfort-zone" barriers to serve people different from yourself. Get to be their friend. Learn how you can help each other.

Most of all, remember that Jesus died for all people. And his gift of love may flow through you as a gift of life. What does God require of you? That you belong to him

and that you allow him to guide you in any direction that brings him glory!

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WHAT ARE YOUR IDOLS?

Harold Redd

INTRODUCTION

The Old Testament Book of Amos is an eighth-century B.C. prophetic work of a man by the same name. Scholars attribute the book to Amos, who did most of his prophetic work in North Israel but was a resident of South Judah. One scholar writes, "his name signifies *carrier* but is better interpreted *heavy* or *burden*, in allusion to the grievous message which he had to deliver."¹ John T. Willis describes Amos as a man who "apparently had to hold down three jobs to support his family."² Willis points out that Amos was a *shepherd* (1:1), a *herdsman* (7:14) and a *dresser of Sycamore trees* (7:14).³ The herdsman (*boger*) cared for and raised cattle and the shepherd (*noged*) raised sheep. It is generally understood that Amos and shepherds like him raised a special breed of sheep that was economical because the breed required less food and yet produced, in abundance, a very fine wool. The combination of economy and quality made the breed of sheep practical for the small farmer.

In addition to caring for animals, Amos was a dresser of sycamore trees. Sycamore trees produce a fruit, similar to figs, which had to be pierced to ripen. The fruit was lightly esteemed as food and was used as such, primarily by the common people. Since sycamore trees do not grow in the region of Tekoa (Amos' town of residence, located about ten miles south of Jerusalem and five miles south of

Bethlehem, on the road to Engedi), but along the coastal plain and the Jordan Valley, it is reasonable to think that each year at the proper time, Amos migrated to one of these areas to gather and dress the sycamore fruit.

When Amos was called to prophesy is not recorded in the Book of Amos, although it is clear that he was active "in the days of Uzziah, King of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, King of Israel, two years before the earthquake" (1:1). The kings mentioned can help date the activities. As historical dates are uncertain, so are the dates for the kings mentioned. Uzziah's fifty-two year reign is dated about 790-749 B.C. If Amos preached while Jeroboam II and Azariah were contemporaries, he would, of necessity, have prophesied from the middle to the end of the eighth century B.C. Some commentators have dared be specific enough to say 760 B.C.

It is clear, however, that Amos was called by God and given a message for his people. In response to Amaziah, the priest at Bethel, Amos declared, "I am not a prophet, neither a prophet's son (or a prophet's pupil) but a herdsman and dresser of sycamore fruit" (7:14). Amos was not of the professional class who trained at the schools of the prophets. He had no academic preparation for his vocation as a prophet. Yet, he proved that he was indeed a prophet who possessed the Spirit of the Living God when he predicted the destruction that awaited Israel, even before there was a reason to expect such catastrophe. Related to his training and three jobs, John Willis appropriately writes:

These occupations made it necessary for Amos to do a large amount of traveling to the wool and cattle markets of Israel and Judah. In this way, he learned firsthand the military, social, and the economic conditions and practices of rich and poor alike. As a poor farmer, he watched the rich mer-

chant middle class thrive under the prosperity which the reign of Jeroboam II had brought the land, and he saw and perhaps experienced the oppressions which the poor had to suffer at the hands of the cold-hearted rich.

Thus when God called Amos from following his flock in Judah and told him to go and prophesy to North Israel (7:15), Amos went without hesitation. He had received a special divine call and with it a message which was relevant and vital for God's people to hear.⁴

So Amos, the poor farmer, became a prophet of God.

STRUCTURE, MESSAGE, AND APPLICATIONS

The nine chapters of the book of Amos almost naturally fall into three major divisions. Consequently, the outlines of the individual addresses and the arrangement of the book are fairly simple. The first section consists of chapters 1-2, which are the oracles against the nations and neighbors of Israel and culminates with oracles against Judah and Israel, as well. In the first section each oracle begins with the phrase, "Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of...and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof" (1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6). James Robertson writes,

Beginning with the more distant and alien peoples of Damascus, Gaza, and Tyre, he wheels around to the nearer and kindred peoples of Edom, Ammon, and Moab, till he rests for a moment on the brother tribe of Judah and thus having relentlessly drawn a net around Israel, by the enumeration of seven peoples, he swoops down upon the Northern King-

dom to which his message is to be particularly addressed.⁵

The second section embraces chapters 3-6, which are oracles of doom against Israel for the various sins which were being practiced in Amos' day. Each discourse is introduced by the phrase, "Hear this word" (3:1; 4:1; 5:1). Additionally, a woe is pronounced against "them that are at ease in Zion" (6:1).

The third section includes chapters 7-9 and consists primarily of a series of visions reflecting the condition of Israel, the inevitable judgment of God, and some of the basic themes of Amos' message. Often commentators relate the five visions of chapters 7-9 and Amos' call to be a prophet. The visions are introduced by the phrase, "thus the Lord God showed me" (7:1, 4, 7; 8:1), varied by "I saw the Lord standing beside the altar" in Amos 9:1. They include: (1) the locusts; (2) the great fire devouring the land; (3) the plumb line; (4) the basket of summer fruit; and (5) the Lord standing by the altar commanding utter destruction.

The destruction was coming because God's people were not acting like God's people and had come to mean no more to him than those who were pagan. After God had raised Israel up and brought them from Egypt, they did not appreciate their privilege or deliverance, but an ungrateful people turned to other gods of selfishness and materialism. They refused all God's warnings and would have none of his correction. In the face of such sin and refusal to repent, Amos could only sing a funeral song. He predicted that God would visit Israel with awful death and destruction.

What kinds of sins deserved such destruction? What were Israel's sins specifically? The answers to such questions still prick hearts because they are precisely the sins of this age. Damascus threshed Gilead with instruments of

iron. Gaza and Tyrus took whole communities captive and sold them to Edom. Edom and Ammon were without mercy and compassion. Ammon ripped up pregnant women just to enlarge their border. Judah and Israel rejected God's laws and turned to their own gods. Their idols are our idols too, but such false gods will never stand in the place or power of God! I shall briefly mention three big umbrellas of idolatry under which are many smaller images that have the same power of the bigger beast.

Ancestors. Under this are images like family, fathers, etc., to whom people are more loyal than they are to God. Judah walked after their ancestors but rejected God (2:4). God blessed Israel, and during the days of Jeroboam II, the kingdom of Israel rose to a degree of influence and general materialism, unequaled since the days of Solomon (2 Kings 14:25). But in worship, Israel remained loyal to their ancestors and to the changes in worship made initially by Jeroboam I. They still worshipped in Bethel, and Jeroboam II, like the other kings of Israel, "departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin" (2 Kings 14:24).

Selfishness. Bashan and Bethel remind us of the second umbrella of idolatry. Man manifests his selfishness in pleasure and in worship. He wants what he wants when he wants it. Selfishness opens the doors to, or is interrelated with, images of ingratitude, materialism, greed, lust, oppression of poor, injustice, etc. The luxurious women, styled "kine of Bashan," stretched out on their ivory couches while their husbands mixed their drinks (4:1). The rich had finest summer and winter houses. They had the best food and oil while they entertained themselves with the "instruments of music like David" (6:5). Their extravagances were maintained by the oppression of the poor. With a heart wretched with repulse at the misuse of people,

Amos cried for justice: "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness as a mighty stream" (5:24). He pleaded with Israel to seek good, hate evil and establish justice (5:14, 15). However, Israel ignored Amos and refused to concern themselves with the approaching danger to their country.

As mentioned above, God had allowed Israel to conquer. However, the extension of territory and increased wealth, as advantageous as they may be, can also be disastrous, and such was the case with Israel. The rich Israelites oppressed the poor. The statement of Amos 2:6 relating how they "sold the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes" is echoed and amplified throughout the book (3:9-10; 4:1; 5:11, 12; 8:4-6). The luxury of the rich at the expense of the poor is castigated in biting irony by Amos (6:1-7).

Israel was also religiously corrupt. Without doubt, their religious corruption was related to their social dilemma. Real worship and the search for true religion had sunk to a pitiful low. In the face of the social atmosphere, little attention was paid to the forms of worship or to God's instructions about worship. One can almost envision the prophet flinging his arms in frustrated sarcasm, "come to Bethel and transgress; at Gilgal multiply transgression...bring your tithes every three years...offer your sacrifices with leaven...for this is what you like..." (4:4, 5). Israel was careful to maintain an outward connection to the Levitical system of worship to God. They seemed to think that as long as they honored God with costly offerings and gorgeous ritual they were pleasing to him. It is likely that even their offerings to God were taken from the poor (5:11). Justice and mercy were just as absent from religious life as they were from social life. Yet, the Israelites

were secure, complacent, and even optimistic in the face of conspicuous danger.

Complacency. The third umbrella of idolatry is complacency. Under this umbrella is security, pride, arrogance, etc. These images make it almost impossible to hear the message of God. Amos cried warnings like:

Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and which trust in the mountain of Samaria.... Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near; That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; That chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music like David; That drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them that stretched themselves shall be removed. (6:1, 3-7)

Israel, in her security never heard. God had sent natural reminders in drought, famine, pestilence, and damaging winds. Yet, Israel had not sought him. Consequently, he declared through Amos, his prophet, "therefore this will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel" (4:12). Israel needed to prepare to face God, not at judgment, but within the framework of time. The "day of the Lord" was inevitable, and escape from the roaring lion would only lead to being bitten by the serpent.

The messages of Amos were certainly from God as the fulfillment of them would show. In 722 B.C., less than one generation after Amos, Shalmaneser came up against Samaria like a lion and took Israel as prey (2 Kings 17:1-

6). Interestingly, when the Israelites were replaced by the foreigners, "the Lord sent lions among them, which slew them" (2 Kings 17:25).

Appropriately, the book ends with a message of hope (9:11-15). It is doubtful that Amos or any of the prophets ever believed that God would utterly destroy his people in captivity. Amos envisioned a day when Israel would be restored, the wasted cities rebuilt and gardens and vineyards replanted (9:14). God did not utterly destroy his people. During the sixth century B.C., after the Babylonian exile, Zerubbabel led back exiles and rebuilt the broken tent of David, and restored the homeland of God's holy people.

CONCLUSION

According to chapter 5, Amos preached a funeral sermon for Israel. With her sins, she was as good as dead. But still there was a message or plea of hope. They could, "seek the Lord and live." That is still the message. Like God, Amos, and our Lord, we must decry the sins of man in tones of love and concern, and must neither neglect to say the serious consequences of modern idolatry nor withhold the encouraging message of joyful hope for God's people when they repent.

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NOTES

1. W.J. Deane, "The Book of Amos," *The Pulpit Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1977), 14:iii.
2. John T. Willis, *My Servants the Prophets* (Abilene: Biblical Research Press, 1971), 53.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid, 53-54.
5. James Robertson, "Amos," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 1:122.

THE DAY OF THE LORD: GOD'S JUDGMENT BASED ON NAHUM

Jimmy Allen

INTRODUCTION

The Old Testament was written for our learning (Rom. 15:4). Its examples can be useful to us today (1 Cor. 10:6, 11). We simply cannot live long enough to make all possible mistakes. We must profit some by the mistakes of others, even the wicked. If nothing more is learned, we can determine not to make the same mistakes they made. From this perspective, every person and event can teach us something if we are willing to learn. In light of the ungodliness that characterizes modern day America, we must be attentive to the teaching of Nahum, who dealt with similar issues more than 2500 years ago.

THE PROPHET

Nahum means "comfort," "compassion" or "consolation." Although his message was one of wrath and destruction for Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, it must have been consoling to the Hebrews and others who had suffered so much at the hands of merciless Assyrian soldiers.

The prophet was a native of Elkosh (Nahum 1:1). Jerome thought he lived in northern Galilee, near Capernaum which means "city of Nahum." Others have said the village was located in Judah and have cited Nahum 1:15 to support their view. The left bank (west) of the Tigris, two days' journey

north of Nineveh has also been suggested as the place where Nahum lived. Somewhere I read that Elkosh was in the tribal land of Simeon. The truth is that we do not know where the prophet lived. In only a minor way, pointed out below, does his location have any relevance to the book he wrote.

As far as I can see, the place where the book was written matters little except for the prophet himself. If Elkosh were located near Nineveh and if the Assyrians were apprized of the book's contents before his predictions began to occur, there is little doubt that his life would have been in danger. The Assyrians, especially their kings, were so cruel that one who predicted calamities for Nineveh, as did Nahum, would have been butchered (I used the right word) without the slightest hesitation.

It is fairly clear that Nahum lived in the seventh century before Christ and was a contemporary of Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and perhaps Habakkuk. When he wrote, the Egyptian city of No-Amon or Thebes had already been overthrown by the Assyrians (Nahum 3:8). Esarhaddon went into Egypt around 670 B.C. and his successor, Ashurbanipal, destroyed the city in 661 B.C. Nahum predicted Nineveh's fall which took place in 612 B.C. Hence, we can date his prophetic work between 661 and 612 B.C.

ANCIENT NINEVEH

Nineveh was first built by Nimrod, son of Cush, "a mighty one on the earth" (Gen. 10:8, 11). It was probably the capital of Assyria for ninety-two years, from 704 B.C. to its fall in 612 B.C. Sennacherib was the son of Sargon II (Is. 20:1), who destroyed Samaria and carried Israel into captivity in 722 B.C. Sennacherib ruled Assyria in Nineveh from 704 to 681 B.C. and lost 185,000 troops when he went up against Jerusalem during the reign of Hezekiah (2 Kings. 19:35-37).

Esarhaddon, son of Sennacherib, ruled at Nineveh from 681 to 669 B.C. He is also known as Osnapper (Ez. 4:10). His son, Ashurbanipal, reigned in Nineveh from 669 to 626 B.C. He established Nineveh's great library which consisted of thousands of clay tablets. Although he was extremely harsh, like his predecessors, he is thought to have been a scholar and lover of books. Fourteen years after Ashurbanipal's death, during the reign of Sinsariskun, the city was overthrown.

During Jonah's time in the eighth century B.C. (before Nineveh's walls were built), it took three days to walk across the city (Jon. 3:3). Some think this distance included what is called "the Nineveh triangle," i.e. Nineveh, Khorsabad (13 miles to the northeast), and Nimrud (23 miles to the southeast). The city's walls, erected by Sennacherib, were founded on huge blocks of stone (to prevent undermining), and were seven to eight miles long (encompassing the main part of the city), forty to fifty feet thick, and a hundred feet high. It is said that three chariots could run abreast on top of Nineveh's walls. The walls had fifteen gates and twelve hundred defense towers. There was a moat around the city (60 feet deep and 140 feet wide) except on the west where the Tigris River flowed. The Khoser River ran through Nineveh from the east and emptied into the Tigris.

During Jonah's time, there were 120,000 people in Nineveh who did not know their right hand from their left (Jon. 4:11). Some think this means there was a total population of 120,000. Others believe the figure represents only the children. If this is the case, there could have easily been 600,000 people living at Nineveh in the eighth century. Surely it was larger in the seventh century when Nahum set forth his predictions. According to a trigonometrical survey made within the outline of Nineveh's walls in 1854, allowing fifty square yards per person, 174,000 people could have lived inside its walls. If the large population suggested above

is correct, many people lived outside the walls, and during time of attack, they must have gone inside for protection.

The Assyria of Nahum's day was the Nazi Germany of the ancient world. Its Berlin was Nineveh. Will Durant gave an ugly but accurate description of its people.¹

God's earlier dealings with Nineveh through the preaching of Jonah had brought about a city-wide repentance, which likely included the whole nation of Assyria, and the Lord relented in his anger and spared the people (Jon. 3:5-10; 4:11). However, they had relapsed into the grossest forms of wickedness, and this time, according to God's design, there would be no escape from catastrophe.

THE COMING DESTRUCTION

The tragedy was predicted by God through the prophet Nahum. Keep in mind that Nineveh was the greatest city in the world when Nahum wrote. Truly, she was "the queen of the East." This book is not simply the work of a far-seeing statesman or a general narrative about how God punishes the wicked. No one, on his own, could have foreseen the city's utter destruction with such precision and assurance.

Nineveh's destruction is certain. The Lord's plan cannot be thwarted (1:9). When Sennacherib tried it, he wound up with a dead army (1:11; 2 Kings 19:35-37). God will make a full end of his enemies and not take vengeance twice (1:9, RSV). The city will be consumed like dry stubble (1:10); she will be cut off and pass away (1:12, RSV). Her name shall no more be perpetuated, her gods will be destroyed, and her grave will be dug (1:14). When a city or nation is told "I am against you says the Lord" (2:13; 3:5), there is not a vestige of hope for its people. There is simply no escape for those who neglect God's will for them (Heb. 2:1-4).

In Nahum's "Hymn of Hate," Nineveh's destruction is vividly described. Her river gates are opened (2:6). According to legend, the Khoser river flooded and made a breach in the walls through which enemy soldiers entered the city. The shatterer, consisting of mighty soldiers clothed in scarlet, makes his approach (2:1, 3). The mantelet (a moveable siege tower that offered protection for archers) is set up (2:5). Enemy chariots rage in the streets (2:4). Assyrian soldiers are as women before the onslaught (3:13). Horsemen charge, swords flash, and spears glitter (3:3). Assyrian hearts faint, knees tremble, and faces grow pale (2:10). People are devoured by the sword, and their chariots are burned (2:13). Endless Assyrian treasures are plundered (2:9). Women of the palace are stripped and carried away (2:7). When the battle concludes, there are "hosts of slain, heaps of corpses, dead bodies without end--they stumble over the bodies" (3:3; Ezek. 32:22-23). Nineveh is like a pool whose waters run away (2:8). She becomes a desolation, a ruin (2:10), and a dry waste like the desert (3:7; Zeph. 2:13). "Herds shall lie down in the midst of her, all the beasts of the field; the vulture and the hedgehog shall lodge in her capitals; the owl shall hoot in the window, the raven croak on the threshold; for her cedar work will be laid bare. This is the exultant city that dwelt secure, that said to herself, I am and there is none else. What a desolation she has become, a lair for wild beasts" (Zeph. 2:14-15).

Nahum also relates how others would react to Nineveh's devastation. There would be none to bemoan or comfort her (3:7). What was bad news to Nineveh was good news to Judah because the wicked Assyrians would never attack her again (1:15). As a matter of fact, the prophet says in his conclusion, "All who hear the news of you clap their hands over you. For upon whom has not come your unceasing

evil?" (3:19). The death of Nineveh brought nothing but happiness to the ancient world.

WHY THE DESTRUCTION?

The nature of Nineveh and the nature of God were totally incompatible. She had to be destroyed because of her collision course with the Almighty. More than 700 years after Nahum was written, Paul spoke of "the goodness and severity of God" (Rom. 11:22). Both traits are seen in the prophet's language. The Lord is slow to anger (1:3). He is good, a refuge in times of trouble, and he cares for those who trust him (1:7). However, he is also jealous, avenging, wrathful (1:2, 6), and will by no means clear the guilty (1:3).

Nineveh was built on blood, pillage, and plunder (3:1; Is. 10:14). She was full of lies (3:1), vile (1:14), deceitful (3:4), and given to the worship of idols (1:14; 3:4). The white-hot anger of God could no longer be restrained (1:6); it had to be poured out upon Nineveh to bring her to shame (comparable to throwing a harlot's skirt over her face to expose her nakedness) (3:5-6) and devastation (comparable to what she had done to Thebes in 661 B.C.) (3:8-10). Nineveh had sown the wind and had to reap the whirlwind (Hos. 8:7), for the Lord, whom she had defied for so long, was against her (2:13; 3:5).

FULFILLMENT OF PREDICTION

After the death of Ashurbanipal (626 B.C.), Assyria went into rapid decline. Nineveh was attacked by the Scythians in 614 B.C.; however, after two years she continued to stand like a phalanx. In 612 B.C., the Scythians were joined by the Medes and Babylonians, and four months later the city fell. As was pointed out earlier, according to tradition, the Khoser

River flooded and washed out part of Nineveh's impregnable wall, which may have been prophesied (1:8; 2:6). If the tradition is correct, the river did what three armies had been unable to do. Three hundred years later, the legions of Alexander the Great marched over the mounds of Nineveh without knowing that the former ruler of the world was under their feet. Nineveh lay buried beneath her own rubble for almost 2500 years before she was discovered in A.D. 1842.

In 1969, my friend, Jack Gray, and I flew to Mosul in Northern Iraq. We crossed the Tigris River and walked over much of the area where Nineveh had been located. We stood on Tell (hill) Kuyunjik (castle of Nineveh) where the palaces of Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal and the temple of Nabu have been excavated. We also walked on Tell Nebi Yunus (prophet Jonah) where Esarhaddon's palace remains buried (very little excavation has been done there as it is inhabited and considered to be a sacred place because of its mosque and the supposed burial of Jonah). When I was there, most of what used to be the greatest city in the world was covered with grain crops. As I looked across the fields, I imagined that I heard the cadence of marching soldiers, the sounds of children playing, the noise of traders hawking their goods, and the conversation of women, but all I actually heard was the wind rustling the grain. *The word of God stands true. Nineveh is no more!*

LESSONS FROM NAHAM

God and the Nations. God is merciful, compassionate, sympathetic, and understanding. Truly, he is patient or longsuffering and not anxious to hurt anyone (Rom. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9,15). However, even the patience of the Lord can and does come to an end. Assyria was a cruel and dominating power for more than 100 years, but finally God said,

"Enough," and brought the nation to ruin. There is a point in wickedness beyond which a people cannot go without the judgment of God falling upon them (Gen. 15:16). Because of this truth, the world of Noah's day was destroyed by the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah were burned from the face of the earth, the Amorites and their leaders were defeated by the Hebrews, Israel fell to the Assyrians, Judah was overthrown by Babylon, and Babylon was conquered by the Medes and Persians. It is still true that "the wicked shall be turned into hell and all nations that forget God" (Ps. 9:17). In light of the collapsed family and its values in our nation, the murder of 1.6 million unborn babies annually, the attempt to make homosexuality respectable, the soaring crime rate even among our young, the practice of all kinds of immorality and ungodliness, and our enormous deficit, much of which has been brought about by subsidizing various forms of wickedness, how much longer will it be before the Lord brings disaster upon us? One fellow said, "If God does not bring judgment on America soon, he should apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah."

Character of Nahum. Because of Nineveh's wickedness, the prophet was stirred to moral indignation even to the point of speaking out against its evil, although at the time it was the most powerful city in the world. He was compelled to represent suffering humanity that had been outraged and cowed by the brutality of the Assyrians. Of similar attitude was Lot, who was "greatly distressed" by the perverted conduct of the Sodomites (2 Pet. 2:7-8). Phineas was so incensed by the sexual immorality of Israel at Baal-Peor that with one thrust of a spear, he killed Zimri and Cozbi while they were in the embrace of fornication (Num. 25:7-11). Incidentally, God thought so much of him that he made him Israel's next high priest. Paul's spirit "was provoked within

him" due to Athens' idolatry, and he turned on the Jews apparently because they had not strongly denounced it prior to his arrival (Acts 17:16-17). Jesus experienced anger because some had hardened their hearts to truth (Mk. 3:5) and he "hated iniquity" (Heb. 1:9). We should "hate every false way" (Ps. 119:104, 128) and "abhor that which is evil" (Rom. 12:9). Many Christians have not only lost their ability to hate wickedness, much less speak out against it, but they, like the people of Jeremiah's day, are not even embarrassed by it (Jer. 6:15; 8:12). Ungodliness is sweeping our land, and many of us have become mute!

Strength of a Nation. The strength of a nation is not to be found in the power of its military. The Assyrians were strong militarily but weak because of moral rottenness. Nor does a nation's power lie in its natural or man-made defenses. In spite of its mighty wall and moat, Nineveh fell. Even our oceans cannot protect us from modern-day missiles. A good trade policy will not guarantee a country's future. It appears that Nineveh had successful trade agreements with others (3:16); nevertheless, she was destroyed. Vast treasure, natural or accumulated, will no more protect America today than it did Nineveh in the long ago (2:9). Of course, a nation's ability to endure will depend upon its trust in God and obedience to his will. It is "not by might nor by power, but My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6). "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord" (Ps. 33:12). "Happy are a people whose God is the Lord" (Ps. 146:5). It is righteousness that exalts a nation (Prov. 14:34). If we are to get things turned around in the United States by a spiritual and moral revival, it is absolutely necessary that we humble ourselves, turn from our wicked ways, and seek the face of God (2 Chron. 7:14).

Certainty of God's Word. God's word is true (Jn. 17:17; 8:31-32) from the first chapter of Genesis to the last chapter of Revelation. It will not return to him void or empty (Is. 55:11). What he predicted about Nineveh did happen, and what he has prophesied about death, the resurrection, final judgment, and man's eternal destiny will occur. We have all heard, "You can be sure if it's Westinghouse." After multiplying the certitude of that statement by billions, one can confidently say, "You can be sure if it's the Word of God." The truth is that far greater woes are pronounced against sinners today than against Nineveh by Nahum (Matt. 23:13-15; 26:24). Profit by the mistakes of the Ninevites. Do not live and die in rebellion to God as they did. Help to save our nation and save your own soul by turning to the Lord now through obedience to his will.

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NOTES

1. Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1942, 1:275-276.

G. P. Holt

INTRODUCTION

Our subject, "Faith: Accelerating When You Can't See," fits well the minor prophet I am to discuss, Habakkuk. His faith was strong even when he did not understand what God's plan was for him or for God's people.

David Pharr, in his book *Modern Messages From Minor Prophets*, says that "this book of prophecy is different from other books in that it is not a speech spoken to the people, but rather the prophet's troublesome questions and the answers he found."¹ Pharr also says the book's value to us is that the problems and principles discussed are still with us, though the circumstances differ, and even though the problems are on a different scale, we may see much of ourselves in the prophet's position.

THE QUESTION "WHY"

In chapter 1, we, like Habakkuk, have asked the same question, "Why?"

Most of us have had a lot of practice with the question "Why?" Do you remember? If not, do you remember your children and grandchildren asking you "Why?" And many of these "Why's" we just could not answer then, and many of these "Why's" we cannot answer now. Because of this I have decided to concentrate on *whom* rather than on *why*.

I may not know why. I may not know when. I may not know how. I just want to know whom. And if I know whom (God), if my faith can become strong enough in him, I can go on. I can do all I need to do, even if I cannot see.

Now what was Habakkuk's question? What was his "Why?" Listen to him in chapter 1, verse 2: "O Lord how long shall I cry and thou wilt not hear, even cry out unto thee of violence and thou wilt not save?" He continued in verse 4 by saying, "The law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth, for the wicked doth compass about the righteous, therefore wrong judgment proceedeth." Habakkuk is saying, "Lord, why do you permit wrong to prevail? Why is it that evil men seem to be succeeding while the godly, your children, are having such a hard time?"

A young man said to me a few years ago, "Why, why, why?" He was not asking me for an answer; he was demanding an answer. He said, "Why did he get that good church? Why did he get that good salary when his life is bad? He's not living right, but I am. Look at my church, look at my condition. I do not understand this. Does living right really pay off?" This is the same thing Habakkuk is asking.

Jeremiah asks the same question in chapter 12:1. Hear his question: "Why doth the way of the wicked prosper?" In verse 13 Habakkuk says of God: "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?"

Lord, why don't you say something? Why don't you do something? Have you ever been there? Have you ever felt like that? I have too, but let's back up to verse 5 where God tells Habakkuk, "I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe though it be told you." But he did

not understand why-- and even with God's promise to work a great work in his day--he could not understand why God would let the Chaldeans suffer to accomodate his work. They are our enemies, they hate Judea -- Why, why, why?

What do you do when you come to the end of your road, when you do not know what to do? What do you do in times of despair when you don't understand why -- when God seems to be moving so slowly and evil is running wild, like a mad dog on the street?

THE ANSWER -- HABAKKUK PRAYED

Habakkuk prayed:

I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd.' And the Lord answered me and said, 'Write the vision and make it plain upon the table that he may run that reads it. (2:1)

One can always pray. If there were no other reason to become a Christian than the privilege of prayer, that would be enough. Someone has said that prayer is the Christian's breath. Someone has said that "A man on his knees is higher than a man on a mountain." Christians are exhorted to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17) and that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Jas. 5:16).

Verse 3 in Habakkuk chapter 2 says, "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry."

Now listen to verse 4: "Behold his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him, but the just shall live by his faith."

Peter quoted the prophecy of Habakkuk in Acts 13:40: "Beware therefore, lest that come upon you which is spoken of in the prophets." Habakkuk 1:5 says, "Behold ye despisers, and wonder and perish for I work a work in your day a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you."

The sin which Paul warned Israel against was the deliberate rejection of the long-promised Messiah, and he quoted Habakkuk 1:5. Therefore, the coming of Christ was the great work of God as promised to Habakkuk and Israel. In verse 5 of chapter 1, God's answer is that punishment is on its way. He would use the Chaldeans (vs. 5-6). It may sometimes appear that God is doing nothing, but he always acts in due time. While Habakkuk knew the wickedness of Judah had to be punished, he could not understand how God could use a nation worse than they were. Such situations are always hard to accept. David puts it this way in Psalm 73:1-3:

Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart, but as for me, my feet were almost gone my steps had well nigh slipped, for I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

Real faith is tested when circumstances suggest reasons for doubts and when burdens are heavy. Job put it in these words: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him, but I will maintain mine own ways before Him" (Job 13:15).

Paul used these words to express his trust and faith in God:

For the which cause I also suffer these things. Nevertheless, I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day. (2 Tim. 1:12)

Note Paul says, "I know in *whom* I believe," not *what* I believe. His faith rested in the "whom" (Christ). When you know in whom you believe, you can handle the problems of life. When you know in whom you believe, you can surely say with Habakkuk in chapter 2:18 and 20 to "servants of idol gods, who could not see, hear or talk" that "the Lord is in His Holy Temple, let all the earth keep silence before him." When you know in whom you believe, you can just wait on God's will to be done. When you know in whom you believe, that faith will accelerate when you can not see.

CONCLUSION

Let us note Habakkuk's faith accelerating when he could not see.

Habakkuk 3:17: "... the fig tree shall not blossom" (Figs were the main food in Old Testament times.); "Neither shall fruit be in the vines" (The fruit of the vine is the grape. Wine was a drink offering.); "the labour of the olive shall fail" (The oil came from the olive.); "and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold" (No sheep or lamb chops.); "and there shall be no herd in the stalls" (No steaks on the table.)

Habakkuk 3:18: "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." In the words of Kyle Yates, "When faith is swept off its feet, it finds that it has wings." ²

The apostle John declared: "And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 Jn. 5:4).

Faith *sees* the invisible, *believes* the incredible, *achieves* the impossible.

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NOTES

1. David Pharr, *Modern Messages from the Minor Prophets*,
2. Kyle Yates, *Preaching From The Prophets*, Nashville: The Broadman Press, 1942, 155.

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOUR WIFE GOES TO THE STREETS?

Dr. Prentice A. Meador, Jr.

He is the con artist of the patriarchs. He lies to his blind father to get the family blessing. It takes some ingenuity and some deception. Twice he does some fancy footwork around his brother Esau to protect his future.

No doubt about it, Jacob forgets about the *means*. He is always looking at the *ends*. Never bothered by truth and honesty, Jacob covers his dishonest tracks. He certainly lives up to his name which means "one who trips people."

Now he has used slight of hand tricks to get the best of the flocks from his father-in-law, Laban. He is ready to get out of town, and for his own safety that is probably one of his better decisions.

Meanwhile, back in the tents, his new wife Rachel follows her husband's dishonest footsteps. She goes into her father's house and steals the household gods that belong to him.

Seven days later, Laban and his men catch up with Jacob's family. "I know that you want to go back to your home. That's why you left. But why did you steal the gods from my house?" Jacob responds, "But you find anyone who has your gods, he shall not live." Jacob does not know that Rachel has stolen Laban's gods. She deceives her father by hiding them inside her camel's saddle and sitting on them. She falsely claims, "Don't be angry with me Father. I'm not able to stand up before you. I am having

my period." Laban searches but can not find his family gods. He goes home empty-handed.

A MYSTERY

This is the first clear-cut illusion to idolatry in the Bible. On their journey from Shechem to Bethel, Jacob's family buries the wood and metal gods of the Canaanites, through whose land they passed. But they did not destroy the household gods of Laban (Gen. 35:2-4).

During their long stay in Egypt, the Jews bought in on the worship of the Egyptian gods, and it stayed with them a long time (Josh. 24:14; Ezek. 1:27). Moses threw down the gauntlet of Jehovah God to the Egyptian gods. And the plagues of Egypt destroyed the power of the Egyptian gods (Num. 33:4).

While in the desert, Israel worshiped a golden calf, the fertility god revered not only in Egypt, but also in Crete and throughout the Mediterranean Basin. Remember that Aaron called the calf not only god, but the lord (Ex. 32:5).

On the plains of Moab, Moses reminds Israel not to worship the goddess of the Assyrians and the Canaanites.

When you set up an altar for the Lord your God, you must not place beside the altar any of the wooden poles that honor the goddess Asherah. And you must not set up special stones for worshiping false gods. The Lord your God hates those things. (Deut. 16:21-22)

Even under the strong leadership of Joshua, the Jews have great difficulty in staying faithful to the living God and to the covenant that they had entered into with God. Israel's conquest of Canaan is neither quick nor final (Ps. 106:34). The Hebrews simply occupy parts of the land of Canaan and begin to mix and mingle with the Canaanite

city states. Without totally abandoning their worship of God, Israel begins to worship and make offerings to the gods of the land ". . . upon the hills, under oak, poplar, and terebinth, because their shade is good" (Hos. 4:13). They engage in the same sacred rites of prostitution, intoxication, and ecstasy in the hope that the gods of the land would give them the blessings of fertility. "Men kiss calves" (Hos. 13:2). "They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons; they poured out innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan" (Ps. 106:35-39). The cult of the Baal and Asherah with its fertility rites and strange sexual practices fascinates the Hebrews.

In his farewell address, Joshua urges Israel:

'Now fear the Lord and serve Him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt) and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.' Then the people answered, 'Far be it from us to forsake the Lord to serve other gods!' (Josh. 24:14-16)

But they did! Again, and again, and again.

Even Gideon, himself, just like his father Joash, turns away from God and worships idols (Judg. 8:27).

Though temple worship is fully established under Solomon, his many wives are allowed to bring in their tribal gods. Solomon worships Asherah, goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh, the god of the Moabites, and Milcom, the god of the Ammonites. Solomon crowns three of the peaks of

Mount Olivet with the high places to his wives' foreign gods (1 Kings 11:7; 2 Kings 23:13).

Here is the fundamental mystery, the drama of which unfolds over centuries.

WHY WOULD GOD'S PEOPLE KEEP TURNING AWAY FROM HIM TO METAL, WOOD, AND STONE IMAGES?

What a paradox! No doubt, they are God's people. These are the people saved from Egypt, who are in covenant with God, who are given the Ten Commandments, the rite of circumcision and through whom the Messiah will bless all the nations of the earth. Why do these people break covenant with God? Why do they worship sticks, stones and pieces of metal?

In one of the finest books on the prophets, Abraham Heschel explains this incredible paradox, this unfathomable mystery.

Pagan gods not only appeal to the imagination and are beloved by poets and painters alike: they are more comprehensible than the invisible God of Abraham. The conception of one God who created heaven and earth is hard on the imagination. There is such multiplicity and variety of beings, there are thousands of communities, millions of human beings, countless numbers of days and nights - and only one God? Pagan gods, moreover, are more easily approached and appeased.¹

You can imagine the rationalization of an eighth century Hebrew. You believe in God. But in a world of mystery, birth and death, maybe it will not hurt to believe in these gods, too. You would not deny that these Canaanites have a different alphabet, language, culture and world experience.

So they have Baal and Ashtoreth. After all, can you not believe in what works for you? Is it not all subjective anyway? Of course, you keep the Passover. But what is the harm in having an Ashtoreth pole? Or a household god in your tent? What if I got rid of it? Would my baby die? Would my wife have a disease? If I got rid of that stick given to me by my mother, would my wife be barren?

SOLUTION TO THE MYSTERY

If you are God, how do you react through all this? How do you remind your own people of who you are, who they are? How do you get back to the point of it all? Clearly, it is no longer an academic question. Because they have turned to these gods, the family unit is nearly destroyed; divorce, adultery, premarital sex, and stealing have increased. Judges fleece the poor, the land belongs to the rich and powerful, the poor have no rights, and no justice is found anywhere. Israel no longer looks like the people of God. She looks like everybody else, especially on the street.

So if you are God, what do you do? What you need is a drama--a story so powerful that Israel will get the point, will never forget it!

What you need is Hosea. Of all the prophets, he gives us the clearest view of the inner life of God as God ponders his future with Israel. Nowhere in all of Scripture is the motive of God clearer, more unquestioned, purer, than in the story of Hosea. The decisive motive in God is steadfast love.

GOMER'S PROMISCUITY/HOSEA'S LOVE

Hosea must have started a scandal in Israel. Why? He marries a prostitute (Hos. 1:2-3). Her name is Gomer,

daughter of Diblaim. Talk about gossip. Tongues wagged, people giggle and merchants snicker as the marriage news spreads across the Northern kingdom.

Imagine the conversation: "Hey, did you hear the latest? Gomer got married--she got herself a holy man, Hosea!" "Couldn't he find somebody more like himself?" How humiliating can it get?

"Has Hosea lost his mind?" No, Hosea is doing exactly what God told him to do! He is one of the most patient and forgiving of all of the men of the Old Testament.

At their marriage, Gomer pledges her fidelity, her life-long commitment, and her willingness to leave all the other men for Hosea. In time, she gives birth to three children. Devoted wife of Hosea, Gomer is a mother. Her days of prostitution have passed.

Or have they? The offers for her favors begin to come again. She breaks her marriage covenant with Hosea and returns to her harlotry. It is not one lover, but many lovers! In fact, she is for sale, to the lover with the most money.

So here is the key question: What do you do when your wife goes to the streets? With remarkable fidelity, Hosea goes down to the market place and buys Gomer back for six ounces of silver and nine bushels of barley. He pleads with her, "You must stay at home with me for many days. You must not be like a prostitute. You will not be with another man. And I will be your husband" (Hos. 3:3).

What a magnificent drama! What a story of grace, steadfast love and faithfulness! What a story of patient forgiveness, of undying commitment. Here is the cardinal, basic emotion of unquenchable love that prevails over anger, harm, and destruction. Instead of stoning Gomer, instead of ending the commitment, Hosea renews his faithful covenant to his wife.

But why? That must have been a question Hosea asked many times. And the Lord gives him the answer: "Because that is like the Lord. The Lord continues loving the people of Israel. But they continue to worship other gods and they love to eat raisin cakes" (Hos. 3:1).

Like no other prophet, Hosea powerfully expresses the tension between God's anger and God's compassion.

"People of Israel, listen to the Lord's message! The Lord will tell his argument against the people that live in this country. People in this country don't really know God. The people are not true and loyal to God. The people swear, lie, kill, and steal. They do the sin of adultery, and they have their babies. The people murder again and again" (Hos. 4:1-2).

"My people are asking pieces of wood for advice. They think those sticks will answer them. Why? Because they have chased after the false gods like prostitutes. They left their God and became like prostitutes" (Hos. 4:12).

"Ephraim has joined his idols. So leave him alone. Ephraim has joined their drunkenness. Let them continue to be prostitutes. Let them be with their lovers. They went to those gods for safety, and they have lost their ability to think. Their sacrifices bring them shame" (Hos. 4:17-19).

"The people of Israel have done many bad things. And those bad things keep them from coming back to their God. They are always thinking of ways to chase after other gods. They don't know the Lord" (Hos. 5:4).

"Ephraim, what should I do with you? Judah, what should I do with you? Your faithfulness is like a morning mist, your faithfulness is like the dew that goes away early in the morning. I used the prophets, and made laws for the people. The people were killed at my command. But good things will come from those decisions. Why? Because I want faithful love, not sacrifice; I want people to know

God, not to bring burnt offerings. But the people broke the agreement just like Adam did. They were unfaithful to me in their country" (Hos. 6:4-7).

"Ephraim mixes with the nations. Ephraim is like a cake that was not cooked on both sides.... So Ephraim has become like a silly dove without understanding. The people called to Egypt for help. The people went to Assyria for help.... I trained them and made their arms strong, but they have made evil plans against me" (Hos. 7:8, 11, 15).

"Put the trumpet on your lips and give the warning. Be like an eagle over the Lord's house. The Israelites have broken my agreement. They have not obeyed my law.... The Israelites chose their kings, but they didn't come to me for advice. The Israelites chose leaders, but they didn't choose men that I knew. The Israelites used their silver and gold to make idols for themselves so they will be destroyed.... Ephraim went to his lovers like a wild donkey, he wandered off to Assyria. Israel went to his lovers among the nations. But I will gather the Israelites together. That mighty king made them suffer a little" (Hos. 8:1, 4, 9-10).

"Israel, don't celebrate like the nations do! Don't be happy! You acted like a prostitute and left your God. You did your sexual sin on every threshing floor" (Hos. 9:1).

"They make promises - but they are only telling lies. They don't keep their promises! They make agreements with other countries. God does not like those agreements.... Israel will be ashamed of its idol. Samaria's false god will be destroyed. It will be like a piece of wood floating away on the water's surface. Israel sinned and built many high places" (Hos. 10:4, 6b, 7-8).

For Hosea, marriage is the image for the covenant relationship between God and Israel. It conveys permanence, fidelity, mutuality and steadfastness. Is there anything more powerful than the love between man and

woman? Is there anything more enduring than a lifetime commitment between husband and wife.

So Hosea indicts Israel for her idolatry. Idolatry is adultery. She is like a woman who goes back to the streets again, and again, and again. She goes to bed with every nation in the Mediterranean world. She is for sale. Faithfulness, steadfastness, and permanence are hollow words. She is a harlot instead of a faithful wife.

BUT GOD LONGS FOR HER

Because of who God is, he longs for reunion with Israel. He is willing to go to the marketplace and buy her back and bestow her with gifts such as everlasting love and mercy.

"Ephraim, I don't want to give you up. Israel, I want to protect you. I don't want to make you like Admah! I don't want to make you like Zeboiim! I am changing my mind. My love for you is too strong. I will not let my terrible anger win. I will not destroy Ephraim again. I am God, not man. I am the Holy One, I am with you. I will not show my anger" (Hos. 11:8-9).

"The Lord says, I will forgive them for leaving me. I will love them freely. I am not angry at them now. I will be like the dew to Israel. Israel will blossom like the lily" (Hos. 14:4-5)

God cannot abandon his bride, Israel. In spite of her infidelity and prostitution, the relationship is maintained by the steadfastness of God's love and mercy.

WHAT DOES GOD'S AMAZING GRACE MEAN TO US TODAY?

You and I are sinners, guilty of different kinds of sin. We have violated the holy nature of God with "missing the mark." Whether it is sin of the mind, of the heart, of disposition, of relationships, or of our own body, we stand in eternal, deep need.

Grace is what we need, not what we deserve. Death is what we deserve. It is because God initiates his own mercy and grace toward us that our lives have hope. He is the greatest of all lovers! That draws us to him.

While God's love is unconditional, God's grace is conditional. Grace does not condone license. His grace calls for us to be faithful to him. To stay married to him even when we break the marriage fidelity, he is willing to go the extra mile because of who he is. The God of the Old Testament is not permissive; neither is vengeance his chief characteristic, but *Love*. Sure there are times when God punishes. But his punishment is short term while his love is long term. The point is altogether too clear: We as individual Christians and as a brotherhood must be faithful to God. Right here it is so easy to become confused. We say things, "We must be faithful, then God is faithful." Wrong! In Hosea, we see that God is faithful regardless of what we do and who we are. Faithfulness is determined by who God is! He is not bringing us in and out of relationship with him because of who we are.

Joy becomes a lifestyle. Do you work as a Christian to be saved, or do you work because you are saved? Is your Christian life drudgery or joy? Remember, you do not have to die with your fingers crossed. The victory is God's victory in your life, not self victory. Remember, God is faithful, not us! We have failed him nearly every time, but

because of who God is, we can worship, serve and die in joy.

In one of the most popular TV programs ever shown on PBS, Bill Moyers found that the most popular song is "Amazing Grace." Any wonder why?

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NOTES

1. Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets*, New York: Harper & Row, 1962, I:46.

ARCHAEOLOGY
AND
THE MINOR
PROPHETS

EIGHTH CENTURY MINOR PROPHETS: HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Jack P. Lewis

POLITICAL EVENTS¹

The dominant element in the background of the eighth century minor prophets is the Assyrian crisis. Amos sees an unnamed nation on the horizon which threatens exile (Amos 6:14; 7:11), Hosea is explicit that the danger is Assyria (Hos. 7:11; 8:9; 10:6; 11:11), and Micah is concerned about what the Assyrian invasion means to the small land owner in his area (Mic. 1:8-16). Prophets came to the fore in Israel in times of crises. Samuel arose at the time the Philistines threatened Israel; but through the victory of Samuel over them and through the successful wars of Saul and David, the Philistines were effectively subdued. Elijah and Elisha appeared on the scene to offset the efforts of Jezebel to foster the cult of Baal in Israel. There were also prophets of lesser renown at other periods.

The Assyrians, searching for timber and minerals, expanded to the Mediterranean under Tiglath-pileser I (1114-1076 B.C.), a time equivalent to the period of the Judges.² Israel sat on the land-bridge between the Euphrates and Nile valleys. But military problems elsewhere prevented the succeeding Assyrian kings from proceeding further in the eleventh century and allowed the expansions of Saul, David, and Solomon.

By the middle of the ninth century, Shalmaneser III was expanding in the west, and a coalition of nine western kings, momentarily putting aside their local clashes, attempted to block him at the Battle of Qarqar on the Orontes River in 853 B.C. According to Shalmaneser's record, among the allies was Ahab the Israelite who commanded 10,000 soldiers and 2,000 chariots.³

Ahab's predecessor Omri had moved the capital of the northern kingdom to Samaria (1 Kings 16:24) which was open to relations with Tyre. Ahab attempted to protect his kingdom by allying with Tyre and marrying Jezebel, princess from that area. When not facing Assyria, Israel and the Arameans of Damascus were occupied in repeated territorial wars reported in the Elisha stories of the book of Kings.

In 841 B.C., Shalmaneser broke through the coalition and overran Aram and perhaps Israel. Jehu, who had overthrown the house of Ahab, came to terms with Shalmaneser and paid him tribute, an event attested to by picture and text of the Black Obelisk to be seen in the British Museum.⁴ Assyrian military methods were ruthless. Overrun countries were made a part of the province system of Assyria. Princes were forced to pay tribute.

Later, Israel was delivered from the Arameans (cf. 2 Kings 13:5) by Adad-nirari III to whom Joash paid tribute.⁵ The inscription is the oldest known inscription containing the name Samaria. Assyria's pre-occupation with military and political problems in other areas left the western states room to develop during the long reign of Azariah (Uzziah) of Judah and of Jeroboam II of Israel.

Jeroboam's reign (covered in seven verses) is described in the book of Kings as one of the most glorious periods of the Northern Kingdom (2 Kings 14:25-28). His territory expanded from Lebo-hamath to the Sea of the Arabah (2

Kings 14:25). Amos mentions successful battles conducted at Lo-debar and Karnaïm (Amos 6:13). For Israel, Jeroboam recovered Damascus and Hamath that Judah had previously controlled (2 Kings 14:28). The Southern Kingdom also enjoyed a golden age at this time under Uzziah (2 Kings 14:22; 2 Chron. 26:6-15). Together the two kingdoms were almost as extensive as Solomon's kingdom had been. The period is usually thought of as Israel's Indian summer.

