

# BIBLE STUDIES

"Now **these** were more noble **than** those in Thessalonica, **in that they received the** word with **all readiness of mind,** **examining the Scriptures daily,** whether **these things** were so" (Acts 17. 11)

STUDIES IN **SEVEN MINOR** PROPHETS

NOTES ON THE PSALMS

VOLUME **39**

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# CONTENTS

## Studies in Seven Minor Prophets

The <b>Sign</b> of Jonah the Prophet . . . . .	7
The Repentance of Nineveh. . . . .	26
Sounding the Alarm in Zion. . . . .	38
The great and terrible <b>Day</b> of the Lord. . . . .	55
Judgements on Samaria and Jerusalem. . . . .	69
God in Wrath remembering Mercy. . . . .	87
The divine Reckoning with Assyria. . . . .	101
Desolations on Israel and her Oppressors. . . . .	120
The Lord in the Midst . . . a mighty One to save. . . . .	138
The Vision made plain to Faith. . . . .	152
Triumphant Confidence in God amidst Apostasy. . . . .	169
Edom and the Day of the Lord. . . . .	181

## Supplementary Study Articles

Israel and Judah in the times of Jonah. . . . .	2
Tyre and Sidon. . . . .	18
The Days of Uzziah. . . . .	23
The Reigns of Jotham and Ahaz. . . . .	35
The Times of Hezekiah. . . . .	50
Ammon. . . . .	52
Moab. . . . .	66
Edom. . . . .	82
Assyria. . . . .	85
The Reigns of Manasseh and Amon. . . . .	98
<b>Egypt</b> —Influences on Israel during prophetic Period. . . . .	114
Prophetic Aspects of Egypt's Destiny. . . . .	117
Josiah of Judah . . . . .	130
Syria. . . . .	133
Babylon—Decline foretold. . . . .	146
<b>Babylon</b> —Predictions of end-time Aspects. . . . .	149
Ethiopia. . . . .	167
<b>Philistia</b> . . . . .	178
Chronology of seven Minor Prophets. . . . .	6, 34, 100, 151
Editorials. . . . .	1, 17, 33, 49, 65, 81, 97, 113, 129, 145, 161, 177
Comments. . . . .	13, 44, 60, 77, 91, 108, 125, 143, 158, 160, 175, 188
<b>Questions and Answers</b> . . . . .	15, 32, 64, 78, 92, 109, 126, 159, 160, 175, 188
Notes on the Psalms. . . . .	47, 80, 92, 110, 175, 189
Job, The Book of. . . . .	127
Salvation, Three Aspects of. . . . .	161

# BIBLE STUDIES

*'A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God (Acts 17. 11). '*

VOLUME 39

JANUARY, 1971

## EDITORIAL

We have embarked together for 1971 on a study of seven of the "minor" prophets. These men of God lived in an era which immediately preceded the final stage of the dispensation of the prophets. Apart from the continuous relevance of all Scripture, divinely inspired as it is, the messages and experiences of these prophets touch both Israel and the nations around in a vital and dramatic way. These very nations or their historical descendants are to be seen today in the divine crucible as the dispensation of grace moves inexorably to its conclusion. Both in respect of certain prophecies of the future, and of their contemporary significance when delivered, these messages from God have a pointed relevance today. In order to assist in bringing this out in our study, the supplementary study articles highlight Israel and the nations in various historical and spiritual respects. Furthermore, Mr. Lindsay Prasher will be contributing quarterly articles on the chronology of the times and peoples we shall be studying, to help us in terms of the historical background. We look forward to plenty of "feed-back" from study groups on points raised in these, as well as on fellow-students' monthly papers. Other original articles will also be welcome.