But following the death of Jeroboam, stability gave way to political anarchy. There were six kings in a little more than twenty-five years. The various motivations back of the assassinations--whether ambition, political policy, or local rivalry--are not explained.

Zechariah was murdered after six months in 743 B.C. by Shallum (2 Kings 15:8-10), bringing to an end the dynasty of Jehu. After one month, Shallum was murdered by Menahem from Tirzah (2 Kings 15:13-14). Menahem reigned ten years (743-738 B.C.) during which time he paid Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria a thousand talents of silver to establish him on his throne--a tribute recorded both in the Old Testament (2 Kings 15:19) and in Assyrian records.⁶ The money was raised by a tax of fifty silver shekels each on property owners in Israel (2 Kings 15:20). Menahem carried out atrocities on the civilian population at Tiphshah (2 Kings 15:16; cf. Amos 1:13). In the prophet Hosea's period, Menahem was the only northern king after Jeroboam II to die a natural death while in office. Beginning in 738 B.C., Pekahiah, son of Menahem, reigned two years (2 Kings 15:23-25) before his captain Pekah murdered him. Hosea aptly described Israel's instability: "Samaria's king shall perish, like a ship on the face of the waters" (Hos. 10:7).

Meanwhile, with the accession of Tiglath-pileser III to the throne of Assyria in 745 B.C., Assyrian western expansion again got underway and continued with some interruption for almost a century and a half, bringing the west into confrontation with strong figures in addition to Tiglath-pileser (745-727 B.C.) such as Shalmaneser V, Sargon II, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Ashurbanipal. Arpad was conquered by the Assyrians in 740 B.C., and that opened the way to conquests to the south, resulting in Menahem's paying tribute in 738 that has earlier been mentioned.

When Pekah came to the throne of Israel in 735 B.C., he, representing those who favored resistance to Assyria, made common cause with Rezin of Damascus and Hanun of Gaza to revolt against Assyria. In the south, at the death of Jotham, young Ahaz had come to the throne of Judah. The confederates attempted to force Ahaz into the alliance, but, probably fearful because of Assyria's successes in Philistia,⁷ he refused.

It was a time of crisis. Edom gained its independence from Judah (2 Kings 16:6).⁸ Judah was invaded by Israel; captives were taken but were eventually released at Jericho (2 Chron. 28:6-15). Pressure was felt in the Philistine area (2 Chron. 28:17-18).

Faced by what is known as the Syro-Ephraimitic war and with being invaded from the north (2 Kings 16:5) by confederates who hoped to put ben Tabeel on Ahaz's throne (Isa. 7:6), Ahaz, against the advice of Isaiah, appealed to Tiglath-pileser III (2 Kings 16:7-9). Ahaz robbed the temple and palace treasures in order to pay the required tribute.⁹ Assyria acted to accomplish what it would have wanted anyway. Judah became a tribute payer from which status it never recovered. The confederates had to withdraw from Jerusalem. Judah then pursued and acquired part of

Israel's territory. Ahaz, while in Damascus to pay his tribute, saw an altar that pleased him and had a copy made for use in the worship of the Lord in the temple in Jerusalem (2 Kings 16:12-16). Assyria took Damascus by storm in 732 B.C., and it was made an Assyrian province.

Assyria at this time limited the territory of Israel by taking the transjordan and northern areas, making them into provinces. Portions of the population were exiled (2 Kings 15:29; 1 Chron. 5:6, 26). Archaeological evidence has shown that cities like Hazor, Megiddo, Bethshan, and Gezer were destroyed. The captured territory was made into the Assyrian provinces of Gilead, Megiddo, and Dor. Sparse cuneiform texts from Samaria,¹⁰ Gezer,¹¹ and Tell Keisan¹² attest Assyrian presence at these places.

Pekah had reigned twenty years (737-732 B.C.) before Hoshea, the son of Elah, murdered him and seized the throne (2 Kings 15:30), saving Assyria the bother of deposing him. The Assyrians also recorded this exchange.¹³ The chronologists usually shorten the time allotted to Pekah by various expedients. Hoshea was a vassal king reigning over the area of Mount Ephraim only.

According to the Books of Kings, Hezekiah came to the throne of Judah in the third year of Hoshea (2 King 18:1), and in Hezekiah's fourth year (the seventh of Hoshea) Shalmaneser began the siege of Samaria (2 Kings 18:9). Chronology of this period is confusing and cannot be settled in this paper. Scholars generally set Hezekiah's accession at 715 B.C. (cf. 1 Kings 18:13), after the fall of Samaria.

Whenever Hezekiah's accession may have been, Hezekiah is credited with a reform in Judah that included destruction of high places, pillars, and asherah (2 Kings 18:4, 22) which shows that prior religious conditions in Judah were not essentially different from those in Israel.

After nine years of Hoshea's reign (732-724 B.C.), Tiglath-pileser had died and had been succeeded by Shalmaneser V. Hoshea discontinued paying his annual tribute to Assyria and plotted with So of Egypt who is otherwise unidentified. Shalmaneser deposed Hoshea, besieged the city of Samaria three years and took it in 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17:6; 18:11). Destruction debris at Megiddo, Shechem, and the northern Tell el-Far'ah are conjecturally attributed to this period.

Shalmaneser's successor Sargon freely boasts of having captured Samaria and having exiled its important people, totaling 27,290 persons.¹⁴ He rebuilt the city, imported foreigners into Israel to fill the vacuum, bringing their gods with them (2 Kings 17:24-31), and the territory was made an Assyrian province called *Samarina*. Other foreign people were brought in later under Esarhaddon (Ezra 4:2) and under Ashurbanipal (Ezra 4:10). With the fall of Damascus and Samaria, the possibility of an effective coalition against Assyria in the west vanished.

Israel, over the about 250 years of the monarchy, had twenty-one kings representing nine different dynasties. The time span from Saul to Hoshea approximates the period from the American revolution to the present.

The nearer at hand international relations of Israel during the period before Amos and Hosea are first characterized by continuous clashes with Judah from whom Israel had separated. While Rehoboam, son of Solomon, was forbidden by the man of God, Shemaiah, to attempt military action to regain the northern territory (1 Kings 12:21-24), his successors were in repeated military clashes with Israel, and the border moved back and forth contingent on the success of either side in the latest campaign.

Particularly influential, however, were Israel's ongoing clashes over territory with the Arameans of Damascus ruled

by a series of persons named Ben-hadad and Hazael.¹⁵ The Romans called the territory north of Israel "Syria," and its people "Syrians." That terminology was continued in the KJV; but in the 20th century it has become standard to transliterate the Hebrew terms, giving us "Aram," "Aramaic," and the "Arameans." The stories of the prophet Elisha focus on the Aramean wars.

Assyria in its campaigns ruthlessly destroyed opposition, exiled significant elements of conquered populations, and imported foreigners from other areas (2 Kings 17:24) which changed the ethnic composition of the population.¹⁶ The result was that effective counter-organization by the conquered could not be achieved. In cases when there were further revolts, Assyria made areas into Assyrian provinces and placed Assyrian rulers over them. The policy progressively developed over time by trial and error.

The lands of the west first attempted to meet the threat of Assyria by the age-old technique of allying with neighboring states. Western allies and Israel, led by Ahab, had clashed with Shalmaneser III (858-824 B.C.) in the battle of Qarqar in 853 B.C. Israel became known to Assyria as "Omri Land," showing something of the international significance of this figure to whom the Book of Kings devotes only eleven verses. The Israelite kings were known to the Assyrians as "Sons of Omri" even after another dynasty had taken over in Israel. But after Shalmaneser III, Assyria was occupied with problems in areas other than the west, and that permitted the expansions in Israel and Judah which characterized the reigns of Jeroboam II and Uzziah (Azariah) earlier noticed.

Judah survived the downfall of Samaria as an Assyrian vassal, but now had the Assyrian province of *Samarina* as its northern border. Hezekiah launched an attack on Philistia (2 Kings 18:8) in an effort to regain the territory

that his father Ahaz had lost (2 Chron. 28:18). In 711 B.C., the revolt of the Philistine territory brought the Commander in Chief of Sargon to Ashdod (Isa. 20). Hezekiah was tempted to join the revolt, but evidently was kept out by the drastic behavior of Isaiah who went naked and barefooted three years as a sign of the fate awaiting the rebels. Sargon left records of the campaign,¹⁷ and the excavation of Ashdod turned up fragments of an Assyrian stele there presumably erected in commemoration of the Assyrian success there.¹⁸

International policies in the west remained fairly constant. Hezekiah included Israel in his invitation to Passover observance in Jerusalem (cf. 2 Chron. 30:5, 10-11). In 701 B.C., the Philistine states were again in revolt. Padi, the Assyrian ruler of Ekron, was deposed and accepted as a prisoner in Jerusalem by Hezekiah.¹⁹ Judah could persuade itself that help would come from Egypt (2 Kings 18:21; Is. 18:1ff.; 30:2; 31:1). Hezekiah is thought to have constructed the Siloam water tunnel in Jerusalem in anticipation of siege (2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chron. 32:3-4, 30).²⁰ He fortified Jerusalem and Judean cities (2 Chron. 32:5, 30; Isa. 22:6-11), and he repaired weapons and supplies (2 Chron. 32:5f., 28f.).

Sennacherib advanced down the sea-coast road taking the Philistia area and coming to besiege Lachish. Remains of the Assyrian siege dam are still to be seen there.²¹ Sennacherib set up 13 life-size wall plaques in his palace in Nineveh which are now in the British Museum depicting the siege and capture of Lachish.²² The prophet Micah is thought to be concerned with the impact of this invasion on the towns of his area (Mic. 1:10-15). Destruction layers identified on Judean sites (Arad, Beer-sheva, and Lachish) are thought to have been created in this campaign.

Merodach-baladan of Babylon, who was a thorn in the side of four successive Assyrian rulers, sent representatives to Hezekiah who were kindly received by him to the chagrin of the prophet Isaiah (2 Kings 20:12-19; Is. 39:1-8). Ultimately Sennacherib was able to deal with Merodach-baladan.²³ It had all been a flash in the pan.

Hezekiah paid Sennacherib a large indemnity recorded both in the Bible (2 Kings 18:14-15) and in Sennacherib's records.²⁴ Sennacherib claims to have taken forty-six fortified cities and to have exiled 200,150 people. The payment, however, did not convince the Assyrian of Hezekiah's loyalty. Sennacherib moved up to Libnah, a fortress nearer Jerusalem, but again demanded Hezekiah's surrender. An effort of Tirhakah of Ethiopia to aid Hezekiah proved futile (2 Kings 19:9). At the last moment, Sennacherib's army suffered an irreparable loss of 185,000 casualties in the night (2 Kings 19:35; 2 Chron. 32:20-21; Is. 37:36-37).²⁵ Sennacherib withdrew, and Hezekiah was saved.

Sennacherib, occupied with problems elsewhere, did not again come to Jerusalem. Some twenty years later, he was assassinated by one of his sons and was succeeded by Esarhaddon, another son (2 Kings 19:37). But these events and their outcome are the concern of the seventh century, not the eighth.

The threats of destruction of the eighth century prophets aim primarily at the Assyrian menace. They should be interpreted in the light of these developments. Israel and Judah stood in the way of Assyrian expansion toward Egypt with no effective power to resist Assyria except the aid of the Lord to whom they had been disloyal.

Caught in the squeeze between the two great powers--Egypt, whose heyday was long passed, and Assyria who was the rising star--Israel and Judah vacillated. Egypt

promised much but never delivered. It seems that the politicians of Israel (as well as those of Judah) were eternally optimistic about the possibilities of Egypt's help. The yoke of Assyria was galling; they grasped for a broken reed of a staff, and the outcome was disastrous.

RELIGIOUS FACTORS

The religious history of Israel is perhaps even more significant for the study of the eighth century Minor Prophets than is the political history. Jeroboam I, when coming to the throne following the division of the kingdom, promptly realized that he could not hope to hold a throne for any time over a people whose religious life centered in the temple in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was in the territory reigned over by a descendant of David. To meet this crisis, Jeroboam set up the golden calves in Bethel and Dan, shrines located in the north and in the south of his territory, telling the people, "Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt" (1 Kings 12:28). He set up a festival cycle for his people to replace the pilgrimages to Jerusalem. He set up a non-levitical priesthood to function at the shrines he had created. The writer of the Book of Kings, unsympathetic toward Jeroboam's innovations, makes repeated use of a refrain, "He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father [Jeroboam], and in the sin with which he made Israel to sin" (1 Kings 15:26). An adverse verdict is passed on all of the northern kings because of their worship at the high places, and Jeroboam is the model of all.

Northern apostasy received further impetus with the coming of Jezebel, princess of the Sidonians and wife of Ahab (1 Kings 16:31), who began an active program of

introducing the worship of Baal and Asherah while opposing the worship of the Lord. Ahab built a house of Baal with an altar to Baal in Samaria, and also built an Asherah (1 Kings 16:32-33). There were 450 prophets of Baal, and 400 of Asherah fed at Jezebel's table (1 Kings 18:19). Elijah's victory over them in the contest on Mt. Carmel is known to all. Although Jehu later destroyed the house of Baal and the worshipers (2 Kings 10:18-28), the cult was not stamped out.

These developments only gave encouragement to the surviving popular religion of Canaan. From Sanchuniathon's account preserved in Eusebius's *Preparation of the Gospel* from Ugaritic texts, and from accusations of the Hebrew prophets, especially in Hosea, we have a fairly clear picture of what Canaanite religion was like. As a fertility religion, its centers were the high places and the luxuriant wooded areas.

A high place (*bamah*) was a shrine (often open air) located on the elevations about the country. Archaeologists think they have excavated a few of these shrines.²⁶ Amos spoke of an oath, "As thy God liveth, O Dan" (Amos 8:14). The excavator of Tel Dan conjecturally interpreted remains of a building there as an open high place.²⁷

Such a shrine had a stone object (*matstsebhah*; "the pillar") representing the male divinity and a wooden object '*asherah*;' "the post") representing the female divinity. Deities were always in male and female pairs. There was an altar where sacrifice was offered. Attendants included priests, sacred women (*qedheshoth*), and sacred men (*qedheshim*; derogatorily called "dogs" in Deuteronomy 23:18 (cf. Rev. 22:15). Intercourse with these sacred personnel was thought to give fertility to man, land, and cattle. This practice lies back of and gives meaning to the prophets' image of harlotry for disloyalty to the Lord.

Whether or not the Canaanite shrine had a resident prophet is a scholars' quarrel. The case for the so-called "cult prophet" is less popular than it once was.

The texts of Ugarit show a pantheon of which El is the head; but he is being displaced by Baal who is the storm god and controls the rain. Elijah's being able to announce a drought and then to experience rain after having slaughtered the prophets of Baal is a slap at the belief that Baal controls rain. The females, Anath and Astarte, are goddesses of love and war. The gods and goddesses are in no sense models of ethical behavior when judged by either Old Testament or New Testament standards.

Scholars will perhaps always argue over whether the Israelites adopted the worship of the Canaanite gods and then became outright idolatrous or whether they adapted the Canaanite rites to the worship of the Lord, assigning to him the functions and rites of Baal, which act would be known as syncretism. Either way, the penetration was extremely deep.

Though biblical Hebrew has no word for goddess, from an inscription from Kuntillet 'Ajrud located in the south at the border of Sinai, we have an eighth century text reading, "The Lord and his Asherah."²⁸ There are the numerous place names like Baal-peor, Baal-hazon, and others which are compounds of the name Baal. There are places like Anathoth which are compounds of Anath, a Canaanite goddess. There are personal names like Ishbaal, Meribbaal, and Jerubbaal which are compounds of Baal, and there is Shamgar ben Anath.

The north seems never to have had a reformer who successfully stamped out Baal worship. Elijah was the great opponent of Baal worship in the time of Ahab, and he was told (when he complained that he alone was left), that there were seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to

Baal. Jehu, though pretending to be a worshiper of Baal, slaughtered the worshipers of Baal (2 Kings 10:18-27), burned the pillar, and made the house of Baal to be a latrine. But Jehu did not turn from the worship of the golden calves (1 Kings 10:29). All of the northern kings are given adverse verdicts in the Book of Kings as they are judged by the demand to centralize worship in Jerusalem.

In Judah, Hezekiah carried through a reform (2 Kings 18:4-8) with the removal of high places (cf. 2 Kings 18:22), the destruction of pillars, and the breaking of the bronze serpent (cf. Num. 21:6-9). There was also a revival of national worship (2 Chron. 29:3) which would automatically increase the prestige of the Davidic house. Remnants of Israel were invited to keep the Passover in Jerusalem (2 Chron. 30:1) which, if accepted, would add to the recognition of the unity of the whole people. Members of the tribes of Issachar and Zebulun did participate. Hezekiah named one of his sons "Manasseh," the name of the largest northern tribe with territory on both sides of the Jordan. Israel no longer had a king. Its only hope for relief from Assyria would have to come from united action with Judah.

THE PROPHETS

The eighth century Minor Prophets are the heirs of a prophetic history which begins with Samuel at the end of the period of the Judges. These earlier prophets were designated by the same word "prophet" (*nabhi*) that the 8th century ones are. Why in the middle of the eighth century collections of oracles of prophets began to be made is an enigma in Old Testament study. However, of the earlier prophets we know episodes in which they participated, but few of their oracles have been preserved. In some cases,

only a single oracle is preserved. Of the literary prophets, we have collections of oracles but know few episodes in their careers. With the exception of some affairs of Elijah and Elisha, the preserved stories of earlier prophets deal with the royal court rather than with the ordinary citizen. They do not primarily concern themselves about behavior of the private citizen. The literary prophets address the people as a whole and threaten national disaster rather than centering on the royal house.

Interest in ethical behavior is not absent from the early prophets as can be seen in Nathan's rebuke of David over his adultery with Bathsheba and also seen in Elijah's rebuke of Ahab over Naboth's vineyard. With the eighth century prophets, ethical concerns become major. Early and late prophets are concerned with the exclusive loyalty to the Lord and denounce the Baal cult. Samuel denounced the tendency to trust in sacrifice rather than being obedient (1 Sam. 15) just as the literary prophets later did. None of the Minor Prophets reveals a close connection with the court of the king such as is seen in such figures as Nathan, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. None is a military advisor like Elisha was on occasions (2 Kings 3).

There is no historical justification for a distinction between Major and Minor Prophets either in time or content. Isaiah is the Major Prophet of the eighth century, but Amos, Hosea, and Micah would not have seen themselves in a different category from their contemporary Isaiah. It was Augustine who gave us the titles Major and Minor Prophets, not speaking of their significance but of the length of their books.²⁹ The Twelve Prophets were assembled as a corpus earlier than any surviving evidence attests.

In many areas, the prophets show much similarity. They all claim to be speaking for the Lord, delivering a

message that is not their own. They engage in symbolic acts. Ahijah tears his garment into twelve pieces, giving ten to Jeroboam as a symbol of his getting ten tribes. Hosea gives his children symbolic names and himself enters a symbolic marriage. Use of parables and other figures of speech is done by prophets early and late. Rhythmical oracles are found early and late.

Hebrew writing far antedates the times of the Hebrew prophets. The earliest examples of Hebrew scribal writing now extant would be ostraca from Arad dating in the tenth century B.C.³⁰

GEOGRAPHY

The book of Jonah does not give Jonah's hometown of Gathhepher (2 Kings 14:25); an unexcavated place called el Meshad located slightly north of Nazareth claims to have his tomb. Joppa retains its ancient name and was an important, though hazardous, port until modern times. It is a part of the metropolitan area--Tel-Aviv-Yafo. Tarshish is thought to be Tartessus on the coast of Spain, a westernmost point of call for Phoenician traders. Israelites are not depicted in the Old Testament to be sea-faring people. That Nineveh was indeed a great city for its day will be considered in looking at the seventh century prophets, especially the book of Nahum. Numerous places claim the distinction of being the location where the fish vomited out Jonah; but all are folklore.

The cities mentioned by Amos were long ago destroyed; and, with the exception of Jerusalem (or Zion), Tyre, and Damascus, their ancient locations were forgotten. The identification of exact sites for these places is one of the great contributions of modern discovery. Amos's town of Tekoa is identified with the unexcavated site Khirbet

Tequ'a located five miles south of Bethlehem. Its surface has Byzantine ruins.³¹ Ancient Damascus has not been excavated, but a recent history of the place has been published.³²

The five Philistine cities, except Gath, have all been located; a major excavation was carried out on Ashdod,³³ and the sites of Ashkelon³⁴ and Ekron³⁵ are currently under excavation. The site of Gaza occupies a part of the area still retaining the ancient name.³⁶ Amos passes over Gath in his list but later mentions it (Amos 6:2). Though often searched for, its location remains uncertain.³⁷

The areas of Tyre, Edom, and Ammon have also been objects of investigation. Teman (Amos 1:12) is probably the north part of Edom;³⁸ however, others choose the site Tawilan.³⁹ The capital of Edom is Bozrah that is identified with Buseirah.⁴⁰ Rabbah was at the citadel of Amman.⁴¹ Kerioth in Moab (Jer. 48:24, 41; Amos 2:2), also mentioned on the Mesha Stone, is a site not definitely located.⁴²

Samaria (Amos 3:12; 4:1; 8:14; Hos. 8:5, 6; 10:7; 13:16; Mic. 1:1) is the site of Sebastia,⁴³ and Bethel (Amos 3:14; 4:4; 5:5; 7:10; Hos. 12:4) is the site of Beitin where Albright and Kelso excavated.⁴⁴ Gilgal (Amos 4:4; 5:5; Hos. 12:11; Mic. 6:5) though often sought still remains unlocated.⁴⁵ Also unlocated are Sodom and Gomorrah (Amos 4:11) though they are conjectured to be at the south end of the Dead Sea.⁴⁶ With them are Admah and Zeboiim (Hos. 11:8).

Other places mentioned are Lo-debar,⁴⁷ Karnaim, and the entrance of Hamath (Amos 6:13-14). The last place is now customarily transliterated Lebo-hamath,⁴⁸ conjectured to be the northern exit of the Bika' between the Lebanon and Antilebanon. Karnaim has been conjectured to be Tell 'Aistara. The location of these places is disputed.

The excavation of Dan, which has been going on for a generation, has revealed an inscription identifying the place as a shrine.⁴⁹ Beer-sheba was excavated by Aharoni.⁵⁰ Stones of a dismantled horned altar were found there, possibly a victim of Josiah's reform which extended from Geba to Beersheba (2 Kings 23:8). Caphtor (Amos 9:7) is thought possibly to have been Crete,⁵¹ but Kir (Amos 9:7) is unlocated.⁵²

Hosea adds to this list Gibeah (Hos. 5:8; 10:9) which is identified with Tell el-Ful, three miles north of Jerusalem.⁵³ He also mentions Ramah (Hos. 5:8) which is er-Ram.⁵⁴ Beth-aven (Hos. 5:8) is thought to be a derogatory title for Bethel. Shechem (Hos. 6:9) is Tell el-Balatah located between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim.⁵⁵ There are also Gilead, Memphis in Egypt, Baal-peor,⁵⁶ and Beth-Arbel (Hos. 10:14) whose location is uncertain.⁵⁷

Micah adds Moresheth-gath, his hometown (Mic. 1:14), conjecturally identified with Tell el-Judeideh.⁵⁸ The towns on whose names Micah puns are conjecturally located in the Shephelah area near his home. A convincing rationale for the sequence of listing is still missing. Places like Lachish⁵⁹ and Maresha⁶⁰ have been excavated.

Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2) remains identified, but no excavation of a level of Micah's day has taken place.⁶¹ Micah also mentions Shittim (Mic. 6:5), but its location is uncertain.⁶²

MISCELLANEOUS ILLUSTRATION FROM ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS

The eighth century prophets are active in the periods the Palestinian archaeologists call Iron Age IIa and IIb. From archaeological finds it is known that writing was being practiced by traders, potters, builders, and other craftpersons

and their clients.⁶³ The Siloam inscription, the Kuntillet 'Ajrud stamps on jars and clay bullae, and ostraca are all evidence. The amount of evidence increases in the seventh century. Palestinian cities Ashtaroth, Gibton, Gezer, and Lachish are artistically depicted in Assyrian reliefs.⁶⁴

Amos, not to be confused with Amoz the father of Isaiah (Is. 1:1), is unknown outside his book. The term *nokedh*, used for his prior occupation, is also used for Mesha of Moab (2 Kings 3:4) and occurs in Ugaritic texts. It is, however, overplaying the evidence to deduce from the term that he was either a royal shepherd or a cult official.

The name Hosea is a common Old Testament name, and it occurs in the Lachish Letters, the Metsad Hashavyahu ostrakon, and on seals and seal impressions of the 7th-6th centuries B.C.⁶⁵ There is no reason to identify any of these persons with the prophet.

The Israelite and Judean kings alluded to in the headings and texts of the 8th century Minor Prophets are attested in non-biblical sources. Omri (Mic. 6:16), though dating more than a century before Micah, is known from repeated allusions in Assyrian texts. Ahab is known from Shalmaneser III's account of the Battle of Qarqar. Uzziah (elsewhere called Azariah) is known from a later inscription which attests a burial of his bones. Jeroboam II is attested by a seal (found at Megiddo but now lost) depicting a roaring lion and reading, "Belonging to Shema, servant of Jeroboam."⁶⁶ A seal of Jotham (Hos. 1:1; Mic. 1:1) was found at Ezion Geber. Ahaz (Hos. 1:1; Mic. 1:1) is mentioned by Tiglath-pileser among his tribute payers; and Hezekiah is repeatedly mentioned by Sennacherib.⁶⁷

Amos's allusion to ivory beds (Amos 6:4) and ivory houses (Amos 3:15; cf. 1 Kings 22:39) raised many an eyebrow until the excavation of Samaria yielded eighth

century ivories which had previously been inlays on furniture used there.⁶⁸

Amos's charge that the people of Samaria lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge recalls that the law requires that a widow's garment not be taken in pledge at all (Deut. 24:17) and that the garments of others must be returned before nightfall (Ex. 22:26-27; Deut. 24:12-13; cf. Prov. 20:16; 27:13). On an ostrakon found at Metsad Hashavyahu, dating from the time of Josiah, a peasant appeals to an official asking the return of his garment which he insists has been unjustly seized.⁶⁹

Amaziah, priest of Bethel, in his rebuke of Amos addressed him as "seer" (*chozeh*; Amos 7:12) which is a term often used in the Old Testament for prophet type personalities. But it was also a term used beyond Israel. An eighth century inscription of Zakir of Hamat (Afis) claims that his deity spoke to him through seers and diviners.⁷⁰ A fragmentary plaster inscription from Tell Deir 'Alla in the East Jordan Valley shows that Balaam at a late date was there regarded as a "seer of the gods" (*chozeh 'elohim*).⁷¹

Excavations at Samaria revealed sixty-three ostraca dating to the time of Jeroboam II which deal with sales of oil and wine and are interesting for the personal and geographical names they contain.⁷² Almost half of the names contain Baal compounds while the other half have Yahweh compounds⁷³ revealing something of the penetration of Baal worship into Israel.

Hosea laments, "men kiss calves" (Hos. 13:2), likely referring to the images Jeroboam set up in Bethel and Dan (1 Kings 12:28-29). A small bronze bull from the Canaanite period (Late Bronze Age) was found in the ruins of a temple at Hazor.⁷⁴ A cast bronze bull image from the period of the Judges has been found at a Canaanite shrine

near Dothan⁷⁵ and a silver one from an earlier time at Ashkelon.⁷⁶ One of the Samaria ostraca dating in the 8th century has an inscription that may be read as "The calf of Yahweh."⁷⁷

Further penetration of Canaanite religion into Israel and Judah comes from an 8th century inscription found in a tomb near Hebron which speaks of "Yahweh and his Asherah."⁷⁸ Another occurrence of this penetration comes from Kuntillet 'Ajrud which is in the south on the border of Sinai.⁷⁹

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SEVENTH CENTURY MINOR PROPHETS: HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Jack P. Lewis

POLITICAL EVENTS¹

The eighth century Minor Prophets (Jonah, Amos, Hosea, and Micah) warned of the approaching catastrophe of Israel and Judah in the clash with Assyria. They do not narrate the clash itself which reduced the area of the northern kingdom in 735 B.C., captured and exiled Samaria in 722 B.C., brought the commander in chief of Sargon to Ashdod in 711 B.C., and brought Sennacherib to Hezekiah's door in Jerusalem in 701 B.C.

The Hebrew prophets seemed at their best when the nation was facing a crisis. It was Isaiah, however, rather than a Minor Prophet who told of Sennacherib's withdrawal and of his assassination by a son some twenty years later (2 Kings 19:35-37; Is. 37:36-38). Another such crisis period came at the end of the seventh century: Nineveh was destroyed bringing to an end the Assyrian domination of the Middle East; Egypt was driven back into its territory; the Neo-Babylonian empire came to power; and then the Judean state ended with the Babylonian exile. The prophets Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and perhaps Obadiah are active at this period.

The only prophetic oracle preserved from the first three quarters of the seventh century threatens Judah for the evils brought on by Manasseh who reigned for fifty-five years (2

Kings 21:10-15). There is a seal from an unknown location with the inscription, "Belonging to Manasseh son of the king." The art decoration contains a six pointed star and a crescent and is the first Hebrew seal to have these symbols. It is apparently a seal of a royal prince, but whether it is the son of Hezekiah is uncertain. The symbols may represent the religious deviations of the owner.²

In Assyria, Sennacherib was succeeded by Esarhaddon (680-669 B.C.) who is depicted holding two royal captives on a stele from Zinjirli.³ During a very brief reign, Esarhaddon continued the drive of Assyria toward Egypt and succeeded in conquering lower Egypt in 671 B.C. He was followed on the throne by Ashurbanipal,⁴ who is perhaps best known for the library he assembled at Nineveh, the discovery of which in the last century opened up a major portion of our knowledge of ancient Mesopotamia. However, Ashurbanipal succeeded in penetrating Egypt and taking Thebes, capital of upper Egypt, in 663 B.C., an event noted by the prophet Nahum (cf. Nahum 3:8-10). Ashurbanipal left a record of his success⁵ and also left a relief in his palace at Nineveh of his assault on an Egyptian city in which the walls are attacked with picks, and ladders are used to scale them. Protection to the attackers is offered by bowmen. A soldier sets fire to the gates. Fettered captives with their wives and children are being taken into exile.⁶

Manasseh of Judah (696-642 B.C.), Esarhaddon's vassal, on one occasion was taken to Babylon by an unnamed Assyrian king (2 Chron. 33:11-12).⁷ He was among twenty-two Western vassal kings required to bring to the imperial capital at Nineveh material for construction of the royal armory and storehouse, and he furnished troops for Ashurbanipal's conquests in that king's first campaign against Egypt.⁸ In addition to fortifying Jerusalem,⁹

Manasseh is said to have put commanders of the army in all the fortified cities of Judah (2 Chron. 33:15). A fortress excavated at Horvat 'Uza dating from the late seventh century has been conjecturally suggested to fit construction that Manasseh could have done.¹⁰

Following a long reign, Manasseh was succeeded by his son Amon; but after two years (ca. 640-639 B.C.), Amon was assassinated by his servants (2 Kings 21:23-24; 2 Chron. 33:24);¹¹ however, the people of the land killed the conspirators and put Josiah who was only eight years old on the throne.

With the death of Ashurbanipal in 627 B.C., the downfall of Nineveh (and thereby of Assyria) came in shocking rapidity. The Scythians, Babylonians, and Medes joined forces to capture the city in 612 B.C. Ashur-uballit and the army fled westward to establish a short-lived rump state at Haran.¹² Under Psammeticus I, Egypt rushed to aid her former enemy in 616, 610, and 609 B.C. at which time Ashur-uballit was killed.¹³ Egypt apparently extended authority at this time over the Megiddo area of Palestine.

But crown prince of Babylon (Nebuchadnezzar II) defeated the Assyrians and their Egyptian ally, Neco, at the battle of Carchemish (605 B.C.). Assyria was finished, and for seventy-five years until 639 B.C. the new Babylonian empire dominated the Middle East. Nebuchadnezzar succeeded Neboplassar to become king in 604 B.C.

Josiah of Judah (640-609 B.C.) had extended his reform of 621 B.C. to include demolition of high places in the cities of Samaria (2 Kings 23:19; 2 Chron. 34:6-7). Now in 609 B.C. he attempted futilely and tragically to block Neco's progress to aid the Assyrian army at Haran (2 Kings 23:29-30; 2 Chron. 35:22-25).¹⁴ Neco had captured Gaza.¹⁵ Josiah was killed at Megiddo. A commemoration of his death was inaugurated (2 Chron. 35:25).

With Josiah's demise, the people of the land put his son Jehoahaz (Shallum; Jer. 22:11) whose mother was Hamutal, daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah, on the throne (2 Kings 23:30-31; 2 Chron. 36:1). He seems to have represented the anti-Egyptian party, and in three months Neco summoned him to Riblah. Jeremiah proclaimed that Jehoahaz would return no more (Jer. 22:10-12; Ezek. 19:1-4). Neco carried him off as a captive to Egypt where he died. A second but older son, Eliakim, whose mother was Zebidah, daughter of Pedaiah of Rumah (2 Kings 23:36), was put on the throne about 609 B.C. with his name changed to Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23:31-35). Jehoiakim paid a heavy indemnity to Neco which he raised by taxation of the people of the land (2 Kings 23:35; 2 Chron. 36:1-4). He is spoken of as being a "servant" of his sovereign (2 Kings 24:1). Momentarily, Egypt controlled all the western area from Wadi el-Arish to the Euphrates (cf. 2 Kings 24:7); but all changed with the Battle of Carchemish (Jer. 46:2-12) in 605 B.C.¹⁶ Jeremiah saw Nebuchadnezzar ruling all the west (Jer. 25:1-14), and until the end, he urged submission (Jer. 21:8-9; 36:24; 38:2ff.). The Judean politicians, however, never seem to have grasped how the wind was blowing.

King Jehoiakim oppressed the people in order to build palaces (Jer. 22:13-17). He had the prophet Uriah who threatened destruction of the temple executed, and he ordered the arrest of Jeremiah (Jer. 26:20-23; 36:26). After the fortunes of Judah shifted from being controlled by Egypt to being controlled by Babylon, disloyalty was found in Jehoiakim (2 Kings 24:1). Jehoiakim disregarded Jeremiah's warning that the king of Babylon would destroy the land (Jer. 36:29). The exiling of people reported in Daniel 1:1-3, known only from that source, is not described in the *Babylonian Chronicle* (cf. 2 Chron. 36:6-8). The

Babylonians made a futile attack on Egypt with heavy losses on each side and returned home empty-handed. In an Aramaic letter from Saqqara in Egypt a Palestinian area ruler (possibly from Ekron) appeals to Pharaoh for military aid against the impending Babylonian attack.¹⁷ Whether he got aid or not is unknown.

Nebuchadnezzar came to besiege Jerusalem. Jehoiakim died under unexplained circumstances (cf. LXX of 2 Chron. 36:8; Jer. 22:18-19; 36:30), and his son Jehoiachin came to the throne only after three months to surrender on March 15/16, 597 B.C. (1 Kings 24:8-12; 2 Chron. 36:9-10). Jehoiachin and significant people of Jerusalem were taken into exile, a policy the Babylonians had taken over from the Assyrians. Nebuchadnezzar has left a record both of the battle of Carchemish and of the taking of Jerusalem.¹⁸ An ostrakon from Judah at the time of Josiah has the complaint of a peasant that his coat has been taken from him, and he appeals to an official for its return.¹⁹ Ostraca found in excavations of the citadel at Arad reveal fear of an Edomite invasion of the area as well as revealing information about administrative and religious conditions of the time.²⁰

People of the leader class including prophet and priest were taken (2 Kings 24:12-16; Jer. 24:1; 27:20; 29:2). The prophet Ezekiel was among these exiles. Jeremiah saw the exiles as the good figs in the basket of his vision (Jer. 24:2). Those still in Jerusalem are the rotten figs.

A heavy tribute was levied on Jerusalem.²¹ Despite the fact that Zedekiah was king in Jerusalem, events began to be dated from the exile of Jehoiachin (Ezek. 1:2; 33:21; 40:1). A record found at the Ishtar Gate in Babylon reporting rations for (among other national figures) Jehoiachin and his sons shows something of conditions in the exile.²² Thirty-seven years after Jehoiachin's exile (*ca.*

560 B.C.), he was elevated from prison to a place at the king's table (Jer. 51:31-34).

After the taking of Jehoiachin in 597 B.C., the Babylonians made one more effort at controlling the Judeans by placing Mattaniah (another son of Josiah) on the throne with the name of Zedekiah (2 Kings 24:17).²³ It seems that he was taken to Babylon to make an oath of loyalty (Ezek. 17:12-21).²⁴ After a turbulent ten years (597-586 B.C.), history repeated itself. The Judean politicians, encouraged by Pharaoh Hophra (Jer. 44:30; Ezek. 17:15, 17) and hoping for aid from Egypt, were in revolt. Zedekiah was afraid of both his ministers and his people (Jer. 38:24). Egypt proved to be a broken reed (Ezek. 29:6; cf. 2 Kings 18:21; Is. 36:6; Lam. 1:2, 7; 4:17). The Lachish Ostraca are thought to have been written at this period. One letter speaks of "Conaiah, son of Elnathan, has come down to Egypt."²⁵

Though the siege of Jerusalem at one stage was temporarily lifted by the Babylonians at the threat of Egyptian aid (Jer. 37:5-11; Ezek. 17:17; 30:2-26), Nebuchadnezzar, after a siege of a year and a half, took Jerusalem in 587 B.C. During the siege, Zedekiah feared to surrender lest he be killed by Judeans already in the Babylonian camp (Jer. 38:19). The day of the capture of Jerusalem became a day of fasting for later generations (Zech. 7:3-7).

In the midst of the crisis, King Zedekiah and his army attempted to escape to Jericho (2 Kings 25:4-7; Jer. 39:2-7; 52:6-11), but they were captured; the king was taken to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah, his sons were slaughtered, and he was blinded and spent the remainder of his days in Babylon.

The Babylonians destroyed the temple (cf. 2 Kings 25:8-9; Jer. 52:13), exiled the important people, and left behind only vinedressers and husbandmen to tend the land

(2 Kings 25:11-12). Kenyon in excavating on the Ophel Hill identified tumbled walls of Jerusalem with rubble up to six meters thick.²⁶ Also evidence has been identified in the upper city.²⁷ Numerous Palestinian sites in the south reflect in their excavated remains the destruction the Babylonians wrought. Ostraca from Arad reveal the expectation of an Edomite invasion into that area. The area north of Jerusalem, however, seems to have escaped destruction, perhaps from making peace with the Babylonians prior to Jerusalem's fall.²⁸

The exiling of people from Judah across the period we have surveyed by the Babylonians took place in stages. Three thousand twenty-three were carried off in Nebuchadnezzar's seventh year (Jer. 52:28). Then, in a major exile, others were taken (2 Kings 24:12) which may have brought the total to 10,000.

The Babylonians now turned Judah into a province instead of its being a vassal kingdom. They are not reported to have replaced the exiles with deportees from elsewhere in the empire as the earlier Assyrians had done. The people seem to have been kept intact.²⁹

Mizpah (12 km. north of Jerusalem) was chosen for the seat of government. Gedaliah, son of Ahikam (2 Kings 25:22; Jer. 40:5), was installed as governor with the support of the Babylonian garrison (Jer. 41:3). A seal impression found at Lachish reading "Belonging to Gedaliah who is over the household" may refer to this Gedaliah when he was a governmental official.³⁰ Refugees who had fled the Babylonians were attracted to return (Jer. 40:7-12). Those people left were given fields and vineyards (Jer. 39:10). Despite the destruction of the temple, some sort of worship continued in Jerusalem. Pilgrims from Shechem, Shiloh, and Samaria brought offerings and incense to the temple

(Jer. 41:4); but all but ten were slaughtered by Ishmael who the day before had assassinated Gedaliah (Jer. 41:5-8).

This Ishmael, son of Nethaniah and a member of the royal family (Jer. 41:1f.), had conspired with the Ammonite king Baalis (Jer. 40:14). An extant seal impression is thought possibly to refer to Baalis.³¹ Ishmael and eight of his companions safely escaped to Ammon. The surviving supporters of Gedaliah and Babylonian rule (fearing Babylonian reprisals) fled to Egypt, taking the prophet Jeremiah with them despite his efforts to dissuade them (2 Kings 25:26; Jer. 41:11-43:7). It has been conjectured that the group of exiles carried to Babylon in 582 B.C. (Jer. 52:30) may have been a consequence of these events. Edomite and Arabian tribes flowed into south Judah, and that area became Idumaea.

RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS

Neither the books of Kings nor Chronicles surveys religious conditions in Judah in the last years of Hezekiah after 701 B.C. Hezekiah was succeeded by his son Manasseh who as a vassal of Assyria proceeded to undo all the reforms that his father had carried through (2 Kings 21:3-6, 16, 17; 23:5, 10-12; 2 Chron. 33:5-6). He rebuilt the high places, worshiped the host of heaven (cf. Jer. 8:2; Zeph. 1:5), offered his son as a burnt offering, and is said to have filled Jerusalem with innocent blood. In tradition, the death of Isaiah came during Manasseh's reign when Isaiah was sawed in two with a wood saw. Manasseh allowed magic and divination which are forbidden in Leviticus (20:6). The outcome was the Lord's decree to destroy Jerusalem as Manasseh is thought to be the worst of kings (2 Kings 21:9-14; cf. Jer. 15:4). The Chronicles

(2 Chron. 33:10-13) tell of his repentance. An apocryphal writer later composed The Prayer of Manasseh, but the catastrophe could not be turned back.

Manasseh's son Amon continued the same policies his father had earlier followed until slain by his servants (2 Kings 21:19-25). The people of the land then made Josiah, eight-year-old son of Amon, to be king.

The extent to which submission to Assyria required worship of Assyrian gods is disputed among students. Two scholars have argued that Assyrian sources do not substantiate the theory that Assyrians required support of Assyrian sanctuaries or Assyrian cult in the territory of vassals though some sort may have been expected in provinces. They argue that Manasseh's acts were a voluntary revival of Canaanite traditions.³²

The Scythian menace has played a significant role in the study of prophecy of this period. According to Herodotus,³³ the Scythians, a people out of the Caucasus region, aided in the overthrow of Nineveh and then swept to the border of Egypt where they were bought off by Psammeticus I. They then took Azotus (Ashdod) and dominated Asia for twenty-eight years. Earlier study of prophecy made much of the Scythians as being the enemy out of the north (Jer. 1:13-15) and also as being the stimulus for Zephaniah's expectation of the imminent Day of the Lord. It is now recognized that there is no evidence for a Scythian invasion of Judah.³⁴ The records of the new Babylonian empire suggest that already at this period there were rumblings against Assyria from the Babylonian region. Any invader of the west from the Euphrates region would come out of the north (rather than across the 500 miles of desert) despite the fact that its native region may lie due east of Jerusalem.

The best known religious event of the period of Josiah was the discovery of the book on the law in his 18th year

during repairs made on the temple. The book was authenticated by the prophetess Huldah. The discovery touched off Josiah's famous reform of 621 B.C. which included stopping worship on the high places, centralizing worship in Jerusalem, and providing for the keeping of the Passover in an unprecedented way. Reform extend to Bethel (2 Kings 23:4, 5) and to the cities of Samaria (2 Kings 23:8, 19; 2 Chron. 34:6-7). Josiah purged the Assyrian cult, including sun worship. All approaches to study of the Old Testament recognize the discovery of the law as a turning point in Old Testament history.

Jeremiah is a far more dominant figure across the last years of the Judean kingdom than is any Minor Prophet. Though he is unmentioned in either the books of Kings or Chronicles, his own book depicts his active role as he stood alone as a bronze wall against the king and nation. His book must be studied to grasp adequately the religious and political situation at the end of the 7th century. Ezekiel, thought to have been carried into exile in 597 B.C., began his prophesying in 592 B.C., and through his visions gives insight into Jerusalem in its last years.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSIGHTS

The seventh century Minor Prophets were active in the period Palestinian archaeologists call Iron Age IIIa (700-586 B.C.) Discoveries of written materials in Palestine come at this period from Lachish, Arad, and Metsad Hashavyahu.

None of the seventh century Minor Prophets (Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, and perhaps Obadiah) give biographical details that describe a role for them in the political events of Judah. They are unknown outside their own books. These prophets appear as spokesmen for God, but

not as politicians or political advisors. Nahum and Zephaniah celebrate the downfall of Nineveh. Habakkuk is concerned with how the Lord could use such a wicked nation as the Chaldeans to discipline what he considers to be the less wicked nation of Judah.

The manuscript materials for establishing a text for these books are approximately the same as for the Assyrian period prophets. Already earlier than any information we have, the Twelve Prophets had come to be considered one corpus. The Qumran fragmentary materials are our oldest texts. The Qumran community not only copied the books, but they also had commentaries on Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah of the type scholars know as *Midrash Peshet*. The scripture text is cited and then is applied to the community with the introductory phrase "It means." Contemporary application of prophetic material rather than anything that might be thought of as scientific exegesis is practiced. From Cave One, there is the *Habakkuk Commentary* which covers the first two chapters of the book giving text and commentary.

The publication of the *Chronicles of the Chaldean Kings* made possible the refinements of chronology of events connected with the fall of Nineveh and the later capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. Earlier books dated the fall of Nineveh at 606 B.C.; but now the date is solidly at 612 B.C. with the battle of Carchemish dated at 605 B.C., the capture of Jerusalem in March 15/16, 597 B.C., and the final demise of the city at 586 B.C.

The name "Nahum" is a common one in Old Testament times. An ostrakon from Arad reporting oil trade is addressed to and acknowledged in the name of a Nahum.³⁵ There is a sixth century jar impression with the same name,³⁶ and a seal of the 7th-6th century of "Nahum (son of) 'Elishama.'³⁷ A bulla from the City of David excava-

tion reads, "Belonging to Nahum son of Sheela."³⁸ Less can be done with the name of Habakkuk.

Examples of non-biblical occurrences of the name Zephaniah in Hebrew include the legend of a Hebrew gem now in the British Museum (No. 1032) belonging to a "ben Zephanyahu."³⁹ Two bullae from the end of the Judean kingdom belonging to "Jeremiah, son of Zephaniah" were found in 1968 at Lachish,⁴⁰ and in the Aramaic Elephantine Papyri at the beginning of the fourth century a "Zephaniah b. Machi" is a witness to a document.⁴¹ The element "zaphon" of this name has been found used in other names in seal impressions at Beth Shemish, Lachish, Tell Judeideh, and on a seal from an unknown locale now in the Israel Museum.⁴²

In the ancestry list of Zephaniah, the name "Cushi" has the form of a gentilic (cf. Zeph. 2:12) and when used with a definite article means a man originating from Cush (cf. Gen. 10:6; 2 Sam. 18:21-22; thereafter translated "Ethiopian"; cf. Jer. 38:7-13; 39:15-18). Cushi may be compared to names like Buzi (NRSV: "Buzite"; Job 32:2) and Jehudi (Jer. 36:21, 23) which likely arose when the bearer was outside his home land.⁴³ Moses married a Cushite woman (Num. 12:1), and an Ethiopian saved the life of Jeremiah, Zephaniah's contemporary. As a proper name, Cushi occurs elsewhere in Scripture only in Jeremiah 36:14 where it stands at the beginning of a genealogy. It occurs as a man's name in an inscription from Ipsambul.⁴⁴ It is the only name in the series of Zephaniah's ancestors which is not a theophoric name.