The papers submitted on our opening study, "The Sign of Jonah the Prophet", show a very encouraging depth and range of treatment of the subject. Jonah is, in certain respects, almost unique among the prophets. There is so much more of his experience recorded than his actual ministry. Yet we may well note that Jonah's terse message as recorded in 3. 4 is an outstanding example of the prophetic message in its simplest and finest form. Add to this the singularly dramatic nature of his experience, and its very special relevance to that of the Lord Himself as revealed in the gospels, and the aspects of the subject which suggest themselves for study and comment multiply with consideration.

Many of these have been most helpfully dealt with by contributors from groups. Not a great deal was contributed on the popular attempts to discredit the book of Jonah, which, no doubt, are the work of the Adversary, because of our Lord's direct and personal antitypical link with Jonah. "Apologetics" is not, however, a major aim of our study and we most gladly accept the Master's accrediting of the book. Another area of fruitful consideration touched on briefly by a few, is the remarkable psalm contained in chapter 2, with its solemn forshadowings of die sufferings of Christ and His death. Altogether we have the promise this month of a rich exploration of these often neglected prophets in the months ahead.

*J. D. T.*

## ISRAEL AND JUDAH IN THE TIMES OF JONAH

One of the very real problems in any study of the Old Testament prophets and their impact on Israel and the nations around is the establishment and maintenance of historical perspective. It is well worth the effort to acquire this, and in an attempt to help in this direction a tabulation has been prepared of the kings of Israel and Judah from the time of the division of the kingdom on Solomon's death. Alongside are shown the approximate periods with which the various prophets are thought to be associated. This setting out of the kings has been based primarily on Anstey's calculations, since these were carefully harmonized with scriptural data and with established dates from secular history. The Scriptures also state during which reigns certain prophets fulfilled their ministry. Where no scriptural information is given, information has been gleaned from generally accepted sources. Thus this table is offered as a general guide and may not necessarily be exactly accurate in every detail. It may nevertheless be helpful in relating one to another corresponding kings of Israel and Judah and in sorting out such confusing coincidences as kings called Ahaziah and Jehoram, partially contemporary, in both Israel and Judah.

Turning more specifically to the conditions in Israel and Judah in the times of Jonah, we find that one point in Jonah's prophetic ministry is clearly pin-pointed for us in 2 Kings 14. 25, in the reign of Jeroboam II of Israel, connecting Jonah's ministry rather more closely with the northern kingdom. Indeed it will be seen that Azariah (Uzziah) of Judah and Jeroboam II were contemporary

for a large part of their reigns and the days of Uzziah will be dealt with separately in a later article in this series. We shall therefore deal more in the present contribution with the northern kingdom, although the fortunes of the kingdoms were intertwined to a considerable extent in the days of Jonah and those which immediately preceded them.

It may be well to remind ourselves that the history of the kings of the northern kingdom of Israel was one of almost unbroken evil from the days of the first king Jeroboam, "Who made Israel to sin". No king who succeeded him, right down to the Assyrian captivity, wholly followed the LORD, and few made any serious pretence of doing so. Jehu was probably the most God-fearing of all Israel's kings and even he, though efficient in destroying the house of Ahab and Jezebel at God's behest, and in eliminating Baal worship, retained the golden calves in Bethel and Dan and "took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD" (2 Kings 10. 28-31). In some ways the reign of Jehu, the furious rider, marks a watershed in the royal history of Israel. The dynasty established by Omri and carried on by Ahab and his two sons was, of course, noted for its concentrated evil. Jehu was the warrior whom God prepared for their overthrow and who was rewarded for the thoroughness with which he executed this judgement by the divine promise "Thy sons of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel" (2 Kings 10. 30). This promise the LORD in due time fulfilled, and Jeroboam II, whose period we are now considering, was the fourth of the five kings of Jehu's royal line. After they passed from the scene, a series of evil kings, usurping one another, hurried the deteriorating northern kingdom to its sad end at the hands of the Assyrian king in the year 721 B. C.