The name Gedaliah is the name of more than one Old Testament person (cf. 2 Kings 25:24; 1 Chron. 25:3, 9; Ezra 10:18; Jer. 38:1; 39:14). The use of the name is attested by a seal of the 8th-7th centuries B.C. of unknown provenance but now in the Israel Museum which reads,

"Gedaliah son of Samakh."⁴⁵ It also occurs on a bulla from Lachish reading "Gedaliah the royal steward,"⁴⁶ and on an Arad ostrakon.⁴⁷

The name Amariah is used by eight persons in the Old Testament (1 Chron. 6:7 [5:33], 52[37]; 23:19; 24:23; 2 Chron. 19:11; 31:15; Ezra 10:42; Neh. 10:[4]3). It occurs in the longer form "Amaryahu" on a seal from Tel Kiryat Ye'arim reading "To Isaiah and Amariah,"⁴⁸ and on incised jar handles from Gibeon.⁴⁹

The name "Hezekiah" has been identified on a bulla of the 8th-7th centuries B.C. from an unknown locale reading "To Yehazarach son of Hilqiyahu, servant of Hezekiah."⁵⁰ Hezekiah is mentioned by name by Sennacherib in his inscriptions.⁵¹ That the ancestor of the prophet is the king remains only a hypothesis, not an established fact. "Amariah" is not listed in Scripture among the king's sons.

The modern student of the Minor Prophets who is well oriented in warfare with tanks, trucks, airplanes, missiles, aircraft carriers, satellite, radio, and telephone communication must dismiss all of these and go back to the rich source of Assyrian art to get a realistic grasp of how warfare was carried out in the seventh century B.C. There he can see depicted the Assyrian calvary, the charioteers, the bowmen, and the slingmen. He can see the attack on the city walls, the defense from the walls, and the attack on gates. He can see city walls, details of siege, and the departure of exiles for their lands of exile. From Assyrian texts he can read of the brutality with which the Assyrians overran their enemies.

The Bronze Gates from Balawat depict an Assyrian chariot force in action. At that period the chariot had six spokes, but by Nahum's time the heavier chariot wheel would have eight.⁵² The prophet speaks of the rumble of

the wheel (Nahum 3:2-3). He speaks of drawing water for the siege (Nahum 3:14). A relief from the palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Calah, though far earlier than Nahum, shows an attacking soldier cutting the rope on a bucket lowered by the besieged to draw water.⁵³

Zephaniah announces "a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements" (Zeph. 1:16). The trumpet (*shophar*) was used to assemble the army (Judg. 3:27; 6:34) and to sound either attack (Josh. 6:5, 20; cf. Job 39:24) or retreat (2 Sam. 20:1, 22). Neither a *shophar* nor a description of one has to this time been revealed in excavations in the land of Israel; however, the trumpet as a musical instrument made of various materials is depicted in Egyptian and Hittite art;⁵⁴ miniature models in gold have been found in Persian mounds from the second millennium B.C. and one of iron from Ugarit.⁵⁵ The scenes depicting the attack of Ramses II on a Syrian town show an Egyptian trumpeter signaling victory.⁵⁶ The Assyrian bas relief (now in the British Museum) shows a trumpet used for signaling to slave laborers who are trying to drag a colossal bull into place.⁵⁷ The Qumran *War Scroll* (3:1-11) describes an extensive use of the trumpet for marshalling the battle, assembling the infantry, and for carnage, pursuit, and recall.⁵⁸

The word "fenced" in the KJV (Zeph. 1:16; cf. Is. 2:15) is archaic meaning "fortified." Zephaniah also speaks of "lofty battlements" (Zeph. 1:16; cf. 3:6). Sennacherib, earlier than Zephaniah, in Hezekiah's reign attacked Judah's fortified cities (2 Kings 18:13; 2 Chron. 32:1; Is. 36:1). Judean defenses, "strong cities, walled forts and . . . small villages" of this period are mentioned by Sennacherib,⁵⁹ and those of Lachish are seen in his depiction of his siege of Lachish.⁶⁰ Such defenses are represented by foundation remains at Tell en-Nashbeh, Lachish, and other cities.

Nahum 3:14 calls upon the defenders of Nineveh, "Go into the clay, tread the mortar, take hold of the brick mold!" Bricks needed to repair damage done by the enemy's missiles and battering rams were the chief building material used in Assyria. The walls of the city were made of sun-dried bricks. Sennacherib says that he made the wall "mountain high." From Thebes in Egypt there has come a representation of the craft of brickmaking and bricklaying. The mud is trampled with the feet, bricks are molded, dried in the sun, and then placed in walls.⁶¹ Likely the process was not different in Assyria. Nahum used the word *malben*, and heated discussion has taken place over whether it is the place of brickmaking ("the brickkiln" of the KJV) or the mould for making bricks.⁶² M. Held calls attention to a possible Ugaritic parallel to Nahum's phrase in a text which he translates, "Is Asherah a handmaid that she should make bricks?"⁶³

The remains of ancient Nineveh are represented by two mounds, Kuyunjik and Nebi Yunis. The area is surrounded by remains of the ancient walls which today might be compared in appearance to a river levy with breaks where the ancient gates were. The area enclosed is approximately 3 miles in length and varies in width from 1 1/2 miles at the northern end to 1100 yards at the southern end. The walled-in area thus encloses at least 2,000 acres.⁶⁴ Excavations have been periodically conducted for more than a hundred years.⁶⁵ Recent excavations have revealed debris thought connected with Nineveh's fall.⁶⁶

The Philistine cities Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron (Zeph. 2:4) have been considered in looking at the 8th century prophets. These same Philistine cities are listed in the tribute lists of Esarhaddon⁶⁷ and Ashurbanipal.⁶⁸ Zephaniah predicts the destruction of the Philistine cities (Zeph. 2:4). A relief from Sargon's palace at Khorsabad

depicts the capture of Ekron. The place is identified in cuneiform characters. The defenders shoot arrows outward as the attackers shoot inward.⁶⁹ Like Amos, Zephaniah passes over Gath.

The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah which are used in a comparison (Zeph. 2:9) were also considered in the 8th century study.⁷⁰ These cities serve biblical writers as figures of the ultimate in wickedness (Deut. 32:32; Is. 1:9-10; 3:9; Jer. 23:14; Ezek. 16:46ff.), of sudden overthrow (Is. 1:9; Jer. 50:39-40; Lam. 4:6; Amos 4:11), and of permanent destruction (Jer. 49:17-18). It is the last of these figures that is used by Zephaniah. The exact location of these cities remains undetermined.⁷¹

Zephaniah uses the phrase "Canaan, land of the Philistines" (Zeph. 2:5). According to present information, Canaan enters history with the Ebla texts. The Ebla peoples called their chief god "Dagon the Canaanite" or "The Lord of Canaan." This usage supports the contention that Canaan stretched from the border of Egypt to the north Syrian coast, including the land bridge between Syria and Mesopotamia.⁷² Canaan also appears in a Mari text.⁷³ Idrimi, king of Alalakh, later (about the 13th century) describes his exile as being "in Ammia in the land of Canaan."⁷⁴ Egyptians like Seti I,⁷⁵ the writer of an Amarna letter,⁷⁶ an anonymous writer of the 13th century,⁷⁷ Ramses III,⁷⁸ and an envoy of the twenty-second dynasty⁷⁹ all mention Canaan. The name occurs in the Hurrian form *Kinahhi*.⁸⁰ The Amarna letter speaks of "Hanni, son of Maires, the commissioner of the king for the land of Canaan." The Merneptah Stele declares, "Plundered is the Canaan with every evil."⁸¹

Jerusalem is mentioned four times in Zephaniah (Zeph. 1:4, 12; 3:14, 16) and Zion as its parallel is twice (Zeph. 3:14, 16). It is now agreed that Zion earlier referred to the

Ophel hill rather than the western hill which it came to designate in later times. The specific areas of Jerusalem which are mentioned (Zeph. 1:10)--the Fish Gate, the Second Quarter (cf. 2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chron. 34:22), and the Mortar (Zeph. 1:11) despite extensive excavation in the Jerusalem area--are to be located only conjecturally.⁸²

The Chaldeans are mentioned by Habakkuk as the force God is raising up to deal with the violence complained of (1:6).⁸³ The Moabites, the Ammonites, (Zeph. 2:9),⁸⁴ and the Ethiopians (Zeph. 2:12)⁸⁵ are noticed by Zephaniah. He also alludes to an offering brought from beyond the rivers of Ethiopia (3:10). The Egyptians depicted their black southern neighbors in their paintings. Egypt was ruled by an Ethiopian dynasty which Ashurbanipal defeated when he destroyed Thebes in 663 B.C. Zephaniah uses no verb in the first of his statements on the Cushites, leaving the English translator to supply a suitable tense. The facts might suggest the suitability of a present passive tense here, "are slain by the sword"--not "will be slain" as in the English renderings.

The figure in which Nahum compares Nineveh to the lion's den is particularly apt in the light of the prominence of the lion in Assyrian art, in the claims of Assyria's kings, as well as in descriptions of the fierceness and rapacity of her soldiers. Sennacherib boasts of his war-like activity, "Like a lion I raged . . ."⁸⁶ Nergal, the war god, had a winged lion with a man's face as his emblem; and the goddess Ishtar was often depicted as mounted on a lion's back or as a lioness herself.

Nahum uses the phrase of the lion pride, "with none to make them afraid" (2:11). The Assyrian inscriptions attest the accuracy of this description of Nineveh residing in undisturbed might at the zenith of her power. The Qumran community, however, oblivious to the historical setting of

Nahum, applies the prophet's statement to problems of the Greek period.

Nahum uses the verb *chanaq* ("strangle"; 2:12) for the means by which the lion dispatches his victim, and the term has raised much discussion. While it is granted that strangulation is not the primary means of attack by the lion, an ivory from Samaria depicts a lion strangling its victim.⁸⁷ Nimrud ivories show a lion sinking its teeth into a victim's throat,⁸⁸ and a shell from Lagash shows a lion strangling a bull.⁸⁹ From an entirely different line of approach, it may be observed that the writer of *4QpNah*, in applying Nahum to his own time, interprets *chanaq* by *talach* ("hang"). The fact that the Septuagint renders *talach* by *stauroo* in Esther 7:9 lies back of the speculation which proposes that *talach* could have meant "crucify" to the Qumran author.

In another figure, Nahum 3:13 compares Nineveh's people (or army) to women. The figure is common in the Old Testament. The Egyptians (Is. 19:16), the people of Damascus (Jer. 49:24), the people of Edom (Jer. 49:22), and the Babylonians (Jer. 50:37; 51:30) all are said to be women. Comparable images are used when Ashur-nirari says of an enemy, "May his warriors become women,"⁹⁰ when like things are said in other treaty curses,⁹¹ and when the figure is used by Herodotus.⁹²

Nahum notes (contrary to fact) the possibility of Nineveh's saving itself by multiplying like locusts (Nahum 3:15). Biblical comparisons of multitudes to locusts (Is. 33:4; Jer. 46:23; 51:14, 27) have their parallels in Ugaritic literature,⁹³ but the figure earlier occurs in the curse of Agade.⁹⁴ An Assyrian text says, "and I carried off to Assyria horses, mules, asses, oxen and sheep more numerous than locusts."⁹⁵ Assyrian art shows locusts being served shish-kebab fashion at a banquet.⁹⁶ The god Asshur is depicted with a locust.⁹⁷

Habakkuk compares the Chaldeans to a fisherman who sweeps up people in his net (1:15-17; cf. Mic. 7:2). Centuries earlier, a Mesopotamian stele from Susa, the capital of Elam, depicted an unidentified king holding a net full of captives.⁹⁸

Habakkuk speaks of the Chaldeans' heaping up earth in order to take a city (1:10). Remains of siege dams built to attack the cities are still in place in Israel on the sites of Lachish and Masada. Habakkuk in a prayer describing God's manifestation in nature speaks of "plague followed close behind" (3:5). The Hebrew word for plague is *resheph* which is also the name of a Canaanite deity who is known from Ugaritic texts as a god of war who shatters his foes. He is also known from a relief in Egypt.⁹⁹ Habakkuk is not referring to the god.

Zephaniah compares the officials of Jerusalem to evening wolves (3:3; cf. Hab. 1:8). Wolves are not yet extinct in Canaan. A wooden wolf's head survives from Egypt.¹⁰⁰

The twenty-one ostraca found at Lachish dating from the time of Jeremiah (perhaps 789 B.C.) reflect the impact of the Babylonian invasion of the area. One ostrakon speaks of watching for the signals of Lachish, for those of Azekah cannot be seen (cf. Jer. 34:7). Three use a phrase met in the Old Testament: "Who is thy servant but a dog..." (cf. 2 Kings 8:13). A phrase paralleled in Jeremiah is "weakening the hands" (cf. Jer. 38:4). One ostrakon speaks of a message sent through an unnamed prophet.¹⁰¹

Among the few allusions in Zephaniah to utensils of daily life is the one to lamps (*neroth*) used to search out hiding sinners of Jerusalem (1:12). The KJV renders *neroth* by the anachronism "candles," and the REB by "lantern"; but the clay lamp was the light source in the biblical world. The evolution of the clay lamp is easily traced in Palestine

from the numerous examples found from different periods in excavations. Those of Iron Age II are characterized by their heavy base.¹⁰² *Ner* is also a Ugaritic word and is now known to occur in Ebla place names¹⁰³ many centuries earlier than the Minor Prophets. Josephus later tells of men dragged by the Romans from sewers, pits, and caves where they were hiding in the time of the Roman war.¹⁰⁴ From an interpretation of the description given by Zephaniah in his book, he is represented in later pictures (iconography) as carrying a lamp.

Zephaniah threatens "the remnant of Baal" (1:4). New views about the worship of Baal have been touched off by the discovery of the Ras Shamra materials. From that source it is now known that Baal, though not the head of the Canaanite pantheon, was among the more significant deities. His person and worship are now the subject of many hypotheses.¹⁰⁵ The sort of syncretism that seems represented in Zephaniah's charge that the people "bow down and swear to the Lord and yet swear by Milcom" (1:5) may be illustrated from the fifth century B.C. Elephantine papyri where the God Yaho is worshiped, but there are also allusions to Ishumbethel and Anathbethel. A Jew sends a blessing by Yaho and Khunub.¹⁰⁶ A Jewish woman in a legal transaction swears by the Egyptian goddess Sati.¹⁰⁷

A newly found Ammonite seal impression from Tell el 'Umeiri reads, "servant of Ba'alyisa'/or Ba'alyasa'"). The divine name "Milkom" does not occur in biblical Ammonite names, and this impression is the first instance found in either seals or inscriptions. The publisher of the seal connects Ba'alyasa' with Baalis, king of the Ammonites, who is accused of having sent Ishmael to murder Gedaliah (Jer. 40:13, 14).¹⁰⁸

The word *komer* is used only three times in the Old Testament and in each case is for foreign priests (2 Kings 23:5; Hos. 10:5; Zeph. 1:4) but is widely known in Semitic languages. In Akkadian, *kamiru* is a trusted, responsible person.¹⁰⁹ Thus far in Ugaritic, where the ordinary word for priest is *kohen* as in Hebrew, *komer* is attested only in proper names: *kmry*, *kmryn*.¹¹⁰ *Komer* as an Aramaic term for priest is found in inscriptions¹¹¹ and in the Elephantine papyri which have "priest of the gods Khnum and Sati." *Kmr* was used about 2000 B.C. in Assyrian colonies in Cappadocia, then in ancient Aramaic, and later on in the dialect of Palmyra and Syria.¹¹² On a Palmrene altar inscription is a masculine personal name *kmr'*,¹¹³ and a reconstructed Ta'anek name is *K[am]aru*.¹¹⁴

Worship in the roof mentioned by Zephaniah (Zeph. 1:5) is also attested in Egyptian,¹¹⁵ Hittite,¹¹⁶ and Akkadian texts.¹¹⁷

Comparisons of this sort with the seventh century Minor Prophets can be carried out much further where time and space allows. New discoveries make possible the defining of previously unknown words as well as sharpening meanings of those previously known. Customs become clearer. The examples of illumination chosen show only a beginning of the wealth of the contribution to understanding the prophets which discovery has made.

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POST-EXILIC MINOR PROPHETS: HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

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THE POST-EXILIC PERIOD¹

Jeremiah had set the duration of the exile as seventy years (Jer. 25:11, 12, 29:10; cf. Dan. 9:2; Zech. 7:5). He urged the people to make a life for themselves in the exile so that they would increase and not decrease (Jer. 29:4-9). Ezekiel, prophet in the exile, struggled to convince the exiles that the idolatrous situation in Jerusalem would only result in additional exile. There was no hope for a speedy return there (Ezek. 8:1ff.). He placed great emphasis on the doctrine of individual responsibility (Ezek. 18:4, 30-32), thereby discouraging tendencies toward assimilation with the nations while in exile. His vision of the valley of dry bones reflects the conviction that a resurrection of the nation is in store (Ezek. 37).

The Neo-Babylonian empire was short lived. Nebuchadnezzar died in 562 B.C. and was succeeded by three kings of shorter reigns. Then the last Babylonian king, Nabonidus, came to the throne about 556 B.C.

Little is known about the Persians before Cyrus II united the Medes and Persians after he had overthrown Astyages, king of the Medes. Cyrus then defeated Croesus and captured Sardis in 546 B.C., extending his territory to the Aegean coast. He then entered Babylon as a peaceable conqueror in 539 B.C. after having defeated its king

Nabonidus at Ophis. The Cyrus Cylinder² (which gives a Persian version of the event), the "Verse Account of Nabonidus,"³ and the Nabonidus Chronicle⁴ suggest that Cyrus was welcomed by the Babylonians and especially by the priests of Marduk who had been offended by Nabonidus's neglect of Marduk worship.

After Cyrus entered Babylon almost without a struggle in 539 B.C., the trauma of the exile for the Jewish people began to be relieved with the issuing of the decree of Cyrus in 538 B.C. permitting a return to Jerusalem for the purpose of rebuilding the temple (2 Chron. 36:23; Ezra 1:2-4; 1 Esdras 2:3-7; cf. Is. 45:1-7). While this decree is known only from the books of Chronicles and of Ezra (one copy of it in Hebrew and one in Aramaic), the decree is in keeping with the policies announced in the Cyrus Cylinder found at Babylon and now stored in the British Museum.⁵ Though no specific mention is made on the cylinder either of the Jewish people or of Jerusalem, Cyrus announced a policy of allowing exiles in Mesopotamia to return to their homes and of returning sacred treasures to their rightful places. He was no more specially inclined toward the worship of the Lord than he was toward worship of the gods of the Babylonian temples. He credits Bel and Marduk with his victories. However, the exiling policies of the Assyrians and Babylonians were being reversed. It is possible that Cyrus wanted Palestine to be a buffer between Persia and Egypt. The Aramaic Persian decrees preserved in the book of Ezra are thought to be authentic. Aramaic (formerly called Syrian, but now transliterated as Aramaic) had become the official language throughout Syria, Palestine and Egypt.

The return from exile took place in stages just as the going into exile had been in stages. Sheshbazzar organized a return involving about fifty thousand persons (Ezra 2:64-

66) who brought with them treasures that Nebuchadnezzar had carried off (Ezra 1:7-10). The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are characterized by their lists of returnees (Ezra 2:3-67; Neh. 7:6-69).

Many Jews by choice or other reasons remained in exile. For some, no doubt, faith in God had been shattered by the calamity. Among those remaining and their descendants would be Daniel, Esther, and Nehemiah. Seals from some exiles from unspecified locations have been identified.⁶ However, free-will offerings for temple reconstruction were made both by those who remained in Babylon (Ezra 1:6) and by the returnees (Ezra 2:68-69; Neh. 7:70-72).

Some returnees settled in Benjamite towns which seem to have escaped Babylonian destruction in 586 B.C. (Ezra 2:21-35; Neh. 7:25-38). On the other hand, Albright affirms that there was not a single known case of a Judean town that was continuously occupied through the exilic period.⁷ Through slaughter, deportation, pestilence, and flight the population of the country was much less than it had been before the catastrophe under Nebuchadnezzar.⁸

Under unexplained circumstances the leadership of the return passed from Sheshbazzar to Zerubbabel who was a grandson of exiled King Jehoiachin. Those returning set up the altar on its foundations and began sacrificial worship while the temple was not yet restored. Josephus describes the altar as being of unhewn and unwrought stones.⁹ Jeshua, son of Jozadak, led the priests, and they designated Levites to serve. Money was paid to the Sidonians and Tyrians to bring (by sea from Lebanon to Joppa) the cedar needed for construction. In the second year of the return (536 B.C.), the foundations of the temple were laid with great rejoicing, but old people who had seen Solomon's temple before going into exile wept (Ezra 3:12, 13).

Judah had not been an unoccupied territory during the exilic period. Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal of Assyria had imported people from other regions into the land before the Babylonian conquest, and the poor of Judah had been left there to be vinedressers and husbandmen (2 Kings 25:12; Jer. 39:10). Refugees had returned in the days of Gedaliah, and upon their return they had gathered wine and summer fruits in abundance (Jer. 40:12).

When those of the land offered to help in the reconstruction, claiming that they had worshiped the Lord ever since coming into the land, their aid was flatly refused (Ezra 4:1-3). These people became opponents to reconstruction from the time of Cyrus to that of Darius. The work on the temple ground to a halt.

Cyrus's son Cambyses (530-522 B.C.) undertook the task of extending Persian dominion to Egypt, and in 525 B.C. he defeated Psamtik III and entered Saïs. However, his expedition against Ethiopia was a disaster. Cambyses, while in Egypt, showed respect for the Egyptian temples as Cyrus had done for the Babylonian ones. The Persian empire was larger than any the ancient orient had seen. Uprisings in Persia made it necessary for Cambyses to return there; but he died on the way.¹⁰

There was a serious dynastic struggle which is recorded by Herodotus and by Darius on his Behistun cuneiform inscription which is in Old Persian, Susian, and Babylonian. A certain Gaumata posed as Cambyses's younger brother Bardiya whom Herodotus calls "Smerdis." Darius (who may himself have been the usurper) was able to quell the rebellion in various areas. On the Behistun rock, Gaumata is depicted as being under Darius's feet, and other "lying kings" are drawn before him. He claims that "Truth" had triumphed over the "Lie."

Darius made improvements at the capital of Susa, and shortly after his accession he began the construction of a new capital at Persepolis. Darius would have passed through Palestine on his way to Egypt in 519 B.C. The lion's den episode (in Babylon) of the book of Daniel is set in the reign of Darius (Dan. 6:1ff.).

The Persian empire was organized into twenty satrapies with governors who were assessed tribute.¹¹ A certain degree of autonomy was enjoyed. Darius, who with his successors was known as "The Great King," continued for Judah the privileges that Cyrus earlier had granted (cf. Ezra. 6). Royal roads were built to unify the empire.¹² The royal army was made up of contingents from various parts of the empire.

For sixteen years after the temple building was stopped in the time of Cyrus, no further progress on the temple was made. However, in the second year of Darius (520 B.C.), the prophets Haggai and Zechariah arose to stir the people into temple building (Ezra 5:1; 6:14). Their oracles are dated by the regnal years of Darius, and Zechariah uses Babylonian names Chislev (Zech. 7:1; cf. Neh. 1:1; 1 Macc. 1:54) and Shebat (Zech. 1:7; 1 Macc. 16:14) for months.

Haggai prophesied between August and December of 520 B.C., and Zechariah appeared just two months after Haggai (Hag. 1:1; Zech. 1:1). They have the distinction of being the only ones of the Minor Prophets other than Jonah (2 Kings 14:25) who are mentioned in the narrative books of the Old Testament. Micah is mentioned in Jeremiah (Jer. 26:18), but Jeremiah, though containing narrative portions, is not a narrative book. Haggai and Zechariah are credited for having stimulated the people to complete the temple (Ezra 6:14). That project is their concern. Objection by Tattenai, governor of the province "Beyond the River" (Ezra 5:3), proved ineffective when a copy of

Cyrus's decree was found in the fortress at Ecbatana (Ezra 5:5-6:1). Tattenai is known by a document from Babylon.¹³

The temple was carried to completion in 516 B.C., seventy years after its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar. In it, prayer was to be offered "for the life of the king [of Persia] and his children" (Ezra 6:10).

If the assumption is correct that the Artaxerxes, in whose seventh year Ezra came, was Artaxerxes I, some sixty-one more years went by before Ezra led his group of exiles to Jerusalem in 457 B.C. Seventy-nine years had elapsed since the return of the group under Zerubbabel. We have practically no information about Palestinian conditions in these intervening years. Albright conjectures that the population may have been approximately 50,000.¹⁴ The territory of Judah was only twenty-five miles north to south.¹⁵

Meanwhile, the Persians in the early 5th century B.C. faced revolt on their western front, the putting down of which led to a clash with Greece. Darius was then defeated at the battle of Mareathon in 490 B.C. Although he prepared for a second campaign, Darius died in 486 B.C. before he could accomplish it. The putting down of revolts in Babylon (482 B.C.) and Egypt delayed his son and successor, Xerxes, from returning to Greece. Xerxes would have passed through Palestine in 483 B.C. on his way to Egypt. The Greek defenders from Sparta were annihilated at Thermopylae in 480 B.C., but the Persians then suffered defeat in a sea battle at Salamis later in 480 B.C. and in a land battle at Plataea and Mycale in 479 B.C. Eventually peace was made, but the Persian invasion had set the stage for the subsequent conquests in the Persian area by Alexander the Great, an event that is beyond the date of the Minor Prophets. The Hebrew prophets do not explicitly deal with what was going on in Greece.

Assuming the correctness of the identification of Ahasuerus with Xerxes (486-465 B.C.), the scenarios of the book of Esther would fall between the completion of the temple and the return of Ezra.

After a distinguished career, Xerxes was succeeded on the throne of Persia by Artaxerxes I (465-424 B.C.), and he, after an intense civil war, by Darius II (423-404 B.C.). Next came Artaxerxes II (404/5 B.C.) and further wars of succession.

The records of the house of Murashu, from 730 tablets found at Nippur in 1893, give information on economic and social life of Jews remaining in exile in the period between 455 and 403 B.C.¹⁶ Among the names is Shabbetai, son of Haggai (cf. Ezra 10:15). The tablets reflect that the Jews prospered under the Persian kings (cf. Jer. 29:1-14). A group of Aramaic letters from Elephantine in Egypt¹⁷ show conditions there near the end of the fifth century. The Jewish temple in Elephantine had been destroyed, but the community got court permission to rebuild. The Elephantine documents seem to make it probable that the Artaxerxes concerned with Ezra and Nehemiah is Artaxerxes I. In 455 B.C., there was a Jewish community at Sardis (cf. Obad. 20).¹⁸

Under the authority of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:11-26), Ezra, a scribe skilled in the law of Moses, brought a group of uncertain number with him after conducting a special drive to recruit descendants of Levi for his party. Four months were spent in his journey from Babylon to Jerusalem (Ezra 7:7-9). Seals of the Persian period contain the title "scribe."¹⁹ The total of the figures given in Ezra 8 for those returning is 1,750 males. Whether women and children accompanied them is not stated. Gold and silver offerings from the king, his counselors, and Israel were brought. Ezra found a sordid situation in Judah in which those

earlier returning had intermarried with the surrounding peoples. His call on the people for repentance was effective, and the foreign wives were put away. The book of Ezra furnishes a list of the men involved (Ezra 10:18-44).

Thirteen more years elapsed, bringing one to the 20th year of Artaxerxes (445 B.C.) and the events of the book of Nehemiah. Ninety-one years had passed since the group under Zerubbabel had returned. Nehemiah, who had risen to high office in Shushan, returned under a commission of Artaxerxes to restore the walls of Jerusalem. Though encountering vigorous opposition from Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem (Neh. 2:19; 4:1ff.),²⁰ he carried the wall building through to completion. Ezra then led the people in a public reading of the law (Neh. 8:1-12). The observance of the Feast of Booths was kept (Neh. 8:13-17), there was a national confession of sin (Neh. 9:1ff.), and an agreement to keep the law was entered into. Nehemiah served as governor, but in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes (433 B.C.) he was back in Babylon for an indefinite period. At this point, 102 years had passed since Zerubbabel had led his group back to Jerusalem. Jerusalem had been destroyed 154 years earlier--a time comparable to that between the American Civil War and the present.

Upon Nehemiah's return to Jerusalem, he found abuses he considered serious. Tobiah had been granted a chamber in the temple courts (Neh. 13:7), the Levites were not receiving the portion due them (Neh. 13:10-14), the tithe was not being brought properly, the Sabbath was not being observed properly (Neh. 13:19-22), and there were again mixed marriages (Neh. 13:23-29). Nehemiah carried through reforms in all of these areas. How long he served as governor is unknown.

The prophet Malachi does not furnish specific data by which the time of his activity can be definitely determined.

Some scholars argue that he must date before 460 B.C., thereby before the returns of Ezra and Nehemiah. The abuses he speaks of suggest that the initial enthusiasm of the return had played out; carelessness had crept in; hence, a date nearer the time of Nehemiah than to that of Zerubbabel would be conjectured. The prophet attacks carelessness of the priests in teaching, their acceptance of defective animals for sacrifices, marriages made with foreign women, neglect of tithes, skepticism, and taking advantage of the poor (Mal. 3:5).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSIGHTS

Texts. The materials for establishing a text for Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi are the same as those for the total Minor Prophets corpus; they have no independent history. The oldest manuscripts come from the Dead Sea Scroll find. A non-biblical text from the first century A.D. cites Malachi 1:13-14.²¹ In addition, Malachi 1:10 is cited in the *Cairo Damascus Document* 6:11-14. A second century A.D. scroll from Wadi Murabba'at has portions of the text of the book of Haggai and a portion of Zechariah 1:4.²² The post-exilic prophetic books would be included in the Cairo scroll of the Prophets of the tenth century A.D., and then in the Leningrad and Aleppo codices. Zechariah 11:11 is echoed in *4QpIsa*^c,²³ and Zechariah 13:7 in *CD* 19:7-9. Zechariah 13:9 is in *4QTanhumim*.²⁴ The content of the eight unpublished scrolls from Cave 4 at Qumran has not yet been made public.

Portions of the Greek text with *lacunae* of Zechariah up to chapter 9:4 are included in the manuscript from Nahal Hever.²⁵ Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi are all covered in the Minor Prophets scroll from the third century A.D. in the Freer collection.²⁶ These three prophets are included in

Alexandrinus, Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, and some later manuscripts.²⁷

Sources. By date, the Persian Period falls in what Palestinian archaeologists call Iron Age III. Susa (now in Iran) has been excavated by French archaeologists and Pasargadae by the Archaeological Institute of Persepolis. Persepolis has been excavated by the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago and by the Archaeological Institute of Persepolis. Nearby are the tombs of Darius, Xerxes, and Artaxerxes at Naksh-e-Rustam.

Josephus in book eleven of his *Antiquities* is dependent on the apocryphal 1 Esdras rather than the canonical Ezra for his account of the post-exilic period.²⁸ Josephus is thought to preserve some reliable details not in the canonical book. He states that many Jews remained in Babylon, being unwilling to leave their possessions.²⁹ Josephus alludes to the encouraging work of Haggai and Zechariah.³⁰ He erroneously places both Ezra and Nehemiah in the reign of Xerxes.

The Persian period, prior to the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, was not one of the best documented periods of Palestinian archaeology. Traces of the temple of Zerubbabel were blotted out in Maccabean and Herodian construction. Since--apart from the building of the temple--allusions to historical events are sparse in Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, the archaeological contribution to understanding the books is limited. The Cyrus Cylinder of 538 B.C. has already been mentioned.

Persons. Of the persons mentioned in the post-exilic Minor Prophets, only Darius (Hag. 1:1; 2:1, 10; Zech. 1:1, 7) is of sufficient stature to be noticed in a non-biblical record. The prophets themselves, Zerubbabel, and Joshua son of Jehozadak would be known only from the Bible and from sources dependent on it. Ben Sira praises the latter two:

How shall we magnify Zerubbabel? He was like a signet on the right hand, and so was Jeshua the son of Jozadak; in their days they built the house and raised a temple holy to the Lord (Sir. 49:11-12).

Darius is a well-known figure both from classical sources and also from the remains of his buildings at Susa and Persepolis.³¹ But none of his records deals with events in Judah. At the beginning of his reign, Darius suppressed the revolts in the empire. About 518 B.C. in Old Persian, Susian, and Babylonian he recorded on a rock-cut relief at Behistun the surrender of his enemies, the unrest that characterized his first two years, the suppression of nineteen countries, and the peace brought to the Empire by 519 B.C.³² A fragment of a copy of the text of this inscription on stone has been found at Babylon and a papyrus fragment at Elephantine. Haggai speaks of upheaval (2:21-22) thought to be connected with these revolts, and the peaceable conditions of which Zechariah 1:11-15 speaks are thought to be those Darius accomplished.

Haggai is a common Hebrew name both in the Old Testament and in archaeological sources.³³ Zerubbabel, Shealtiel, Joshua, and Jehozadak are known only from biblical sources. Darius is well-known from his building activities at both Susa and Persepolis.

Zechariah is a common Hebrew name worn by others in and out of the Old Testament. His ancestors Berechiah and Iddo also have good Hebrew names. Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah (Zech. 6:14), the exiles from Babylon, are not figures of enough stature to expect records of them outside the book of the prophet itself. The same is true of Josiah, son of Zephaniah (Zech. 6:10).

Geography. In describing Persian times, Herodotus,³⁴ though not entirely consistent in his terminology, uses the name Palestine for the land occupied by Israel and Judah.

At first, "Babylon and the land Beyond the River" made up one administrative district. By the time of Xerxes, "Beyond the River" was itself a satrapy. There were Persian garrisons in various cities, but administration was left in local hands.

The south border of the Persian province of Judah was on a line between Hebron and Lachish. Edomite and Arabian tribes held the territory to the south. Later (at the end of the 5th century) there was a province of Idumaea.³⁵

Judah formed a province (*hammedina*; Ezra 2:1) with a governor (Ezra. 5:14; Neh. 5:14; 12:26; Hag. 1:1, 14). A bulla and a seal have the inscription "Elnathan the governor."³⁶ Also wearing the title "governor" is Bigvai [Bagohi] mentioned in the Elephantine Papyri.³⁷ A silver coin found at Tell Jemmeh in 1970 reads "Yehizqiya the governor."³⁸ An early fifth century jar impression reads, "Yeho'ezer, governor," and a jar impression reads "Ahazai governor."³⁹ While the question has been disputed, it is likely that Samaria and Judah were separately administered within the satrapy of "Beyond the River." The existence of a governor (*pachath*) is attested by Haggai 1:1 and Malachi 1:8. By the time Nehemiah came, Sanballat was governor of Samaria as is evidenced by the title in the Elephantine Papyri and by a seal from the Wadi ed-Daliyeh.⁴⁰

A large number of seal impressions contain the name *yehud* (Judah).⁴¹ The territory, now less than half what it had been in the pre-exilic kingdom of Judah, may have been further subdivided with capitals at Jerusalem, Keilah, Beth-haccherem, and Bethzur.⁴²

Geographical allusions to places and areas in Palestine are sparse in the post-exilic Minor Prophets. Although Haggai deals with building the temple in Jerusalem, the name of the city does not actually occur in his book. Zechariah is also set in Jerusalem and alludes to Jerusalem

and Zion (1:14,16; 2:7; 7:7; 8:1,23; 9:9; 12:3,6,10; 13:1; 14:2,11,12,14,16,21). Malachi also alludes to Jerusalem (2:11; 3:4).

Excavations both on the Ophel Hill and in the upper city have revealed Persian strata though nothing explicitly connected with the Minor Prophets. Avigad conjecturally identifies the broad wall part of which he uncovered in the Jewish Quarter with Nehemiah's Broad Wall (Neh. 3:8; 12:38). He concludes that the Western Hill was unoccupied in the Persian Period in agreement with the statement in Nehemiah that "the people within it were few and no houses had been built" (Neh. 7:4).⁴³ Kenyon's earlier excavation found evidence of a wall higher up the Ophel slope than that one previously identified with Nehemiah's reconstruction, suggesting that the post exilic city was smaller.⁴⁴ Shiloh's excavation of the City of David in 1978 revealed a Persian pottery layer there.⁴⁵

The Benjamin Gate, the place of the former gate, the Corner Gate, the Tower of Hananel, and the king's winepress (Zech. 14:10) cannot be definitely located. Zechariah correctly notices that the Mount of Olives is east of Jerusalem (Zech. 14:4).

We have considered the place Bethel (Zech. 7:2) in the earlier study of the 8th century prophets. The excavators reported a destruction in the transition period between Babylonian and Persian control and a resettlement at the end of the Persian period.⁴⁶ Geba (Zech. 14:10) is thought to be the site of Jeba' north of Jerusalem. Rimmon (Zech. 14:10) is thought to be identified with Khirbet er-Ramamin located north-northeast of Beersheba. The identifications have not been confirmed by excavation. Zechariah alludes to the Negeb and Shephelah (Zech. 7:7) as having been inhabited before the exile. The Negeb is that geographical region in the south beginning north of Beersheba,⁴⁷ while

the Shephelah denotes the foothills stretching south from the valley of Aijalon which separates the mountains from the Philistine plain.⁴⁸

Like Amos, Zechariah mentions Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron and Ashdod (Zech. 9:5-7), four of the Philistine cities. Gath is passed over. These sites have been discussed when considering the eighth-century prophets. Excavations and surveys show habitation in the Persian period in the Judah and Philistine area.⁴⁹ Malachi's allusions include Edom (Mal. 1:2ff), located to the southeast of Judah.⁵⁰ Edom in the Persian period occupied most of south Palestine to a point north of Hebron. By the fifth century, Arab tribes had taken over Edom's traditional area (Mal. 1:2-5). The date of the arrival of the Nabateans in Edom's territory is uncertain.⁵¹

In the surrounding territory, Zechariah's world extended from "the River" [the Euphrates] to the ends of the earth (Zech. 9:10). He knew of the Nile (Zech. 10:11). Gilead (Zech. 10:10) which lies south of the Yarmuk River, Bashan (Zech. 11:2) which lies north of it, and Lebanon (Zech. 10:10; 11:1) are all on the limits of his world. Also noticed are Damascus, Hamath, Tyre and Sidon, and the land of Hadrach (Zech. 9:1-2). Hadrach is thought to be in the northwest part of Lebanon. Earlier scholars called the area north of Israel "Syria," but now it is known as Aram. Babylon (Zech. 2:7; 6:10) and the land of Shinar (Zech. 5:11) get a notice; and on the west, Egypt (Zech. 14:19) and Greece (Zech. 9:13).

Rather than conceiving that some of the tribes have been lost in the exile, Zechariah's visions of the return include the house of Joseph (Zech. 10:6) and Ephraim (Zech. 10:7).

Over fifty archaeological sites in Israel have yielded remains from the Persian Period, but not all are of a time

contemporary with the three post-exilic Minor Prophets.⁵² Sites like Hazor, Shikmonah, Tel Megadim, Tel Mevorakh, Ein Gedi, and others have revealed levels of the Persian period. Surveys by "The Israel Survey" have given information on remains of this period which enable areas of settlement to be mapped, modifying considerably the picture of the country held before 1948.

Plants. The grain, new wine, and oil alluded to in Haggai 1:11 are products of the native plants of the land repeatedly listed in the Old Testament (cf. Zech. 9:17). The oil is not petroleum but oil from olives that ripen in the Mediterranean climate. That the land is vineyard country is noticed in the earliest Egyptian references to it.⁵³ Sinuhe says, "Figs were in it, and grapes. It had more wine than water. Plentiful was its honey, abundant its olives." For every man to be under his vine and under his fig tree (Zech. 3:10; cf. Mic. 4:4; 2 Kings 18:31) is considered the ideal life. The pomegranate (Hag. 2:19) is another native fruit still flourishing in the country.

For the farmer, the danger of blasting and mildew (Hag. 2:17) was ever threatening. One might plant vineyards and not eat of them (Hag. 1:6, 9). It was believed that the Lord had full control of the weather (Hag. 1:9-11; Zech. 10:1; Mal. 3:10), shutting up the heavens when displeased (cf. Deut. 11:13-17). Hail in the rainy season was a threat to olives and to vines (Hag. 2:17).

People in mid-America have little way to appreciate the extent of calamity Haggai is describing when he speaks of dew being withheld (Hag. 1:10). In an area like Palestine where there is no rain from May to October, dew keeps vegetation alive; however, at times the Lord withheld the dew essential to crops (Hag. 1:10; Zech. 8:12). A stream that flows both summer and winter (Zech. 14:8) is impossi-

ble under present climatic conditions. All streams in the described area dry up in the rainless summer.

Zechariah 14:5 alludes to fleeing an earthquake as was done in the time of Uzziah, an earthquake which is also mentioned in Amos 1:1. Haggai in a figure of speech for social upheavals talks of shaking the earth (Hag. 2:6; cf. Ezek. 38:20; Heb. 12:7-28). Palestine is earthquake prone, and excavations at Hazar, Beersheba, and Qumran have revealed debris thought attributable to earthquake. Those at Hazor and Beersheba possibly occurred in Uzziah's time. An earthquake catalogue is not available for the time of Zechariah, but one has been compiled for recent centuries.⁵⁴

Objects. The Persian (or Iron Age III) period has its distinctive style of pottery as all other periods do.⁵⁵ A large amount of Greek pottery appears on Palestinian sites, showing the extent of Greek trade at the time. The pottery has a pattern of red on a black background. The clay cooking pot (Zech. 14:20-21) is a common find in excavations. Numerous examples of ovens (cf. Mal. 4:1) of various periods have also been found.

The cylinder seal of Darius depicts a Persian chariot.⁵⁶ Terra cotta figures of horses and riders have been found in Persian strata of Palestinian sites. Two bronze horse bits were found at Gezer.⁵⁷ Persia was known for raising horses, and Persian horsemen are depicted at Persepolis. Haggai speaks of horses, riders, and chariots (Hag. 2:22). The book of Zechariah speaks of colored horses with riders (Zech. 1:8-10) and of chariots pulled by colored horses (Zech. 6:1-8). He also threatens horse and rider (Zech. 12:4). Clay figurines from various sites depict horse and rider.⁵⁸

Two coins from Jerusalem and one from Shechem attest coin usage in Palestine as early as the sixth century B.C.⁵⁹

There are coin discoveries, especially at Tell Jemmeh. The earliest extant coins are Greek.

The shekel (Zech. 11:12, 13) as a weight was in use in Palestine and is alluded to also in the Elephantine Papyri.⁶⁰

The Wadi ed-Daliyeh papyri offer documents dating from 375 B.C. to 335 B.C., later than the Minor Prophets, but yet in the Persian Period.⁶¹ A trove of stamps and bullae published by Avigad gives names and offices held by a number of individuals.⁶² There are also ostraca from Arad and Beer-sheba of the Persian period. Statutes and figurine collections suggest something of the worship practices of the time.⁶³

The frieze of the archers from Susa, but now on display at the Louvre,⁶⁴ suggests the sort of escort the returnees might have had from the Persians.⁶⁵ The sword (Hag. 2:21; Zech. 9:13), the battle bow (Zech. 9:10; 10:4), the bow and arrow (Zech. 9:14), and the slingers (Zech. 9:15) are all illustrated from art and from finds.

Reliefs from Persepolis depict Babylonian and Tyrian tribute bearers.⁶⁶ Judah was at this period called *Yehud*, and seal impressions with this name found at Ramat Rahel come from the Persian period strata. There is also a clay vessel stamped "Yerushalem."

The turban and clean garments placed on Joshua (Zech. 3:5) may be suggested by the 3rd century artist's depiction of Aaron at the Dura-Europas synagogue.⁶⁷ The question of the delegation from Babylon about festival observance is roughly paralleled in a question on a potsherd from Elephantine which asks, "Tell me when you are going to celebrate the passover."⁶⁸ Stone slingers are depicted in Sennacherib's siege of Lachish⁶⁹ which far antedates Zechariah 9:15, but the later *War Scroll* from Qumran still speaks of slingers.⁷⁰ Numerous arrowheads, some of the

Irano-Scythian type and some of the Greek type, have been found.⁷¹

Because of the lack of a proper place, the Jewish people could not sacrifice when in the exile. The post-exilic prophets no longer attack the people's trust in sacrificial worship and the temple, but now great stress is on the need of the temple and upon the offering of properly qualified sacrifices. Malachi urges a ritual that is sincere. There were those who believed in ritual but were not concerned how it was done or about the attitude of the worshiper. All remains of Zerubbabel's temple were swept away in Hellenistic and Herodian reconstructions. No evidence of that temple has survived.

Zechariah speaks of a vision of the seven-branched lampstand (Zech. 4:1-5, 10b-14). Though the known examples are not contemporary with Zechariah, this object is depicted on the Arch of Titus in Rome, on a fresco under the plaster of a priestly house in Jerusalem, and on a coin of 40-37 B.C.⁷²

Haggai metaphorically compares Zerubbabel to a signet (*chotham*; Hag. 2:23). The same metaphor has been earlier used by Jeremiah when he threatened Jehoiachin: "though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim . . . were the signet on my right hand, even from there I would pluck you off" (Jer. 22:24). The signet is a fitting metaphor for that which is extremely close personal property. Seals in the Old Testament period, used to authenticate documents and to show ownership, were carved stones containing an inscription and sometimes a decoration to be impressed in clay or wax. The ring used for stamping is alluded to in Esther (*tabba'ath*; Esther 3:10, 12; 8:2, 8, 10). A seal mounted on a copper ring (though earlier than the Persian period) was found at Ezion Geber with the inscription reading "Jotham's." Palestinian excavations have turned up numer-

ous seals and seal impressions. Some carry the inscription *Yehud* and a place name. On some the name "Jerusalem" occurs. Some governmental seals were found at Ramat Rahel.

Zechariah 12:11 alludes to mourning for Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. Hadad-rimmon was a form of the name of the storm-god worshiped at Damascus already in the ninth century (1 Kings 15:18; 2 Kings 5:18). Remains of the Persian period show that Megiddo was occupied throughout the period. Greek Attic black-figurine pottery and a fifth century Athenian silver didrachma found there reveal trade connections.⁷³

Malachi ends with a promise of the coming of Elijah. The contest of Elijah with the prophets of Baal is depicted artistically in the third century A.D. synagogue at Dura-Europas.⁷⁴

NOTES

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THEME CLASSES

PREACHING FROM THE MINOR PROPHETS

Charles B. Hodge

INTRODUCTION

The Minor Prophets? Scholarship says they are "weird, confusing, and all sound alike." I agree. We neglect the entire Old Testament. We misunderstand and abuse the prophets. Yet exploding from the Old Testament are the most courageous and colorful men in the Bible. Our times are most like theirs. Their message must become ours. "Weird, confusing, and all sound alike." They have something to say to our church today. They were not tossed about like children with the fads of men. They were not captive to any brotherhood bunch. They served the Living God who was alive and active in their world. "Now" was more important to them than "later." We study the prophets to know God--to know that he works and wins in our present world. Who is really running the world? Babylon? No! Egypt? No! God is on the throne. Nebuchadnezzar is now a footnote in history--the prophets live. The prophets challenge us to live out the world as God wills it. It is God's life, here, right now. We can be partners with God. We can be a part of his Story. We can make a difference. Let us study and preach the Minor Prophets.

DO OUR HOMEWORK

Yet preachers must not "rush in where angels fear to tread." There are many things preparatory to preaching on the Minor Prophets.

Study the Old Testament. We must study and know the Old Testament. You cannot understand the Minor Prophets until you know how they fit in the Old Testament. Tragically, the Old Testament is basically a lost book in churches today. To most, the Old is unknown, unimportant, a relic of an ancient past.

Apart from the Old Testament we cannot understand the New. Apart from the Old Testament we cannot understand the nature of man -- his creation, fall, helplessness, redemption. The Old Testament reveals the real nature of our world.

Apart from the Old Testament we cannot understand ourselves as human beings. We were created by God, fearfully and wondrously made. We fell. Apart from God and grace there is no hope.

Apart from the Old Testament there is no "story." Christianity is not philosophy, moral ideas. Christianity is "God's Story." Stories allow us to understand, to enter in. We are players in a cosmic drama being privileged to work with God.

The Old Testament is that confession of faith.

Know the Prophets. We must also know who/what the prophets were. We neglect the Old Testament. We basically misunderstand the role of the prophet; one must have a great understanding of the prophets before he preaches from the prophets. Let us observe some prevalent misunderstandings.

Theology labels the prophets as Major and Minor. In one way this is wise, harmless. Yet in another it is unwise and harmful. In accommodative language communication is easier made. Yet the Bible knows nothing about Major/Minor Prophets. Each was called by God with his mission. Each fulfilled his assignment. Each was vital. I personally am restrained with said designations. There were also "Writing Prophets" and "Non-Writing Prophets." The point? They were all "prophets." They did not give their opinions nor vent their personal wrath. They all were "seers" speaking for Jehovah. Their word was God's Word -- as binding as the Bible, "Thus saith the Lord." They were not in the main predictors. They were "forth tellers." They answered to no man -- only God.

Arresting! They were called: (1) Servants, (2) Man of God, (3) Seers, (4) Messenger of Jehovah, (5) Watchman, and (6) Witnesses.

They were men of great conviction and deep passion. Inspired of God, they saw and knew things other men did not. They were "human authority" from God. They had something to say; they did not have to say something. The bigger the problem the bigger the prophet!

This word was external. It came from above. It did not come from the prophet's thought, analysis, musing. These were unique, special men.

The world in general thinks the prophets were "characters." They were. Most advise, "Have character -- don't be a character." The prophets had character and were characters! Think of Jonah and Amos. However, they were not "ancient beatniks" who scorned society, rejecting the establishment. They were not outsiders nor radical revolutionaries, distancing themselves from their audience. On the contrary they personally identified with their people. They admitted their sin; they cried over their punishment. Their

message broke their hearts. Prophets speak for God to men. But they equally speak for man back to God. Consider Habakkuk, Micah, Amos, Hosea. Prophets did not divorce themselves from their people. This is crucial in preaching from the prophets. Too many neurotic preachers think they are prophets when they batter the brethren! There is more to prophetic preaching than bashing. Prophetic preaching is far more than judgmental preaching.

The main principle of the prophet was holiness. He "ate" the message! Hosea saw his family disintegrate before his eyes! The message was given *to* them before it could pass *through* them. The prophets were men of profound prayer. They were men personally dedicated to their task. Prophets were not psychologists practicing therapy! They were not moralists chewing brethren out. They (humanly speaking) practiced what they preached. They *did* before they *taught*! They were not into marketing and consumerism. They had no personal interest in politics. They were uncompromising individualists, conscious of a divine call, clean in character and conduct, outspoken critics of sin.

Beware of men who call themselves prophets! Their word is not God's Word! Prophets as such do not exist today. Beware of men who speak for God.

Others think the prophets were social reformers or political activists. They were far more than that. We use the word "prophet" carelessly today. Self-righteous preaching is not prophetic preaching. Prophets were not primarily social reformers; their ethics transcended abstract ethics. They called people back to God. They were far more than astute political observers.

Another "red flag." Prophets were unique in that they were "Watchmen For God." They had a profound responsibility in that area. I am my "brother's keeper," but I am not

my "brother's watchman." Preachers today are gospel preachers. They are not "watchmen," guardians of the orthodoxy, detectives, judges. Brethren are not serving in the prophetic role when they presume to police the brotherhood.

To preach on the prophets requires the discipline of a competent hermeneutic. The prophets were real men in real time serving real people. Sermons are not to be "lifted" from their context. To preach on the prophets is to know their history. We must grasp the northern kingdom (Israel) and the southern kingdom (Judah). We must know the foreign kings and kingdoms that influenced Palestine. We must know the temptation politically Egypt always was. We must understand Nineveh and Babylon. We must understand the Canaanites who led them astray with idols and immoralities. Who was Israel? What had they done? How were they God's people? How had they sinned? Why were they under God's wrath? Our time is, in many ways, like theirs. We preach a salvation, a forgiveness that only God gives. We do not teach the responsibilities of faith to a Sovereign Lord. Preaching from the prophets produces a serendipity -- a more honest, competent, approach to scripture.

The prophets are timeless. Their life problems are ours:

1. The silence of God in the pain of man (God hides himself). Where is God? Does he, can he work in human history?
2. The problem of evil, pain, suffering, injustice. "It ain't right!"
3. Violence and evil outwardly have won. Where is right and good?
4. The terrible suffering in this world. Life, at best, is tough.

The prophets recognized these needs and addressed them. Their answers were not answers--their answer was God! GOD! God--not Pharaoh--is on the throne. Nineveh and Babylon will fall (totally removed from the earth). God knows. God acts. God wins! This is the message of the prophets. God is dependable. God has "His Story."

Our final observation. The prophet was not negative. We usually categorize prophetic preaching as "hard preaching." The prophets declared that people (you and me) matter to God. Midst our sins and failures stands a holy God who cares. The prophets protected the holiness of God. The unique quality of Jehovah in a pagan world was holiness. God is righteousness. He is infinitely pure. A holy God cannot countenance a sinful man (world).

Therefore, the prophets preached grace. Midst the wrath of God was the mercy of God. God provides THE LAMB! What man cannot do, God still does in man. JESUS THE LAMB! Herein lies the predictive aspect. Israel was God's chosen nation. He protected them, redeemed them even in their apostasies. God has "His Story." He uses other nations (even bad guys) to discipline them. But from this faithful remnant will come "a Branch"...JESUS! Every prediction is "right on the money." History is moving under the sovereignty of God. It is no accident that a vicarious servant will save the world! The final prophet, the supreme prophet, is that Suffering Servant. God--the God of heaven--will join the human race and die for their sins. This is the heart of prophetic preaching. Jesus Christ is the Savior. God loves his people. The church is the body, the family, the community of God.

By their very nature the prophets were confrontational. They rebuked people in sin; they challenged the elect to a greater righteousness. They were never "politically correct."

They were shouted down, laughed at, stoned. Yet they were respected! They were the most honored servants in the Bible.

PREACHING FROM HOSEA

God commanded Hosea to marry a harlot. He did. He lived betrayed by his wife as God lived with fallen Israel. Amos was a preacher to the conscience; Hosea was a preacher of repentance. Hosea dramatizes the grace of God. Hosea publicly bought his wife back. Hosea also surprises us about God. To marry a harlot bothers us. Do not be more religious than God is! Do not put God in a puritannical box. Do not tell God how to be holy. Hosea is great preaching. Great texts are 2:15; 3:2; 4:6; 4:9. Hosea confirms to us that God's love will not fail. God does not wish that any should perish.

PREACHING FROM JOEL

His name means "Jehovah is God." Joel's prophecy is a call for repentance. Israel has sinned. God has promised blessings from obedience; He also has promised curses with apostasy. God is a God of wrath! Yet midst that wrath is the promised Holy Spirit. Peter began the Pentecost Sermon with his text in Joel. Great texts are 1:3,4; 2:12; 2:28f.

PREACHING FROM AMOS

Amos is a fascinating fellow who was not a prophet nor the son of a prophet. One sermon then a return home. Prophets do not earn the right to be prophets. When not prophesying, they are not prophets. Some prophets served but a short time; others totally gave their adult lives to

prophesying. In a wealthy time of pride Amos cut them to the quick. To Amos God was broader than Israel. To Amos there was the awesome peril of privilege. Amos is an ultra-modern book. Religion is not insurance; it is only an opportunity. Justice and political equity are paramount, Amos was the "burden-bearer" for God. Great texts are 3:2, 3; 4:12; 5:21; 6:5.

PREACHING FROM OBADIAH

His name means the "Servant of Jehovah." Although Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament, its message rings loud and clear. It is truly "an indignant oration." It is also a very fascinating book. Edom had its fortress, Petra. They thought they were invincible. Petra was one of the wonders of the ancient world. Providence! God is alive. All of God's bills do not come due in October. The message of Obadiah is doom to Edom. It is comforting today to know that our God pays his debts on his time.

PREACHING FROM JONAH

This is the most bizarre book in all the Bible. Jonah is the subject of Jonah. He was a prophet from Galilee. The author was the content. Our kids (and adults) love to study Jonah. His name means "the Dove." God's grace was extended *both* to Jonah and Nineveh. Jonah, also, is ultra-modern. Jesus believed Jonah was a real human being swallowed by a real fish!

A great outline to preach:

Chapter 1 - "Running From God"

Chapter 2 - "Running To God"

Chapter 3 - "Running With God"

Chapter 4 - "Running Ahead of God"

PREACHING FROM MICAH

Micah was a contemporary with Isaiah. Isaiah ran with the Kings; Micah was the country preacher. No two prophets were alike. "Who is like the Lord?" The religion of God is summed up in Micah 6:8: "He has shown you, O man. What is good, and what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." God is the same in *both* the Old and New Testaments. He was not "converted" between Malachi and Matthew. The Old Testament message was internal -- not merely external. The Old Testament was a "Heart Religion" with eternal principles not rules. Mercy is a great teaching of law. God's religion captures our lives. Micah also named the birth-town of Jesus, Bethlehem.

PREACHING FROM NAHUM

Nahum is the forgotten book with a powerful message. Few sermons come from Nahum. How tragic! The message is simple, "The destruction of Nineveh" (612 B.C.). Nahum was a contemporary with Zephaniah, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk. Nineveh was founded by Nimrod. Because of the preaching of the prophet Jonah, it has been spared for another century. "At last" justice is done. God's way, God's time. The frightening language of God, "I am against you." God is God over pagans--over all the world. His vengeance is complete. "Vengeance is mine," saith the Lord."

PREACHING FROM HABAKKUK

This is a short book with one of the greatest messages in all the Bible. Its depth belies its size. God's ways are not our ways. Habakkuk spoke for his people to God. How could a corrupt, immoral, pagan Babylon punish Judah? Yet from Habakkuk came the heart of faith -- trust, dependence, commitment! Habakkuk says he will trust God regardless. The foundational principle of Christianity (quoted three times in the New Testament, Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38) was revealed in 2:4. Man has always been saved by grace through faith. Habakkuk is a needed book today in the church.

PREACHING FROM ZEPHANIAH

He was of "royal blood," a descendent of the good king, Hezekiah. The son of Cushi, he prophesied against Judah. Josiah the king found the lost book of the Law in the Temple. He tried to reform, but it was too little, too late. Jehovah is the God of the universe. God punished the heathen; God also punishes his apostate people. Zephaniah called out for repentance. This is a sobering book for today's church.

PREACHING FROM HAGGAI

The remnant had returned from the Babylonian captivity. Yet all is not well. The Temple was to be rebuilt. God said, spiritually, it could be better than Solomon's. Haggai enforces priority, commitment. He teaches sacrificial giving, yet in the midst of their gloom, Haggai is a book of great expectations. The excitement of "Building For a Future." Great texts are: 1:2-7; 2:5, 8.

PREACHING FROM ZECHARIAH

History does repeat itself. Two months after Haggai's great exhortation Zechariah comes to renew it. Zechariah is a difficult book employing figurative language. Zechariah and Zerubbabel both worked to rebuild the Temple. With Messianic overtones Zechariah calls us back to mission, vision, priority, duty. Jesus is included in Zephaniah: 9:9; 11:12; 13:7.

PREACHING FROM MALACHI

Malachi literally means "Messenger." It is the final book in the Old Testament canon. Babylon cured the Jews forever of idolatry. Now formalism takes over--externals without internals. The priests were ignorant of God's law; the people were weary of well-doing. Malachi lives today. God will never take crumbs or left-overs. God hates divorce. People then and now rob God in their church giving. John the Baptist is promised; the Messiah is coming.

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HAGGAI'S VOICE FOR TODAY'S CHURCH

Chris R. Bullard

Few prophets have received such immediate, positive response from their ministry as did Haggai. All we know of the man are four sermons he has left for us.

According to the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, three waves of refugees returned to the land of Israel to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. The first wave returned under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua in the year 538 B.C. Against this backdrop Haggai ministers the Word of God.

According to Ezra 3, the people have come home and the altar has been reestablished. The foundation for the new temple had been put in place, and the temple is ready to be built. You can imagine the excitement! Few things generate more enthusiasm among God's people than a good building program. Here are the people of God thrilled as can be about raising a new temple and restoring life like it used to be before the Babylonians came and ruined everything.

But something happened. The enthusiasm they originally had began to wane. That is just human nature. When the going gets rough and the newness wears off and you find yourself faced with just a lot of work and sweat and giving, then all of a sudden it does not seem as exciting as it once did. And that is exactly what happened here. The people began to devote themselves to their own affairs, their own houses, their own priorities. Obstacles came in the form of persecution and discouragement as letters were

written by their enemies, falsely charging them with rebellion against the king. The constant hounding by their enemies with their threats to stop the work discouraged the hearts of the people, and their building program got bogged down. The people lost heart. They did not see how they could go on with the task before them.

It was about this time in 520 B.C. that God raised up a prophet by the name of Haggai to stir the hearts of the people. In three public messages, the prophet called God's people back to the task for which God had brought them home.

IS IT TIME?

Timing. The introduction to Haggai's first message (1:1-15) suggests a sermon challenging the comfort of God's people. Notice *the timing* of this message: "the first day of the month." This day lent itself to spiritual concerns. This was the "new moon" holy day, a day when business activities were suspended as on the Sabbath. According to Numbers 10:10 Moses instructed the people to blow their trumpets over their sacrifices every new moon to celebrate their happiness. Special burnt offerings were brought to the Lord on this day. This was also an occasion when the people were especially attentive to the sermons of the prophets (2 Kings 4:23).

Have you discovered that timing can be critically important in the success of any project? It is not always the right moment to tell your boss that his idea is impractical or that a certain pet project is not going well. You look for just the right moment, do you not? That is exactly what Haggai has done. He has waited until the new moon, until a day when the hearts of the people would normally be more focused on spiritual concerns.

Leadership Responsibility. Notice not only the principle of timing, but the principle of *leadership responsibility*. Haggai's first message was directed to the leaders of God's people. Wherever human relationships are involved, the leaders in any realm have a real measure of responsibility under God for the welfare for those under their leadership. That this first message is directed to the leadership of the remnant rather than to the people themselves indicates that the lethargy of the people was due in large measure to the lethargy of the leadership. People rise no higher than their leaders. As Lee Iacocca once said, "The speed of the boss is the speed of the team."

What was God condemning in the lives of these Jews in general and the leaders in particular? The trouble was twofold. First, there was a problem with procrastination: "This is what the LORD All-Powerful says: 'The people say the right time has not come to rebuild the Temple of the LORD'" (1:2).

There is a note of contempt here. Notice God does not say "My people," but "the people." It is as though the Lord is disgusted at the failure of the remnant to whom he had given such high privileges in allowing them to go back and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple.

Have you ever heard such an excuse? "It's not the right time to start this project. We don't want to start now because summer is coming on and we all know that summer is a poor time to start anything. We should wait until next fall. But then, it's not a good thing to start in the fall because...." Mark it down: there never is time for people who cannot find the right time.

Haggai focuses attention upon an ever present problem of spiritual living: the universal human tendency to put off doing what God requires. How many church members are going to get more active in the church's work *later*? How

many Christians are going to develop a better quiet time with God *someday*? How often have you said you would serve as a Bible school teacher another time, but not now?

In hundreds of different ways contemporary believers are deluded by the error that to wait for a more convenient time of circumstances justifies procrastination right now. It is always easy to refrain from what God calls us to do, saying it is not the psychological moment to act.

We can make excuses for so long that we actually begin to believe that now really is not the time to do what we know God wants us to do.

The remnant who came back to Jerusalem were not saying that the building should not be done. They were not that unspiritual. They were simply saying now is not the time to do it. And that is what God condemns in his people. God does not charge his people with not wanting to build the temple. God is disturbed that they are procrastinating, putting off doing what he wants them to do in order to do what they want to do.

Application. We can apply this in two ways. First, the Christian today is the temple of God (1 Cor. 6:19). In the Old Testament God had a temple for his people, but in the New Testament God has a people for his temple. In that day, God's Spirit dwelled in the Holy of Holies in the back of the temple. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who dwells in you.

As we think in terms of rebuilding the temple, we might each ponder our own situation. When we believed and were baptized, we laid the foundation. Jesus Christ is that foundation (1 Cor. 3:11). But with that foundation laid, God calls each of us to build on that foundation. For some, it may be a prayer life. You have thought for so long: "I need to pray more." For others it is some kind of involvement in ministry. Maybe you look at yourself and think: "I

really should be more active in one of the ministries of the church. I'm busy with my career, but I can't say that I have done much to help the cause of Jesus' church." Maybe you have thought to yourself: "I know I need to be sharing my faith, Lord, and one of these days...." Or, "I know that I need to spend more time just reading and meditating on your Word, Lord."

That is the testimony of Mr. and Mrs. Average Christian. Tragic, but true. It is always some other time. The intentions are good, but the time never seems to be right.

We can apply this text in a second way. The church is the temple of God. We are called to add more stones to the temple of God, the living stones of men and women who make up the New Testament temple of God. The methods of the 19th century will not reach people of the 21st century. Changes will have to be made. But many believers will think: "It is not yet time to do that. The economy isn't right. There aren't enough people yet. I'm comfortable with the schedule the way it is. Let's not go changing the services around when we don't know for sure it will help. Let's wait until we get more data."

You are so afraid of the unknown, so afraid of trying to do things in fresh and creative ways, that you have rationalized why we should not attempt anything different.

Whether it involves the rebuilding of our own spiritual lives or the task of building God's temple, the church, God condemns people who opt for comfort over fulfilling the task to which he has called us.

The real problem stems from a problem of priorities (1:4): "Is it right for you to be living in fancy houses while the Temple is still in ruins?"

They did not have time to give to the things of God, but they found plenty of time to spend on themselves. They did not have time to build the house of God, but they had

the time to build their own fancy houses. Clearly, here was a case of wrong priorities.

It is a law of life that we do what we want to do. We do not always do what we need to do. We do not always do what we should do. But we always do what we want to do. And what we want to do is controlled by our priorities.

You can see how that is related to procrastination. If we put off doing what we know we should be doing, we put it off because it is not very high on our list of personal priorities.

What are your priorities? Jesus said in Matthew 6:33: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Are your priorities keeping you from putting first things first?

HEARTS ON FIRE

Tom Peters and Robert Waterman, in their book *In Search of Excellence*, tell about interviewing Dr. Sidney Janus, a psychologist employed by Delta Airlines. Delta, of course, is one of the most successful airlines in a highly competitive business. In the interview, Dr. Janus made this comment: "At Delta, you don't just join a company, you join an objective."

The church ought to be able to say to every prospective new member: "Here, you don't just join a church, you join an objective." That objective, of course, is to win souls and change lives.

Don Humphrey opened his book *Hearts On Fire* with this observation:

The average member of the church of Christ has heard 4,000 sermons, sung 20,000 hymns, participated in 8,000 public prayers...and converted zero sinners.¹

If Humphrey is right, most of us are joining churches without ever joining an objective. We have forgotten that the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing!

Purpose. The people of God had the same problem in Haggai's day. In 1:8 we discover *the purpose* this old prophet said was behind the need for rebuilding the temple: "'Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,' says the LORD."

What is the purpose in building the temple? God says *it will please him*. In other translations God says, "I will be delighted. I will take pleasure in it." In other words, the reason God wanted his people to build his house was because of the joy it would give him. And it still gives God delight to see construction on his temple today.

In Luke 15 Jesus was ministering among the outcasts of society--the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the lepers, the poor--and one day the Pharisees and scribes murmured incessantly about the pitiful company of irreligious people Jesus hung around with. Jesus' response was to tell them a story (15:4-7) about a shepherd who goes hunting for a lost sheep. He concludes:

And when he finds it, he happily puts it on his shoulders and goes home. He calls to his friends and neighbors and says, 'Be happy with me because I found my lost sheep.' In the same way, I tell you there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who changes his heart and life, than over ninety-nine good people who don't need to change.

The only time the Bible talks about God's rejoicing is when people are being saved. When lost sheep are brought home (or a lost coin is found as happens in the next story he tells), heaven rejoices.

Hebrews 12:2 says, "Let us look only to Jesus, the One who began our faith and who makes it perfect. He suffered death on the cross. But he accepted the shame as if it were nothing because of the joy that God put before him."

What was the joy set before Jesus? The salvation of men and women through his atoning death on the cross.

Why should you and I be aggressive in evangelism? Because God takes extreme pleasure when his temple is being built. The heart of God delights in seeing more living stones added to his spiritual temple, the church!

God may enjoy our songs of praise. God may take pleasure in our frequent prayers. God may be excited over our many ministries. But if you and I want to give our God pleasure, the only way we know for sure that we can do that is to actively bringing men and women as living stones into the Temple of God.

Function. Haggai 1:8 also reveals *the function* that would be accomplished through the temple's being built. According to the Hebrew text, God literally says, "I will display my glory." That is what he did at the tabernacle back in the wilderness. When Moses came down, his face shone like a light bulb because he had been in the presence of the glory of God. In fact, his face shone so brightly he had to wear a veil over his face to keep from blinding the people. Later when they finished building the tabernacle, Exodus 40:34 tells us, "Then the cloud covered the Meeting Tent, and the glory of the LORD filled the Holy Tent."

Five centuries later as Solomon's workers were completing the temple, that permanent structure that replaced the mobile tabernacle in the wilderness, the Bible says, "The priests could not continue their work, because the Temple was filled with the glory of the LORD" (1 Kings 8:11).

When the temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C., the divine glory departed from Israel. The place where God said he would dwell was wiped off the face of the earth. But now God says he wants to put his glory back on the earth. He wants to dwell once again in the Holy of Holies. And so, God says through Haggai, "Get on with rebuilding my temple because it will bring me joy and I will once again be able to display my glory."

God is still putting his glory on his temple. In 2 Corinthians 3 Paul draws a comparison between what happened in Old Testament times and what is happening in God's spiritual temple today. Paul says God wants men and women added to his spiritual temple the church so he can put his glory on them again. And how do you see that glory? You see it in their transformed lives. As broken lives are healed, as marriages are healed, as debilitating habits are shattered by divine power, the power and glory of God is put on display before an unbelieving world. When you triumph over evil, when you defeat temptation, when you suffer for doing what is right and do not complain, when you live with hope while everyone around you is despairing, all because you know that you belong to God and his Spirit is in you and he will see you through, you are proclaiming to the world that God is great. And every victory simply increases God's opportunity to put his glory on display in your life. Every time a sinner is converted and put on the path of righteousness, God has a new opportunity to show his glory in a human life.

We all show the Lord's glory, and we are being changed to be like him. This change in us brings ever greater glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18 NCV)

Curse. In Haggai's day the people of God missed out on the glory because they failed to fulfill their God-given

function. Instead, they lived under *the curse* of God's displeasure. Haggai says the people planted much but harvested little. They put on clothes but could never get warm enough. They earned money, but it never went far enough.

God had warned the people through Moses in Deuteronomy 28 that he would bless them in the city and in the country if they did what he wanted them to do. But he also promised to curse them in the city and curse them in the country if they did not do what he wanted them to do. For 16 years the Jews had not been fulfilling the purpose for which God called them back to the land of Israel--the rebuilding of God's temple--and consequently God has put them under a curse.

That same principle is in effect today. The contemporary church is not the evangelistic giant that the early church once was. In fact, evangelism is almost non-existent in most churches. Where that is true, those churches come under a curse.

Church Under Curse. What are the marks of a church under the curse? Instead of growing through conversions, they spend their time dividing the church by theological nitpicking over which translation can be read in the pulpit.

A church under a curse experiences spiritual burnout as people are reluctant to volunteer for ministry because they are tired and no longer find any joy in what they are doing.

A church under a curse argues a lot: argues about what color carpet to install, argues about which song book to buy, argues about the budget, argues about whose fault it is that the church is not growing.

A church under a curse goes through the motions on Sunday but makes no difference in anyone's life on Monday at the office.

Compare that with the first century church that was the most evangelistic army of believers the world has ever known. Luke says of that first church:

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:46-47)

When new stones are constantly being added to the Lord's spiritual temple, there is an infectious spirit of joy and excitement that spills over into every facet of the church's life. But when the waters are not being stirred, when no new spiritual blood is regularly coming into the church, the church turns inward and starts to play religious games. The joy dries up. The enthusiasm wanes. And God's people do not enjoy church.

The solution is to get back to the business of building God's temple, the church of Jesus Christ! Nothing will transform a church and bring back the joy like a constant stirring of the waters.

According to 1:1 and 1:15, there was a period of only 23 days between Haggai's message and the resumption of work. They did not spend months in drawing up plans and forming committees and studying the whole issue. They just repented and got on with the work! And when they recommitted to the task of building God's temple, they received the promise of the Lord: "I am with you."

Listen to what the Lord says to his church today: Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely

I am with you always, to the very end of the age.
(Matt. 28:19-20)

Same task: build the temple of God, this time out of living stones. Same promise: the Lord says, "I will be with you."

Someone once observed that the more things change, the more they stay the same. The book of Haggai demonstrates the truthfulness of that maxim. Though our modern world has changed dramatically from the world of Haggai, the problems we face are the same. This ancient voice still speaks to us at the point of our need.

OVERCOMING DISCOURAGEMENT

Under Haggai's powerful exhortation, Israel had returned to rebuilding the temple. But according to Ezra 5, external pressure to stop the work arose immediately. Political threats were made. Insinuations of treason were made. The people were intimidated and soon began to grow discouraged. So God put another message on Haggai's heart: a word of encouragement for a disheartened people (2:1-5).

Notice the date for this sermon: it is the twenty-first day of the seventh month. If you knew the Jewish calendar, you would understand part of the reason why the people are growing discouraged with the project again. They have not been able to put much work in on this project after renewing their commitment to the task. The seventh month is a month of feasts -- the first day of the month is the Feast of Trumpets, the tenth day is the Day of Atonement, the fifteenth day is the Feast of Booths. So throughout the whole month they had been able to work only about 9 days, and the temple did not look like much. They had gathered

some wood, cleared out some debris, but the place was still a pile of ruins. Discouragement was close at hand.

The Reasons for Discouragement. The reasons for discouragement are seen in three questions the prophet asks his people.

Haggai's first question is: "Do any of you remember how great the temple was before it was destroyed?" Why do God's people often lose heart? Number one, because *we focus on our personal past.*

Some of the older folks who had been away in captivity for only 50 years could remember Solomon's temple. They were focusing on the past, what used to be, the good old days.

That is a pretty typical response for us as humans. And it is a major source of discouragement, focusing on past failures. Satan loves to remind us of how we disappointed God in the past...how we have failed so often before to honor him with our lives. And he uses that memory to attempt to discourage us from even trying to live godly lives in the present. "What's the use?" he wants us to think. "I haven't been able to be holy before. Why should I think I can do better this time?"

Discouragement can also come, however, by focusing on past successes. We start to think: "Well, I'll never be able to do that again. I can't do that well again." And so we are discouraged from even starting to put out the effort.

Instead of looking at what God was doing right then, these Israelites were focusing on the way things used to be. But God never calls us to live in the past, only to learn from it. So many of God's children are living defeated and discouraged lives because they listen to Satan's constant reminders about past failures, past defeats, past disappointments. It does not do any good to live in the past. You cannot change one thing that has already happened. If your

past is filled with mistakes, learn from those mistakes but do not live in the past. It will not do anything for you but will discourage you and keep you from enjoying God's blessings today.

A second cause of discouragement is found in Haggai's next question: "Do any of you remember how great the temple was before it was destroyed? What does it look like now?" We grow discouraged when *we confuse our present perspective*.

Some of them did not see the building of the temple for what it really was. They did not view it as the commissioning of God for his glory, the provision of God as a testimony to the surrounding nations of his power and his worthiness to be worshiped.

We get muddled in our perspective, not only when we put our own needs first, but by gauging God's work by human standards. Oftentimes we think the time or money we give to God is so little that it is really worthless. But you cannot gauge the value of what you do for God by human standards. Remember that widow who only had two little coins to put into the temple treasury? To those folks in the temple, it was so little, it hardly seemed it was worth her trip to the temple to give it. But Jesus saw that widow's gift from heaven's perspective, and so he told his disciples, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow gave more than all those rich people" (Lk. 21:3).

We need to remember that when we are doing what God wants us to do, our work is greater than it oftentimes looks. Do not measure God's mission for your life by secular standards.

There is a third reason why people get discouraged and that is this: *we play the deadly game of comparisons*: "Do any of you remember how great the temple was before it

was destroyed? What does it look like now? Does it not seem like nothing to you?"

Why are the people getting discouraged? Because they are playing the game of comparisons! They compared the building they were constructing with the one Solomon had built, and it just did not compare. And so, the effort did not seem worthwhile. "Why should we finish this project anyway when we all know that it isn't going to look anything at all like the one Solomon built?"

You can just mark it down: making comparisons is one of the deadliest weapons that Satan has in his arsenal to destroy God's people. Thus the apostle Paul warns us, "We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise" (2 Cor. 10:12). When we start comparing--whether it be preachers, ministries, number of baptisms, visitors, whatever--we are setting ourselves up for discouragement.

Remedy for Discouragement. Having pinpointed the cause of the people's discouragement, Haggai tells them *the remedy for discouragement*. His prescription is threefold.

First, God's people need to *rejoice in God's presence*. Haggai says: "'But now be strong, O Zerubbabel,' declares the LORD. 'Be strong, O Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Be strong, all you people of the land,' declares the LORD, 'and work. For I am with you,' declares the LORD Almighty" (2:4).

In a word, the antidote to discouragement is to strengthen ourselves in the Lord. One of the best remedies for discouragement is service and ministry to others in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. When that remedy is applied, then the comforting presence of the Lord is made

real to you because you know he is with you as you do what he wants you to do.

Our tendency when discouraged is to quit work. To drop out of ministry. To withdraw from others. But God's solution is to send his people back to work. He tells a discouraged Elijah at Mount Horeb, for example, to go back and anoint two kings and a prophet to be his successor (1 Kings 19:15-16). Thus, the first remedy for discouragement is for us to get back to the work he calls us to do and to trust him to be there with us to see us through.

In battling discouragement, we also need to *remember God's promises*. God reminds the people through the prophet: "I made a promise to you when you came out of Egypt, and my Spirit is still with you. So don't be afraid" (2:5).

If God kept his promise to his people at the time of the Exodus, if God kept his promise which he made with his people at Mt. Sinai, if God kept his promise to be with his people when they invaded the land of promise, then you can be encouraged to know that this unchanging God will keep his promises to you.

When we are facing discouragement, we need to lean on the promises of God. "Give all your worries to him, because he cares about you" (1 Pet. 5:7). "Depend on the LORD; trust him, and he will take care of you" (Ps. 37:5). "So don't worry, because I am with you. Don't be afraid, because I am your God. I will make you strong and will help you; I will support you with my right hand that saves you" (Is. 41:10).

The reason we get discouraged is because things are not going right and they are beyond our control. But the promises of God can take away our discouragement because they point us toward our Burden-bearer, the One who is greater than our crises, greater than our circumstances, the

One who has the power to overcome all that is about to overcome us.

The final part of Haggai's prescription is this: we should *reflect on God's power and God's provision*.

With great encouragement Haggai declares:

This is what the LORD All-Powerful says: 'In a short time I will once again shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all the nations, and they will bring their wealth. Then I will fill this Temple with glory,' says the LORD All-Powerful. 'The silver is mine, and the gold is mine,' says the LORD All-Powerful. 'The new Temple will be greater than the one before,' says the LORD All-Powerful. 'And in this place I will give peace,' says the LORD All-Powerful. (2:6-9)

Scholars struggle with understanding precisely to what Haggai refers. But the text is clearly Messianic. Hebrews 12 interprets these verses to refer to Jesus' coming and establishing an unshakable, eternal kingdom which you and I know as the church.

But what I want you to remember is this: God took that temple they were building that looked so puny and insignificant to them and promised to transform their work into something greater than they ever imagined possible. First, through King Herod the Great God filled that temple with gold and silver treasures from all over the world. Then he brought his Shekinah Glory to that temple in the person of his own Son Jesus Christ who taught in its courtyards. Finally, in the courtyard of this very temple God established his eternal temple, the church, that temple made of living stones and filled with the Holy Spirit.

It seems impossible to us that we could do anything for God worth noticing in our communities. But such a view of our situation would be discouraging were it not for the

truth that God's power can take our seemingly feeble efforts and transform them and use them in unexpected and unprecedented ways. You never know how God's power will multiply what we do for him when we are faithful to our calling.

The apostle Paul delights to remind us:

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are. (1 Cor. 1:26-28)

If what you are doing for God in your community seems weak and inadequate even after your best efforts, you need to be encouraged by God's power to transform our puniest efforts into something incredibly good for the sake of his kingdom.

We could summarize Haggai's remedy for the people's discouragement with the words of a familiar hymn:

"Trust and obey, for there's no other way,
to be happy in Jesus, than to trust and obey."

Trust God and get on with what he has called you to do, and he will be with you. Does it not encourage your heart to know that?

OBEDIENCE BRINGS BLESSING

Haggai's final public message comes about 90 days after he first stirred the hearts of the people to resume the work which God had given them to do. The theme of this last sermon is the contagiousness of sin.

In verses 10-13, we see *the principle advanced* and it has to do with "cleanliness" or acceptability. Every culture has its standards of what is clean (or acceptable) and what is unclean (or unacceptable). In our Western culture, for example, your foot may be as healthy and sanitary as your hand after your shower in the morning, but when you sit down to eat breakfast, it is "unclean" by our standards for you to put your feet up on the dinner table.

The Jews had their own God-given standards of what was clean and what was unclean in their society. And so, Haggai goes to the priests for a ruling in a given situation. Of course, the prophet is not confused. He is not after a ruling so much as he wants them to understand the implications of a principle in the Mosaic law. Haggai asks two questions in order to get clear in their minds the concept he is about to apply in their lives.

In 2:12 Haggai's question concerns the *transference of holiness*. The question went something like this. Let us say that a priest is on his way home from a day's service at the altar. In the pocket of his robe is a piece of meat that had been sacrificed to the Lord and which was then given to the priest for him to eat. Leviticus 6:27 says that anyone or anything that touches such holy sacrificial meat directly also becomes holy. But notice Haggai's question to the priests. He says that if this person has holy meat in the pocket of his robe, then his robe becomes holy. But Haggai wants to know: if the robe touches something else, does *that* object become holy too?

The priests' answer is "No." As those who knew the law, they answered Haggai's question correctly. Holiness could not be twice transmitted. While the garment that holds the meat becomes holy, the garment itself could not pass that holiness on to a third object. In other words, there is no such thing as second-generation holiness.

Then the prophet asks a second question: if anyone who is unclean from having touched a corpse touches any of these same things, will what he touches become unclean (2:13)? Here the opposite principle is in view. Again, the law of Moses addressed this situation. According to Leviticus 22:4-6 contact with a dead body incurred a high degree of contamination.

Again the priests respond correctly when they say: if a man touches a corpse, then he touches something else, what *he* touches becomes unclean.

The conclusion is this: the effects of sin are *more contagious* than the effects of holiness. Defilement can be passed on. But not holiness. Holiness is not transferable from person to person. Holiness is an individual matter.

We see this truth demonstrated daily in several ways. For example, a healthy mother cannot communicate her health to her sick child who has pneumonia. But that sick child can pass his sickness on to his mother.

One bad apple in a barrel of good apples will spread and make the others bad, but the good apples will never make the bad apple good.

Likewise, Adam could transmit the effects of his sin down through each successive generation. I have never met Adam. I have never had any personal contact with Adam. But I know that one day I will die, and it all started with Adam. I am defiled because of my contact with Adam through the human race.

But goodness does not work that way. Holiness is an individual matter and is *not* transmitted to a third party. Your parents may have been genuinely dedicated Christians but their holiness and righteousness does you no good as far as your own salvation. It is an individual matter. It is not a property of Christian faith that once it is found in a family it is secured for future generations. Each succeeding

generation must personally be touched by Jesus in order to be made holy.

There is another contrast between holiness and sin. Sin is not only contagious, but it is oftentimes in its personal effect *more consequential*.

Again, take the one bad apple in a barrel of good apples. The one bad apple does not just affect one other apple; it affects all of them. The power of the rottenness is greater than the power of the health of the good apples.

Do you remember these words: "The good that men do is oft interred with their bones, but the evil long lives after them"? How true! What is the first thing that comes to your mind when I mention King David? Did you think of Bathsheba? Most people do. Very few answer immediately: he is "the man after God's own heart."

What do you think of when you hear the name "Nixon"? Did you think "Watergate"? That man spent almost 8 years in the Oval Office, but he is remembered for one tragedy.

You see, there is that tendency for sin to outweigh good. One wrong act can destroy the reputation, the career, the marriage that has taken years to build.

Sin is also *more costly*. These Jews had lived in rebellion to the will of God for 16 years, and even though they have turned back to God, they must still experience the consequences of their former rebellion.

The Psalmist declares, "O LORD, our God, you answered your people; you showed them that you are a God who forgives, even though you punished them for their sins" (99:8). God is gracious enough to forgive us when we fail, but he reminds us that he will not remove the consequences of our choices. You cannot sow your wild oats and then pray for crop failure! There is a price tag attached to every sin.

THE PRINCIPLE APPLIED

In 2:14-17 Haggai moves on to *the principle applied*.

According to the book of Ezra the priests had been offering the daily sacrifices on the altar while all the time the ruined temple, a witness to the peoples' negligence and self-centeredness, stood like a corpse in their midst. That ruined, corrupted temple defiled every sacrifice they offered and made it unacceptable to God. No wonder the hand of God's blessing was off God's people all those years.

What they were doing there at the altar made no change or impact on what they did at home. It made no difference in how they spent their time during the week. It made no difference in their priorities. Those had stayed the same. All those sacrifices on the altar did not turn their selfish hearts into serving and giving hearts. Yet they looked around and wondered why God's blessings had been withheld.

That is still true on the threshold of the 21st century. You can go through the motions. You can be at every service. You can be involved in some ministry. But if your heart is unclean before God, your service is unacceptable. The blessing of God will be missing in your life. Drought and barrenness and emptiness will describe how you feel about your life. The things you thought were really going to satisfy will turn to dust in your hands.

The same thing happens to a church as a whole. When a church does everything but the one primary thing God called it out of sin to do--that is, evangelize and make disciples, add living stones to the temple of God--that church will not enjoy the blessings of God. It will come under a curse. For all of its busyness and programs and many good works, it will not experience spiritual vitality and power because God does not bless his people when

they do not build his temple. You can whip up an atmosphere of excitement with a charismatic leader, but the real joy and fellowship of the Holy Spirit will not be there.

GOD'S PROMISES AFFIRMED

Haggai does not end his message on a note of despair but a note of hope. In 2:18-19 we see *God's promise affirmed*.

Haggai is telling the people this. There was no seed in the barn yet; it was still in the ground. The vine, the trees had not yet brought forth fruit. There was no tangible evidence yet that God's blessing had returned. But it is only December. Blessing *will* come. Disease spreads its damaging effects rapidly, but health comes back slowly. Blessings that had been withheld because of disobedience, now because of genuine obedience, *will* return. God has promised it.

What does all this have to do with you and me? Simply this: the blessings of God do not come instantly when we turn back to God after a time of sin. Many times we turn to God in desperation to get us through a difficult time; we make God all kinds of promises. Maybe we get more involved in prayer and Bible study and church activities, but things do not seem to get better. God is testing the genuineness of your conversion. You cannot manipulate God with a few promises and some good works. He wants to know the authenticity of your return to him, and more importantly, he wants you to know it. And so it is that we should not expect immediate blessings when we turn our hearts back to God. Perhaps you are in a bad marriage and have decided to try God, but your marriage does not seem to have improved very much yet.

Perhaps you have been in an argument with a friend and you decided to follow the biblical teaching and you have gone to that person to make things right, but it does not seem like the relationship is improving. Perhaps you have given up some shady ways of doing business with your customers, and now that you are committed to following biblical teachings in your business, you still do not see your business flourishing. If we are serving him from our heart, if our spirit is pointed in the right direction, ultimately the blessings we desperately need will come. Our task is to be genuinely faithful. The rest is up to God.

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NOTES

1. Don Humphrey, *Hearts on Fire*, Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1992.

Neale Pryor

HOSEA

Times of Hosea. The days of Jeroboam II, 782-753 B.C., were times of great prosperity and great wickedness. See 2 Kings 14:23-29. Note the similarity to the 20th century. The people saw no need for God. They could not see destruction just around the corner. Samaria, the capital of Israel, fell to Assyria in 722 B.C. People draw nearer to God in adversity, not in prosperity.

Theme of Hosea. Hosea is a prophet of God's love. His unfaithful wife symbolized Israel's unfaithfulness to God. Hosea still loved her and bought her back (ch. 3). God would still take Israel back if she would return. What a lesson on loving the unlovely! Compare Ezekiel 16; Romans 5:6-10. This is a good lesson on spiritual adultery. The church is God's bride, as Israel was in Hosea.

Hosea's Children. Hosea gave his children names to symbolize his message. Isaiah did the same with Shear-jashub and Maher-shalal-hash-baz (Is. 7:3; 8:3). Jezreel means "God sows." It is the name for one of the most fertile valleys in Palestine, so named for its fruitfulness. It is also the place where Jehu killed the king of Israel and set up a dynasty that was still ruling in Hosea's day (2 Kings

9:16-37). It was a prophecy against the king Jeroboam II, a descendant of Jehu.

Lo-ruhamah means "not pitied," and Lo-ammi means "not my people." God would no longer pity Israel, and they would no longer be his people. Hosea 2:23 shows that there will be a reversal of this attitude toward Israel in the days to come. God will sow her in the land (Jezreel), he will pity "not pitied" and will say to "not my people," "You are my people." Compare the New Testament reference in 1 Peter 2:10.

Israel and Her Lovers ch. 2. Canaanites thought that committing adultery would promote agricultural prosperity through a type of sympathetic magic. Baal was worshipped as the god of the land; he had three sisters, consorts, wives or whatever the particular story happened to call them: Asherah, Astarte, and Anath. When Israel committed spiritual adultery by following Baal, she actually committed physical adultery at the high places, where Baal was worshipped. Israel thought the Baal worship had given her prosperity (2:5), but it was God who had done it (2:8). God was going to remove the word *Baal* out of their vocabulary (2:17).

Mercy and Not Sacrifice 6:6. God does not forbid the sacrifices that were commanded in Leviticus. He wants a right heart and life before the externals of worship are acceptable. Compare 1 Samuel 15:22; Amos 5:21-24; Isaiah 1:12-20; Micah 6:6-8.

The Messiah in Hosea 11:1. "Out of Egypt have I called my son." Israel is the son, but the nation was a type of Christ. This is an example of typological fulfillment.

The Knowledge of God 4:1; 6:6. The Old Testament word for *know* implies intimate acquaintance with. It is often used of husband-wife relations. Knowledge of God is a deep abiding relationship with him. True knowledge of God cannot be superficial. How appropriate is this expression in Hosea where the husband-wife relation of God and his people is stressed. Compare Philippians 3:10; John 17:3. Also see Jeremiah 22:15-16.

JOEL

Background. The time and circumstances of Joel are unknown. The import of his message is important, no matter when he lived.

The Locust Plague. The first two chapters of Joel describe a great locust plague. These insects come in millions and devour completely all living plants before them. Locusts, droughts, and invasions are the three things most feared by the ancient people. Joel used this to call the people to repentance. Often God allows calamities to befall us to shock us to our senses (Cf. Amos 4:6-11).

Superficial Repentance 2:13. "Rend your hearts, and not your garments." Ancient people often tore their clothes as a sign of great emotion. Joel suggested that the mourning be deeper than that. How much "repentance" is only skin deep today.

The Prophet of Pentecost 2:28-32. This is the passage Peter quoted in Acts 2:17-21. A study of this prophecy from Joel and its fulfillment in Acts makes a very excellent lesson.

AMOS

Times of Amos. Amos, like Hosea, prophesied in the days of Jeroboam II. Amos may well be the first prophetic book written. He prophesied about 750, just a short while before Hosea began his ministry. The prosperity and ungodliness of Jeroboam II's reign were well known. The rich oppressed the poor. Those "at ease in Zion" could not care less about the oppressed. This same greed and apathy is obvious in today's society.

The Prophet of Justice. Amos is characterized as the prophet of justice, a beautiful complement to Hosea's emphasis on love. Amos 5:24 characterizes his message: "Let justice roll down like waters." In Amos, justice is a sense of fairness, respecting the rights of all people, even the poor and helpless.

God, the God of all People. In the first two chapters of Amos the prophet shows God's judgment on the surrounding nations. He condemned the people around Israel (which Israel dearly loved to hear) before focusing on Israel. Also he emphasized that Israel's God is a God of all peoples. Many believed in henotheism: there is a god for each nation. Amos went further than this to monotheism: there is one God, period.

"Can Two Walk Together Except They Be Agreed?" (3:3). This could be better translated, "Can two meet unless they have made an appointment?" The normal sermon from this passage is not exactly true to the text.

"Who Can But Prophesy?" (3:8). Note the urgency of speaking. One must be full of the spirit of God before he is

effective. Compare with Jeremiah 20:9. Amos had never gone to school to learn how to be a prophet. He was a simple farmer who had something to say and had to say it (Amos 7:14-15). Some people speak because they have to say something; others because they have something to say. Great preachers feel the urge to say something and also have something to say.

"Prepare to Meet Thy God." Israel had not heeded God's warnings (verses 6-11). Now God was to come, probably in the form of the Assyrian invasion which destroyed the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. What a great sermon here on the need for us to prepare to meet our God!

1. We all will meet God.
2. Some are not ready to meet God.
3. Now is the time to prepare.

Misuse of 5:23; 6:5. Do not use these scriptures on a sermon against instrumental music in the church. They refer to the wickedness and unconcern of the people and have nothing whatever to do with the issue in the church.

OBADIAH

Circumstances of the Book. Judah had fallen to some enemy, and the Edomites were gloating over her misfortune. Edom, the descendants of Esau who lived to the south, was never strong enough to conquer Judah, but she rejoiced to see someone else do it. Some date this book in the 9th century B.C.; others in the 6th century B.C., when Judah fell to Babylon.

"The Pride of Your Heart Has Deceived You", Verse 3. The Edomites lived in the hills and enjoyed security from

enemy invasion because they were not worth the trouble to dig out. God says he will get to them. Though they live high like the eagles, God will bring them down. Here is a great lesson on false security. We place our confidence in our missiles, bombs, etc. To parody the old song, "Pass the Lord, and praise the ammunition." There is no real security except in God.

Sideline Rooters, Verse 11. Saul held the coats of those who stoned Stephen (Acts 7:58). He did not throw the stones, but he was implicated in the deed. Edom did not destroy Judah, but their attitude made them a part of the event. Some today do not have the nerve to do things that are wicked, but they enjoy watching others or encouraging others to engage in them. Note the statement against Edom in Psalm 137:7.

Possessing Your Possessions, Verse 17. Do you possess your possessions, or do your possessions possess you? Possessions make great servants, but horrible masters. It is terrible to be enslaved to one's material things. The meaning of this verse in its context is that Israel will once again possess the land that God gave to them for a possession.