The middle portion of 2 Kings 14 records the conflict between Jehoash (father of Jeroboam II) of Israel, and Amaziah of Judah, in which the king of Israel defeated the king of Judah, raiding the house of the LORD in Jerusalem and carrying off the valuables of the temple to Samaria, the northern capital. Such internecine strife among His sadly divided people must have occasioned the LORD particularly poignant sorrow. Grievous enough would be the sight of a foreign monarch carrying away the precious things of the sanctuary, but such desecration by rival factions in Israel bespoke a situation of spiritual and moral chaos which was bitter indeed. It will

## KINGS OF ISRAEL & JUDAH IN RELATION TO THE PROPHETS

ISRAEL	B. C.	JUDAH	B. C.	PROPHETS
Jeroboam	983-962	<b>Rehoboam</b>	983-966	
<b>Nadab</b>	962-961	<b>Abijam</b>	966-964	
<b>Baasha</b>	961-938	<b>Asa</b>	964-923	
<b>Elah</b>	938-937			
Zimri	937			
Omri	937-926			
<b>Ahab</b>	926-905	Jehoshaphat	922-898	
<b>Ahaziah</b>		Jehoram		<b>Elijah</b>
(co-rex)	906-905	(co-rex)	901-898	
Jehoram	905-894	Jehoram		
		(sole <b>king</b> )	898-894	
		<b>Ahaziah</b>		
		(co-rex)	895	
		<b>Ahaziah</b>		<b>Elisha</b>
		(sole king)	894	
Jehu	893-866	<b>Athaliah</b>	893-887	
Jehoahaz	865-849	Joash	887-848	
Jehoash				
(co-rex)	851-849			
Jehoash				
(sole <b>king</b> )	848-833	<b>Amaziah</b>	847-819	
<b>Jeroboam II</b>	833-793	Interregnum	818-808	Jonah
Interregnum	792-771	<b>Azariah</b>		
Zechariah	770	(Uzziah)	807-756	Joel <b>Amos</b>
Shallum	769			
Menahem	768-759			<b>Isaiah</b>
Pekahiah	758-757			<b>Hosea</b>
Pekah	756-737	Jotham	755-740	
Interregnum	736-729	<b>Ahaz</b>	739-724	
Hoshea	728-720	Hezekiah		
		(co-rex)	726-724	<b>Micah</b>
		Hezekiah		
		(sole king)	723-697	<b>Nahum</b>
		Manasseh	697-642	
		Amon	642-640	
		Josiah	640-609	<b>Zephaniah</b> <b>Habakkuk</b>
		Jehoahaz	609	
		Jehoiakim	609-598	<b>Jeremiah</b>
		Jehoiachin	598	Obadiah
		Zedekiah	597-587	<b>Ezekiel</b>
				Daniel
				<b>Post-Exilic Prophets</b>
				<b>Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi</b>

be seen from the table of kings and prophets that, at this point in His people's history, God began to raise up a series of prophets of whom Jonah was one of the earliest. Most of this ministry was associated with the northern kingdom and appealed to those Israel monarchs and their subjects who, by wise response to the LORD's voice through His prophets, might have saved Israel from the fast approaching judgement by captivity.

Now it was Jonah, we read, who was employed of God to indicate a very generous intervention by God in the fortunes of Israel in the days of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14. 25-27). This king was plainly described as being evil and departing not "from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat". Yet God enabled him to implement a policy of restoration of Israel's border "from the entering in of Hamath unto the sea of Arabah". His people were in very grave trouble and if there were not a God-fearing man at hand to effect a measure of deliverance, God would, and did, use wicked king Jeroboam II. The yearnings of the LORD's heart over Israel is beautifully if sadly expressed in 2 Kings 14. 26, 27: "For the LORD saw the affliction of Israel, that it was very bitter... and... said not that He would blot out the name of Israel... but He saved them...".

All of this being so it is the more remarkable that Jonah was used by God in the way indicated in the book which bears his name. Can it be that the ministry to Nineveh was early in Jonah's prophetic career and a lesson to him about God's concern for heathen nations? How much more for His own erring people! Jonah's frame of mind towards Nineveh was certainly in terms of the wicked receiving the due reward of their deeds, even to the extent of resenting the display of divine mercy. Yet he was to witness in Israel to divine mercy and grace even in the absence of repentance and humbling. So little is revealed, however, of the actual extent, content or pattern of Jonah's prophetic ministry that it is not possible to be certain of the sequence of even the few events in his life of which we do read. He was thus associated with a period in Israel which called forth a remarkable degree of divine forbearance, to the extent of positive intervention on the nation's behalf in the complete absence of any evidence of return to the LORD. It is against such a background that God's dealing with his reluctant prophet, in the moulding of his character, must be viewed.

J. D. Terrell

## THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE MINOR PROPHETS BEING STUDIED IN 1971

### 1. *Chronology of Jonah*

The chronology of the kings of Judah and Israel is given in great detail in Scripture, with definite links with the reigns of Gentile powers. It is hoped to study this in a series planned for 1972 (D. V. ) together with other aspects of scriptural chronology. Suffice it to say here that, although the chronology of the kings is complex, a coherent pattern runs through it whereby it is possible to find guidance about the dates of the rulers of both Israel and Judah, and this from Scripture alone.

However, the prophets cannot be so definitely dated. Only a few like Jeremiah (627 B. C. ) and Ezekiel (594 B. C. ) have the dates of the commencement of their ministry given to us. For others, like Isaiah, Hosea and Micah, we are told the reigns during which they prophesied, which is very helpful in determining the background of their messages. For others again, such as Nahum and Habakkuk, less definite indications are given, but for all we do have the approximate time scale of their service.

In this and three ensuing quarterly articles, the chronology of the prophets being studied in 1971 will be briefly discussed, together with some indication of the value of this factual data. This month we look at Jonah, then in turn at Joel and Micah, Nahum and Zephaniah, and finally at Habakkuk and Obadiah. From 2 Kings 14. 25 we see that Jonah, the son of Amittai, prophesied that Jeroboam II would restore the borders of Israel from the entering in of Hamath unto the sea of Arabah (Dead Sea). This was the eastern border of Israel, 250 miles in length. God in mercy saw the nation's dire distress and not only gave them some protection from their enemies, but told them in advance to comfort them; this despite the wickedness of Jeroboam II. Jonah therefore was active before this restoration of the border, but the event itself is not dated. Nor is the book of Jonah dated. However, since Jeroboam II reigned from 833-793 B. C, it is *cleat* that Jonah ministered about 800 B. C. His visit to Nineveh might cause us to deduce that he was active chiefly for the benefit of those outside Israel, whereas Hosea and Joel were prophesying about the same phase of the prophetic era within Israel and Judah respectively.

The destruction of Nineveh was clearly imminent, for Jonah's message was shocking in its definiteness: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown". God's judgement on the city's inhabitants was about to be poured out. Yet in keeping with God's character as displayed throughout the whole of Scripture, he provided the opportunity for repentance in the ministry of Jonah. The people of Nineveh grasped the opportunity and were saved from destruction. Sad to say, despite the later prophecies of Nahum their way of life gradually returned to wickedness, but it was not until 200 years later that God had to use a Gentile power to judge Nineveh. In 626 B. C. Nabopolassar took the city and its final overthrow was in 604 B. C. Thus the merciful and yet righteous ways of God are highlighted by a study of the chronology associated with Jonah. C. L. P.

## STUDIES IN SEVEN MINOR PROPHETS

### *THE SIGN OF JONAH THE PROPHET*

#### JONAH 1 and 2

*From Atherton and Leigh.* —The Lord's comment, "a greater than Jonah is here", is high commendation indeed, for it is given to few in Scripture to be compared with the Son of God in this way (see Matthew 12. 6, 41, 42). This comment, in its context in Matthew 12, is meaningless if Jonah was not a historical person.