JONAH

Background. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, the empire that terrorized the Ancient Near East from the 9th through the 7th centuries B.C. Jonah was told to go preach to Nineveh. He did not want to do it because he was afraid Nineveh might repent. He wanted Nineveh to continue in its wickedness so God would destroy it. Jonah could be called "The Preacher Who Hoped He Would Fail." The main lesson in the book is God's concern for all people, even the

enemies of Israel. The same thought appears in Isaiah 19:23-25.

Jonah, the Man Who Ran. In Chapter 1 Jonah ran from God. How foolish for anyone to think he can hide from God! Psalm 139; Hebrews 4:13. In Chapter 2 Jonah ran to God, in prayer. In Chapter 3 Jonah ran with God. He did his will. In Chapter 4 Jonah ran ahead of God. He tried to second-guess God. How foolish for man to try to do this.

MICAH

Background. Micah prophesied in the 8th century B.C. He was contemporary with Isaiah. His work was mainly among the poor in the villages and farming communities of Judah.

Wickedness 2:1. Those who lie awake at night scheming wickedness and cannot wait for daylight so they can practice it.

The Messiah in Micah 4:1-4; 5:2. Micah 4:1-4 is repeated in Isaiah 2:2-4. The site of Christ's birth is foretold in 5:2. Cf. Mt. 2:6.

"What Doth the Lord Require of Thee?" 6:6-8. God is not interested in just a number of sacrifices: burnt offerings, calves, rams, oil, or even one's firstborn. There are three requirements:

1. Do justice;
 2. Love kindness;
 3. Walk humbly with thy God;
- Cf. Deuteronomy 10:12; Matthew 23:23.

NAHUM

Background. Nineveh, the capital of the dreaded Assyrian empire, fell in 612 B.C. Nahum is either a prophecy of the fall of Nineveh or a song of rejoicing that it has already fallen. It is the "Great At Last." Finally this wicked empire is gone.

The character of God 1:2-8.

His power and majesty 2-5.

His wrath 6, 8.

His goodness 7.

HABAKKUK

Background. Israel is being conquered by Babylon. Habakkuk sees Israel's fall as due to her sins. But Babylon is even more wicked than Judah. Here is a question of justice. Why would God let the wicked swallow up those who are more righteous than they are? Compare this with the theme of Job: Why must the righteous suffer? The explanation of his three friends, that it was due to sin, was not right; but God never told Job why in his particular case. Neither did God give Habakkuk the answer to his question. We do not always have a pat answer to the suffering and misery in our lives.

"Whose Might is Their God" 1:11. The Chaldeans (Babylon) worshipped their military might. Their military machine was the means whereby they captured men, as a fisherman catches fish in his net. Therefore they burn incense to their net (1:16). What a puny thing to put one's trust in!

"The Just Will Live by Faith" 2:4. This is the theme of Romans (1:17). Romans emphasizes that men are made just by their faith. The point in Habakkuk is that the just man will save his soul by faithfulness. God told Habakkuk he could not understand God's ways. If he would remain faithful, he would be saved.

"The Lord is in His Holy Temple" 2:20. Note the contrast between God and lifeless idols in verses 18-19. It must have looked to many that Babylon's god was greater than Israel's God.

The Real Test of Faith 3:17, 19. Note Jacob's bargain with God (Gen. 28:20-21). "If God will bless me, then I will serve him." What if God does not bless us? Should we still serve Him? Do we serve God only for what we can get out of it? Note Satan's accusation: "Does Job fear God for naught?" (Job 1:9). Habakkuk says he will serve God no matter what happens, if everything in the world goes wrong. The real test of our faith is in times of adversity, not when everything is going well.

"Hinds' Feet on High Places" 3:19. The hind is a surefooted animal of the deer family. God will never let us slip when we follow Him. What security! We can walk on treacherous footing on the most precarious peaks and not fall.

ZEPHANIAH

Background. Zephaniah prophesied about 620 B.C., twenty years before the Babylonian invasions of Judah (606-586 B.C.). His theme is "The Day of the Lord." This day is a day of wrath, the day when Babylon takes Judah.

"The Day of the Lord" 1:14-18. To the Jew, the day of the Lord was any day in which God showed his power or intervened in a special way. Normally the Jews regarded the day of the Lord as a day when God would bless them; Zephaniah says it is a day when God will punish them. Cf. Amos 5:18-20; Isaiah 13:6.

"Settled on the Lees" 1:12. Wine has to be poured from pitcher to pitcher during the period of fermentation. Dregs settle to the bottom. If the wine stays on these dregs, it becomes bitter or sour. This is a figure of spiritual stagnation. How many today have done nothing in God's church for so long they are settled on their lees, and worthless.

HAGGAI

Background. Haggai and Zechariah were the two prophets who encouraged the people who returned from Babylon to go ahead and rebuild the temple (Ezra 5:1). The theme of this little book is to encourage Zerubbabel, the governor, to rebuild the temple. Haggai prophesied in 520 B.C., and the temple was finished in 516 B.C. He got results!

"Bag With Holes" 1:6. How terrible to work all day, put your earnings in a bag with holes, and find out when you get home that you have lost it all! How many people are giving their time and effort for that which does not really last (cf. Mt. 6:19-20). You cannot take it with you, but you can send it on up ahead. That which you spend in God's service is yours to keep forever.

Who Comes First? 1:4. Is it right for us to dwell in panelled houses while God's house lies waste? Does not our attention to the house called by God's name reflect our interest in his work?

ZECHARIAH

Background. The circumstances of Zechariah's prophecy are the same as that of Haggai. The theme in the first part (Ch. 1-8) is rebuild the temple.

"Despise Not the Day of Small Things" 4:10. Our lives are spent mainly in tending to small duties. We feel that we would do better if we had big, important jobs. A great life consists in doing small things well day after day. When we do our little jobs well, God may entrust us with a more responsible task. Naaman nearly died a leper because he refused to do a small thing (2 Kings 5:13).

Messianic ideas in the latter part of Zechariah.

The triumphal entry into Jerusalem 9:9; Cf. Mt. 21:5.

Judas' remorse 11:11-12; Cf. Mt. 27:9-10.

Look on him whom they have pierced 12:10; Cf. Jn. 19:3.
Smite the shepherd and scatter the sheep 13:7; Cf. Mt. 26:31.

MALACHI

Background. Malachi wrote about 400 B.C., when the temple was finished and the people had sunk into boredom with their worship. Even the priests lightly regarded their tasks. See 1:6-13. It is easy today for familiarity with things sacred to breed contempt. How careful we preachers need to be of this!

God accepts nothing but the best 1:7-14.

The brotherhood of mankind 2:10.

"I hate divorce" 2:16.

"Will a man rob God?" 3:8.

John the Baptist 3:1; 4:5-6. The word *Malachi* means "My Messenger." 3:1 is also applied to John in Mt. 11:10. John is the Elijah who is to come (Mt. 17:10-13).

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Duane Warden

DEFINITIONS

There are words that defy definition, that have to be experienced to be understood. Worship is one of them. For those who believe, worship expresses a yearning for God, the essence of partnership with him. It is a partnership but not among equals. The posture of the created in the presence of the Creator is prostration. Worship declares life to be tentative and confesses God to be eternal. "For all our days pass away under thy wrath, our years come to an end like a sigh" (Ps. 90:9). [Unless otherwise indicated, biblical quotations are from the RSV.]

The faces of worship are many. At one moment it is silent awe, at another swelling praise, at another tearful repentance. Worship is homage offered by the creature to the Creator. To worship is to look the mystery of life in the face; it is to confess and to plead. "I, I am the Lord, and besides me there is no savior" (Is. 43:11).¹ There is no room for arrogant self-reliance. "As you do not know how the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything" (Eccles. 11:5).

In its essence, worship is the stance of the human in the presence of the Divine. It is intensely private; it flowers in fellowship with others. Worship is David saying, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God" (Ps. 42:1, KJV). "He rode on a cherub, and

flew; he was seen upon the wings of the wind" (2 Sam. 22:11). Worship is Job: "These are but the outskirts of his ways;... But the thunder of his power who can understand?" (Job 26:14). The inadequacy of the most carefully phrased definition is clear when we allow our souls to resonate with the worship of the awestruck and the contrite.

Worship was Israel at the foot of smoking Sinai affirming the covenant. "All that the Lord has spoken we will do" (Ex. 19:8). It was a priest waving the bloody breast-piece and thigh before the Lord. It was Israel gathering in the evening of the great feast day and smearing the blood of their lambs on doorposts and lintels. Worship was tabernacle and temple; it was assembly and fellowship. Whatever definition of worship one refines from the Old Testament, it will highlight the authors' lack of concern for definition. Their focus is on God, his power, his glory, his presence in human life. Their concern was with the doing of worship, not its analysis.

It would be a mistake to relegate God to the role of passive recipient of praise. Worship is a reciprocal relationship. Schaper is correct: "Worship means to receive from God what He pleases to do for us and to respond, not only within the moment in which He serves us, but in the entire activity of our lives."² When his people worship him, God affirms their faith. He reassures his people that they are not alone on the earth in the midst of infinite responsibility with no hope and no guidance. He reinforces godly living and directs his people to an ongoing life of praise.

WORSHIP AS A COMPONENT OF THE PROPHETIC MESSAGE

On first consideration, the Minor Prophets hardly appear to be the most fruitful place in the Bible to look for instruction concerning worship. One scholar designates them "covenant enforcement mediators."³ The commission to Jeremiah was "to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant" (Jer. 1:10). What does the prophetic mission have to do with worship?

We must mine the Minor Prophets in order to extract from them the raw materials of worship and praise. The precious metal does not lie fully refined on the surface. When we have lived in the prophetic books, when their holy indignation has stirred us, then the prophets yield their gold. It is the character of these great men, their intensity, their zeal for the living God that draws us to them. By these means the prophets call our worship into question and challenge us. One may anger God with superficial worship. "Who requires of you this trampling of my courts?" the Lord demands. "I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly" (Is. 1:12, 13).

The prophets offered no blueprint for worship; much less did they examine its psychological intricacies. Their burden was to remind those who brought sacrifices that what they offered was not enough. To borrow the words of Rick Marrs, "In worship, Israel was drawn again to re-examine her values, her commitments, and the essence of her life before God."⁴ The prophets demanded that worship embrace conduct, law, and life. Within this framework they teach us. Societal norms, social conventions, and the law have changed, but God wants from his people what he has always wanted. He wants adoration and praise; he wants

goodness and justice. The following makes no claim to be an exhaustive list of ways the Minor Prophets instruct the church. It is an attempt to enumerate a few principles set forth in their books that bear on Christian worship.

THE END OF WORSHIP IS THE GLORIFICATION OF GOD

The prophets never argued the point. It never occurred to them that the point needed to be argued. All creation is at its best when it sings the praises of the Creator. It is that way all through the prophets. From God's calling the nations to decision in the valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3:12) to the angel of the Lord standing in the glen among the myrtle trees (Zech. 1:11), the sovereign rule of the Almighty overwhelmed them. "His way is in whirlwind and storm,... Who can stand before his indignation?" (Nahum 1:3, 6).

The end of all worship is the glorification of the God who works his will on the nations. "He stood and measured the earth; he looked and shook the nations; then the eternal mountains were scattered, the everlasting hills sank low" (Hab. 3:6). Davies says it well:

True Israelite worship is dominated by enthusiasm for God. Thus Israel's worship is performed, not merely that she may thereby set an example to other nations, and not merely that she may derive blessing or welfare from this worship, but that she may glorify God.⁵

To the degree that the church listens to the voice of the prophets, God will be at the center of worship. Praise will be the center of the church's life. Worship is an act of the church assembled, but it is also the behavior of Christians living for the glory of the God who acts in the lives of his

people. There are some truths so obvious that they need no one to argue them. Is it a mere truism to say that the center of the church's life is its worship, its praise of the eternal God? Perhaps, but I suspect that Christians do not ask themselves what worship ought essentially to be. Those who have never asked the question will have little sense of loss should the church become sidetracked into peripheral concerns.

History confirms the judgment of Alan McNicol: "...the church that does not hold at the center of its life the nourishing of a sense of transcendent purpose will not survive."⁶ To which we could add that such a church has no reason to survive. The prophets have a sense of transcendent purpose. The church needs to drink from the fountain of their words. No one actually says, "Let's place less emphasis on praising God and do more of what pleases ourselves." It is more subtle than that. With all good intentions, insistent voices demand that worship assemblies be more exciting, more varied. Worshipers must be edified; they must be inspired. It is hard to argue with that sentiment. But those who have never examined the purpose of worship may fail to notice that the driving force has shifted from the praise of God to the quest for a worship experience.

References to moribund traditionalism are often interspersed with appeals for relevance. However, voices that are long on criticizing traditionalism are short on suggestions for what would make worship more inspiring. When changes are made, they never seem to be enough. It would be foolish to resist efforts to make periods of worship more inspiring. However, when the overriding concern is for what worshipers get from worship, the church has gone a considerably different direction from the way the Minor Prophets direct it. The leading question is no

longer, "What pleases and glorifies Him who is the source of all being?" It becomes, "What needs to be done for me, the worshiper, in order that I may have an emotionally satisfying experience?"

When Christians ask the wrong questions, those who lead believers in worship are reduced to performers who must please and inspire those who sit in the pews. Woe be to them if they do not. The worshipers might not come back. What could be worse? It is easy for a misguided zeal for relevance to result in efforts being expended to please the worshiper rather than to please God.⁷

WORSHIP MUST ENGAGE THE MIND AS WELL AS THE HEART

The Minor Prophets lift a persistent cry. Over the centuries they urge the church to praise and glorify God through the avenue of knowledge. Knowledge is fundamental to worship. Without knowledge, the people of God perish (Hos. 4:6). Knowing God and glorifying him is the path to love. Emotional bonds flourish when the believer knows the God whom he serves. Conversely, all attempts to generate emotion in the absence of knowledge results in a sterile religion, one devoid of praise.

Call it rationalistic religion if you like, but to know God is fundamental to worshipping him. It is irrational religion that stirs the wrath of the prophets. Gomer was irrational. "And she did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil" (Hos. 2:8). Israel acted irrationally. They built their idols and lavished them with gold and silver. "Sacrifice to these, they say. Men kiss calves! Therefore they shall be like...the chaff that swirls from the threshing floor" (Hos. 13:2-3).

It is hardly as if the prophets left their hearts behind when they spoke of God. As worship cannot be reduced to moments of emotional exhilaration, so it cannot be reduced to mathematical formulas. Neither sacrifice in the Temple nor three songs, a prayer, and the Lord's Supper suffice for the offering of worship to God when they are devoid of love and awe. The praise of the Almighty requires all of one's mind and heart.

The prophets warn that there are some who have no desire to know God but who, nevertheless, appear religious. Crowds with raised hands swaying to a beat do not necessarily honor God. Searching for an illusive experience, some relegate God to a corner of life. They want to control God. When the need arises, with tears and outstretched hands, they summon God. Then, the catharsis completed, they put him back out of sight. Hosea addressed the point when he spoke of a people who "...do not cry to me from the heart, but they wail upon their beds" (7:14). Wailing and tears give no praise unless they affect the way one lives. The Almighty cannot be turned on and off like a light bulb.

WORSHIP FLOWS OUT OF LIFE

The prophets observed people treating worship as an appendage to life. Nothing angered them more. Guilt and uncertainty may drive one to his knees in a church building. Having given a pittance to God, he may continue in his sins, weeping but having no intention of changing. He may testify that he had an uplifting mystical experience. But whatever his personal experience, if he cheats his neighbor, if he lies and commits adultery, he has not worshiped God. The distinction between social or moral life on the one

hand and religious life on the other is artificial. Worship flows out of life.

Andy T. Richie has written, "Any conception which severs the two, worship and life, and isolates them from each other, does extreme violence to the ideals involved to the practical aspects of both."⁸ He adds, "...if daily attitudes are bad and daily habits are unchristian, if affections are on the world and Christians' lives are out of tune with God, good worship cannot take place."⁹

Amos would have agreed. Israel went to shrines and offered sacrifices but allowed the law of God to have little influence the rest of the time. Amos says, "Come to Bethel, and transgress; to Gilgal, and multiply transgressions" (4:4). Then he adds, "Seek the Lord and live, lest he break out like fire on the house of Joseph" (5:6). No amount of assembly, sacrifice, ritual, or praise can substitute for godly living.

WORSHIP MEANS PARTICIPATION IN A COMMUNITY

When God asked Cain about his brother Abel, Cain's retort is well-known. "Am I my brother's keeper?" he demanded. Cain's question is a testimony that faithfulness to God includes caring for and serving those whom our lives touch. Obeying God has always entailed the offering of support to and drawing support from a community of faith. For Israel it meant sharing in the national life of God's people. For the church of Christ it means worshiping and serving in the body. It means bearing witness to a non-believing world that Jesus Christ is "the way, the truth, and the life."

The Minor Prophets testified that the behavior of each individual had an impact on the nation. It worked the other

way too. The behavior of the nation had a profound impact on each individual. Even when Israel and Judah were at their spiritual worst, there were those in both the northern and southern kingdoms who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Habakkuk writes, "So the law is slacked and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous, so justice goes forth perverted" (1:4). The prophet indicts the nation with a general description. There were some to whom the description did not apply. But when the judgment of God came, the innocent and the guilty suffered together. The community of God's people are bound up in one another's lives.

Because worship meant participation in a community, the prophets pleaded with the nation to repent and be faithful. The fate of individuals was tied up in the spiritual life of the nation. Micah writes "...the Lord has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel" (6:2). The offering of worship that honored and pleased God was not a simple individual act. It was a national act. When priests were corrupt and prophets spoke lies, the most sincere individual was likely to find himself caught up in the whole. The prophets make little reference to individuals. They address the nation.

Is the quality of the church's worship a factor in the worship that you individually offer to God? Do the moral standards and ideals of the people who live around you affect your spiritual life? I believe the prophets would answer yes on both counts. Paul would answer yes too. He speaks of a church whose members are as intricately related as the hand of a body to its shoulder (1 Cor. 12). What any believer does affects the life of the body.

Whether speaking of the wider community in which the believer lives or of the church where he is a member, the Christian is concerned with the behavior and the worship of

the whole. It is not enough to file into a pew on Sunday morning and take no interest in what anyone else does. We are members of one another. The worship of the church is my worship. The life of its people is my life. The church is a community of worship. Its communal worship is woven into the fabric of life.

Some maintain that religion is essentially a way of exercising political power. They argue that it amounts to a means for some people to control the lives of others. Religion is different in type, they argue, but not in kind to political or economic power. Whether one is impressed with this type of reasoning depends on his assumptions. If one assumes that religion is strictly a human phenomenon like language or government are human phenomena, then religion is in large measure a means of exercising power. But if God is real and if worship and praise are important because of the essential nature of things, then religion is a matter of relating to the Divine.

The prophets teach the church that worship is not simply an act by an isolated individual. Worship is also a community of believers from whom the individual partakes and to which he contributes. To live godly is to live in fellowship with others who share in faith.

WORSHIP ALLOWS FOR NO RESERVATIONS

A careful reading of the prophets suggests that the people of Israel on the whole were neither monotheists nor polytheists. They were henotheists. They believed that there are many gods, but one was chief. Most Israelites continued to offer sacrifices in Jerusalem while they were practicing the most flagrant idolatry. They believed that Yahweh brought them out of Egypt. He had been the God of their fathers. They owed him special worship because he was

Israel's God. But Baal was in charge of the thunderstorm. The Asherah determined the productivity of the fields. So he worshiped them too. It could not hurt to have as many gods as possible on one's side.

The prophets are most forceful here. God will not share his praise with a dumb piece of wood and stone. On great feast days, idolaters brought their images out of shrines, placed them on palanquins, and paraded them through the streets. Isaiah responded that the Lord's people do not carry him. He carries them (46:3-6). Habakkuk asks, "What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies?" (2:18). Hosea puts it simply, "I am the Lord your God from the land of Egypt; you know no God but me, and besides me there is no savior" (13:4).

In the New Testament Paul declares that covetousness is idolatry (Col. 3:5). Even though there may be no physical images of pagan gods as there were when the prophets lived, it remains true that some worship God part of the time and their own gods at others. God is either the supreme sovereign of life or he is nothing at all. God will not share sovereignty in the heart of the worshiper.

CONCLUSION

At first glance it appears that the Minor Prophets have little to say about worship. After looking more closely, our minds have been changed. The manner of Israel's worship under the Law of Moses was different from that of the church, but the qualities of heart and mind brought to bear when God's people worship him have not changed.

Jesus teaches us things of God that those who lived under the old law either did not know or saw only dimly. The Christian knows much more of worship and praise than did ancient Israel. Still, the prophets speak their messages

with a force and intensity that continues to inspire us. By listening carefully to their messages, we will give him the more glory.

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NOTES

1. See the classic discussion of the *mysterium tremendum* in Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. by John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1923).
2. Robert N. Schaper, *In His Presence: Appreciating Your Worship Tradition* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), 15.
3. Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 151.
4. Rick Marrs, "Worship and Social Responsibility in the Psalms," *Leaven* 1 (Spring 1990): 9.
5. G. Henton Davies, "Worship in the OT," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 4:883.
6. Alan McNicol, "Contemporary Developments in the Church of Christ: Reflections on Worship," *Leaven* 1 (Winter 1990): 30.
7. James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), p. 29f asks of worship, "Which takes precedence, the glorification of God or making people holy?" White sees no great tension between the two. It seems to me that there is considerable tension. The essence of the question is whether worship is to be focused on God or the worshiper. The Minor Prophets are clear. God takes precedence.

8. Andy T. Richie, Jr., *Thou Shalt Worship the Lord Thy God* (Austin, Tx.: Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1969), 43.
9. *Ibid.*, 163.

HOSEA: THE HEART OF GOD

John T. Willis

Hosea (ca. 750-724 B.C.) proclaimed God's message to North Israelites primarily (i.e., Ephraim, since Ephraim was the predominant tribe in North Israel--1:4-5; 3:1, 4; 4:15-17; etc.), but also to Judeans (1:7, 11; 4:15; 5:5, 10; etc.). He was not a founder of a new religion, but called God's people back to the relationship (covenant) which God had established with them through his mighty deeds in their behalf at the Exodus from Egypt and through the principles for life growing out of that relationship which he declared to them through Moses at Mount Sinai. Accordingly, the book of Hosea is full of references to God's mighty acts in Israel's past and God's instructions for his people.

The book of Hosea graphically depicts God's relationship to his chosen people by means of four well-known relationships experienced in daily life: (a) husband and wife; (b) parent and child; (c) vinedresser and vine; and (d) physician and patient. This prophetic masterpiece portrays this progressive relationship in six critical phases which serve as the outline of the message of the book of Hosea in what follows.

YAHWEH CHOOSES ISRAEL AS HIS OWN PEOPLE

Hosea reminds God's people repeatedly that Yahweh entered into a relationship with them when he delivered them from the oppression of the Egyptians, opened the

waters of the Red Sea for them to pass over on dry land, led them safely through the dangerous wilderness, and gave them his guidelines for life at Mount Sinai. He is Israel's God "from the land of Egypt" (12:9; 13:4-5). God's "election" of Israel to be his people is like a marriage or wedding. At the Exodus, God became the husband of Israel's youth (2:15). Although Israel was "destined to become a harlot" when God married her, in Hosea's figure she was a pure woman at the time of marriage. Since Hosea uses his relationship to his wife Gomer to depict Yahweh's relationship to Israel, Gomer also must have been a pure woman when Hosea married her (1:2-3--the "proleptic" view).

God's "choice" of Israel to be his people is like a parent adopting a child. God adopted Israel to be his "son" when he brought his people out of Egypt (11:1). This divine election is like a vinedresser uprooting a wild, grape-bearing vine from bad or inferior soil (9:10) to transplant it in a better environment. It is like a physician healing a patient of a terrible, life-threatening disease (11:3).

Hosea reminds God's people of these events and uses these figures in order to emphasize how much God had done for them in spite of their helpless circumstances, their sinfulness, and their failures. His ultimate purpose is to open their eyes to appreciate all that Yahweh had done for them, to be grateful for all his blessings and gifts (2:5, 8; 10:1; 11:2-4).

ISRAEL LEAVES YAHWEH

After Yahweh brought the Israelites into the land of Canaan and drove out the former inhabitants of that land from before them, they "forgot" him (2:13; 8:14; 13:6); they "sinned against" him (4:7); they "forsook" him (1:2; 4:10;

9:1); they "left" him (4:12); they "strayed from" him (7:13); they "went from" him (11:2); they "turned away from" him (11:7); they "rebelled against" him (7:13; 13:16); they "devised evil against" him (7:15); they "broke his covenant and transgressed his law" (8:1); they "spurned the good" (8:3). It is not that Yahweh left Israel, or that Yahweh and Israel decided mutually to sever their relationship; but Israel left Yahweh in spite of all the love he had manifested to her and all the gifts he had given her.

This is like a wife leaving her husband (4:10, 12; 9:1), a son leaving his father (11:2), a vineyard becoming detestable (9:10; or degenerate--Jer. 2:21), and a person who has been healed inflicting pain on others (7:1; see also 4:2; 6:8-9; 10:13; 12:7). Here there is a striking contrast between the selfish determination of the one leaving to get what he wants, and the unselfish concern of the one who is left for the welfare of the one leaving.

ISRAEL DEPENDS ON POWERS OTHER THAN YAHWEH

Hosea proclaims that there were three great spiritual rivals to Yahweh with which the Israelites came into contact in the "promised land" of Canaan and which continue to be powerful attractions for them at the present time: the fertility god Baal and his consort Anat (Asherah, Ashtoreth) whom the long-established Canaanite inhabitants of the land worshiped; powerful foreign nations on whom they could call for help in a time of distress; and the Israelites' own king with his military strength and strategy.

Israel's "love affair" with the Baals of Canaan began east of the Jordan shortly before the death of Moses at her last camping site before crossing the Jordan, Baal-Peor. There, under the counsel of the wicked Mesopotamian

prophet Balaam, the women of Moab and of Midian enticed the men of Israel to come in to them and commit cult prostitution with them as an act of worship to Baal (9:10; see Num. 25; 31:1-18). The Baals in the land of Canaan are like "lovers" who entice Israel away from her husband Yahweh to commit harlotry with them (1:2; 2:2, 4-8, 10, 12-13; 3:1, 3; 4:10, 12, 15, 17; 5:3-4, 7; 6:7, 10; 7:15; 8:5-6; 9:1; 10:5-6; 11:2; 13:1-2; 14:3, 8). Israel's "love" for Yahweh is as fickle and as fleeting as "a morning cloud" and as "the dew that goes early away" (6:4).

The people of Israel also rely on apparently powerful foreign allies in critical times rather than on Yahweh. They seek help from Assyria (5:13; 7:11; 8:9; 12:1; 14:3) or Egypt (7:11; 12:1). By bringing large sums of money and expensive goods to these nations to persuade them to help them, the Israelites "hire lovers" (8:9-10). In light of this dependence on foreigners, Hosea compares Israel with a cake not turned (7:8), an individual who is prematurely gray because aliens have sapped his strength (7:9), a silly dove (7:11), one who "sows the wind" (8:7) or "herds the wind" (12:1), a "useless vessel" among the nations (8:8).

The Israelites trust in their earthly king (13:10-11). He appears to offer them security because of the well-trained army over which he is the commander and because of the numerous war horses and war chariots (10:13; 14:3) and effective weapons that Israel has accumulated under his leadership (1:5, 7; 2:18). Yet, there are so many self-seeking parties among God's people that no king could survive very long. Warring factions kill one king after another (7:3-7). They set kings on the throne, but not under Yahweh's direction (8:4).

Hosea compares Israel's unswerving reliance on such earthly powers to a wife who commits adultery with many lovers (2:5-13), a child who rebels against his parent (7:15;

11:2-3), a vineyard whose root is dried up and which bears no fruit (9:16), and a patient who goes to a physician who does not have the power or the medicine to heal him (5:13; 7:1; 11:3). However, Israel's sin is fundamentally not certain external, unrighteous acts that she performs, but an attitude of heart: "the spirit of harlotry" (4:12; 5:4).

YAHWEH SEVERS HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH ISRAEL

Yahweh has tried to bring Israel back to him in many ways for a long time, but all his attempts have failed. Therefore, in a final, desperate attempt to jar his people into reality and to restore them to himself, he declares through Hosea that he will sever his ties with them, send a powerful enemy nation to overthrow them, and carry them into Assyrian exile.

He compares this Assyrian exile with Israel's former captivity in Egypt, and proclaims that she will "return to [the land of] Egypt" (8:13; 9:3, 6; 11:5; cf. 7:16), i. e., Assyria. (Note the parallelism in these passages, and see also 10:6.) Because his people have "rejected" and "forgotten" him, Yahweh will "reject" and "forget" them (4:6). He will "withdraw from" them (5:6); he will "depart from" them (9:12); he will "chastise" them (10:10). He will "punish" and "destroy" them for their ways (4:9; 5:9; 7:13; 8:13; 9:7, 9; 10:2, 8, 14; 11:9; 12:2, 14; 13:9) like a "wind that wraps something in its wings" (4:19) or "the east wind rising from the wilderness" (13:15); or like a "whirlwind" that destroys everything in its path (8:7), like "the morning mist or the dew that goes early away" (13:3), like "chaff that swirls from the threshing floor" (13:3), like "smoke from a window" (13:3), like a "moth" that devours clothing or "dry rot" that destroys plants (5:12), like a "lion" or

"leopard" or "bear" that rends and carries off a prey (5:14; 13:7-8), like a hunter that "spreads his net over a bird" to catch it (7:12), like a rancher who places a "yoke" on the neck of a rebellious animal (11:7), like inevitable "death" (13:14). He will "drive them out of his house" (9:15), and he will "cast them off" (9:17).

Yahweh will send an enemy against his people to burn their cities with "fire" (8:14) and slay them with the "sword" (11:6; 13:16) and to "pursue" them when they try to escape (8:3).

Hosea says that Yahweh's severing of his relationship with sinful Israel is like a husband "divorcing" his unfaithful wife, saying, "she is not my wife [any longer], and I am not her husband [any more]" (2:2). Referring back to the Assyrian captivity of North Israel in the days of Jeremiah, Yahweh declares, "I had sent her [North Israel] away with a decree of divorce" (Jer. 3:8). Further, Hosea compares Yahweh's breaking his relationship with Israel with a parent's disowning a son or a daughter. He does this vividly by giving his own children symbolic names which portray this idea. Hosea calls his first son "Jezreel," which means, "God scatters," indicating that Yahweh will scatter the sinful Israelites among the nations (1:2-5). Hosea names his daughter "Lo-ruhamah," meaning, "Not pitied (mercied, compassioned)," declaring that Yahweh will no longer have mercy on his sinful people (1:6-7). Hosea calls his second son "Lo-ammi," which means, "Not my people," suggesting that Yahweh is no longer willing to claim Israel as his own (1:8-9).

Hosea also compares Yahweh's cutting off relations with his chosen people Israel to a vinedresser "casting off" his vineyard because it does not bring forth good fruit (9:16-17) and to a physician who himself inflicts pain and wounds on his patient (5:13-6:1).

YAHWEH STILL LOVES HIS UNFAITHFUL PEOPLE

Yahweh's love for human beings is illogical. It has a distinct "in spite of" dimension. Even though Israel has been unfaithful to Yahweh consistently for decades, Yahweh still loves her. In fact, he punishes her because he loves her. His purpose in punishing humankind is not to destroy, but to redeem.

Hosea himself vividly portrays this love by his own willingness to "buy" his unfaithful wife Gomer from one of her paramours (3:1-2). After Yahweh has disowned his son Israel, he cries out in anguish, "How can I give you up?" And he replies, "I will not execute my fierce anger." "I will not come to destroy" (11:8-9). Yahweh still wants to "heal" his sick and wounded people (7:1) and to revive the vineyard which he has pruned back by being the "dew" to give them renewed nourishment (14:5).

YAHWEH WILL RESTORE HIS PEOPLE TO HIMSELF

Yahweh's incomparable love motivates him to re-establish his relationship with his people, in spite of their sinful nature and ways. They are not worthy of his love, but he loves them nevertheless. As in the days of the Exodus, Yahweh will allure his divorced wife, bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her, so that she will respond as she did when they were first married (2:14-15). No longer will she think of Yahweh as "Baali," "my harsh taskmaster" who requires of me heavy burdens that no one could bear, but as "Ishi," "my husband" who loves me so much that I gladly and willingly respond in love for him (2:16). Yahweh will become "betrothed" or "engaged" to

Israel once again and will "re-marry" her (2:19-20). In response, Israel's love will cease to be a mere external show of religion (5:6; 5:13-6:6; 7:14) and will become the steadfast love of a faithful wife. Accordingly, she will "know" the Lord, i. e., she will have an intimate, daily, personal relationship with Yahweh, as a faithful wife has with her husband (2:20; cf. 6:6).

Yahweh will take back his apostate child as his own. To symbolize this, the names of Hosea's three children are reversed. "Jezreel" comes to mean "God will sow," to indicate that Yahweh will plant his people on the promised land once again as he causes them to return from captivity. "Lo-ruhamah" becomes "Ruhamah," "Pitied (Mercied, Compassioned)," to suggest that Yahweh will again have mercy on his people (cf. 11:8; 14:3). "Lo-ammi" is changed to "Ammi," "my people," to proclaim that Yahweh is going to take his people back as his own (1:10-2:1; 2:21-23). In a similar figure, Hosea compares Yahweh with a lion that roars for his scattered cubs, and they respond by returning to his lair for protection and reassurance (11:10).

Like a great physician, Yahweh will intervene and heal his sick and wounded people (14:4). Like a patient and caring vinedresser, he will cause his vineyard to flourish in its land (14:5-7). He will reunite North Israel and Judah under a descendant of David's (1:11; 3:5) when he returns them to their homes from which they have been separated by captivity (11:11).

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PAUL WATSON

Redemption is not only a major theme of the minor prophets but of the entire Old Testament and New Testament as well. Narrowly defined, "redeem/redemption/redeemer" are used to translate the Hebrew roots *g'l* and *pdh* and refer to the recovery of something for its original owner by means of a monetary payment. Thus land, houses, and even individuals could be reclaimed by being bought back ("redeemed") from another party (Jer. 32:6-15). By extension, the widow of a deceased relative was to be "redeemed" (Deut. 25:5-10; Ruth 4:1-9); and the murder of a kinsman was to be avenged by the closest male relative, the "redeemer-of-blood" (2 Sam. 14:11, referring to Absalom). In Israel's worship, provision was made for redemption of the firstborn by sacrifice (Ex. 13:11-13). By analogy, God "redeemed" Israel - from her enemies (Jer. 15:21), from her own sins (Ps. 130:7-8), even from death itself (Job 5:20).

Broadly speaking, "redemption" is only one of many metaphors used to portray the restoration of a right relationship between God and human beings. God is not only "redeemer," but also "husband" (Hos. 2:1-20), "father" (Hos. 11:1-4), "master" (Is. 1:3), "warrior" (Ex. 15:1-3), the One who has "chosen" Israel (Is. 41:8-10), "savior" (Is. 43:11-12), and "comforter" (Is. 40:1-2), to name only a few. In the minor prophets, "redemption" in the more limited sense (*g'l* and *pdh*) appears seldom (especially compared to

the frequent occurrence of these words in Psalms and Isaiah 40-66). But "redemption" in the broader sense--God's salvation of His people--is abundant; and it is this broader theme that we will pursue in the following study.

REDEMPTION AS THE WORK OF GOD

"O my people, what have I done to you?
In what have I wearied you? Answer me!

For I *brought you up* from the land of Egypt,
and *redeemed you* from the house of bondage...."

In the famous covenant-lawsuit passage in Micah 6:1-8, God's accusation against Israel begins with this reminder of his own paradigmatic act of redemption, *viz.* the liberation of the people of Israel from Egyptian bondage. The Exodus was for old Israel what Calvary is for the new Israel of God. Both were God's doing, first and last: "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will work for you today" (Ex. 14:13a).

Redemption Necessitated by Human Sin. If redemption was God's doing, the need for redemption was brought about by human sin. Such sin - both personal and communal - had alienated humanity from God in the first place (Gen. 3-11). It was only by God's proactive intervention, beginning with his call of Abraham (Gen. 12), that reconciliation/salvation/redemption could ever occur. In the Exodus, God had to overcome the timidity of Moses (Ex. 3-4), the opposition of Pharaoh (Ex. 5-14) and the fear of Israel (Ex. 14:10-12) to liberate his people from bondage and bring them to Sinai to enter into covenant with them there (Ex. 15-20).

Redemption Prompted by God's Pathos for His People.

All the prophets hold up before their respective hearers this basic understanding of redemption as the self-initiated action of God in response to human sin. But they do more: they emphasize the personal, emotional nature of God's interaction with Israel. God can "hate" and "despise" Israel's worship (Amos 5:21); feel like a dishonored father (Mal. 1:6-14); have "fierce anger" against Israel (Zeph. 2:2; cf. Zech. 10:3); and show her "no pity" (Hos. 2:4). Yet God may also "speak tenderly" to Israel (Hos. 2:14); "rejoice" and "exult" over her (Zeph. 3:17); be "jealous" for Zion (Zech. 8:2); and be "avenging" and "wrathful" toward her enemies (Nahum 1:2). In the words of Micah 7:18,

Who is a God like thee, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love.

Such passages as these prompted Abraham Heschel to write,

The God of the [Greek] philosophers is...unknown and indifferent to man;...while the God of Israel is a God who loves, a God who is known to, and concerned with, man....God does not stand outside the range of human suffering and sorrow. He is personally involved in, even stirred by, the conduct and fate of man.... Man is not only an image of God; he is a perpetual concern of God.¹

THE RESPONSE OF THE REDEEMED

When Redemption is a Memory. When redemption is a past event and God's people are enjoying the benefits of a restored relationship with him, the challenge is not to take such redemption for granted. That, in large part, is the

message of Amos, Hosea, Micah and Zephaniah to audiences who had come to presume upon God's grace. Take Amos 3:1-2 for example: The "whole family" of Israel--the family God had "brought up out of the land of Egypt"--God's *only* family--would bear his punishment precisely because they had violated their special relationship with him.

Hosea speaks of God, the "father," calling Israel, his "son," out of Egypt, only to have that "son" abandon him despite his repeated pleas to his "son" (11:1-2). Again, in 13:4-16, Hosea speaks of Israel's "forgetfulness" of God's redemption (v.6); God, in turn, will no longer protect Israel but will be Death's agent to destroy her (v.14). Micah speaks of God's "devising evil" against his own "family" (2:1-3) because they blithely say "...disgrace will not overtake us" (2:6) and offer endless, empty sacrifices to God as a substitute for true obedience (6:1-8). Zephaniah picks up Amos' metaphor of "the day of the Lord"--popularly conceived to be a day of victory and success--and instead proclaims that "day" to be one of bitterness, anguish and ruin (Zeph. 1:14-16).

The bottom-line message of all four prophets regarding God's redemption is this: Don't take it for granted. God called those he had redeemed into covenant-relationship with Him (Ex. 15:13; 19:3-6). But God was not restricted by his own saving-acts. He could and would punish even those of his 'family' who violated their covenant-commitment and thus nullified their redemption: "Woe to them, for they have strayed from me. Destruction to them, for they have rebelled against me! I would *redeem* them, but they speak lies against me" (Hos. 7:13).

When Redemption is a Hope. In 721 B.C. Samaria, the northern capital, fell to the Assyrians, fulfilling the warn-

ings of Amos and Hosea. Even more devastating was the fall of Jerusalem and its temple in 587 B.C. and the subsequent Babylonian Exile. Now what would happen to the survivors? Would "Israel" cease to exist as the people of God? The answer was a resounding "No!"

Even in the pre-exilic Minor Prophets there are expressions of hope and confidence that God will once again redeem Israel, such as the following: "In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen..." (Amos 9:11-12). "I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel... I will plant them upon their land" (Amos 9:13-15). "I will heal their faithlessness. I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them" (Hos. 14:4-7). "There [from Babylon] you shall be rescued, there the LORD will redeem you from the hand of your enemies" (Mic. 4:10). "Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told" (Hab. 1:5). "At that time I will bring you home... when I restore your fortunes before your eyes" (Zeph. 3:20).

The post-exilic Minor Prophets elaborate these promises of future redemption. A prime example of this prophetic confidence is found in Zechariah 10:6-12 which begins with an unqualified promise resting upon the character and pathos of God: "... I will bring them back because I have compassion on them... I am the LORD their God...." Zechariah goes on to stress that redemption is God's doing, whether it be from Egypt, from Assyria or Babylon, or wherever (see v.10); the ongoing nature of this new redemption ("with their children they shall live and return," v.9); the explicit comparison of this new redemption with the Exodus (v.11); and that the result of this new redemption will be a restored relationship with God: "I will make

them strong in the LORD, and they shall glory in his name" (v.12).

Other noteworthy promise-passages include Haggai 2:5, where God reminds both leaders and people alike of "the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt"; Zechariah 2:12, where those exiles still in Babylon are urged to return to Judah, for "The LORD will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem"; and Joel 2:28-32 (and Acts 2:16-21) promising "the coming of the great and glorious day of the LORD," when "everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved."

Do such unqualified assurances of God's coming salvation leave Israel with no responsibilities, no divine expectations of them? Not at all. Through the prophets God calls upon his people to *repent* (Hos. 14:1; Joel 2:12-13a); to *fear him* (Mal. 4:2); to *trust* him rather than foreign powers or their own idols (Hos. 14:3); and to *wait faithfully* for his promises to be fulfilled (Zeph. 3:8; Mic. 7:7). This last, encompassing expectation is made crystal clear to Habakkuk, who impatiently questions God about Israel's fate and future when one wicked nation (the Chaldeans) replaces another (Assyria) as Israel's conqueror. God's response to Habakkuk is a word of assurance -- "If it [the vision] seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay" (2:4) -- and a call to faith -- "He whose soul is upright in him shall fail, but the righteous shall live by his faith" (2:5). Habakkuk comes to such a faith (3:16-19); and it is this "living-by-faith" to which the Lord still calls those who seek his salvation (Rom. 1:16-17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:36-39).

THE DYNAMICS OF REDEMPTION

As indicated at the outset of this study, "redemption" in the fullest sense is a very broad, very inclusive theme. It has many aspects, four of which merit special attention here.

Redemption both Corporate and Individual. Does God redeem individual persons or groups of people? The answer, from both the Minor Prophets and the Old Testament as a whole, is "Yes." Sometimes distinct individuals, named or unnamed, are specifically marked for redemption/salvation. Examples include Zerubbabel (Hag. 2:23) and Joshua (Zech. 3:1-5), and the house ("booth") of David (Amos 9:11). Examples outside the minor prophets include Abraham (Is. 29:22), Job (Job 19:25), and the petitioners in the Psalms (Ps. 26:11; 49:15; etc.)

More frequently, however, it is a group of persons whom God will redeem. This group may be identified in various ways: as "sheep" (Mic. 2:12b); as the "lame" and "outcast" (Zech. 3:19b; cf. Mic. 4:6-7); as "captives" and "prisoners" (Zech. 9:11-12) or as "Zion" (i.e., former residents of Jerusalem; Zech. 2:10,12; Mic. 4:8-10). The most common designation, however, is that of a "remnant"—those who survive the punishment visited by God upon his people and become the nucleus of the new community: "It may be that the LORD, the God of hosts will be gracious to the *remnant* of Joseph" (Amos 5:15b). "I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob, I will gather the *remnant* of Israel" (Mic. 2:12a). "The seacoast shall become the possession of the *remnant* of the house of Judah" (Zeph. 2:7). "I will cause the *remnant* of these people to possess all these things" (Zech. 8:12b).

Redemption both Physical and Spiritual. Just as redemption encompasses both individuals and communities, so also redemption includes both physical and spiritual renewal/restoration. Agricultural fertility will be one feature of God's new redemption (Amos 9:13-14b; Hos. 2:21-23 and 14:5-7; Joel 2:18-27 and 3:8). Likewise, homes and cities which have been destroyed will be rebuilt and reinhabited (Amos 9:14a; Mic. 7:11; Zech. 1:16-17). Above all, Israel will be restored to her land, both in a geographic and a political sense (Amos 9:15; Mic. 4:8 ; 5:2-6; Zech. 9:9-10).

But redemption is not only external restoration; it is internal renewal as well. It is personal security and a sense of peace and well-being: "But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid" (Mic. 4:4a; see also Hos. 2:18b; Mic. 5:4; Nahum 1:5a; and Zech. 3:10; 8:4-5). Such peace ultimately depends on the restoration of a right relationship with God. Hosea 2:14-23 depicts such restoration coming about when God and Israel renew their vows: "...and I will say to Not-my-people, 'You are my people'; and he shall say, 'Thou art my God.'" This restored fellowship is secured by God's promise to be ever present "in the midst" of his people: "The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst; you shall fear evil no more" (Zeph. 3:15b; cf. Joel 2:27 and Zech. 2:10).

Redemption both from Enemies and for Enemies. The prophets, both major and minor, affirm that Israel's defeats by her enemies are not coincidental; nor are these defeats the result of the superiority of those enemies (or their gods). Rather, God allows such defeats to occur as a way of punishing Israel for her sins: "They shall return to the land of Egypt, and Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to me" (Hos. 11:5; cf. 9:3; 10:3-6;

13-15; also Amos 9:9-10; Mic. 1:8-16). And as the Assyrians were to Ephraim, so the Chaldeans would be to Judah: "They gather captives like sand" (Hab. 1:9b; see 1:5-11, and cf. Zeph. 1:2-18).

But God's use of other nations to punish Israel or Judah was no indication of his approval of their way of life. On the contrary, God strongly *disapproved* of their behavior; and he determined to punish them as well. That punishment, in turn, would be vindication/redemption for Israel. The messages of Nahum and Obadiah are thus directed against Assyria and Edom respectively. Such indictments of Israel's enemies are prominent elsewhere as well, as typified by Zephaniah 2:12-15 (Assyria); Joel 2:20, 3:4-8 (Tyre, Sidon, Philistia); 3:19 (Egypt and Edom); and Zech. 9:5-7 (Philistia). Note also the series of indictments against six of Israel's neighbors, plus Judah, in Amos 1:3-2:5.

Astonishing though it might be, God also offered redemption *for* Israel's enemies. The prime example of this among the Minor Prophets, of course, is the book of Jonah. Jonah's message, given him by God, was "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" (3:4; cf. 1:2). Nineveh and her king, upon hearing this message, did something which Israel repeatedly failed to do--repent. And God in turn "repented of the evil which he said he would do to them; and he did not do it" (3:10).

Beyond this specific example of Nineveh, there are many passages which indicate that God, through Israel, will draw "all nations" into a redeemed relationship with himself. Best known, perhaps, are the words of Micah 4:1-4 (cf. Is. 2:2-4): "... many nations shall come and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, ...that he may teach us his ways and we may walk in his paths.'" Also to be noted are Zephaniah 3:9-10 ("...all of them may call on the

name of the LORD") and Zechariah 2:11: "And many nations shall join themselves to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people."

The Agent and Center of God's Redemption. How and where shall God's redemption come to his people? From the time of Isaiah on, that question was answered in terms of a royal ruler from the family of David as God's agent to bring about redemption with Jerusalem/Zion as the center of that redemption.