Jonah's prophetic ministry to the northern kingdom of Israel followed fairly closely in time those of Elijah and Elisha (2 Kings 14. 25), and there are similarities in these three prophets' experiences; e. g., each was used by God to assist Gentiles (see Luke 4. 25-27), and the spiritual struggles of Elijah and Jonah are similar (1 Kings 19, Jonah 4).

Jonah's experience inside the fish was deliberately brought about by God to foreshadow the death and resurrection of His Son. The story of the lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness by Moses (Numbers 21, John 3. 14) is a comparable incident, also predicting by illustration the death of Christ, and again arising initially from an act of wrong-doing [see Comment 1].

The feature of Jonah's experience which the Lord emphasized in relation to "the sign of Jonah the prophet" was that he was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so remarkably

predictive of His own experience in "the heart of the earth". "The heart of the earth" was considered by most to refer to Hades and not to Joseph's new tomb, because

- (1) the term "the heart of the earth" is hardly appropriate to a tomb on the surface of the earth;
- (2) while He was dead, the Son of Man was not in the tomb, but only His body; He was in Hades (Acts 2. 27, 31);
- (3) other Scriptures point to Hades being located within the earth (e. g., Numbers 16. 33 R. V. M., Ephesians 4. 9) [see Comment 2],

We gather from Luke 11. 30 that Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites. Jonah would tell them of his extraordinary experience, and this may have been partly responsible for their prompt repentance. Similarly, the Lord became a sign to Israel when the apostles later bore witness to His resurrection on the third day—"as Jonah became a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of Man be to this generation".

Jonah's experiences recorded in Jonah 1 provide several other helpful analogies to the work of Christ: -

- (1) There is a similar balance between the parts played by God and men. Jonah himself laid down his life, the men threw him overboard, and God provided the storm of judgement.
  - (2) The men on the ship were saved from death through Jonah's action
  - (3) Jonah was reclaimed from "death" by God for further service.
- Some, however, find difficulty in accepting these other analogies, because it was only through Jonah's disobedience that he was thrown overboard, etc., and so he is not a fitting person to portray the Lord Jesus in these respects [see Comment 3], But the same objection applies equally to the experience of the three days and three nights. We must also bear in mind that God was still prepared to use His servant after his disobedience, which seems to show that Jonah's motives, though misguided, were deeply sincere. Jonah's mission to Nineveh clearly involved him in a great personal repugnance. As a prophet, Jonah probably knew that Assyria, of which Nineveh was the capital city, would within a century carry away Israel into captivity [see Comment 4]. Also, Jonah would find the ways of Nineveh so revolting to his own high standards that his action was not so

**much an act of rebellion against God's will as a violent response to his own deep loathings, which could perhaps only be overcome by means of the fearful ordeal in the deep. God was preparing His servant for the task He had given him, and this was the means God chose to overcome Jonah's personal feelings. Viewed like this, we see the whole of Jonah's experience as foreshadowing the far more awful mission of God's perfect Servant. How much He must have loathed the ways of this wicked world! Jonah's failure serves to highlight the dedication of the One "greater than Jonah", who, like Jonah, though in another sense, was made "perfect through sufferings" (Hebrews 2. 10).**

*D. S. Jones, L. de Ville*

*From Methil.* —Jonah was not in the mind of the LORD in not wanting to go and preach to the Gentile. He should have known better than to attempt to flee from the presence of the LORD (Psalm 139. 7-10). However, God's purposes will be accomplished despite puny man's self-will. "The LORD sent out a great wind".

Men around Jonah were perishing, yet he was unaware of danger. Awakened from sleep, he was told by the Gentile captain to arise and call upon his God. We are reminded of Romans 13. 11-14 and Ephesians 5. 14.

God can bring good out of evil (Genesis 50. 20). We believe the mariners were all saved, both from a watery grave and eternally (1. 16; c. i. Romans 10. 13) [see Comment 5].

Nothing happens by chance. The LORD prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah, and he spent three days and three nights in its belly. God heard his prayer from one of the strangest places in which any man ever prayed, and Jonah was vomited out upon dry land. From this experience we have gained one of the most beautiful gospel-texts: "Salvation is of the LORD" (2. 9).

Many down the centuries have cast doubts on this remarkable yet true story. What the Lord Jesus said should dispel any doubts (Matthew 12. 38-41). He explained to the disbelieving Jews, who only believed if they saw signs, that the sign of Jonah the prophet was pointing to Himself: "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale; so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth".

The people of Nineveh repented at Jonah's preaching; how much more then should the Jews have responded to the Lord Jesus Christ

who was greater than Jonah, and was present among them! From Jonah's story we learn that God's wonderful mercy extends far beyond the Jews, even to the whole human race. *Neville Coomer*

*From Edinburgh.* —The Pharisees said to Nicodemus, "Out of Galilee ariseth no prophet", but they obviously forgot that Jonah came from Gath-hepher (2 Kings 14. 25). He was the LORD's servant and the LORD's prophet, a worthy successor to Elijah and Elisha. His greatness is indicated in the Lord's words, "A greater than Jonah is here". Wherein lay his greatness? Jonah fled from the presence of the LORD. This statement can mean one of three things: -

- (1) He ran away from God. This is unlikely, for Jonah told the mariners, "I fear the LORD", and as a prophet he would know that the LORD was omnipresent.
- (2) The LORD's presence was known among His people. He dwelt in their midst, although the kingdom was divided. Jonah speaks of his prayer reaching God's holy temple (2. 7), yet he was prepared to turn his back upon the place where God's presence was known.
- (3) A prophet stood in the presence of the LORD. For example, in 1 Kings 17. 2 Elijah speaks of "the God of Israel before whom I stand". "The LORD hath chosen you to stand before Him" (2 Chronicles 29. 22).

Jonah seemed prepared to lay down his prophetic office rather than go to Nineveh. If that is the case, it may provide us with the key to Jonah's greatness.

Jonah had the vision of the seer and he knew that God was gracious (4. 2). He knew that if Nineveh was spared, Israel was doomed. In his patriotism Jonah spoke of Israel as "my country" (4. 2), and such was his zeal that he was prepared to die rather than see the salvation of the aliens of Assyria. But he refused to accept that the God of Israel could and would deal mercifully with another nation; to Jonah, God's blessing should be confined to Israel [see Comment 6].

Jonah was preserved in the great fish in order to learn that God's will embraced all men. His experiences when entombed in that fish foreshadow the Lord in His burial and resurrection. It would seem that Jonah was conscience-stricken (2. 8). Yet he must learn again

that the word of the LORD must be obeyed despite his own personal feelings. So Jonah was given a second chance. *A. M. Hope*

*From Paisley.* —Jonah, according to the New Testament, is a type of Christ, both in his sufferings and in his testimony. Yet we might infer from the book that bears his name that he was by no means one of the best of men. Disobedient, distrustful, vindictive, sulky, his character is at first sight most unattractive, but the LORD knew that Jonah was a true servant of His, and He took care to leave on record a testimony that enables us to recognize him as such (see 2 Kings 14. 25 where Jonah is spoken of as Jehovah's servant).

Moreover, it is of interest to note that Jonah's native place was Gath-hepher. This village stood very near the site of what was later the town of Nazareth. The Pharisees, overlooking Isaiah 9. 1, 2, declared that the Scriptures foretold no prophets to arise from Galilee (John 7. 52). But Jonah by his Galilean origin, as well as in other ways, foreshadowed the Greater than he, who was also "of Galilee". Jonah's course, like that of men generally, was a downward one. He "went down" to Joppa, and there he found a ship and "went down" into it. He is then said to have "gone down" into the sides of the ship to sleep. But trouble always comes to those who wander from God. Strenuous efforts were made by the mariners for Jonah's salvation, but in vain. The only way of salvation lay through that which typified the death and resurrection of Christ, three days and three nights in the belly of the fish. *N. J. P.*

### **IMPRESSIONS FROM OTHER CONTRIBUTORS**

Below is a summary of impressions from the remaining papers from Birkenhead, Birmingham, Derby, Glasgow (Parkhead), Hamilton (Ontario), Melbourne, Nottingham and Vancouver.