Two passages announcing the new ruler whom God would raise up are of special note. The first, Micah 5:2-5a, has numerous exegetical challenges, yet many things are clear: The new ruler is to be sent by God ("come forth for me" v. 2). This ruler shall have strong ties to the people ("his brethren" v. 3) and their heritage ("whose origin is from old" v. 2). His work is that of a shepherd ("stand and feed his flock" v. 4), resulting in both the tranquility of his people ("they shall dwell secure" v. 4; "this shall be their peace" v. 5a) and his own widespread renown ("he shall be great to the ends of the earth" v. 4). The second passage is Zechariah 9:9-10. Here the "triumphal entry" of the king echoes Isaiah 40:1-11 and 52:9-10 and anticipates Mark 11:1-10. What is most striking, however, is his humility (v. 9). Moreover, his work will be to eliminate the weapons of war, not proliferate them (v. 10). As with Micah 5:2-6, this ruler shall establish God's peace.

Furthermore, the dominion of this ruler shall be worldwide ("from sea to sea" v. 10c); but it shall begin in Zion/Jerusalem (v. 9a). Other passages in the minor prophets locate the center of God's redemptive work there as well: Joel 2:32, 3:16-21; Obadiah 17, 21; Zephaniah 3:14-20; Haggai 2:6-9; and Zechariah 1:14-17, 2:6-12, among others. Micah 4:1-5 depicts not only the rebuilding

of the temple (v. 1), but a great pilgrimage of "many nations" to it to learn God's will for them (v. 2). There, God shall judge the world (v. 3a); and his righteous judgment shall lead to disarmament (v. 3b) and to absolute tranquility (v. 4).

But perhaps the most complete picture of all of the redeemed Zion is found in Zechariah 8:1-23, in a series of snapshots, as it were, of new life there. Zion is the LORD's abode, and it is to be faithful and holy (vs. 1-3). There the aged can sit outdoors and watch children playing in the streets (vs. 4-6). Exiles shall return to it (vs. 7-8). Its economy will be stable again (vs. 9-13). Justice will prevail in its courts (vs. 14-17). Worship will take place again there (vs. 18-19). Finally, "many peoples and strong nations"--outsiders--will ask to live in it, saying to Zion's citizens, "Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you" (vs. 20-23).

GOD'S FINAL WORD: THE PROMISE OF REDEMPTION

Diversity among the Minor Prophets and their Messages.

Taken one-by-one, the twelve minor prophets exhibit great individuality, both in the form and in the content of their messages. Such distinctiveness can be attributed, at least in part, to the fact that the minor prophets encompass three or more centuries of Israel's history, centuries which witness great events and changes in the lives of the people of God. The Assyrian threat to both Israel and Judah in the last half of the eighth century B.C. is the occasion for the messages of Amos, Hosea and Micah (and, in quite a different way, of Jonah). A century later came the fall of Assyria (Nahum), the rise of Babylon (Habakkuk), the complicity of Edom (Obadiah) and problems of all kinds within Judah

(Zephaniah). After the exile, initial enthusiasm for the restored community and its leaders (Haggai and Zechariah 1-8) gives way to a somber judgment on both (Malachi). Yet hope for the future, boldly and broadly depicted, remains (Joel and Zechariah 9-14).

"Promise" as the Unifying Feature of the Prophetic Witness. Within all this diversity, is there any unity to be found? The answer is "yes" -- in the overriding, enveloping word of promise for the future. B.S. Childs puts it this way:

Each [prophetic] book has its own canonical shape by which to render the traditions. Yet there are consistent theological patterns, and in all a message of forgiveness and future promise is voiced ...The effect [of having judgment-oracles followed by promise-oracles] is that the great variety of prophetic material has been ordered within a unified schema which functions in the end as a message of salvation.²

Similarly, R. E. Clements has observed:

When we look at the canonical collection of the Latter Prophets, we find that there is a certain connectedness between the different prophets, and signs that their preaching has been treated as a part of a larger whole. It is the conviction that all the prophets were speaking about the death and rebirth of Israel that has brought together prophecies which stretch across more than two centuries. ...Individual prophetic hopes and promises have become part of a much greater theme of 'promise' which came to be characteristic of prophecy as a whole.³

This trajectory toward hope may be found in the rest of the Old Testament as well. Thus, the Torah ends not only with the death of Moses but also with a vision of the "promised land" and the inauguration of Joshua as Moses' successor (Deut. 34). The Deuteronomic History (Joshua through 2 Kings) ends with the hopeful note of Jehoiachin's being released from prison and enjoying special privileges from the Babylonian king (2 Kings 25:27-30). The Chronicler's history concludes with the edict of Cyrus, the Persian conqueror of Babylon, allowing the people of God to return home from Exile (2 Chron. 36:22-23). Even the Psalms move from mostly laments in the first section to mostly hymns and songs of thanksgiving in the last section, concluding with the all-encompassing doxology of Psalm 150.

The emphasis of the minor prophets on God's once-and-future redemption is therefore in keeping with Scripture's fundamental understanding that God always intends to move his people from judgment to salvation, from despair to hope, from separation to redemption. Later generations certainly heard this overarching theme of hope, as witnessed by these words from a Jewish intertestamental "wise man" and from a New Testament apostle:

May the bones of the twelve prophets also send forth new life from the ground where they lie! For they put new heart into Jacob, and rescued the people by their confident hope. (Sirach 49:10)

The prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired about this salvation; ...It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things which have now been announced to you by those who preached the good news to you through the

Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which the angels long to look. (1 Pet. 1:10-12)

"He who has ears to hear, let him hear" -- even today.

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NOTES

1. A. Heschel, *The Prophets*. New York: Harper & Row, 1962, 224, 226.
2. B. S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985, 131, 238.
3. R. E. Clements, *Old Testament Theology*. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978, 143-144.

WHO IS A GOD LIKE UNTO THEE?: WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A PART OF GOD'S PLAN

Janet M. Fortner

THE WORLD OF THE PROPHET

Arrogance is perhaps the one word which comes to mind when one thinks of the attitudes of the nations of Israel and Judah in the seventh and eighth centuries B.C. But one could mention other sins of mind and practice: religious self-satisfaction, complacency, and certainty; love of pleasure; exploitation of others; materialism; and violence. These sins were the outcome of the one major sin of God's people: Idolatry. They had gone after other gods, put other gods in God's place; and, in so doing, had come to be like their gods. These are frighteningly *familiar* social phenomena!

When the writing (or classical) prophets make their appearance just before the mid-point of the eighth century B.C. with the prophecy of Amos, both Israel and Judah had ceased to be living witnesses to the nations around them. It may have been precisely this failure to fulfill their mission as a testimony to the watching world, a "light to the Gentiles" (Is. 42:6; 49:6), which occasioned the appearance of the writing prophets speaking on behalf of God, rejecting Israelite worship practices, condemning its lifestyle, foretelling its doom, as well as judging the Nations around them.¹

In the first half of the eighth century B.C., Assyria was in a period of decline due to ineffective rulers and problems

with her vassal states. This was the time of the long reigns of Uzziah (Azariah) in Judah (792-740 B.C.) and Jeroboam II in Israel (793-753 B.C.). Both states were able to enlarge their borders and to develop new commercial and trading interests, and they both experienced a time of golden prosperity. Ironically, it was in this time of prosperity that Amos, likely the first of the writing prophets, was called from tending sheep and trees to condemn the nations and to tend the erring flock of God.

The Judah and Israel of Amos' day were rich but rife with evil. Their religion was fully syncretistic, pagan, and idolatrous. However, because they continued to include Yahweh in their pantheon and were zealous observers of his cult, they were secure and complacent about their religion. They loved luxury and were materialistic, greedy, and exploitative. Their politics, like those of the world around, were power-based. They had become arrogant and congratulated themselves for blessings which *God* had given them. In a word, their religion, their nation, their ethics, their morals were bankrupt while they themselves remained blissfully, even purposefully, ignorant of their sin and the imminent danger in which it placed them. (And if Israel were wicked, how much more evil were the nations around her!) At a cultural and political "high tide," the Life was ebbing out of God's people.

THE BURDEN OF THE PROPHET

Onto this scene, the writing prophet of God was called. He was a man with a crushing burden. It was not a burden of his choosing. Often he did not even want it, but it was pressed upon him by his God. He saw with a clear eye the evils of the nations and, with perhaps an even clearer eye, the evils of God's people. The eye with which he saw and

the voice with which he spoke were God's. The heart which burned within him was the heart of God. So the prophet launched an attack against what he saw, against things which would destroy men, things which God hated: arrogance, idolatry, love of power, greed, materialism, exploitation, cultism, complacency, and self-satisfaction. He spoke to man on behalf of God. And, on some occasions, he pleaded with God on behalf of the people (e.g., Amos 7).

The prophet was a man facing the gravest difficulties. He acknowledged the great evils committed by other nations, but he grieved over the even greater evils committed by his own people. He knew Israel's righteous few were suffering at the hands of their brothers, and he realized that these few righteous ones would suffer even more at the hands of the nations who came at God's command to punish Israel (Habakkuk).

In essence, the prophet recognized that he and the righteous remnant were caught between two corrupt world views and were struggling to live by faith in an almost overpowering situation. The *apparently* more overwhelming world view was that of the nations: thoroughly polytheistic, idolatrous, pagan, violent, and sensual. However, the more immediate, and hence more dangerous, one for the righteous man was the world view of God's own people--a Yahwistic religion compromised and paganized by the incorporation of elements from the larger, Gentile world--idolatrous, yet religiously self-satisfied, materialistic, exploitative, pleasure-loving, and materialistic.

The Man of God came into the vortex created by these two world views to condemn them both. Neither was acceptable to God; neither would be spared. But the people of God stood under greater condemnation because they had known the Source of all life, the Living God, and had

chosen to worship and serve "vanities." They alone of the peoples of the earth had been chosen, created a people, brought under the wings of the Almighty, and had experienced special revelation and a special relationship. They were a "treasured possession," "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:5, 6). Because of this, they had the special responsibility to live separately, differently, as witnesses *for* God *before* the pagan nations.

Not only had Israel and Judah failed to live holy lives before God and the nations, they incorporated pagan practices and ideas into their politics, their religion, their ethics, their morals, and had become *like* the nations around them. Doubtless, the prophet was called to condemn the pagan nations, but he saved his most ardent call to repentance, his most scathing rebuke, and his direst threat for God's own polluted people. Ezekiel actually found Jerusalem more wicked than the nations surrounding her (5:5-7). Ezekiel and Jeremiah found Jerusalem so evil that even the intervention of Moses or Samuel, who were the great mediators of the Old Covenant, or of Noah, Daniel, and Job, who were the great righteous and wise men of the Old Testament, would not suffice to turn God from his destruction of her (Ezek. 14:14, 21; Jer. 15:1).

Sometimes the prophet was a rallying point for the remnant of God's people who remained faithful; at other times, he stood alone before an almost solid consensus on the part of the pagan world and of his own people which made it clear to him that he was unwanted, unneeded, and out of step with the times. Whether alone or supported by others of God's people, he had seen the situation clearly from the perspective of God. He knew the final outcome. He had to continue the prophetic outcry and the prophetic life. Pained at the call to testify against his people whom he loved, the prophet was more pained at the sins they had

committed and at their rejection of God. His position was clear: "The Sovereign Lord has spoken--who can but prophesy?" (Amos 3:8).

THE MODERN WORLD VIEW

All times and all nations have world views. A world view determines the categories with which we organize information and beliefs, the things we value, and the things we despise. Our modern world view has been in the making for centuries. We have not the time or space to trace out here all its elements and their sources, but one thing must surely be clear to us: it is as idolatrous as Judah and Israel ever were. If the ancient world appreciated wisdom, might, and wealth, we today cherish them as well.²

But we have enlisted them in service of our modern god, *The Self*.

In a recent television survey of teens' attitudes toward God, one girl of about fifteen years responded that she did not think much about God. In fact, she guessed that she was her own god. Basically, she just wanted to be "happy." This emphasis upon self and its "pursuit of happiness" is very old. It certainly predates Jefferson's Declaration of Independence and arguably can be traced to the Renaissance. In the modern West, the Religion of the Self takes many forms, but in one way or another they all share Ayn Rand's view that the "achievement of his own happiness is man's highest moral purpose."³ The influence of this Religion of the Self is felt in all disciplines: history, education, the sciences, the social sciences, and *religion*--even ours!

As a consequence of our worship of this other god and placing all our values at his service, we give silent assent to, or even participate in, all the sins which the god's

worship promotes: love of pleasure; materialism; exploitation of the physical world and of persons; trust in power politics; and religious certainty, self-satisfaction, and complacency. A *secular* philosopher has compared America unfavorably to the former Soviet Union in regards to what the two nations believed (and, in our case, still believe) most firmly. Both the USA and the USSR were characterized as materialist and sensualist.⁴ Both nations have accepted the ultimate material nature of the world, and both have sought above all else to satisfy the sensual desires of their citizens.

It should also be clear to us that we live in a world in which the worship and values of a Yahwistic religion are once again (or, perhaps, *still*) compromised. We continually incorporate into our religion, our ethics, our morals as many of the world's values and practices as we dare. Our love of luxury and pleasure tells our children that the basic reality of the world and its highest values are actually material. Our treatment of our fellowman communicates that laying down one's life for one's neighbor is a fiction or, even worse, "codependent." Our assent to the exploitation of natural resources indicates the poverty of our stewardship of God's world. We substitute careful doctrinal practice for a fervent, sacrificial relationship with Almighty God. We *live* as if the material world were all there is! We *act* as if our happiness were our chief aim! How is it we are surprised when our children wholeheartedly embrace the beliefs and practices of the world? When they meekly accept and practice a compromised, even if Yahwistic, religion?

WE STAND IN THE PLACE OF THE PROPHET

The purpose of this brief study, meant to be indicative rather than definitive, is to suggest that we, like the prophets, stand hard pressed by two world views: one belonging to the pagan world and one held by a compromised Yahwistic religion. With respect to both of these world views, we must stand in the "place of the prophet." That is what it means to be part of God's plan.

Whatever particular life-choices we may make, whether we are stay-at-home wives or working mothers, we must make sure our choices *contribute to* (not hinder) our speaking to our families, our nation, our time, with a "prophetic voice." If our choices compromise us or our witness to each other and to the world, they are wrong ones. If our choices place us outside the prophet tradition of living separately and differently from the world and witnessing to it, they are wrong ones. If our life choices make us more like the world or like compromised religion (*wherever* it is found), then they are wrong ones.

Like the prophet, we must seek, first of all, to live lives which are consistent with the Words and Ways of God, lives which are as committed in heart and body as they are careful in religious doctrine and practice. Like the prophet, we must be people who are convinced that there is a Power greater than the material powers of earth and which will bring judgment and retribution upon those who "do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (1 Thess. 1:8). Like the prophet, we must "pray without ceasing," believing that God will work his will in spite of, even *in and through*, the nations of the world in the twenty-first century as he did in the eighth, seventh, and sixth centuries B.C. Like the prophet, we must not confuse our patriotism with commitment to God. The prophet's

commitment to God often meant that the prophet found himself speaking against his own government and viewed by his contemporaries as unpatriotic and even traitorous.

Like the prophet, we must not be deceived, but must *see* clearly the threats to the Way of Life which we have chosen and to our souls and those of our children. Like the prophet, we must teach our children that following God is *not* primarily a matter of following this set of rules versus that set, but rather it is first and foremost a matter of choosing Who shall be our God and whose world-view we shall live, and *die*, by. Like the prophet, we must make the hard choices and then live by them--live by them in such a way that our ethics, our morals, our lives and our words are a testimony to the decaying religious tradition which we have rejected as well as a witness to the pagan nations in which we find ourselves.

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NOTES

1. Cf. Is. 8:16-20; Hab. 2:2-3; Amos 8:1.
2. Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets: An Introduction* (New York: Harper & Row, Harper Torchbooks, 1962), 8.
3. Ayn Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness: A New Concept of Egoism* (New York: The New American Library, An NAL Books, 1962), 23.
4. Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, edited by Allan Bloom (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1947, 1980).

Wendell Willis

On the surface, Christians today would seem to have as little in common with Amos of Tekoa as one could imagine. He lived over 2,700 years ago, on another continent. He was an uneducated farmer (a shepherd and tender of fig trees). He spoke to a king, not a president. So one question which quickly comes to mind is "Why Amos?"

The obvious answer is that Amos is part of the Bible, which we regard as "Holy Scripture" and therefore of abiding importance for God's people. But then, "Of the 66 books of the Bible, why Amos?" Why not Paul, or Jesus, or at least the eloquent teaching of Isaiah? My own response is that for all our differences with Amos (and they are notable) we are more similar than we imagine--or wish. I challenge us all to give Amos a hearing because it is a powerful book.

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Amos. This short book is a collection of independently understandable oracles (Amos called them "words") delivered orally by the prophet of visions he received over an unknown period of time in the middle of the eighth-century before Christ. This makes Amos one of the first of the great prophetic books of the Old Testament. Vital to a full appreciation of Amos is to realize that these words were first *spoken* to a gathered audience of God's people. This means they were first designed to be *heard*

and their reading is secondary. Some of their very powerful impact is lessened by reading them.

The second stage of the book of Amos is that these visions were collected, preserved and put into *written* form. To them were added two brief narratives about the prophet himself (1:1,2 and 7:10-17). Since these are in the third person, it is probable that Amos himself did not add them, and so the final collection was not by Amos, but perhaps a disciple of his. In this written stage, as we have it today, his words are to be read and understood as a unity.

The third stage is that this collection of oracles, visions and narratives were *preserved* in Israel after the original reason for their existence had become past history! The disaster which Amos warned about came true in 721 B. C., so why did later generations preserve his warnings? (Such predictions, one commentator said, would have the value of last evening's theater ticket!) Obviously it is because the people of God understood that these words had ongoing value as divine instruction about living, as they do still today.

The Setting. Amos' words were not spoken in a vacuum, but were delivered to a specific people who lived in a particular time and place. To appreciate the intent of these words when God first gave them to Amos, it is essential to understand the people to whom they were spoken first, so a brief historical review is useful.

Amos prophesied during the reigns of Jeroboam II in North Israel (786-746 B. C.) and Uzziah in Judah (781-740 B. C.) This is just over a century following the death of Solomon. Although a citizen of the southern kingdom, Amos was commissioned to speak in the northern nation of Israel. North Israel represented a rebellion against the Davidic Kingship, established by God, and it featured a counterfeit religious system to stop its residents from

pilgrimage to Jerusalem. There is, not surprisingly, no positive evaluation of North Israel in the Old Testament.

However, if one were to look at this kingdom "objectively" (a peculiarly modern desire, which the biblical prophets and teachers would find completely mistaken) as a modern historian might do, Jeroboam's nation might have a different score card.

At the end of the ninth-century, external pressure once made against Israel from its northern neighbor, Syria (called Aram or Damascus), diminished, because Assyria, on the eastern border of Syria had defeated that nation. This gave enough of a power vacuum to allow Israel to expand (2 Kings 13:25; 14:25) until Assyria began to put pressure on Israel directly. Finally, in 721, Shalmaneser captured Samaria, and took the Israelite ruling class into captivity (which fulfilled the oracles of Amos, but that gets us ahead of our story!).

Prior to the kingship of Saul, Israel was a patriarchal society, most like a collection of tribes, which followed a basically nomadic life. But under the kingship it became more like a feudal state, with strict social stratification, and a sharp division among classes.

In the time of Amos, there was a ruling, wealthy class consisting of the king and his friends (3-6% of the populace is one estimate) who controlled the land and the economy--and the religious life. Understandably they viewed economic prosperity and military success as proof of God's approval of Israel's life. The majority (80+%) of the population were peasants, most like tenant farmers, who produced the agriculture of the land, but had no hope of ever rising above their desperate financial circumstances.

These social realities had serious consequences. The ruling classes organized society to keep the poor restricted in their hopeless place, although allowing them to be "free."

This was done by controlling the prices paid for necessities. By dividing all the things necessary for agriculture, and charging high rent on each part, it was possible that those peasants who produced successfully could still lose financial ground each year. The result was, as in American sharecropping, that one could actually go deeper into debt while living frugally and producing successfully! But to the ruling class, peasant needs and wishes were not serious concerns. This assessment is clear in Amos where the rulers are indicted for neglect of the poor, denial of justice and personal extravagance in living.

Of course, the ruling classes would not have seen their nation this way at all. They were confident that God was "with them" in their national life. They kept the appointed religious festivals gladly, made pilgrimages, and supported the central religious shrine at Bethel (or "house of God"), and they looked forward to even better times when the "Day of the Lord" came. They envisioned this day as a time of national triumph and prosperity, when Israel would be vindicated over all its (and thus God's!) enemies. In short, whether eighth-century Israel was a blessing or a bane, depended on whose evaluation you accept, the rulers or God's!

One additional point is important for understanding this book. Today we think of the prophets as few and far between--because we only read of a limited number in the Old Testament. But to understand Amos, we must realize that "prophets" were a common part of daily life under the kingship in both Israel and Judah. Every king had his court "prophets", who were anticipated to support the national life and the king's political ambitions (read 1 Kings 22). It is precisely this accepted association of the prophet and national ruler which made Amos a problem. He insists upon doing the work of a prophet, but turns his criticism on the

leaders of Israel, rather than the national enemies. Like many of us, the national leaders were pleased to have God's judgment promised--as long as it was aimed at others!

Outline of Amos. There are several possible outlines of the book of Amos, and one should consult the commentaries to see the range of options and reasons for them. Without going into great detail, one outline that could be used is:

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 1: 1,2 | <i>The superscription</i> , or heading introduces the prophet, his background, and states the theme of the book. |
| 1: 3--2; 16 | <i>The first major section</i> of the book, contains the eight oracles against the nations. |
| 3: 1-6; 14 | <i>Second major section</i> , which gives additional oracles and accusations against Israel. |
| 7:1-9:15 | <i>Third major section</i> containing a series of visions, a report of the prophet's call, and a prophecy of salvation. |

COMMENTS ON MAJOR UNITS

The Superscription (1: 1,2) places Amos in the time of Uzziah king of Judah and Jeroboam, king of Israel, and dates his visions/oracles "two years before the earthquake." Amos is described only as a "shepherd" from Tekoa, a rural village in Judah (we learn more in chapter 7 about Amos' life before God chose him to be a prophet). This superscription makes clear that the oracles of Amos occurred well before the writing of the book (which must have been at least two years later).

The theme of Amos' message is summarized in v. 2, that God roars/ thunders judgment and the "heat" of his fierce judgment evaporates the key features of the land of Israel.

The First Major Section (1:3-2:5) contains eight oracles of judgment on the nations which surround Israel, which are united by their common form and arrangement. Each oracle begins, "Thus says the Lord" followed by a numerical pattern, "for 3 sins, even for four." In each, God's judgment is coming because of sins of each nation which violates basic ethical standards. The debate is whether these imply that God had some relationship with nations other than Israel, and some moral standards for them which they have violated.

In their present arrangement, we see a conscious plan, moving around the perimeter of the nation of North Israel, before finally zeroing in on Israel itself (2:6-15), with increased specificity and intensity. Clearly the present arrangement is a creative rhetorical style, designed to create in the Israelite hearers their "righteous assent" to the condemnation of other nations for their cruel lives (including sister Judah). But just as they have "amened" the rebuke of Judah, Amos turns his judgment on the nation of Israel. (Stylistically, it is like Nathan's rebuke of David in 2 Samuel 12.) Already here we can see both the *object* of the prophetic critique in Amos (it is Israel) and *those sins* which will be emphasized as the grounds of divine judgment (abuse of the helpless and the poor).

It is noteworthy that in 2: 6-16 where Amos speaks God's condemnation of Israel, that what he gives as sins worthy of judgment has to do with abuse of the poor and the slaves--for God (and thus Amos) this is a religious issue. In 2: 9-12 Amos surveys the national history, but he sees it as repeated rejection of God's will. (See Acts 7 where Stephen does a similar critique.)

The Second Major Section (3:1-6:16) is more diverse in its content both in terms of the topics discussed and the style of presentation. In these chapters there are several

oracles: there is a mimic of a "call to worship" (4: 4), there is a lament (5:1,2), two "woes" (5:18-20; 6:1-7), some wisdom style materials (3:3-6), and two doxologies (4:13; 5: 8,9).

It is in this section where we learn most about the offenses of Israel that has led God to threaten judgment. The powerful in Israel have oppressed the poor and crushed the needy (4:1; 5:11-12), and have kept them from having justice in the courts (5:7,15). At the same time others have lived in opulence with stone mansions, lush vineyards, (5: 11), or they lounge on ivory couches, eating well-fattened stock, enjoy good music and excessive drink (6:4-6), disdainful of the plight of those who are poor.

Another charge made repeatedly in this section is that even as this injustice is tolerated and exploited in the nation, worship continues as if nothing were wrong. This is clear in the mocking mimicry of a "call to worship" in 4: 4, "come to the House of God (Bethel) --and sin!" The nation is very regular in meeting its ceremonial commitments (4:4, 5) and enjoys doing so. But because their worship is not associated with a concern for justice, God "hates" these worship gatherings (5:21, 26), and would prefer Israel return to the time of the desert wandering, when there was not a temple of God.

A third charge made here is that Israel is too complacent about their relationship with God. They presume upon God's favor too strongly. Thus they refused to learn from the lessons which God had sought to teach them in the past when he sent punishments such as drought or flood, blight and plague and even military defeat (4:6-11). Because Israel presumes that "God is on our side" it regards its present prosperity as a "Godsend" and anticipates an even fuller blessing in the future, at the "Day of the Lord."

The "Day of the Lord" apparently had acquired a sense of "Good times a'coming" in popular Israelite belief. This would be the time when God would openly elevate Israel above all the nations, and grant unlimited prosperity to his people. It was probably tied to expectations raised and nurtured in worship. But through Amos, God warns that Israel then is going to get something much different than it expects (5:18-20), for this day will not be prosperity, but perdition, "pitch dark, without a ray of brightness."

The Third Section (7:1--9:15) is composed of three visions (the first-7:1-9-having three parts; 8:1-13 and 9:1-10), a biographical sketch of Amos' encounter with Amaziah, priest of Bethel (7:10-17), and a concluding word of restoration (9: 11-15). A common thread to all three chapters is the stress on the "Lord YHWH" (occurs 11 of 20 times in this third of the book!)

The visions reinforce the point made in Amos' oracles--God is going to bring full destruction on Israel, he has judged them and found them wanting. (this is seen in the trilogy of parables in 7:1-9, "I will spare them no longer" and in the judgment of the basket of ripe fruit, 8: 2). The last vision (9:1-4) describes God's judgment as centered upon the cultus of Israel--the altar. The great irony is that the horns of this altar were a place of protected refuge in Israel, and yet God is so distressed at the life of the nation that even at that place they will meet judgment--from God himself!

The encounter of Amos with the priest Amaziah in 7:10-17 provides a small amount of additional information about the prophet. Here we are told that his prophetic ministry was seen as subversive to the nation by Jeroboam, the king. It seems clear that in the prosperous, expanding nation of Israel, such sermons were seen as disloyal, as well as discouraging. Just as would be true in most countries, it

was assumed that the preachers would support the nation's interests--especially if the nation regarded itself as favored by God! (One of the best illustrations of this tension is in the movie, *Chariots of Fire*, where Eric Lidell's refusal to run on Sunday was seen as treasonous by the British government).

In this encounter, we also learn that Amos had not been a prophet before his call by God to this mission (7:14), but a herdsman and orchard worker (whether this means Amos was from the poorer class or not is hotly debated). In any event, it is clear that Amos claims his authority is not one of profession, but of divine call. It is his awareness that God has given him his mission that leads Amos to contrast what the royal court would like preached (7:16) and what he feels he is compelled to say (7:11). It is because Amaziah, the priest at the royal supported shrine at Bethel, seeks to stifle this message that Amos warns that God will punish Amaziah's family (7:17).

Finally there is in Amos 9:11-15 a word of future hope for Israel as God's people. Because this hope stands in such stark relief to the threat of divine judgment, many have suggested that it was not part of the original book of Amos. Previously this was almost a uniform view of scholarship, but in recent decades has come under criticism for retailoring Amos to say what the scholars felt he must have said. (A good survey of this is found in Hasel).

Taking the present book as a whole, however, this final section seems necessary if God can be relied upon not only to punish sin, but to restore the devastated (a consistent theme in the Bible). This hopeful conclusion does break the unrelieved threat of the rest of the book, but it certainly does not lessen the degree of punishment that Israel must pass through.

THE MESSAGE OF AMOS

It is somewhat a questionable procedure to give a summary of the meaning of a biblical book. This presents two dangers: First, we may impose our own biases upon the reader who ought to hear what the Bible says itself, apart from human interpretations. Second, this may "short-circuit" the learning process, so that the reader only looks at some selected examples rather than considering the whole book--rather like the "Reader's Digest" version of a novel!

However, it is also true that sometimes we must know what we are looking for before we see it. This is especially true of the Old Testament today, for no longer can we assume a familiarity with the contents of these books, much less with the history and ideas found behind the texts. So with an awareness of the dangers of doing so, perhaps a brief summary of Amos' message can be useful.

The most notable thing in Amos is that the book has very little to say in criticism about the worship in Israel. Most of the writing prophets attack God's people for idolatry, and running after the gods of neighboring nations. This is not the case in Amos, who has very little to say about idolatry (and we must remember that he gave his message to the counterfeit shrine at Bethel, which Jeroboam I had established expressly to lead people away from worship at the authorized temple in Jerusalem! 1 Kings 12:26-33).

Amos' oracles deal almost altogether with social and economic sins in the nation. The message of Amos can be summarized as an attack upon the ruling classes of Israel for three major types of sins. The first of these is their corruption of the markets and manipulation of the economy so that the poor are unable to live. The clearest of these

criticisms is in 8:4-6, which among other sins mentions false scales (see Prov. 11:1).

The second type of sin is the oppression of the poor peasantry and a denial of justice to them. If the powerful are abusive of the powerless, their only hope is that the courts will protect them. But in North Israel the protection for the poor provided in the Law of Moses had failed because the poor were denied access to the courts--or if they made a legal plea, they did not receive justice. Five times in the Old Testament it is said that God "arises" and of those four have to do with his anger over the mistreatment of the poor (Ps. 12:5; 68:6; 76:9; 102:13,20; Is. 2:19, 21).

Here we must remember that in the Bible "justice" does not mean "impartiality in decision" (as in the American legal system, for whom our symbol is blindfolded Justice with scales in her extended hand). Rather for Amos, and indeed the Bible as a whole, "justice" is the establishment of what is fair or "just." That is why those national leaders who succeeded Joshua and gave deliverance to Israel when the nation was endangered are called "judges" and were believed to bring "justice" to Israel.

Finally, the third category of sin which Amos criticizes are those who enjoy luxury and are unconcerned about the destitution of others. They do not see any connection between their own extravagancies and the sufferings of others (see 6:4-6 which describes their revelry and the desperate needs of the poor). Like Scrooge in Dicken's *Christmas Carol*, they are willfully blind of the needs of other people.

John Gipson once wrote of his experience at the exclusive housing area of Daytona Beach, called Spruce Creek, where the traffic signs read: "Aircraft have right of way." This is because each home has a hangar for private

airplanes (to escalate conspicuous consumerism beyond a three car garage). But adjoining Spruce Creek is an impoverished area where the median income is \$11,000 annually (well below poverty level). Gipson comments; "I saw the world in microcosm. The 'haves' and the 'have nots' the rich and the poor, the influential and the powerless." He points to the obvious similarities found in Amos 6.

To this repressive situation, and with this pointed message, Amos spoke God's message in the late eighth-century warning of unavoidable disaster. We may say that it was possible for Israel to escape disaster through repentance, but Amos' message sees this theoretical possibility as so slim that it did not merit serious consideration. It would be like saying that one could bat .900 for the season, which is mathematically true, but which no one in any league expects!

Amos' message that what God's people do with their lives can revoke the acceptability of their worship is not an innovation with him. We are past the time when one could place in contrast the "ethical monotheism" of the prophets with the cultic religion of the priests. The law of Moses gave numerous regulations designed to protect the poor of the land from abuse, and the temple made provision for differing sacrifices based upon the fiscal power of the poor. The concern that daily life reflect the character of God is characteristic of the Bible as a whole. Just as God heard the cries of the oppressed Israelites in Egypt, who lacked the necessities of life, who experienced slavery rather than justice, and who had no hope, so too, he has Amos point out the same sins, the same shameful realities within the nation of Israel. Here too, he promises that he will bring judgment upon oppressors and vindicate the oppressed.

One of my teachers at S.M.U. was Dr. Schubert Ogden, a brilliant man whose very prolific teaching and publishing

career focused upon the issues of epistemology--how one may know. He has been particularly renowned for his critical examination of how one may speak about God in contemporary language. Recently he retired, and in an interview, he was asked if he had his career ahead of him if he would do anything different (who would be arrogant enough to say, "No, nothing different!").

Ogden said that he was satisfied with how he had done his theological study and work, but he wished that he had given equal time to the question of "justice" as well as the question of truth. While we in the churches of Christ would share little with Dr. Ogden's philosophical interests, I would suggest that this reply might be as appropriate for us as for him. At least as Amos tells us, God is every bit as concerned with how his people treat others, especially the poor and neglected as he is with their religious rituals and conduct. Perhaps that is the greatest lesson he has for us in this day as well.

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Phil McMillion

INTRODUCTION

Social justice, or the lack of justice, is one of the great issues of our day. We are saddened and even outraged by pictures of injustice from around the world. We see children starving in Africa while we live in plenty. We see the powerless mistreated, and we see the poor oppressed. We want to do something to right these abuses, and yet the problems seem to continue unchecked. In our own country, the problems of injustice, hunger, poverty, and prejudice continue in spite of every effort to help. In many cases, Christians have a negative response to government efforts to deal with these problems. How should Christians respond to problems of social justice? These questions are certainly not new. They have been around since Old Testament times. I would like to look at some Old Testament passages to see if they can give us a foundation for our understanding today.

According to Isaiah 30:18, the Lord is a God of justice. One of the basic elements of God's very nature is justice. Deuteronomy 32:4 goes even further in developing this picture of God. God is just in all his ways. The Lord is a God of faithfulness and is without iniquity. He is described as both just and right. This same theme of God's just nature is celebrated in Psalm 111. God is praised because his works are just. All his actions are carried out in faithfulness

and uprightness. Both Psalms 33:5 and 37:28 tell that the Lord loves justice.

One of the most powerful events in the Old Testament is the Exodus from Egypt. Here the Lord demonstrates his concern for justice by freeing a group of oppressed slaves from Egyptian bondage. God reveals his own nature in the justice that he gives to Israel. God's action also calls for a response on the part of the people. Because God is just, his people are to be just. God's nature should make an imprint on the nature of his people.

This idea is developed especially in passages such as Leviticus 19. God's people are to be holy because the Lord is holy. Israel's response to God is to show itself in the way they live and in the way they interact with each other. Their holiness demonstrates itself in very practical ways. Do not oppress your neighbor, verse 13. Do not mistreat the deaf or blind, verse 14. Do no injustice in judgment, verse 15. Love your neighbor as yourself, verse 18. In Leviticus 19:33-34, Israel is commanded not to mistreat the stranger, because they knew what it was like to be a stranger in Egypt. I wonder how it would influence our views on social justice, if we experienced the real need for social justice?

Scattered throughout the Old Testament are numerous passages that indicate God's concern for how people treat each other. This is what social justice is really all about. One good example is found in Deuteronomy 25:13-16. The people are warned not to have two kinds of weights in their bag. The question here is, What does that mean? In the context it is clear that this is about business transactions. The merchant is not to use one measure for buying and another for selling. The temptation would be to use one measure for the merchant's advantage in selling and another for an advantage in buying. According to the law, they should have only one measure that would be fair to both

sides. At first, this might appear to be dealing with a purely business transaction which has little to do with God. This law, however, shows that God is concerned with fairness and justice in everyday life. God is a God who cares about individuals and with how they treat each other in every aspect of their lives.

SOCIETY IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

One great crisis in ancient Israel was the division of the kingdom after the death of Solomon. The northern kingdom often experienced political instability as leadership changed. Of the nineteen kings in the northern kingdom, nine of them died violent deaths. One exception to this pattern of instability was the rule of Jeroboam II from 786-746 B.C. Jeroboam II was a strong ruler who had a long and peaceful reign. Under his leadership, the northern kingdom experienced a renewed prosperity. The kingdom of Israel was blessed with larger and more fertile territory than the kingdom of Judah to the south. Trade and commerce blossomed under the long reign of Jeroboam II. Merchants and traders grew wealthy, and many in society prospered. Many finely decorated houses from this time period have been excavated by archaeologists, and these serve to illustrate the wealth that was being amassed by some during this period.

In spite of the prosperity of the merchants, there was also a dark side to this period. As is often the case, not all participated in this rising tide of wealth. Some were gaining their new-found wealth by taking advantage of others. While some people got richer and richer, others became poorer and poorer. This was the situation by the middle of the 700s B.C. when the prophets Amos, Hosea, and Micah came on the scene.

THE PROPHETS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

The prophet Amos was one of the most outspoken critics of the injustices of his age. Amos was called by God about halfway through the long reign of Jeroboam II. Amos was from the village of Tekoa south of Jerusalem, but he was sent to be God's spokesman to the northern kingdom of Israel.

The opening section of the book of Amos, chapters 1:3-2:3, contains a series of messages against the nations around Israel. God pronounces judgment on these nations because of the inhumane treatment of their fellow human beings. The common thread in all of these is that God expects certain basic standards of justice and humanity from all people and nations. When these nations violated the Lord's standards, they were brought under God's judgment. God demanded justice even from the pagan nations, and he expected, yes demanded, even more from his own people who were in a close covenant relationship with him. This is clearly taught in Amos 3:1-2. God reminded the people, through the prophet Amos, that he had brought them out of the land of Egypt. The Lord had shown kindness and mercy by delivering the people from slavery. The Lord had established his covenant with the people, and they were to show their gratitude by being obedient to God's will. The people had a special relationship with the Lord, but this also brought special responsibilities and obligations. When God says "you only have I known" in Amos 3:2, this means that God has a special covenant relationship with Israel; and, they, in turn, will be held accountable for their actions.

Amos mentions a number of specific actions that bring forth God's punishment on Israel. One of the first is found in Amos 2:6 where he says that Israel "sells the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes." This probably

refers to casting people into prison or selling them into slavery because they cannot pay their debts. The first is a sum of silver, and this could be quite a large sum, but no specific amount is given. The second line is even more striking. The poor, who have no means to repay even the smallest debts, are sold into slavery to repay the price of a pair of sandals. No matter how small the debt, there is no forgiveness, no extension of time, and no mercy. The people cared little for the poor. In fact, verse 7 says they "trample the head of the poor into the dust and turn aside the way of the afflicted." No one is concerned about justice for the poor. They are pushed aside, and their cases go unheard.

It is not only the men in the leadership who are guilty of oppressing the poor. The rich wives of the best families also took part in this systematic injustice. They eat and drink and enjoy the luxurious life. They expect others to wait on their every whim. How did they get such wealth? Amos says it was by crushing the needy. The Lord has promised that their actions will not go unpunished. When God brings judgment, the wealthy will not escape. They will be taken away just like the poor they have treated so harshly.

Another picture of the luxury enjoyed by some in Israel is found in Amos 6:4-7. Here, Amos goes into some detail about the good things in this life that are enjoyed by some of the wealthy in Israel. They lie upon beds of ivory. This probably refers to beds decorated with expensive inlaid ivory. Such beds have been found in archaeological excavations of ruins from this time period. The prophet also says that they eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall. Not only can these people afford to eat meat regularly, but they have only the choicest animals, carefully selected and fattened for slaughter. These people

are no longer burdened with simply scratching out a living day to day. They now have leisure time for culture and music. They drink their wine from the finest bowls, and their skin is anointed with the most expensive scented oils. It is important to note here that the prophet does not make a blanket condemnation of any enjoyment of the finer things in life. The reason for the condemnation of these people is made clear in Amos 6:7. These people have given themselves every possible luxury but have given no thought at all to those who are living in abject poverty. There is no concern for the destruction of society that is being caused by the oppression of the poor.

In Amos 5:12, the prophet recounts the sins of the leaders. He states that they afflict the righteous, and they take bribes. They turn aside the poor in the gate. The city gate was the usual place where the elders and leaders sat to discuss the business of the city. When people had a problem or a dispute, they brought it to the elders in the gate for a decision. This passage suggests that the complaint of the poor would not receive a fair hearing because they could not afford to pay a bribe. Without the money for a payoff, there would be no chance that their case would be resolved. What a sad state of affairs when God's people must have a bribe to do what is right and just.

One final passage in Amos is found in Amos 8:4-6. The people are so greedy for gain that they can hardly wait for the Sabbath to be over because it is interfering with their business. They do not care about the observance of God's law. They just want to make more money. Not only do they want to reopen their businesses, but they plan to use dishonest practices to improve on even bigger gain. That simply means they will make the amount they are selling smaller but will raise the price higher. That sounds very modern does it not?

The prophet Micah lived a few years later in the southern kingdom of Judah. His preaching shows that he saw many of the same problems in the southern kingdom that Amos had seen in the northern kingdom of Israel. In Micah 2:1-2, the prophet condemns those who lie awake at night devising what wickedness they can perform the next day. They covet the property of others, and because they are rich and powerful, they take it. Micah 3:9-12 shows that bribery and the abuse of power are prevalent in the southern kingdom just as they were in Israel.

The prophets saw the evils and injustices of their day, and they spoke out against them. The prophets preached that God's judgment was coming because of these sins. The prophets realized that these were not simply social problems. These injustices were symptoms of a much deeper problem which was a turning away from God. People were ignoring God's law. That was why they could treat other people in this shameful way. Hosea says it best when he proclaims there is "no knowledge of God in the land" (4:1). Intellectually the people still knew God, but they were not allowing that knowledge to influence their lives. According to the prophets, true knowledge of God must change people's lives. Knowledge that does not change one's life is not real. It is not complete knowledge in the sense that the Old Testament uses the word.

THE PROPHETS IN THE MODERN WORLD

What does all this mean in our modern world. That is an important question that must be addressed if this study is to have a practical application. The prophets reveal great principles about the nature of God and the response that God expects from human beings. Those great principles have not changed, and they are just as valid today as they

ever were. The challenge for us is to look at our own situation. We must see if we face similar problems in our own day. When we do find similarities, we must have the courage to apply the principles in our lives today.

If one begins with the basic principles found in Amos, the prophet condemns the nations for their inhumanity toward each other. It is not hard to find examples of similar inhumanities today. All one needs to do is pick up the newspaper or turn on the evening news. Each week brings a new location with atrocities apparently worse than the ones before. There seems to be no limit to the terrors and brutalities one group can bring on another. The message of the prophet was that God does care about these injustices. God expects humane treatment of others from all of his creation. Much of our modern world has lost sight of this concern. From eastern Europe, to Africa, to southeast Asia people are killing and mistreating each other. We often wonder what we can do. First, and perhaps foremost, we can pray. We can ask God to intervene and end these tragedies. Second, we can express our concern to our leaders. Third, we can do what we can to send aid and relief. In many parts of the world, the most basic supplies such as aspirin, tylenol, vitamins, and soap are difficult or impossible to get. Small scale efforts may make a big difference in some places.

What about the application of some of these principles closer to home? Amos said that the rich were getting richer and the poor were getting poorer. Does that still happen today? Sometimes it does. What can we do about it? How can we show God's concern for the poor. I believe it will take more than just passing out Christmas baskets. In fact, it will take more than just giving out money. There are sometimes emergencies when someone needs extra money to see them through a crisis. Over the long haul, however,

this is not the only way to help the poor. We will need to get involved in longer term relationships. This is harder than just handing out money, but it does more good. We can help people develop self-confidence. We can teach basic job skills such as how to fill out an application, how to go for an interview, how to dress for a job, and many other skills we take for granted. We may have to find new methods to help the poor, but it has to begin with concern and awareness. We must recognize those who need help, and we must care about them. God cared when people were poor and downtrodden, and we must care, too.

We must also remember that we are in a different situation from the days of Amos because we now know the Good News of Jesus Christ. We should be concerned to help the poor in physical ways, but we must not stop there. We must also preach and teach the gospel. To help the poor physically while leaving them starving spiritually would be a tragedy. We must never forget that the gospel of Christ is the greatest gift of all. We must seek to help the poor both physically and spiritually and minister to the whole person.

Amos also warned against the dangers of bribery and injustice in the courts. Is that still a problem in our day? I am afraid that it is. We do not often call it bribery anymore, but money has enormous power and influence at the highest levels of state and even national government. Not every decision is based on the highest principles of justice. We can stay informed about what is happening in our own government. When decisions look unfair, we should question them. We should write our elected officials. We must know our leaders, and we must hold them accountable. We may have to start reading the editorial page in the newspaper. We may have to read the political commentaries in order to learn what is happening. If we are to press for justice, we must be informed. More and more extremist

groups with their own secular agendas are pressing their causes in the halls of power today. If we do not speak up, we may one day discover that Christians again have become a persecuted minority. We need to call for justice and fairness for all peoples, or there may some day be justice for none. God calls for justice and equity for all people, and surely as Christians we can do no less.

Another issue raised by Amos is one that makes us all a bit uncomfortable. That is the issue raised in Amos 6:4-7 of the Israelites who had all the good things in life for themselves but had no concern for the poor and the oppressed. This is something that is still a danger for us today. It is natural and right for us to want to provide for our family. We work hard, and we want to provide for the needs of our loved ones. The problem arises, however, when we have to ask ourselves "How much is enough?" I do not mean to suggest that I or any other Christian should set arbitrary limits on other people. I do not believe we should get into the business of judging each other over houses, cars, or bank accounts. I would suggest, however, that these are areas where each Christian might examine his or her own life. Each of us might periodically ask ourselves, "Am I over indulging myself with too little thought for others?" That is a question that no one else can answer for us, but it is one that is worth asking. I believe this is one way in which the principle of Amos 6:4-7 can still be valid for us.

There is no question that we live in a very complex and complicated world. Our world often appears quite different from the one of the prophets. I believe, however, that there are still important principles of justice, honesty, and compassion that are valid for us today. God is the same God today as in ancient times. God has shown wonderful grace and mercy toward his people, and God still expects

a response of gratitude and of love from us. One of the ways we can show our gratitude is in just and equitable treatment of others.

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THEOLOGICAL THEMES OF THE MINOR PROPHETS: THE CHARACTER OF GOD

Clyde M. Woods

God is active in the world. This practical reality underlies the entire Old Testament doctrine of God. The Old Testament does not emphasize theoretical proofs for God's existence; instead it affirms, "the fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God'" (Ps. 14:1; 53:1). Practical atheism was skeptic refusal to accept God's active concern for the human situation (compare Mal. 3:17), but the prophets affirm that God governs all and develops his purpose in human affairs.

Although numbered as one "book of the twelve" in the Hebrew canon, the minor prophets actually constitute a "mini-library" of prophetic discourses. Along with the more famous "major prophets," (so called because their books were customarily longer) the minor prophets were God's inspired spokesmen, realistic and supportive voices in the confusing maze of Israel's national life. As God's servants they revealed divine lessons from the past, provided guidance for the present, and voiced warnings and hope for the future. In so doing, the prophets continually interacted with the people on behalf of God. Day by day they experienced God's character as they stood in his counsel and revealed his will to Israel.

GOD'S IMAGE DIFFERS FROM MAN'S IMAGINATION

Man must be concerned about God's character; God is concerned about man's awareness of God's character. Moses appealed to this divine concern as he interceded for sinful Israel (Ex. 32:12). Repeatedly Ezekiel insisted that God acts "for the sake of His Name" (Ezek. 20:9, 14, 22, 44; 36:22). Sharing this concern, Amos reminded Israel of God's unlimited power and unique Deity in a series of doxologies (Amos 4:13; 5:8-9; 9:5-6). Addressing a discouraged people who had lost confidence in God's character, Malachi pictures God as pointedly asking, "If I am a father, where is my honor" and "if I am a Master where is my fear?" (Mal. 1:6).

In Israel's history idolatry was never far away. So what did Israel believe about God? Practically everything, if the question involves the varied views of popular religion. Influenced by their pagan neighbors, many assumed a pantheon of divine beings and glibly accepted the conventional wisdom that the power of a deity was directly reflected in the fortunes of his people. Thus, if Israel suffered, God must be weak or uncaring, and, contrariwise, if God were strong, then his temple-dwelling in Jerusalem could never fall. Although deemed "politically correct" at the time, such concepts were dangerously wrong. Such ideas threatened the very heart of Israel's covenant-relationship with God, but the prophets stood in the breach to call the nation back to a genuine awareness of God's character.

JONAH DECLARES GOD'S CHARACTER

Perhaps the clearest general statement of the character of God in the Minor Prophets was made by an angry prophet who deeply resented God's compassion for some sinful people.

The Jonah story is well known, but the reason for his attempted flight from God's presence is not so familiar. The whole book divides well into four parts corresponding to the book's four chapters, as follows: running from God (ch. 1), running to God (ch. 2) running with God (ch. 3), and running ahead of God (ch. 4). No model missionary, Jonah sought to evade God's call to go to Nineveh by fleeing in the opposite direction. Stopped by a divinely sent storm, Jonah escaped drowning by the big fish the Lord sent to rescue the now repentant prophet. Remarkably successful in his evangelism in Assyria, the prophet was infuriated that the wicked Ninevites repented and thus escaped their otherwise inevitable judgment. In his great displeasure Jonah angrily prayed in 4:2:

I pray thee, Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repentest of evil.

The book of Jonah is unique among the prophetic writings in that it is primarily a story about a prophet rather than a record of a prophet's preaching. Jonah's warning to Nineveh takes up only five words in Hebrew and eight in English. The longest statements by the prophet in the book involve two prayers-Jonah's joyous thanksgiving that God spared him (ch. 2) and his angry lament that God spared his enemies (ch. 4). What is important for our purpose is Jonah's appeal to the character of God as well known to

him. This appeal echoes God's revelation of his nature to Moses in Exodus 34:5-7:

And the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and fourth generation."

This magnificent passage undergirds the entire Old Testament doctrine of the character of God. What Jonah angrily resented as inconvenient to his hyper-nationalistic aims, we must enthusiastically celebrate. In the turmoil caused by Israel's apostasy, Moses had requested that God reveal his glory to him (Ex. 33:18), and God had promised to "make all my goodness pass before you" (Ex. 33:19). As the fulfillment of this divine promise, Exodus 34:5-7 reassured Moses and all Israel that the Lord is both gracious and demanding.

Analyzing this seminal text, one senses that the initial repetition, "the Lord, the Lord" suggests that in the final analysis the Lord can only be defined in terms of himself. This would agree with the Lord's first revelation of his name to Moses in Exodus 3:14. Further, God had already shown his mercy in accepting Moses' intercession for Israel's pardon (compare Ex. 33:20). That God is "slow to anger" allows sinful men time to repent. That God is "abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" means that the Lord's love is utterly trustworthy; He will keep his promises. The gracious Lord is willing to forgive all kinds

of wrongdoing, if men repent and properly seek forgiveness. That God "will by no means clear the guilty" suggests that God will forgive sins but will not license them. The Lord is gracious, but also just. In context the "thousands" of Exodus 34:7 refers to generations in striking contrast with the "third and fourth generation" at the end of the verse, as in Exodus 20:5-6. Thus, the text affirms the surpassing greatness of God's steadfast love.

What is there not to like in the sovereign Lord's revelation of his nature to the prophet Moses? What displeased Jonah was that the Lord's longsuffering goodness allowed the oppressive Ninevites opportunity to repent. Jonah wanted to see the hated Assyrians destroyed, as strict justice alone might dictate. The Lord's compassionate character contrasts sharply with the prophet's vitriolic and unreasoning wrath. Jonah did not care about God's wayward creatures, but God undoubtedly does (Jon. 4:11). Jonah was proud to proclaim God as man's unique creator (Jon. 1:9) and judge (Jon. 3:4), but he found it inconvenient, in Nineveh's case at least, to accept the Lord as merciful redeemer. Similarly, we may fail to proclaim the Lord's gracious mercy unless we constantly remember that we too are sinners deserving of judgment yet spared by mercy. Hellfire and brimstone are harsh realities, but they are never the Lord's desired end for his creatures, the objects of his great love.

HOSEA EXEMPLIFIES GOD'S CHARACTER

Like Jonah, Hosea was a prophet in the apostate northern kingdom Israel during the eighth century before Christ. Unlike Amos, who prophesied to that kingdom just before him, Hosea was a native son of Israel. Sensitive as he was, he might nevertheless have shared the indifference

to spiritual matters that characterized almost all of his countrymen, if God had not intervened. For God led Hosea through deep personal tragedy in order that through his own heartbreak the prophet might know the heartbreak that was God's (1:2-3). Hosea's tragic experience with Gomer burned upon his heart the intense pain of unrequited love. Hosea learned that Gomer's failure to understand him and to respond to the love he lavished upon her was a true picture of Israel. Like Gomer, Israel was faithless. The faithlessness of Israel hurt God, just as Gomer's faithlessness hurt Hosea.

Through this inspired understanding Hosea brought a more personal dimension to the concept of the knowledge of God. Repeatedly Hosea stressed God's unrequited love. A striking example is Hosea 11:1-4:

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Ba'als, and burning incense to idols.

Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of compassion, with the bands of love, and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to them and fed them.

In chapter 2 of Hosea interplay is seen between the faithlessness of Gomer and the faithlessness of Israel. In this context 2:8 declares, "And she did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil, and who lavished upon her silver and gold which they used for Ba'al." The fact that Israel did not truly appreciate God's love for her, just as Gomer had not appreciated Hosea's love, is presented as the basis of faithlessness. This was Israel's failure to know God.

In this context the prophet's great indictment of the people in Hosea 4:1-2 should be understood:

... for the Lord has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or kindness, and no knowledge of God in the land; there is swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds and murder follows murder.

Again he cried in Hosea 4:6, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" This lack of knowledge was caused by a leadership that had forgotten God (4:4-6) and by a spirit of harlotry within the people (5:4). The lure of sin had the people within its grasp, and the leaders of the people had neither the desire nor the ability to overcome the spiritual harlotry.

Israel had forgotten God, and this lack of knowledge was seen in every phase of life. Prophet and priest (4:4-6), king and princes (5:1)--all were hopelessly wicked. Swearing, lying, killing, stealing, committing adultery, murdering--these were the order of the day. Surely Israel multiplied altars, but these, because of insincerity and idolatry, were merely altars for sinning (8:11). At the idolatrous high places the men sacrificed with cult prostitutes (4:14), and attributed to the Baals the little fertility left in the land (2:5-13). Israel's covenant with God was broken and its obligations were forgotten in the northern kingdom (8:1).

In this dismal situation the obvious crying need of the people was to seek the Lord they had forgotten. Hosea cried in 10:12, "Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the Lord, that he may come and rain salvation upon you." The cure for the people could only be found in a return to God (14:1-8).

Israel, however, did not realize her need to know God, for the people thought that their multiplied sacrifices kept them in this knowledge relationship (8:2). But Israel did not find true communion with God in mere ceremonial formalism. To Israel God declared in Hosea 6:6, "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings." Israel did not know her true state (7:9-10). Finding no aid from God, the nation like a silly dove (7:11) tried to find security in foreign alliances. These diplomatic ventures, like the worship of idols, were pictured dramatically by Hosea as the hiring of lovers (8:9-10), which prevented return to communion with God. The confidence of the people rested more in their flimsy strongholds than in God (8:14). Thus, in Hosea 5:4, the prophet pessimistically portrayed Israel as incapable of repentance, saying "Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. For the spirit of harlotry is within them, and they know not the Lord." Although Hosea pled with the people to return to God, he realized that they would not return of themselves. Knowing this, he declared the inevitability of the nation's doom. The prophetic names of Hosea's children pictured dramatically the coming judgment on the nation. Hosea 9:11-17 warned of judgment in these words:

Ephraim's glory shall fly away like a bird --no birth, no pregnancy, no conception! Even if they bring up children, I will bereave them till none is left. Woe to them when I depart from them! Ephraim's sons, as I have seen, are destined for a prey; Ephraim must lead forth his sons to slaughter. Give them, O Lord--what wilt thou give? Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts. Every evil of theirs is in Gilgal; there I began to hate them. Because of the wickedness of their deeds I will drive them out of my house. I will love them no more; all their

princes are rebels. Ephraim is stricken, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit. Even though they bring forth, I will slay their beloved children. My God will cast them off, because they have not hearkened to him; they shall be wanderers among the nations.

The judgment Hosea preached, however, was a purifying judgment, and after judgment Israel would know God again (2:13-23). God would make a covenant with nature and would provide peace and safety in the land. God promised in Hosea 2:19:

And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord.

In that day Jezreel would mean "God sows," Not pitied would be pitied, and Not my people would be the people of God. Knowledge of the Lord in the return after punishment is also an integral part of the picture given in Hosea 5:15-6:3. God said he would come upon Ephraim like a lion, but afterward, he would heal. The future time of blessing would be filled with the knowledge of God. Communion with God would be restored, and the people would do righteousness.

CONCLUSION

From first to last all the minor prophets served the same gracious Lord whom Jonah declared and Hosea knew. They all stood in his counsel proclaiming His glorious power and his desire to save. If the earlier prophets emphasize judgment upon sinners, so also do the later ones, and the Lord's reluctance to destroy, though not always stated, is implicit throughout.

Amos and Micah stressed coming judgment upon the nations and upon Israel. The Lord had redeemed Israel from Egypt (Amos 3:1), but the nation had turned to rebellion and violence (Amos 3:10). Disciplinary acts had failed to renew Israel's allegiance, so the nation would now confront its angry judge (Amos 4:1-12). Israel needed to "seek the Lord" in penitence (Amos 5:4, 6, 14), and without repentance, even a multitude of sacrifices were but abomination (Amos 5:21-24; Mic. 6:6-8).

Like Jonah, Nahum proclaimed Nineveh's doom, this time without repentance and reprieve. Obadiah envisioned the same inevitable judgment upon wicked Edom, and Zephaniah saw this "day of the Lord" coming not only upon Judah's pagan neighbors but also upon Judah until there remained a humbled and penitent people who would "seek refuge in the name (i.e. character-c.m.w.) of the Lord" (Zeph. 3:12). Joel likewise spoke of judgment upon Judah, called for repentance, and envisioned a glorious future destiny for the Lord's people after the necessary judgment. Habakkuk struggled to see how the holy sovereign Lord could use cruel Babylon to punish disobedient Judah, but the prophet yet trusted that the Lord who had redeemed Israel from Egypt would renew His loving work and "in wrath remember mercy" (Hab. 3:2).

The post-exilic prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi reflected upon the lessons Israel should have learned from her exile in Babylon. They pictured obedience as the key to national greatness, reminding God's people that, contrary to appearances, the Sovereign Lord controls history and acts to fulfill His creative and redemptive purpose.

What should we do? As the psalmist declared, "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures for ever" (Ps. 136:1). Our confidence is grounded in the character of God. We experience his character in

what he has done. Our response must be gratitude and loving obedience. As we "do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God" (Mic. 6:8) we will "know" God, enjoy covenant blessing, and celebrate in life the glorious and eternal Name (Character) of the Lord."

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THE USE OF MINOR PROPHETS BY NEW TESTAMENT WRITERS

Tim Hadley

INTRODUCTION

Statistics. Depending on how and what you count, there are approximately 27 places in the Minor Prophets (hereinafter MP) that are quoted by New Testament (hereinafter NT) writers in 34 places in the NT. This doesn't seem like much, but it represents 9% of the total 317 Old Testament (hereinafter OT) passages quoted in the NT. And since the MP constitute only about 6% of the OT, it indicates that the NT writers paid somewhat more attention to the MP than to the other OT prophets or the rest of the OT.

In this discussion when we say "The use of the MP by NT Writers" we are speaking of MP passages that are actually quoted or alluded to in the NT. We are not speaking of "fulfilled prophecies," which would not necessarily be the same as "passages quoted." Some of the MP passages that are quoted in the NT are in fact given as proof of fulfillment of prophecy, but some are used for other reasons.

I have included at the end a complete list of the MP passages which are quoted in the NT, in order to make it easier to see some of the following information:

Of the MP passages quoted by NT writers, the distribution is as follows: Hosea (7), Joel (1), Amos (3), Obadiah (0), Jonah (1), Micah (2), Nahum (1), Habakkuk (2), Zephaniah (0), Haggai (2), Zechariah (5), and Malachi (3). As can

be easily seen, the greatest NT use is concentrated in Hosea, Amos, Zechariah, and Malachi, which have 18 of the 27 passages which are quoted in the NT. On the other hand, Obadiah (the shortest book in the OT) and Zephaniah are not quoted even once in the NT.

In the NT, the quoted MP passages are distributed as follows: Gospels (17), Acts (4), Letters (11), and Revelation (2). Of more interest is the distribution among specific NT books: Matthew (11), Mark (2), Luke (2), John (2), Acts (4), Romans (6), 1 Corinthians (1), Galatians (1), Ephesians (1), Hebrews (2), and Revelation (2). Again here, it is easily seen that the NT writers who put the most usage into quotes from the MP are Matthew and Paul, who account for 20 of the 34 MP quotes in the NT.

Furthermore, there are 16 NT books (all letters) which do not quote even once from the MP. And 10 of those (Philippians, Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, Titus, Philemon, 1-2-3 John, and Jude) do not quote from any other OT books either.

QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

Several questions are relevant to the issue of how the NT writers used the MP. They are:

- (1) What are the different ways in which NT writers use the MP passages? There appear to be three primary ways in which OT passages are used by NT writers. And what does this tell us about prophecy, fulfillment, and modern interpretation?
- (2) How do we explain the occasional differences between the NT citation and the original MP statement? And what, if anything, does this say about inspiration?
- (3) What are the major themes from the MP that are developed by NT writers?

Finally, we will attempt to synthesize the statistical, textual, and interpretational material into some summary statements that will, above all, help us to understand the relationship between the OT and the NT better.

WAYS THE MINOR PROPHETS ARE USED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

There appear to be three primary ways the NT writers use the passages they quote from the MP. They are: (1) to prove the fulfillment of prophecy (16 times); (2) to make a doctrinal or ethical point (12 times); and (3) to use similar wording in a different thought or context (6 times).

A well-known example of using a MP passage to prove the fulfillment of a prophecy is Matthew 2:15, which quotes Hosea 11:1: "And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'Out of Egypt I called my son.'" Obviously, Matthew is connecting Hosea's eighth-century B.C. comment about God's long-time relationship with Israel to Jesus' escape to Egypt as a child. This is an example of a fulfillment that would not be obvious unless the inspired writer pointed it out to us, since the context is different. In the OT passage, God is talking about the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage. Matthew changes the context and says that Hosea's words also applied to Jesus' escape from Egypt.

Another example of this usage is Acts 2:17-21, which quotes Joel 2:28-32. Joel warned the Israelites that, unless they repented, God would punish them with great destruction at the hands of the Assyrian army. Peter, through inspiration, pointed out that Joel's words also had a positive connection with the establishment of the church on the Day of Pentecost. Here, too, the context changes from bad to

good, but the prophetic fulfillment is not thereby compromised.

These examples illustrate an important point about prophecy and fulfillment: how important it is for us not to be overly "mechanical" in determining how an OT prophecy was fulfilled in the NT. Those who insist that all OT prophecies have only one fulfillment, and that in the NT, are overlooking the abundant evidence to the contrary. The context of prophecy and fulfillment is often changed from OT to NT, and there is usually an immediate fulfillment during OT times.

A second major way the NT writers use the MP is to make doctrinal or ethical points. They use the MP passages to support the thought or idea they are developing. An example of this usage is Matthew 10:35-36, where Jesus says, "For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law--a man's enemies will be the members of his own household." By quoting Micah 7:6, Jesus did not mean that the passage in Micah was a direct prophecy of his ministry. Rather, he used the OT thought to support his contention that his message would change people's lives. Here again the context is changed from OT to NT. Micah was speaking about the terrible treachery that prevailed during the latter eighth century B.C. as Judah struggled to keep from being overcome by Assyria. Jesus was indicating what a radical decision it would be for people to decide to follow him, even to the dissolving of family ties.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MINOR PROPHETS AND NEW TESTAMENT

Of the 34 times MP passages are quoted in the NT, only 7 show any significant difference between the OT original

and the NT quote. These 7 are: 1 Corinthians 15:55 (Hos. 13:14), Acts 7:42-43 (Amos 5:25-27), Acts 15:16-17 (Amos 9:11-12), Matthew 2:6 (Mic. 5:2), and Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and Hebrews 10:37-38, all of which quote Habakkuk 2:3-4.

Acts 7 and Acts 15 are easily explained as being alternate ways of reading the Hebrew consonants. The text of the Hebrew Bible was originally written only with what we would call consonants. This was the way it existed in NT times. The vowels were not added until hundreds of years later. In Amos 5:26, the word "king" has the same consonants as the god name Molech, used by Stephen in Acts 7. The addition of the name "Rephan" is probably due to a mistake made by the Septuagint (Greek OT--abbreviated "LXX") translator, who got some Hebrew letters mixed up and read them wrong.

These passages illustrate the fact that many NT quotations of OT passages are actually taken from the LXX rather than from the Hebrew OT. This often accounts for the differences to be found between the Hebrew OT and the NT quotation.

Another passage which shows significant differences between MP and NT is Matthew 2:6. Here the LXX furnishes an accurate translation of the MP verse, but Matthew's rendering diverges from both MP and LXX in some challenging ways. First, he identifies "Ephrathah" as "Judah." This is correct, but not the way Micah said it. Second, he says Bethlehem is "by no means least among the *rulers* of Judah," while Micah had said "you are small among the *clans* of Judah." This is easily explained the same way as Acts 7 and 15 above: the Hebrew consonants could be read in more than one way. Finally, he adds the expression "one who will be shepherd of my people Israel"

to the end of the verse, perhaps borrowing from 2 Sam. 5:2 to further emphasize the nature of the Messiah's rule.

At any rate, one thing that becomes clear in analyzing these quotations is that the NT writers, under Holy Spirit inspiration, did not always quote the verse exactly as it appeared in the OT. Sometimes they changed the wording, perhaps working from a different text. Sometimes they completely changed the thought-context of the original, using the same words to say something very different. Again, it serves as a warning to us against being overly mechanical in demanding that NT fulfillments fit our 20th-century criteria.

MAJOR THEMES DEVELOPED BY NT WRITERS IN THEIR USE OF THE MINOR PROPHETS

Of much greater significance than statistical and textual analysis are the major ideas and themes drawn by NT writers from the MP. I would like to concentrate on three very important themes: (1) mercy and faithfulness; (2) salvation by faith; and (3) Jesus is the Christ.

Mercy, Not Sacrifice. In Matthew 12:7, Jesus said, "If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent." Earlier (Mt. 9:13) he told these same Pharisees to "go and learn what this means," implying that they did not understand the Bible as well as they thought they did.

Jesus saved his harshest criticisms for those self-righteous Jews who cared more about the "letter of the law" than about the people the law was supposed to serve. In referring to Hosea 6:6, he was calling up one of the OT's greatest passages: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings." God,

through Hosea, had shattered the self-centered complacency of the eighth-century B. C. Jews who placed more emphasis on the ritual of the Sabbath service than on a true understanding of what God really wanted from them.

But the real emphasis is on the meaning of the word "mercy," which can also be translated "loyalty" or "faithfulness." God wants faith (belief) from his people, but he also wants faithfulness (loyalty). In Hosea the emphasis is on Israel's departure from the covenant, like the spouse who breaks the marriage vow. Jesus called those of his day, and us as well, to a greater commitment to our vows. In essence, he said two things: understand what God really wants, and then make a whole-hearted commitment to it.

Salvation By Faith. A second major MP theme in the NT is "salvation by faith." Not surprisingly, Paul leads the way in developing this idea, and quotes Habakkuk 2:4 in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11. But, as the chart shows, this MP passage is also reflected in Hebrews 10:37-38, so Paul was not the only one who thought it was significant.

Two things need comment regarding Habakkuk 2:4 and its use in the NT: (1) the change of context and emphasis, and (2) the importance of the concept as the cornerstone of our faith.

Habakkuk 2:4 is found in a context which is questioning God's protection of his faithful few. Habakkuk prophesied during the last days of Judah, about 600 B.C.--the greatest crisis in the history of the Israelites. The Babylonians had defeated the Assyrians, but had immediately marched west to subjugate Judah and its neighbors. Habakkuk could not understand why God would allow this, and asked why.

God answered, among other things, that he would punish Babylonia for its wickedness, so Habakkuk should not worry that they would escape untouched. But in the

midst of all this, God reassured Habakkuk that the righteous remnant of Judah would survive if they would remain faithful. This is what he means when he says, "The righteous will live by his faith." He is telling his people how to survive the coming tragedy.

Paul, on the other hand, was attempting to illuminate a major principle of the Christian faith, and so he slightly changed the emphasis of Habakkuk's original statement. In Romans 1 and Galatians 3, he says "he who through faith is righteous will live." This is the best translation, though it is not reflected in all English versions. Habakkuk was telling his people how to survive the coming disaster. He answered the question, "How will the righteous live?" Answer: "By faith." But Paul was telling all of us, Jew and Gentile alike, how to become righteous. He answered the question, "How can anyone live (eternally)?" Answer: "The one who becomes righteous through faith will live (be saved). "

The concept of salvation by faith is probably the greatest part of the theology upon which our salvation is based. We cannot save ourselves, so God's grace is needed. But grace is given only to those who, through faith, obey God. That is why Paul says in Ephesians 2:3, "We are saved by grace through faith." We should not be afraid to say we are saved by faith. It is a Biblical doctrine and it is the basis of our response to God.

Being saved "by faith" does not mean "by faith alone." Even Martin Luther did not understand it that way. He would be shocked at the way modern Protestantism has perverted this scriptural idea into something totally false. Hebrews 11 shows clearly that "saving faith" always includes obedience. Those who believe and teach the idea that we are saved by "faith alone" have missed the point.

But, there are those among us who emphasize far too strongly the "obedience" part and imply that we can almost save ourselves by our many works. It would help us all a lot if we could more fully grasp the full implications of what it really means to be saved "by faith." Among other things, since God is the source of our salvation, it means that we can never save ourselves by more and more works of law. A fuller grasp of this concept might also slow down some of those among us who delight in propagating, promoting, and binding unscriptural traditions, human laws, and questionable inferences from misunderstood scriptures. We are saved by grace, through faith, and not by works of law.

Jesus Is the Christ. Third, the NT writers, especially in the Gospels, strongly used the MP to establish that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ. Thirteen of the 34 NT quotations from the MP have some connection with Jesus as the Messiah. There are prophecies about his birth (Mic. 5.2), his childhood (Hos. 11.1), the preceding work of John the Baptist (Mt. 11.10 and parallels, Mt. 17.10-11), and the events surrounding his death, including the Triumphal Entry, Judas's betrayal, the apostles' abandonment, and his crucifixion. Among other themes, the Gospel writers drew especially from the MP to show the connection between OT prophecy and Jesus of Nazareth.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Minor Prophets are not "minor" in the sense of being less important than the others. They are every bit as important as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the others, and NT usage proves this to be so.

The NT writers understood how rich and worthwhile was the material in the MP, and frequently used it to support the prophetic and/or doctrinal points they were making. We in the church today would be well advised to have the same attitude toward these giants of the past. Hosea, Amos, Micah, and others have much to say to the church today. The question for us, as for those who lived in NT times, is simple: Will we listen?

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COMPLETE LIST OF MINOR PROPHETS PASSAGES QUOTED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

<u>Minor Prophet:</u>	<u>New Testament:</u>
Hosea 1:10; 2:1	Romans 9:26
2:23	Romans 9:25
6:6	Matthew 9:13; 12:7
10:8	Luke 23:30; Revelation 6:16
11:1	Matthew 2:15
13:14	1 Corinthians 15:55
Joel 2:28-32	Acts 2:17-21
2:32	Romans 10:13
Amos 3:13	Revelation 15:3
5:25-27	Acts 7:42-43
9:11-12	Acts 15:16-17

Jonah 1:17	Matthew 12:40
Micah 5:2	Matthew 2:6
7:6	Matthew 10:35-36
Nahum 2:1	Romans 10:15
Habakkuk 1:5	Acts 13:41
2:3-4	Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11;
	Hebrews 10:37-38
Hagg. 2:6, 21	Hebrews 12:26
Zechariah 8:16	Ephesians 4:25
9:9	Matthew 21:5; John 12:15
11:12-13	Matthew 27:9-10
12:10	John 19:37
13:17	Matthew 26:31; Mark 14:27
Malachi 1:2-3	Romans 9:13
3:1	Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2;
	Luke 7:27
3:23-24	Matthew 17:10-11

ARE OUR WOUNDS INCURABLE?

(Micah 1:9)

Michael S. Moore

The beeper woke me up with a jolt. It was about 2:00 in the morning. Somewhere between dream and reality I heard a voice say

"Chaplain to emergency room . . .

Chaplain to emergency room . . .

STAT!"

I cannot remember her name, but I do remember her. About 13 years old. Short brown hair. Big brown eyes. Probably weighed no more than 85 pounds soaking wet. Jumping off the elevator and hustling toward the "family" room, I found her, huddled in a corner, scared to death, waiting anxiously for the news.

There had been a terrible accident. Dad had tried to pack a two-day trip into one, and it backfired on him. Coasting down a twisted Pennsylvania road late at night, he fell asleep at the wheel and rammed his Toyota into a telephone pole. Asleep in the back, his daughter ricocheted off the front seat and fell unharmed to the floor.

Mom and Dad went through the windshield at about sixty miles-an-hour.

Now, fifty feet away in an emergency room, Mom and Dad were fighting for their lives. Mom died within minutes. Dad hung on about an hour or so longer. I remember the resident in charge being so shaken up by the tragedy he could hardly talk, much less tell her the horrible news. He did not know what to say or how to say it, yet he knew he

had to say something. It was difficult to watch as this 24-year-old man, barely acquainted with death himself, fumbled for the words to tell her the truth.

It has been fifteen years now since all this happened, yet the crushed, bewildered look on her face still haunts my dreams. She must be 27 or so by now. Is she married? Does she have children of her own? Has she ever recovered from the trauma?

Sometimes the wounds are deep. The tragedy seems overwhelming. Not all of us have to deal with pain as intense as this, of course, yet all of us have to deal with pain. It is unavoidable. It is the dark side of what it means to be human.

Further, the wounds we suffer are never simply individual. They are corporate, too. Look at the social fabric of our communities. So many families are battered and bleeding from loyalties abandoned and promises broken.¹ So many schoolteachers and single mothers stand daily before a rising wave of angry, fatherless children who feel they have nothing left to lose.² Robert Hughes says we are experiencing the "fraying of America."³ Chuck Colson calls it the new "dark age."⁴

Then there are the religious wounds, the really ugly sores we would rather not see. How tempting it is to turn away and indulge ourselves in the fantasy that our movement is immune to them. But it is not.⁵ Critics see us as a deeply wounded people today, crippled and confused and floundering for direction.⁶ The prevailing image is that of a quarrelsome bunch of secularized legalists who fight and feud over anything and everything. We are the people whose members vote with their pocketbooks and their feet at the slightest hint of dissatisfaction. We are the fellowship whose sister congregations talk more *about* each other than *to* each other. We are the cold institution whose

ministers burn out and leave before anyone even notices they are gone.⁷

Not all of this is true, of course. Yet enough of it *is* true to explain the caricatures. The goal of my contribution to the 70th Annual Harding University Bible Lectureship is not to provide ammunition for self-defense but motivation for self-reflection. We have always been a people committed to Bible study. The message of the prophet Micah is an appropriate place to pause and reflect on these criticisms and concerns.

THE PROPHETS AND THEIR MESSAGE

The prophets have always been clear about the depth of our wounds as well as the power of the Healing One. Isaiah says our wounds are infectious, but he also says the Suffering Servant is able to absorb the poison (1:5, 6: 53:4-6). Jeremiah says no human medicine can cure us, but he also says God can heal us powerfully through faith in a new covenant (30:12-17; 31:31-34). Micah claims that our wounds are "incurable," yet a day is coming when all our sins will be cast into the sea (1:9; 6:19).

We live in a secular age. Some call it a "post-Christian" age. Subversive forms of Christianity are constantly threatening to corrupt the faith. "Sin" becomes "sickness." "Worship" becomes "entertainment." "Salvation" becomes "personal enlightenment." As a result, many Christians are wondering today whether our wounds are really all that deep.⁸

The prophets of Israel are not university professors or bureaucratic managers. They are not trained specialists. They do not segregate politics from religion, economics from faith, or history from worship. Categorizations like these are foreign to biblical thinking in general and prophet-

ic thinking in particular. Instead, one of the strongest tenets of prophetic religion is the belief that God's creation is whole and complete and cannot be segregated into separate realms. No part of Yahweh's creation can proclaim itself independent of its creator. To think this way is the first step toward heresy, the sort of shallow rationalization that desperate kings do--and false prophets encourage.⁹

Genuinely prophetic, holistic views of the world are a constant annoyance to those who are more interested in defining and dividing than in uniting and reconciling this creation. Even a cursory reading of Israelite history shows this to be true. Notice how closely the history of Israelite prophecy runs parallel to the history of Israelite politics. Whenever a king imagines himself above the created order in order to justify a desire to violate it, note how quickly a prophet of Yahweh is there at his elbow to point out his arrogance, often at grave personal risk.¹⁰

In point of fact, *human* monarchy was never a universally accepted institution in Israelite society. Whenever a political crisis arises in Israel, often there is a strong anti-monarchical backlash. This helps to explain why the prophets tend to be the ones most likely to keep their heads on straight when everyone else is losing theirs. The prophets are the ones who dare to view Israel's crises as opportunities for renewal rather than excuses for despair. Samuel is the first in a long line of prophets who warn Israel about the monarchy (1 Sam. 8:10-18). Jeremiah has some particularly harsh words to say about it as Judah's last king leaves the country (Jer. 22:13-19).

The prophets never deny that crises are unpleasant. They simply challenge us to view them in a positive way, in terms of reexamination and change.¹¹ Micah and his colleagues remind us that the greatest and most important spiritual victories are those which are won on the battlefield

of the heart--not the banquet table of the university or the mahogany table of the boardroom.¹²

THE PROPHET AND HIS AUDIENCE

Micah of Moresheth is a rough-hewn country preacher who, alongside his more urbane colleague Isaiah, "declares to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin" (3:8). He preaches to a confused people during a troubling time. Tiglath-pileser III, ruler of Assyria, is busy terrorizing the nations of northern Syria-Palestine. Israel and Syria are pressuring Judah into joining an anti-Assyrian alliance to oppose him.¹³ Judah does not know what to do. Some of her leaders, like Ahaz, completely cave in to the Assyrians, religiously and politically. Others, like Hezekiah, try to resist them.¹⁴

THE STRUCTURE AND THE MESSAGE

Micah preaches to *this* audience in *this* crisis, yet the message he preached then is still applicable today. The challenge for us is whether we want to read it through the eyes of Micah himself or through the jaded eyes of twentieth century postmodernism.¹⁵

Once a lawyer asked Jesus to name the "greatest commandment." He responded by quoting Deuteronomy 6:4, the *Shema*:

Hear, O Israel. The Lord our God is one Lord.
And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. (Mark 12:29-30)¹⁶

For Christ, the greatest commandment is to "*hear*" carefully what God has to say.

The same is true for Micah. The word "*hear*" is the most important word in both the oral as well as the literary levels of the Micah tradition. The structure of his entire message falls into three sections, each beginning with this key word. Chapter one begins with a challenge to the nations, "*Hear, you peoples, all of you!*" Chapter three begins with a demand for Israel's leaders, "*Hear, you heads of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel.*" Chapter six implores the rest of Creation, "*Hear, you mountains . . . you enduring foundations of the earth!*" (1:2; 3:1; 6:2).¹⁷

Perhaps a visual aid will help us to see it better. Visualize the book as the path of a well-thrown boomerang. The opening demand to the nations is the initial throw, which then angles back toward the orbit of a particular nation, Israel, then shoots away toward the rest of the cosmos. Or visualize it as a bullseye on a dartboard. The first "dart" penetrates the periphery of the dartboard, the second plunges deep into the center, while the third penetrates the periphery on the other side of the board.

However we look at it, the structure is the same. Sandwiched between two oracles of a general nature lies a specific message for the leadership of Israel. The primary thrust of Micah has something profoundly to do with *leadership*.¹⁸

THE DEPTH OF OUR WOUNDS

Unlike Isaiah, who probably comes from an urban background, Micah comes from the countryside. And like most country folk, he tends to take a dim view of city life. This explains why he so angrily attacks Israel's capital cities in the opening oracle: "What is the transgression of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? What is the sin of the house of Judah? Is it not Jerusalem?" (1:5).

Micah expects the cities, especially Jerusalem, to provide spiritual leadership for the nation as it struggles to deal with the Assyrian crisis. Instead, their selfish behavior only makes things worse.

IGNORANCE

Gary Collier tells the story of a minister who boasts to others: "People in my church are so illiterate about the Bible that I change things from it all the time, and they never know the difference!"¹⁹

Collier is appalled by this statement, yet grudgingly admits that the man is correct: the church is becoming biblically illiterate. James Smart saw this over twenty years ago.²⁰

Festering at the core of Judah's wound is the very same problem, the problem of *ignorance*. Micah castigates those who revel in it as well as those who exploit it, who dare to segregate God's creation into sacred vs. secular. "Do not preach this message," they whine. "Give us only sermons about God's love. Teach us only about praise in our worship, not lament for our sins. Our wounds are not *that* bad" (2:6-11).

Well, yes they are. The fact that so many resist a holistic biblical theology today proves that our ignorance is deeply rooted. This is an astonishing thing to admit in an age of printed Bibles and computerized concordances. When preachers and teachers succumb to the temptation to tell us what we want to hear instead of what we need to hear, the result is an infectious soup in which every sort of disease will breed. Cults especially breed on biblical ignorance. In Micah's day it was Assyrian paganism with its sorcerers and diviners (5:12-14). In our day it's the Boston movement and a host of other parasites.²¹

INJUSTICE

In that day, says the Lord, I will assemble the lame and gather up those who have been driven away and those whom I have afflicted. I will make the lame a remnant and those who were driven away a strong nation. (Micah 4:6-7)

The other day I was talking to a friend of mine about a few of our favorite teachers, the ones who made us work the hardest when we were students, the ones who truly inspired us with a vision for the Kingdom. Few of them are still teaching today. Some have gone to other institutions. Some have stopped teaching altogether. Perhaps some deserved to be let go. Others were simply cut down in their prime by bureaucratic fear and political injustice.

Injustice is real. True prophets speak out against it. To all who suffer the wound of injustice Micah promises a day of healing, a day of judgment, a day when "new" points of view will be given a fair hearing, a day when freedom in Christ will translate into trust and loyalty and respect, a day when Christian people will learn how to disagree with one another in the spirit of Christ and still stand together for the cause of truth.²²

MATERIALISM

Since I live in the state that gave us Charles Keating, perhaps I am particularly sensitive to the sin of materialism. I see what it does to people, to their hopes, to their dreams. Micah saw a city whose inhabitants "coveted fields and seized them," where poor people were "oppressed" by "haughty" Jerusalemites. Because of their greed, he promises them a day when the nation's standard of living will plummet drastically. Their fields (actually the fields

they stole from the poor) will be divided among their "captors." Their orchards and vineyards will feed others, not themselves (2:1-5; 6:14-15).

One does not have to live through a Great Depression or a Savings and Loan scandal to appreciate the soundness of Micah's economics. But it helps. A friend of mine who serves on the board of a failed S & L recently told me that if he had known then what he knows now, he would have blown the whistle. No one, he said with a look of regret, understood the depth of the problem. Not until it was too late.

Contrary to what Gordon Gecko would have us believe, greed is not "good."²³ Earning a profit is not the most important element in a genuinely Christian business ethic.²⁴ Most American business leaders disagree, and this is why our children and grandchildren may never enjoy the same standard of living their parents enjoy. Many will never own a house or send their children to college. They will not be able to afford it. Instead, they will have to face the same frustrating economic realities that Judah faced: "You shall eat, but not be satisfied. You shall put away, but not save. You shall sow, but not reap" (Micah 6:14-15).²⁵

THE GLORY OF OUR SALVATION

It is because our wounds are so deep that our salvation cannot possibly come from the human sphere. We are not going to educate our way out of our dilemma. Salvation must come from some other source. Salvation must come from God.

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains....(Mic. 4:1)

The fourth chapter of Micah prophesies a glorious salvation for Judah in spite of her wounds. Micah sees a day when Judah's ignorance will be replaced with *knowledge*: "that he may teach us his ways" (4:2). Her injustice will be met with *justice*: "he shall judge between many peoples" (4:3). Her materialism will be replaced with *security* in Yahweh: "they shall sit, every man under his own fig tree, and none shall make them afraid" (4:4).

Most importantly, Judah's selfish leaders will finally be replaced by a leader who cares, a leader who is just, a leader who will bring peace, a leader whose origin is "from ancient days" (5:2-6).

Like all the prophets, Micah's diagnosis of the human dilemma is harsh and severe. No university can cure our ignorance. No political system can address our injustice. No economic miracle can cure our material insecurities.

Are our wounds incurable? Yes. That is why we need to come to the Great Physician.

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OTHER TOPICS

ESTABLISHING BIBLICAL AUTHORITY: THE FUNCTION OF COMMAND, EXAMPLE AND INFERENCE

F. Furman Kearley

How is authority established? First, consider how a child determines what is authoritative in the home.

As the child grows, he or she hears many sounds from the parents. Gradually these sounds become words, and the child begins his vocabulary. Soon the words become sentences. The various sounds and then the words and sentences have different meanings. Some of them are words of love and praise. Others are of narrative and song. Probably the first commands the child hears are "Stop crying!" or "Turn over!" or "Crawl."

As the child's language ability increases, so do the variety of sentences. The child learns experientially or inductively. He does not learn language analytically.

COMMANDS

Later, when the child studies language analytically, he will determine that the sentences he hears or reads are classed into at least four categories: (1) declarative or statement of facts, (2) imperative or statements of command, (3) interrogative or questions, (4) exclamatory or statements of strong emotion, of surprise, of joy or of fear.

Actually, each of these type sentences can be subdivided. For example, imperative or command statements are not all of equal consequence. Commands, such as "Do not catch

a cold" or "Do not get too hot," are not on the same par with "Do not go swimming without my permission" or "Do not get into the street." The child learns by experience (and, perhaps, lecture) that the latter two imply the consequence of scolding or punishment. The first two imply concern followed by loving care if a problem develops.

NECESSARY INFERENCE

The child learns to distinguish between what is merely instruction and a request as opposed to an authoritative command that demands specific behavior. This learning takes place, first, by the understanding of words and commands. However, it also includes interpretation of tone of voice, transfer of learning from instructions and lecture and inferences implied by facial expression and consequential events.

Basically, in the final analysis, the child learns what is required behavior from his parent's commands, their example or behavior, and the judgmental decisions of the parents, growing out of various situations with the child, his siblings, his playmates and others.

Very much a part of his understanding of authority includes learning by necessary inference. If a child is punished for violating one command, such as "Do not go into the street," the child infers that he will be punished without explicit statement if he violates other commands.

If the child is rewarded for obeying a command to wash the dishes, the child transfers and infers that he may be rewarded, at least by praise if not by material gifts, for cutting the yard even if he has not been commanded to do so.

A great amount of our development of social graces comes about as a result of necessary inference. We learn to

please people and get along with people by making necessary inferences as to what pleases them and displeases them. If we want to grow in our relationship with them, we do those things that please them and avoid the things that displease them. On the other hand, if one sibling wants to aggravate the other, he does that which he knows (or by other experience, infers) will infuriate him.

Thus, nature teaches us that we learn authoritative standards or required behavior from commands, judgmental decisions which take the force of commands, examples and necessary inferences which involve a combination of commands, judgments, and examples. The ability to learn in this way is basically called common sense. In an analytical way this ability to interpret interpersonal communications is called hermeneutics.

It is fascinating that in the normal walk of life children learn and practice hermeneutics in the art of human communication even though neither they nor their parents are able to analyze communication or define hermeneutics.

NO NEW HERMENEUTICS

What is astounding is that intelligent human beings, even including some with a Ph.D. degree, can talk about "new hermeneutics." There has been no new hermeneutics in the world since God endowed Adam and Eve with the ability to communicate and understand communication. Genuine hermeneutics and hermeneutical principles are inborn in the human brain as surely as an operational program is built into a computer.

Authority. How is authority established in a school system or in a nation? The process is the same everywhere. First, there is a law, a command, an edict, whether made by

a dictator, a legislature or a principal or teacher. Secondly, there are judgments or case laws derived from specific situations in which the law or command or directive has been interpreted and applied by the authorities. This involves both approved and disapproved examples. Finally, there are necessary inferences drawn from the combination of the law plus the judgments or approved or disapproved examples.

The Law and Command, Example and Necessary Inference. According to the United States' Constitution, the first source of authority is the Constitution itself. It contains some specific laws or commands but more generally states policies and guidelines. Specifically, it gives authority to Congress to make specific laws.

Secondly then, Congress is the authority to make specific laws relating to all types of activity.

Thirdly, Congress cannot make specific details about every aspect. Therefore, in most of their laws establishing departments, bureaucracies and agencies, it delegates authority to these to make regulations that also have the force of law.

Thus, the Internal Revenue Service has written extensive manuals of regulations that have the force of law. In addition, through the appeal process within the IRS, they have made many judgments and rulings concerning specific situations. Further then, the individual taxpayer and his C.P.A. make application by necessary inference concerning what must be reported as income and what may be deducted as expenses and related matters in order to determine the final tax.

The final and ultimate authority in the United States as to what law is and means is the Supreme Court. It makes judgments with regard to specific laws and/or bureaucratic

regulations. Their decision is literally the law of the case. Yet, generally, it is translated into being the law of the land by necessary inference.

The Supreme Court has made many rulings concerning religious activities in the public schools. These cases and rulings constitute an extensive amount of literature, larger than the Bible. They have not outlawed all religious activities in public schools. Yet, since the media has made the public more familiar with the 1963 ruling concerning prayer in the school, many school boards and administrative officials have, in their limited knowledge of that decision and their ignorance of many other decisions, necessarily inferred that each and every religious activity is outlawed.

Their decisions are an example of wrong use of inference because of their ignorance of the total examples and rulings. Thus, they keep creating new cases that the Supreme Court must review. While there are problems differentiating between correct inferences and incorrect inferences, unnecessary inferences and necessary inferences, our American system is absolutely dependent upon inferences in order to work.

Due to human ignorance and imperfections, there may always be problems where inferences are concerned. However, it is a tragic mistake to throw out inference as a necessary part of communication and of execution within any system of authority.

When I was doing graduate work, I moved twice in one year. When figuring my income tax and trying to determine where to put the expense of this moving, I found that the specific situation was not covered. Because I moved twice in less than six months, technically, I could not take the second moving expenses as moving expenses. However, I knew that they were legitimate expenses; therefore, I counted them as such. When I was called for an examina-

tion, the IRS agent said I could not take them as moving expenses. I said, "Well then, they go as education expenses." The IRS agent saw the problem. Though they were related to my education, they were not directly education expenses. The final decision was that the IRS agent let them stand as moving expenses, allowing my final tax statement to remain intact and unchanged. I had used necessary inference in a legitimate and approved manner.

CHRISTIAN AUTHORITY IS ESTABLISHED BY COMMAND, EXAMPLE AND NECESSARY INFERENCE

Christian authority is determined in the same way. God, Christ and the Holy Spirit--the Godhead--are the ultimate sources of authority. They have revealed their will through the holy apostles and prophets. This revelation has been written in the Bible. Thus, for us, the authority to which we are responsible and under which we live is the Bible, the written word of God.

The Bible is a particular type of legal document. It is a covenant. It contains the patriarchal covenant and the Mosaic covenant which together are called the Old Testament. It then contains the new covenant or Testament under which we live.

There is a strong relation between the covenants, and the new covenant is built on and is a fulfillment or completion of the old. Though our specific authority is the new covenant, our complete understanding, appreciation and application of it depends upon a knowledge and understanding of the old (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:1-12; the Book of Hebrews).

Psalm 119 and Terms for Established Authority. Psalm 119 is a most beautiful, extensive and important poem. Its total purpose is to praise and extol God's Word--his revelation--and to urge our appreciation and obedience to it. The Psalm is composed of 22 sections. It is an acrostic poem. Each of the eight verses of the first section begin with the Hebrew letter *aleph*. Each of the eight verses of the second section, verses 9-18, begin with the Hebrew letter *beth*. This continues through the twenty-second section whose eight verses begin with the Hebrew letter *tav*.

In each section of eight verses eight Hebrew words are used repeatedly, interchangeably and synonymously to describe the authoritative word of God. These eight words are translated into most English versions as law, testimonies, ways, precepts, statutes, ordinances, commandments, judgments and word. While each term has some different signification, they all describe the authoritative message or covenant of God.

The terms "law," "precepts," "statutes," "ordinances" and "commandments" more specifically describe the succinct statements that demand specific obedience from us. The terms "judgments," "testimonies," "way" and "word" describe more the total working of God with humanity and principles we should learn by knowing of God's mighty works and ways. The term "judgments" specifically describes the many incidences of case law where a situation developed and was brought to God or his designated judge and a judgment was made. The judgments constituted approved examples.

One specific case would be that of Zelophehad's daughters. Zelophehad had no sons but four daughters. The general law had called for the passing of property from a father to the sons and not to the daughters. Thus, his daughters would have had no possession in the promised

land. Jehovah gave a judgment through Moses that the daughters should receive an inheritance (Num. 27:1-11). Later another judgment was given to require the daughters of Zelophehad to marry only within the tribe of Manasseh so their inheritance would not move from Manasseh to another tribe (Num. 36:1-13).

Jesus on Commandments. Jesus himself emphasized that the commandments of God establish the authority of God and that each individual must obey God's commandments and will. In Matthew 5:19 Jesus affirms that whoever would break one of God's least commandments and teach men so would be called least in the kingdom of heaven.

In Matthew 7:21-27 Jesus teaches that only those who do the will of his father would enter into the kingdom of heaven. He says that the one who hears and does not obey is like the man who builds on sand, but the one who hears and obeys is the wise man.

Jesus condemned the Pharisees for transgressing the commandment of God and making void the commandment of God (Mt. 15:1-9). In Matthew 19:17 Jesus instructed the young rich ruler to keep the commandments. All of these previous statements were made while Jesus lived under the law of Moses and concerned God's covenant with Israel.

In John 14:15 and 21 he focuses on the new covenant and his commandments for it:

If you love me you will keep my commandments....
He who has my commandments, and keeps them, he
it is who loves me: and he who loves me shall be
loved by my father and I will love him, and will
manifest myself unto him.

Jesus states in John 15:10-12,

If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in
my love; even as I have kept my fathers command-

ments, and abide in his love. These things I have
spoken unto you, that my joy may be in you and
that your joy may be made full. This is my com-
mandment, that you love one another, even as I
have loved you.... You are my friends, if you do the
things which I command you.

Many other scriptures could be quoted, and I urge you simply to take your concordance and study the words "command," "commandments" and all synonyms mentioned in Psalm 119. It is the clear teaching of the Bible that the authority of God is established by commandments, statutes, ordinances and such like given by the authority of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit through inspired apostles and prophets.

Applicable and Non-applicable Commands. Still, we must use common sense in determining which commands we are to obey. Commands to Noah to build an ark or to Abraham to leave the land of his nativity are not commands for us. We learn from them. We learn the principle that faith and obedience are essential in every man's relationship to God. We learn that obedience is rewarded with blessings and that disobedience is cause for punishment (Heb. 2:1-4; 10:26-31).

Thus, all commands to the patriarchs under the patriarchal covenant and all commands to the Hebrews under the Mosaic covenant are not binding upon Christians. The famous ten commandments from Exodus 20:1-17 are not binding upon Christians because they were a part of the Mosaic covenant. Nine of them are binding upon Christians because they have been brought over into the new covenant of Christ and incorporated in it (Rom. 13:8-10; etc.). The sabbath commandment is not brought over into the new covenant of Christ and is not a requirement for Christians.¹

The Bible also contains commands from the devil and evil people such as Job's wife (Gen. 3:1-8; Job 2:9; Mt. 4:1-11). Obviously, we are to obey only commandments of divine authority intended for all Christians under the new covenant. Paul's commandments to Timothy to bring books and come before winter are not applicable to us (2 Tim. 4:9, 13, 21).

Examples--When they Bind. New Testament authority is also established by certain examples or judgments and situation or case law. Again, not every example is a binding example. For an example to be binding there must be the correct and full interrelationship between a commandment and example and a necessary inference. The Bible teaches by command, example and necessary inference but does not necessarily bind by all of these. No informed restoration leader has ever taught that every example is binding.

Every example is instructive but not necessarily binding, or we may say the Bible teaches by examples, but every example is not a binding example. Examples are only binding when they are combined together with a background commandment or principle and constructed in God's Word in such a way as to imply authority. This leads us to a necessary inference that this is an obligation upon us.

Examples, then, may fall into one of three categories. The first is an example of disapproved conduct, such as Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-11. From this we learn that we are not to lie to the Holy Spirit nor to give grudgingly.

Second, approved examples may teach us that a certain practice is good and safe but may not be bound upon us. Christians met in an upper room, in the temple and by the riverside. When these examples are combined with John 4:20-24, we conclude that we can worship God at any kind

of physical place or arrangement, but we are not bound to conduct our worship services at any specific place. The command to worship is specific but the place is generic.

Third, an example may combine with a command in such a way as to produce a necessary inference that what is exemplified is binding as Christian doctrine and behavior. A case of such an example is that Sunday is the required day for Christian worship and for observance of the Lord's Supper.

Sunday--Exemplified and Necessarily Inferred. The commands exist to worship the Lord, to observe the Lord's Supper and to assemble (Mt. 26:26-29; Lk. 22:14-23; 1 Cor. 11:20-34; Heb. 10:25). However, no specific command exists stating the time of assembly or the frequency of assembly.

The example is clear that the first day of the week was significant to the early Christians. Jesus arose on the first day of the week and made his first appearances. Other resurrection appearances occurred on the first day of the week. The church was established on Pentecost, the first day of the week (Acts 2:1-4). The church at Troas met for worship and observed the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7).

The strongest example is with the church at Corinth. First Corinthians 11:20-16:2 basically deals with problems concerning the assembly on the first day of the week and regulate this assembly. Paul, by inspiration, regulates that they are to observe the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner. They are to sing, pray and edify one another decently and in order in their assembly. They are also commanded to make a contribution in their assembly. According to 1 Corinthians 16:2, the time of their assembly is the first day

of every week. The RSV translates, "On the first day of every week."

The conclusion of all of Christendom, with but few exceptions, for nearly 2000 years is that Sunday is the day for Christian assembly and worship. There is nothing in which the various Christian groups are more united than that Sunday is the day. This is established, however, by a combination of commands and examples that merge together to form a necessary inference that Sunday is special to Christians and is the time of assembly.

Christians during the first three centuries so strongly believed this that they braved night or early morning services, stinky catacomb services and assembly even though it meant persecution and possibly tortuous death. Sunday as a holy day and ultimately a holiday was bought by the shedding of the precious blood of thousands of martyrs. To say that these Christians died for an unnecessary assembly is to profane their blood and blaspheme their sacrifice.

Lord's Supper Established by Command, Example and Necessary Inference. Tragically, Christendom has not been as united that the Lord's Supper should be observed every first day of the week in the assembly. However, exactly the same evidence is present to establish that the Lord's Supper should be observed as to establish that the day should be honored and the assembly held.

At the very minimum, the New Testament example concerning assembly and observing the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week is an approved example. This establishes a way which is right which cannot be wrong. No one can accuse us of committing sin if we assemble each first day of the week and observe the Lord's Supper. This is clearly what the New Testament Christians did and what the

Christians of the first three centuries did. It is a safe way, a way that is right that cannot be wrong.

I also believe that it is necessarily inferred that this is the only way, the only time authorized by God for Christians to set a mandatory assembly and observe the Lord's Supper. The example of early Christians and churches ever observing the Lord's Supper on any other day is missing.²

Civil Disobedience Established by Necessary Inference.

Another illustration of an example that has been considered binding to the point of death by most Christians through the ages concerns civil disobedience. The civil disobedience I am discussing becomes necessary when Christians must disobey civil authorities in order to obey their consciences and practice Christianity.

I am not discussing the aspect of civil disobedience that moves into the realm of violating laws to keep others from sinning. Forcing Christianity upon others or joining in a revolution to change a society and eliminate unjust laws is not taught in the New Testament.

Virtually universally, Christians have believed and practiced civil disobedience for conscience's sake, even though there is no explicit command in the New Testament demanding that we violate civil law in order to live in all good conscience.

Romans 13:1-7; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13-17 command and demand that Christians obey civil authorities even though civil authorities are pagan and personally wicked. What is most interesting is that there is never included in any of these instructions a phrase or an exception clause saying, "except for conscience's sake."

On the other hand, we do have clear illustrations of Christians engaging in civil disobedience for the sake of conscience. In Acts 4:17-21 the leaders of the Sanhedrin

threatened Peter and John and charged them not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. Peter and John responded that no matter what they charged them, it was necessary for them to speak the things which they saw and heard.

Another example is found in Acts 5. The Sanhedrin reminded the apostles that they had been charged not to preach Jesus. Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men" (5:29). Throughout Christian history we have repeated this statement as if it were a command. However, in context it is not. It is simply an example. Never is there a command or an exception clause commanding Christians to practice civil disobedience.

Stephen and the Christians persecuted by Saul practiced civil disobedience. When Saul became Paul, he practiced civil disobedience and preached the Gospel even though Jews, multitudes and potentates demanded he stop. The book of Revelation reflects that John and faithful Christians in the seven churches of Asia practiced civil disobedience. Some of them were imprisoned, others tortured and some martyred because of civil disobedience. Yet, they never were commanded to practice such (Rev. 1:9; 2:10).

We conclude that it is essential for Christians to practice civil disobedience in order to live in all good conscience and obey God. This conclusion is the result of the necessary inference we must draw from the combined implications of combined general commands and specific examples.

The Bible frequently commands that we are to put God first and the kingdom foremost (Mt. 6:33). We are taught to honor and respect our consciences (Rom. 14). We have many illustrations of early Christians and Old Testament heroes practicing civil disobedience. Therefore, we logically infer that we as Christians in every age and in every country must practice civil disobedience when civil authori-

ties try to stop us from preaching or teaching Christ or practicing Christianity.

Again, history records the examples of Polycarp, Ignatius, John Huss, John Wycliffe, William Tyndale, Sir Thomas Moore, John Bunyan and thousands upon thousands of unheralded Christians who suffered and shed their blood in civil disobedience for conscience sake. This was all done because of a necessary inference compelled by general commands and supportive illustrations.

CONCLUSION

Logic, family activities, the history of nations and law, and the study of businesses and institutions prove beyond any shadow of doubt that authority for human behavior is established by commands, examples or judgments, and necessary inferences.

In Christianity the way biblical authority is established is by commands and examples which combine together with commands to imply action that is essential. We must necessarily infer that these constitute matters essential for Christian faith and conduct.

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NOTES

1. Harold E. Monser, *Topical Index and Digest of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), 115.
2. See the article by Everett Ferguson, "The Lord's Supper," in the *Gospel Advocate*, June, 1991.

ESTABLISHING BIBLICAL AUTHORITY: THE SILENCE OF SCRIPTURE

F. Furman Kearley

CONFLICTS REGARDING SILENCE

By "the silence of the Scriptures" we mean that the Scriptures do not speak specifically about the action, practice or belief under consideration. Differences concerning what this means or how to interpret the silence of the Scriptures are at the heart of Christianity's division into denominations.

Particularly, it is a focal problem in the major division between various segments of the Restoration Movement. Those who introduced instruments of music and the missionary society affirmed that whatever the Scriptures do not specifically forbid is permitted. They affirmed that the silence of the Scriptures about a topic meant it was left in the realm of opinion. Thus, people could do as they pleased in that area. They pleased to use instruments and missionary societies and, therefore, added them which led to the division of the Restoration Movement.

Interestingly, that same element divided over the same issue in the 1950s and 60s. The independent Christian churches separated from the liberal Christian churches (Disciples of Christ) over restructure. The Disciples of Christ affirmed that since the Scriptures did not forbid a hierarchal organization or denominational superstructure, they could form a world wide organization over all the churches. The denomination would own all the property and

control all doctrinal, ministry and business matters. Their only basis was the "Scripture is silent," and therefore, this silence gives us permission. The silence of the Scripture is not prohibition.

In this case, independent Christian churches affirmed that since the Bible taught autonomy of congregations and did not authorize a hierarchal superstructure organization, it was sinful and wrong.

Since that time the Disciples of Christ have continued into apostasy to the point that they care not what Scripture says or does not say. They now affirm that salvation is available to every man whether he acknowledges Christ or not. Even the Mohammedan and the Jew can be saved according to the Disciples of Christ because they care nothing about what Scripture says. Though the Scriptures clearly condemn homosexuality, the Disciples of Christ now affirm that homosexuals can be ordained. They have moved from ignoring the silence of Scripture to affirming that the Bible has no authority whatsoever. This is where new hermeneutics has led and will lead.

Churches of Christ which rejected the use of instruments and the missionary society affirm that the silence of Scripture is a most important principle in the interpretation of Scripture. We affirm that silence is a natural principle of interpretation. This silence can be, depending upon the context of generic commands versus specific commands, both permissive and prohibitive. It can both forbid or approve certain matters in practice or doctrine.

SILENCE IS A PART OF THE NATURAL PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNICATION

Often people complain that God did not write a book on hermeneutics or principles of interpretation to go along with

the Bible. They contend that division within Christendom comes because we do not agree on or practice the same hermeneutical principles. They wish God had revealed the essential hermeneutical principles.

I have news for you. God has revealed to us the natural principles of interpretation or his divine system of hermeneutics. These principles are innate or inborn with every normal human being who has the capacity and ability to learn to communicate with another human being. The hermeneutical principles essential for understanding the Bible are precisely the same hermeneutical principles necessary for a child to understand his parents, a student to understand his teacher, a soldier to understand his commander, a reader to understand a book or a Christian to understand God's inspired written revelation in the Bible. There is not one iota of difference in the essential principles.

The reason people do not understand each other is because they do not want to and they do not work at it. The reason people do not understand God is because they do not want to and they do not study sufficiently. The same principles by which any person in any language understands any other person speaking or writing in that language are the same principles by which one can understand the Bible written in Hebrew and Greek. We must exalt God's will above our own will and be willing to submit totally to God.

If you buy a computer, it comes with a preprogrammed intelligent program so that it can communicate with you. Thus, you are able to give it instructions and understand its responses.

God miraculously gave Adam and Eve the ability to communicate in order to understand him and each other. Since then God has programmed into each child born the

ability to learn language and to communicate with other human beings.

These basic principles are applied inductively in natural living. However, it is as easy to analyze the principles of hermeneutics or interpretation as it is to analyze the principles of grammar. The basic principles of hermeneutics or interpretation are as follows.

First, agree upon the same oral or written text. Many times orally we do not understand each other because we do not hear clearly the words the other has said. They have one oral text, and we have another. The same problem can exist with a written text. Thus, textual criticism is the first consideration in a course in exegesis. We must be certain of the text if we are to understand what the original author says.

Second, we must understand the words alike. The child is born with a capacity to hear, understand and speak. Gradually, by hearing sounds and making sounds, the child comes to imitate the sounds his relatives make. Soon he makes the transfer from the sound "mama" to the real person and also to "daddy," "water," "milk."

Helen Keller was impeded in learning until her teacher was able to make a breakthrough between an abstract sign she made in Helen's hand with the concrete element "water." Immediately upon understanding that the sign was equal to water, Helen's vocabulary expanded rapidly.

Third, we must understand grammar alike. The child learns grammar inductively. The child hears parents and others speak sentences. The child gradually expands from simple to complex sentences. Soon he is able to use past, present and future tense, passive and active voice and all aspects of grammar.

The child does not know these analytically and would not know a noun from an adverb in an analytical sense but

clearly knows them in a practical sense and is fully able to communicate. Only later does the analysis of grammar come.

Other key aspects of the natural principles of communication are context, historical background and historical foreground. Some, later in life, study these analytically; others never study them. Yet we are all able to communicate with each other if we really want to.

The only difference between daily communication of a child with his parents and our communication with God through the Bible is language, history and culture. We must transcend the 20th century culture and go back to the languages, the history, the context and the culture of biblical times to understand clearly the text, the meaning of words, the grammar, the context, the historical background and foreground.

SILENCE IS A NATURAL PRINCIPLE

Silence is a major aspect of the natural principles of interpretation. If silence were not a clearly natural and understood part of communication, parents would have to spend hours to give a child the simple command, "Go play in the back yard." The grocer would have to spend untold hours giving a simple instruction to his delivery person.

The mother says to her little three year old boy, "Go play in the back yard." Now, of course, this command has had a level of learning and maturity to precede it. The child must understand the meaning of the words "go," "play," "back yard." No doubt, this command, if given that simply, would have been preceded by other teaching that would enable the child to interpret the command.

The command "Go play in the back yard" is both permissive and prohibitive; it both allows and it forbids. By

play, the child understands that he can swing, slide, play in the sand box, color, chase bugs or anything he wishes to do. However, previous instruction may have made clear that play does not include swim in the swimming pool or climb the tree with no adult present. In other words, play allows many different activities, but itself may have been preconditioned and limited by other teaching.

Properly understood the word "play" would not mean dig up the rose bushes or pull up the garden plants. Thus, the word "play" allows a certain latitude of activity chosen by the child but forbids other activity that is beyond the meaning of the word "play."

The term "back yard" is specific. Play is generic within preset limits of the term "play." Back yard is a specific back yard. The mother does not have to name all of the places where the child is not to play because she has named the place to play. She does not have to say, "Do not play in the neighbor's back yard" or "Do not play in the street." Since back yard is specific, it has the specific limits of the surveyor's marks.

If the principle of silence were not a natural principle of communication, each time the mother said, "Go play in the back yard," she would have to name all of the other possible places in the world where a child could play and say, "Do not play there." She would have to name all of the other kinds of activities the child could do and say, "You are not to do those; you are only to play." We must naturally understand that silence is permissive and permits as much latitude as the generic command. It is also prohibitive and limited to the strictures of the specific command. Otherwise, it would be necessary for us to speak a volume the size of a dictionary every time we gave a command.

In the highly technical, targeted and limited warfare conducted against Iraq, the principle of silence was very

important. The pilots were briefed concerning their mission. Each was told, "Go bomb sites X, Y and Z." By this command they understood they could go and take any evasive route they chose to get to their target. Even that was limited in that they could not go into air space not previously approved. Specifically, they were to bomb targets X, Y and Z. The commander did not have to tell them all of the other sites in Iraq not to bomb. By silence they understood they were to bomb those three and no more lest there be political ramifications for attacking a civilian site.

PASSAGES AFFIRMING THE PRINCIPLE OF SILENCE

In 1 Corinthians 4:6 the apostle Paul told the Corinthians, "Now these things, brothers, I have in a figure transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes; that in us you might learn not to go beyond the things which are written." To go beyond the things which are written is to act without authorization, to add to God's Word.

This statement is made in the context of the Corinthian's dividing themselves into denominational groups by giving human labels to themselves. This kind of conduct had never been authorized by God. They were to honor the name of God and Christ and not of men.

When denominations today give themselves human or movement names, they have acted without the authorization of God and have gone beyond that which is written. When churches include in their worship or their organization activities or organizations not authorized by God, either specifically or by generic authority, they go beyond that which is written.

First Peter 4:11 affirms, "If any man speaks, let him speak as it were oracles of God." This passage has long been used as the biblical foundation for the Restoration motto, "Speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent." In matters of Christian doctrine and practice we are to speak what God has spoken, no less or no more.

Revelation 22:18, 19 affirms,

I testify unto every man who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto them, God shall add unto him the plagues which are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city which are written in this book.

This passage makes clear that we are not to add unto God's Word or take from or diminish from the inspired teaching of God. In all likelihood, this passage originally was meant with regard to the contents of the book of Revelation. Yet, I believe it was by the providence of God and superintendence of the Holy Spirit that it has been placed at the end of the Bible in order to apply to all of God's Word. Even if this is not true, it is certainly true that the same principles are contained in several places throughout the Word of God.

Paul instructed the Galatians not to leave the Gospel of Christ and not to listen to a perversion of it. He states, "But though we, or an angel from heaven should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema" (Gal. 1:6-10). To add to God's Word or to take from it or to disregard the silence of God's Word is to alter, pervert and preach another Gospel.

Jesus told Peter and the apostles, "Whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever you

shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Mt. 16:19; 18:18). God's revealed will from the apostles by the Holy Spirit binds what God wants bound and has loosed what God wants loosed. Man is not to alter it in any way.

Moses affirmed in Deuteronomy 4:2, "You shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall you diminish from it, that you may keep the commandments of Jehovah your God which I command you."

Surely, these and other passages teach us to honor the silence of God, to know, exalt and obey exactly what God has said and all he has said as properly interpreted to be applied. We must refuse to add to God's Word any human commandments or practices not authorized by God's specific or generic commands. (See the example of Baalam, Num. 22:18; 24:13.)

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES ILLUSTRATING THE PRINCIPLE OF SILENCE

A specific command plus silence affirms no priests are to come from Judah. In Numbers 3:2 God commanded Moses to appoint Aaron and his sons to keep their priesthood. He did not list all of the other tribes and forbid them to be priests. The Jews throughout history, however, understood that priests were to come only from the family and descendants of Aaron. Jeroboam defied this and appointed strangers as priests (1 Kings 12). For this he was condemned and he and his nation cursed.

The Hebrew writer understood the silence of God concerning priests from any other tribe. By inspiration he argues,

For he [Christ] of whom these things were said belongs to another tribe, from which no man has given attendance at the altar. For it is evident that

our Lord had sprung out of Judah; as to which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priests. (Heb. 7:13, 14)

Uzziah tried to usurp the function of priest. The inspired record of 2 Chronicles 26:16-21 reports that he trespassed against Jehovah because he went into the temple to burn incense. Azariah and 80 priests withstood him and said, "It pertains not unto you, Uzziah, to burn incense unto Jehovah, but to the priests the sons of Aaron." God authorized priests of Aaron and his family. This was a specific mandate. God's silence about priests from any other tribe was authoritative. God's silence forbid anyone else from being a priest.

The case of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, clearly illustrates the validity of the principle of silence. Numbers 10:1 in the NIV states that they "took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his command." The KJV and ASV say strange fire. The NIV's rendering of unauthorized fire makes very plain the problem. God had given a positive command to use fire from the brazen altar in the courtyard. He had said nothing pro or con about other fire. He had been silent. However, since he had commanded a specific fire, to use any other fire from any other place was unauthorized and, thus, sin. (See also David's sin by his unauthorized method of moving the ark of the covenant, 1 Chron. 13:1-14; 15:1-15; Num. 4:15 and article, "Lessons from the Ark," by Scott McDowell, *Gospel Advocate*, October 3, 1985, p. 58.)

THE LAW OF INCLUSION, EXCLUSION, AND INCIDENTALS

Still an outstanding illustration of God's law of inclusion, exclusion and expedients or incidentals is the case of Noah and God's command to build the ark. Critics have tried to ignore this, but they have never been able to answer it nor any of the other illustrations of these principles.

God commanded Noah, "Make you an ark of gopher wood; rooms shall you make in the ark, and shall pitch it within and without with pitch. And this is how you shall make it: the length of the ark 300 cubits, the breadth of it 50 cubits, and the height of it 30 cubits" (Gen. 6:14, 15). The command was to build an ark with rooms, pitch, specific dimensions, a window, a door and three stories.

The command was to build it of gopher wood. This is inclusive and automatically excludes pine, oak or any other kind of wood. The command included a door but was not specific about its size or decoration.

The command mentioned nothing about tools, where to build it, how to get the wood or other matters. These were incidental or in the realm of expediency. Noah could use his best judgment concerning the tools available to him, where to have his ark yard and many other matters. God's silence not only permitted Noah a wide area of judgment in the area of incidentals or expedients but also excluded certain actions on his part.

In Numbers 19:2 God commanded Israel to offer a red heifer. The command included all that was necessary to raise, feed and prepare the heifer for sacrifice. It automatically excluded a black heifer and the male of the species. The command left to the realm of expediency how to obtain the heifer (except other commands that said not to steal), raise or feed her.

Christ commands us to go and preach the Gospel. "Go" is a generic command. It is specific in that it involves relocation from one location to another but generic in how to go. One may walk, ride an animal, sail a boat or fly. Though the Bible is silent concerning airplanes, a Christian certainly may use them to go and spread the Gospel.

"Preach the Gospel" is specific in that it is an action involving communication of a message known by the one sent to be given to others who do not know the message. The command is generic in that one may preach by personal evangelism or by pulpit to an audience or by radio, TV or printing. The command to preach the Gospel both includes what is to be done and excludes any other message. It includes any manner possible of communicating the message and leaves in the realm of expediency or judgment many incidentals to carrying out the command.

Please examine and reflect carefully upon the chart of Law Inclusions, Exclusions, Incidentals or expedients appended to this article (pages 360-361). Virtually every command in the Bible can be charted in a similar fashion. Every command contains elements of both a generic command and a specific command. That which is specific about it demands that certain things be included in order to fulfill that command. Since it is specific, it also excludes other matters, and there are many incidentals or expedients to carrying out any command.

The Lord commands us to observe the Lord's Supper and to do this in remembrance of him. Included in this command is the use of bread to symbolize the body and the fruit of the vine to symbolize the blood. This command, however, excludes all other elements. Though the flesh of lamb is prominent in the Bible as a sacrifice and as food, and though it was served in the meal the night the Lord

instituted the Lord's Supper, lamb must be excluded from the Lord's table.

Dr. Bill Humble exposed the inconsistencies of the conservative Christian church in their criticism of our use of the argument from silence. Yet, they follow the same argument with respect to the Lord's Supper. He says,

There must be many practices not mentioned in Scripture, neither commanded nor forbidden, which the independents never would accept. Consider, for example, the Lord's Supper.

The Lord commanded the bread and fruit of the vine and said, 'Do this in remembrance of me.' We and the independents would agree this is scriptural and must be obeyed but couldn't we make the Lord's Supper a little more meaningful for today's world?

While the bread is the communion of the body of Christ, it may be difficult for some Christians to see the body of Christ in bread. Wouldn't flesh, actually animal flesh, be a more graphic reminder of the body and blood of Christ? Behold the lamb of God slain for our sins! Why wouldn't little pieces of roast lamb on the Lord's table make his presence and his death more real to some? Suppose then, that in addition to the bread and the cup, we add cubes of roast lamb to the Lord's supper to deepen its meaning.

Because the Bible is silent and does not forbid this, would we be at liberty to do it? Would our independent brethren accept roast lamb on the Lord's table? Surely not. But here is my challenge: if these brethren will tell us on what basis they would reject roast lamb at the Lord's supper, I think they will discover the silence of the scripture forbids

instrumental music in precisely the same way it forbids the lamb on the Lord's table.¹

We have no record of the Lord's giving specific commands concerning the manner of observing the Lord's Supper or commanding not to connect it with a common meal. Apparently, he was silent about this, assuming that decent people who loved and respected him would know how to conduct themselves in a memorial feast.

However, the Corinthians, not having totally left their paganism, did not know how to conduct themselves in a memorial feast for our Lord and Savior. They connected it with a common meal. They ate to gluttony and drank to drunkenness. Paul had to rebuke them for their sinfulness in their manner of partaking of the Lord's Supper. Though the Lord was silent about this, common decency would have taught anybody how to conduct a memorial feast and how not to behave as heathen.

The Lord's commands include the elements (bread and wine), the purpose, the manner and the attitude. They exclude all other elements, other purposes and false attitudes. His silence leaves in the realm of expedients or incidentals the shape of the bread, whether it is round or square, the kind of container for the bread or the fruit of the vine and other such factors.

Without understanding and applying the principle of silence and the law of inclusion, exclusion and expedients, the obeying of God's command to assemble would be impossible. He has commanded us to worship and not to forsake the assembly (Heb. 10:25; Jn. 4:23, 24). Automatically included in a command to assemble is a place, a time and a purpose.

The Lord has left the place completely in the realm of expediency and incidentals. It may be a public place, a borrowed place, a rented place or a bought and built place.

He has specified by necessary inference that the assembly be on the first day of the week and include prayer, singing, teaching, the Lord's Supper and giving (1 Cor. 11:17-16:4; Acts 20:7). This automatically excludes any other day and any other activities. Incidental would be all other factors necessary to make the assembly possible and comfortable and to accomplish the things that are to be done in the service.

The organization of the church also illustrates the importance of understanding the authority of God's silence. God has commanded and illustrated in the New Testament that each congregation is to be autonomous and to have elders and deacons. The Bible is silent about any kind of hierarchal organization or offices of power and authority over and beyond the local congregation. If the principle of silence is not valid, then the conservative Christian churches should not have resisted the liberal Christian church (Disciples of Christ) when they restructured into a denomination. Rather, they should have simply acknowledged this was a matter in the realm of opinion.

However, to acknowledge that is to acknowledge that the organization of the Catholic Church is acceptable to God. Thus, if one rejects the argument from silence, one must immediately, to be consistent, accept the pope, the college of cardinals, the archbishops, the bishops and the whole hierarchal organization of the Catholic Church as being scriptural and right.

One of the devil's great victories was to get men who called themselves Christians to say, "Whatever God has not forbidden, he has authorized." This then authorizes the Catholic Church, and all protestants should go back beyond the Protestant Reformation and join in again with the Catholic Church so Christendom could be united.

Concerning Christian music, the command is to sing (Eph. 5:19: Col. 3:16). The purpose is to admonish and praise (Jas. 5:13). Intelligible, verbal communication set to some type of music is essential to accomplish these commands. Thus, included in the command is the composition of songs, both words and music and making these available for the congregation to use in some way. Excluded is singing in a foreign language or singing in any kind of gibberish that does not teach or admonish or praise. Incidental is whether the words or music are presented on a blackboard, on handwritten paper, on photocopy paper, in a book or in some other manner.

Instrumental music is a different kind of music than singing. It is playing. Instrumental music cannot fulfill the command anymore than gibberish can. At best, instrumental music could only be an accompaniment, but in most instances instrumental music interferes with and hinders the understanding of the words to teach, admonish and praise.

The question of instruments of music might be a more open one if it were not for the historical foreground. Historical foreground is the evidence from the early Christians immediately after the command. In the foreground in the New Testament we never find the use of instruments mentioned or approved in conjunction with Christian singing. In early church history, not only were instruments not used, but they were opposed by the early Christians.²

A simple analogy to historical foreground and the natural principles of hermeneutics and the natural principle of silence may be helpful. The mother has two boys, one six and one three. She tells both, "Go play in the back yard." As the boys play, the three year old begins to climb the tree. The six year old says, "Don't climb that tree!

Don't you know we are not supposed to climb that tree without mother or daddy here?"

The older brother is an example of historical foreground. He has already been taught his lessons and got his spanking for climbing the tree. Though the mother did not specifically say, just prior to sending the children out, that they should not climb the tree, the older brother knew what was included in "play" and what was excluded. He passed his lessons on to the younger brother.

The early Christians have passed on to us their understanding of the Lord's command "to sing," and their practice and understanding clearly was that "sing" did not include "play."

Furthermore, in matters so important as our eternal salvation, we should follow the way that is safe, that cannot be wrong. All acknowledge that Christian singing is to emphasize verbal communication for praise, teaching and admonishing. All recognize that instruments of music are not necessary but rather have been questioned by scholars in the church of the early centuries as well as Calvin, Knox, Wesley, Spurgeon, Campbell and others of more recent centuries. To introduce instruments of music is to introduce division. To leave off instruments of music is to follow a way that is safe, that cannot be wrong. Also it builds unity because it does not offend the conscience of those who are opposed to it and drive them away.

Truly, we need to honor the silence of God and recognize the principle of silence as an essential element in human communication. As such it is also an essential element in understanding the Bible and applying the commands of God to our lives.

LAW AND INCIDENTALS

LAW	INCLUDED	EXCLUDED	INCIDENTAL
Build Ark	Gopher Wood	Refuse	Ax, Saw
	One door	Delegate	Yard Stick
Genesis 6	Size	Pine wood	Cubit
	Place	Extra Doors	
	Tools	New size	
		Mortar	
Go	All the World	Stay	Ride, Walk
	Any transport	Refuse	Fly, Sail
Mark 16:15	Every continent	Delegate	Camel, Train
	All races	Boycott any country	Horse
		Boycott any race	By twos
			Groups
Sing	Words of Praise	Nonsense	Type scale
	Teaching	Whistling	Song book
Col. 3:16	Some kind of music	Playing	Music
		Refuse	Photocopy
Eph. 5:19	Psalms, Hymns	Yodel	
	Spiritual songs		
Baptize	Burial	Sprinkling	Running, still
	Immersion in	Pouring	Forward
Rom. 6	water	Unbelievers	Backward
Acts 8	Believers	Babies	Who baptizes
Teach	All means of communication	Doctrines of men	How, when
		Error	Literature
Mt. 28:19-20	Whole Truth	Perversion	Sunday school
	Everyone	Gal. 1:7, 8	
Lord's Supper	Bread	Other elements	No. containers
1 Cor 11:16	Fruit of vine	Other days	Size of bread
Acts 20:7	Lord's Day		Time of day

LAW	INCLUDED	EXCLUDED	INCIDENTAL
Co-work	Same aims	Hierarchy	How
	Same cause	Majority rule	When
1 Cor. 3:9			Where

Editor's Note: This lecture was presented at Ohio Valley College April 17, 1992. It is included by permission of Furman Kearley and Duane Warden.

NOTES

1. Dr. Bill J. Humble, "The Silence of the Scripture," *Gospel Advocate*, March 5, 1987, 138.
2. See Dr. Everett Ferguson, *A Capella Music in the Public Worship of the Church*, 2nd ed., (Abilene, TX, ACU Press, 1988).

SHARING THE GOOD NEWS USING YOUNG PEOPLE

Howard Bybee

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE

Most, if not all, church leaders would agree that it is important that young people be involved in evangelism. The important question is "how?" and "to what extent?" A few young Christians are fortunate enough to have parents, Bible class teachers, or youth ministers that influence them to be evangelistic even in high school. I know some young Christians who brought to the Lord one or more of their classmates. Such young Christians are extremely blessed, and their faith is strong. They are, however, the exception and very rare. The evangelistic experience of the overwhelming majority of young people in the Lord's church is either non-existent or limited to some type of campaign.

The campaign experience, in fact, is typical of churches that have youth ministers. This campaign experience is varied. It may include a four or five day vacation Bible school conducted by teens, a one or two week service or literature distribution project to Mexico or Central America or a four to six week campaign to Europe, Africa or South America. These experiences are, for the most part, very positive for young Christians. They give them a taste of the joy of working together for the Lord and in some cases of experiencing a new and different culture. Campaigns combine the concepts of vacation and service. They serve

a very valid purpose and are usually spiritually strengthening to those who participate.

WHAT SHOULD BE OUR STANDARD?

The overriding scriptural principle governing this matter should be "the priesthood of all believers" (1 Peter 2:5, 9). We in churches of Christ teach and preach this principle but do not do enough to instill it in our membership. What is intended by this important biblical principle? It means, of course, that we are all equal in God's sight, that there is no hierarchy, no separate clergy in the Lord's church. It means that every Christian has direct access to God in prayer and that Christ lives in him/her. But it also means that every Christian becomes God's ambassador on earth (2 Cor. 5:20). This carries with it a great responsibility. At the core of that responsibility is sharing the saving message with others as Paul says in verses 18 - 20:

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave *us the ministry of reconciliation*: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. *And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors*, as though God were making his appeal through us.

Every Christian is saved, sanctified, and anointed then sent out to share the saving message with others. If every Christian would fully understand this basic principle early in his/her Christian life, the church as a whole would be much more vibrant and influential. I believe *we can* do more to instill this principle in our young people.

WHAT OTHERS HAVE DONE

The Mormon church has capitalized on the scriptural concept of the priesthood of all believers. They have instilled it into their youth both by teaching and practice. They tell every young member "you are a priest." But they do not stop there. They tell them that as a priest they must be actively involved in the spread of their doctrine. They require them to give two years to mission work. The result is that they have been one of the most evangelistic religious groups in the world. They have today over 30,000 missionaries outside the United States. They have far outgrown churches of Christ. And, not at all least important, they keep faithful to Mormonism 88% of their young people, all of this in spite of their strange, weird doctrines.

The Lord wants us to learn lessons from others. He says in Luke 16:8, "The children of this world are wiser than the children of light." What he means, of course, is that sometimes those who are not Christians know how to get things done better than those who are. The only logical reason for such a statement is that God wants us to observe what others are doing, and when we see a principle or practice that is good, effective and scriptural, put it to use in his kingdom. We are talking about using young people in evangelism, but I hope we are talking about a lot more than that. I want us to talk about the overall growth and stability of the Lord's church. I am convinced, in fact, that properly involving young people in evangelism will not only dramatically increase the mission force of the church but will also greatly strengthen the church at home.

HOW WE CAN IMPROVE

As I said at the beginning, campaigns are great, but they do not go far enough. They do not really teach young people *how* to evangelize, *how* to share Christ. Campaigns are not long enough to accomplish that. Activities on campaigns usually include some service project, the distribution of literature, singing as a group in town squares, hospitals, etc. and in some cases door knocking. Occasionally a little bit of elementary teaching is done. However, to learn how to evangelize effectively takes time, practice and experience. Campaigners often make contacts, but just as they begin to get acquainted with the person, they have to leave. I have observed that it is difficult to pass a contact on to someone else. If the person who makes the contact leaves before the person is brought to the Lord interest usually dies. Time is needed to cultivate a friendship, win the person's confidence, teach him the Gospel and ground him in the faith. We are talking about the need for time from two standpoints. First is the need for time for the young Christian to learn to develop the skills necessary for evangelizing. This, as a general rule, will not happen until the young Christian is actively involved in an outreach effort. Evangelizing, I have often said, is one of those things that can be learned only by doing. It is in this way similar to swimming. No matter how much previous instruction, you do not learn to swim until you get into the water. Evangelizing is contacting people with a view of influencing them for Christ. You cannot learn how to do that until you begin contacting people with a view of influencing them for Christ. Even though the ideal might be that every Christian would begin doing that as soon as he/she is baptized, the reality is that Christians usually do not begin doing that until they become part of an organized

effort designed to spread the Gospel. The second need is, as I mentioned before, time for the Christian to cultivate, teach and influence his contacts. How much time is needed to accomplish these goals?

LEARNING FROM OTHERS

I believe here is where we need to *learn from others*. The Mormon church has made a science out of involving their young people. They have been the forerunners in this area for over one hundred years. They require their young people to spend *two years* evangelizing. Their success in this area is amazing. I encountered two young Mormon missionaries in 1949 when I was driving from Pepperdine College out to Barstow, California to preach on weekends. I have since met them all over Europe. I have from my first encounter with them had a longing in my heart for the Lord's church to initiate a program challenging young Christians to commit two years to spreading the saving message.

In 1969, when I returned from 16 years of mission work in Italy, I had a part in initiating a two-year involvement effort for young people that developed into a program called AIM (Adventures In Missions). This program is based in Lubbock, Texas and is connected with the Sunset School of Preaching. They basically recruit high school graduates, give them six months of training, and send them in groups to work for eighteen months with a missionary somewhere in the world. They do get some workers that are a little older, but the majority are just out of high school.

THE BEGINNING OF AVANTI ITALIA

The Southwest Church of Christ in Jonesboro, Arkansas holds title to a three-story villa in Florence, Italy that was used from 1964 to 1979 as a Bible school for Italian Christians. Most of the students moved to Florence, lived in the Bible School building, enrolled in the two-year Bible study program and also attended a local university. This program was discontinued in 1979 because the number of students declined and the director returned to the States. At that time Harding University made an agreement with the church in Jonesboro to use the villa for a branch program in Florence called HUF (Harding University in Florence). In this program they send about forty students and two professors to Florence for a semester of study and travel.

In 1983 the Jonesboro church asked my wife Doris and me to go to Florence and attempt to revive the Bible training program for Italian Christians. We went to Florence and lived in the same villa with the HUF students for a year while Harding was purchasing their own villa and I was laying the ground work for reopening the Bible School for Italians. During the next three and a half years I carried on a Bible training program for Italian Christians, and Harding's branch program continued to thrive in their own property two miles from the Bible School. I saw the Lord's hand at work in a very unique way during that time. I saw him close one door and open another. We had only two or three Italian students at a time during those years. If not for a Bible school for Italians, how could that villa be utilized?

I had close contact during that time with Harding students in Florence in the HUF program. I noticed a greater-than-usual spiritual awareness in those young Christians. Evidently, living in a foreign culture, worshiping with

the Italian church, and observing Catholic ritualism caused some of them to see the need for the spread of the Gospel. Some of them asked me if they could help in some way in our evangelistic work while they were there. I had to tell them that since they were there for only three months and were so busy studying and traveling that there was not much they could do. Then lightning struck. I began to realize the Lord was pointing the way. I started telling those young Christians that if they really wanted to make a contribution they should commit two years of their lives to spreading the saving message. I suggested they make the commitment, go back to Searcy, finish their degrees, and then return to Florence for two years of evangelizing. Some of them began to accept that challenge, and in 1986 the first Harding graduates returned. They were immediately very effective and we decided to expand the program to graduates of other Christian and state colleges and universities.

Here seemed to be the perfect opportunity to upgrade the AIM and other two-year commitment programs to the college graduate level. This is important, especially for places like Europe where the educational system is quite advanced. There are some places where high school graduates can do a very good work. But in Italy and other European countries, a college graduate is much better prepared to win the confidence of the young people he meets and thus has a better chance of leading them to the Lord. Another advantage college graduates have is that for the most part they are already accustomed to living away from home for extended periods.

I praise all such efforts and appreciate those working in the direction of involving our young people in the Lord's work for extended periods.

In conclusion I believe we need to learn everything we can from others and that we need continually to improve

our own efforts. I have basically narrated my own convictions and experiences on this topic and would like for us to discuss various aspects of it.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. What would be the advantages of a two-year mission experience to a young Christian both spiritually and materially?
2. What would be the advantages to the church if large numbers of young Christians would take part in such a program?
3. How could this challenge be more widely spread throughout the churches?
4. Would young people and their parents be more receptive to this challenge if they heard about it as they grew up in the church?
If so, what could be done to introduce children to this concept on a wide scale?
5. What kind of special training would be ideal for those involved before they go to the field, and how long should it be?
6. How much support should those involved be required to raise, and how should they raise it?
7. What kind of supervision should these young people have once they are on the field?

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for Avanti Italia under the direction of the College church in Searcy, Arkansas in 1990. He and his wife Doris have three children.

WHAT THE LORD REQUIRES

Bob T. Lawrence

BACKGROUND OF MICAH 6:8

Early in the 8th century B.C., the world powers shifted. For over a hundred years Assyria had been extending its empire across Asia Minor. However in the 700's B.C., Assyria faced internal struggles and no longer posed a threat to the western countries of Israel and Judah. This opened the door for Israel and Judah to expand.

Jeroboam II acquired territory for the northern kingdom, Israel, by reclaiming land from the Aramaeans. Damascus and Hamath became vassals and paid tribute to Jeroboam II. At the same time, in the southern kingdom of Judah, Azariah increased his influence by defeating the Philistines and the Arabians. He also acquired tribute from the Ammonites. Together, the military achievements of Israel and Judah led by God's people into an unequalled time of prosperity. Unfortunately, it was also a time of great darkness.

On the surface was a social darkness. Some in Israel and Judah became extremely wealthy while others remained dreadfully poor. For the first time in their history, the Jews formed classes, and the poor farmers found themselves at the mercy of the wealthy merchant class.

The rich took advantage of their new found power. They snatched property and homes from the poor while selling foreigners into slavery. Honest trade in the marketplace was the exception while dishonesty was the rule.

Even the leaders were corrupt. Court ruling went to the highest bidder as judges were easily bought with bribes. These men were described as those "who hate good and love evil" (Micah 3:2). Because of this, Israel and Judah became immersed in a time of social darkness.

Moreover, the 8th century was a time of spiritual darkness. Priest and prophets worked for selfish gain. And the people only listened to prophets who spoke of good times and continued prosperity.

Many people worshiped idols. On the hillside stood the Asherah poles which were fertility images. Despite God's commands, the people erected these and other images for worship. Prostitutes stood in the doorways of temples where others would come and worship the gods sexually.

Spiritually these people were blind, but ironically, they continued to claim that the Lord was among them, despite their darkness. They continued to offer sacrifices to the Lord and sing praises to him, but their hearts were far from him.

God's anger burned because his people acted both religious and ungodly at the same time. They mocked him with their worship. They spit in his face as they ran past him to the prostitutes and the idols. They exchanged the Lord's care for the wealth and pleasures of the world. And most of the prophets who claimed to speak his word did not even know him.

A handful of prophets, however, did know God and they spoke his word with honesty and power. Among them was a man named Micah, a prophet from the small town of Moresheth in the hills west of Jerusalem.

MICAH'S CASE AGAINST ISRAEL

Like a convicting lawyer, Micah brings the Lord's case against Israel and Judah. He warns that prosperous times will not last for those who defy the Lord and who cheat men. God will punish men who live in darkness. Micah specifically names Assyria as the nation God will use to punish his people.

But Israel and Judah still have a chance to turn the Lord's wrath away. The question is how? How can this corrupt nation appease an angry God before he destroys them?

Could they please him with burnt offerings? "Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil?" (Mic. 6:7) What about offering their own children, their firstborns, to compensate for their sin?

Micah presents each of these options, but then contrasts them with what the Lord really requires:

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Mic. 6:8)

Micah points out that God is interested in more than acts of worship. He requires a faithful life. The sacrifices were good, but the Lord also requires justice as opposed to dishonesty, mercy as opposed to selfish greed, and a humble walk with God as opposed to an arrogant walk with self while worshiping other gods. The prophet's words are echoed 750 year later by Jesus in Matthew 23. He rebukes the Pharisees saying:

You give a tenth of your spices--mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law--justice, mercy, and faithful-

ness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. (23:23)

Observe carefully what both Micah and Jesus are saying. You cannot please God by simply paying your dues. He requires more. The 8th century Jews were willing to give sacrifices and the Pharisees were willing to give their spices, but God required their hearts. He still does.

GOD'S REQUIREMENTS TODAY

We are removed from the prophet Micah by nearly 3000 years, and yet he might as well be our neighbor. For though we live at different times, our societies have much in common. Men's faith in God continues to be exchanged for the pleasure of the world. As in Micah's time, honesty is traded for a promotion while immorality is labeled normal. Some even claim to hold God's hand as they run about in the playground of the world trying to please God with only token gifts. As in Micah's time, many act both religiously and ungodly at the same time. And again, God's anger must burn.

But what about us? In a world of greed, envy, and lust, what does the Lord require of his people? What does he require of you and me?

Justice. The answer is the same today as it was in Micah's time. Our lives must reflect our religion. Micah says that, first, of all, we must act justly. God requires that his people do what is right. They must put in honest work, practice hospitality, and tell the truth. God's people are to be trustworthy so that no one can question their integrity.

King Nebuchadnezzar, after being humbled by God, praised and exalted the Lord exclaiming "everything he

does is right and all his ways are just" (Dan. 4:37). In this way, we are to be like God: our ways, like his ways, must be just. From the powerful high courts of the nation to the privacy of our homes, we must act justly and do what is right whether we be at work or play. "For the Lord loves the just" (Ps. 37:28).

Mercy. The second requirement also involves being like God. We must love mercy. Jesus tells the story of a man who has an enormous debt. The king takes pity on the man and forgives his debt. But the man refuses to cancel a debt of a few dollars owed to him by another man who begged for a little time. Servants report the man's actions to the king. Then, infuriated, the king throws the unmerciful man in prison until his overwhelming debt was paid in full. Jesus concluded the parable by stating that God will do the same with anyone who does not forgive his brother.

God's people must be forgiving. We have been forgiven of more than we could ever repay, and the Lord expects us to do the same for others. Jesus himself taught us to pray, "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us" (Lk. 11:4). We must love mercy.

Of course, loving mercy involves more than forgiving sins. It also includes laying down our lives for our brothers. Love your neighbor as yourself. That is the second greatest commandment. But do we really know what it means? If you love yourself, then you provide for what your body needs. If you are hungry, you feed yourself. If cold, then you put something on. If lonely, then you go to be with other people. So to love others as yourself simply means: if your neighbor is hungry, then feed him; if he is cold, give him a coat; if he is lonely, you visit him.

John wrote that in this life we can be like God if we love our brothers (1 Jn. 4:17). That is God's requirement.

We love mercy by taking the love, forgiveness, and care that the Lord has given us, and in turn, giving it to others.

Humility. The third requirement involves a relationship with God. We must walk humbly with God. Or in the words of Jesus, we must be faithful. But what does this mean? Someone once said that humility does not mean belittling oneself, but forgetting oneself. To walk humbly with God means just that--to forget ourselves and obey his commands. In Second Corinthians 5:14-15, Paul says:

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

Paul emphasises that we who are alive in Christ are not to live for ourselves but for him. The Jews in the 8th century created idols and worshiped with the prostitutes. They were unfaithful to God and lived for themselves. But they are not the last. Even today men erect their idols. They put their faith in wealth and spend intimate time with the sensual pleasures of the world.

But God's people are to be different. We do not live for ourselves; we live for God. We are not enticed by wealth, for our treasures are in heaven. We have no needs from the world, for God himself is our provider. And no one can misguide us because we walk with the one who knows the way.

CONCLUSION

The story is told of a Sunday school class studying Genesis 5 and the account of Enoch. The teacher asked how the children thought God took Enoch away. Without

hesitation, a sharp little girl said, "That's easy! Enoch walked with God for three hundred years. By that time they must have walked a very long way and so God said, 'Enoch you are a very long way from home. You better just come home with me.' And so Enoch did."

If we walk with God all of our lives, just as Enoch did, then God will come and take us home with him also. In the meantime, God promises to supply all of our needs because "we obey his commands and do what pleases him" (1 Jn. 3:21).

So let us take a hard look at ourselves. Do we act justly doing what is right? Do we show mercy to others with the love of the Lord? And do we walk humbly with him everyday? Remember, God desires more than our gifts. He requires more than our service. He wants us. And he wants us to imitate him daily. Allow the words of the small town prophet to sink in.

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Mic. 6:8)

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