Through the record of Jonah's experiences, God in His infinite wisdom had many things to teach men, both Jew and Gentile. He taught that no disobedience of man would be allowed to turn aside His counsel. "The counsel of the LORD standeth fast for ever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations" (Psalm 33. 11). Then Jonah's experiences were calculated in the sovereignty of God to bring about the repentance and salvation of Nineveh. In addition Jonah, and all Israel (then and in future generations) must learn

**that God has purposes of grace and mercy towards Gentiles who obey His word.**

**Jonah was given a message by God to a Gentile people, and his reluctance was compared to that of Peter, who went to the Gentiles with the gospel only after special divine insistence (Acts 10). Jonah's disobedience was chiefly prompted by a desire to see Nineveh overthrown, but his experiences teach us the futility, indeed the sin, of disobeying God's direction in His service. Learning from Jonah's grave error, we should be obedient servants at the first call. It is not for us to observe the clouds when sowing the good seed. The Lord of the harvest is not unaware of the problems we face in His service.**

**The book of Jonah is a book of miracles and perfect timing, proving that God is never rendered impotent, nor His purpose frustrated. The men on board the ship were greatly impressed by the events surrounding Jonah's being thrown overboard, and Jonah's God was exalted in their eyes. "He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still... Oh that men would praise the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!" (Psalm 107. 29, 31).**

**Jonah's fearful experiences in the fish's belly caused him great searchings and resolves of heart. "Out of the belly of hell cried I, and Thou heardest my voice" (2. 2). His understanding of God and of his own smallness was deepened. His experiences not only rendered him willing to fulfil his mission, but would also have their effect on the Ninevites. By himself referring to his recent experiences, Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites (Luke 11. 30).**

**One paper suggested that the swallowing of Jonah by the fish was a sign beforehand of the swallowing up of Israel among the nations. At God's word, the fish vomited Jonah on to dry land; so would the LORD address the nations, saying "to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back" (Isaiah 43. 5, 6). Already the nations are obeying, and will continue to obey, the word of the LORD in this matter.**

**Most papers related the sign of the prophet Jonah to the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. One paper suggested that whereas in Matthew 12. 39 Jonah was a sign of his being three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, in Matthew 16. 4 (in context) the Lord was pointing out Jonah as a sign to Israel in the whole**

of his experience regarding Nineveh. His disobedience, his resultant experiences, his repentance and obedience, and his further self-righteous attitude were all a picture of the cycle of Israel's experience time after time.

*Eds.*

### COMMENTS

1. (*Atherton and Leigh*): In remarking that Jonah's experience inside the fish was deliberately brought about by God, we are sure the group will accept that this does not in any way exculpate Jonah in respect of his sin in fleeing from God.

*J. D. T.*

2. (*Atherton and Leigh*): "The heart of the earth". In seeking the true meaning of these words as found in Matthew 12. 40, attention is drawn to John 19. 42, "There... they laid Jesus". Here the Lord's body is referred to by His name. Furthermore, Acts 2. 27 emphasizes, it is suggested, that in God's purposes the experience of the Lord's soul and of His body in His death, are not readily dissected apart. Again, is it right to seek a physical location for an abode of spirits? Not all would agree that Numbers 16. 33 and Ephesians 4. 9 indicate such a physical location within the earth's substance. It is suggested that "the heart of the earth" could indeed reflect the physical experience of the tomb, but that it is best regarded as an expression encompassing the whole of the Lord's experience, spiritual and physical, in His death and burial and answering to the dual thought of Acts 2. 27. If this were accepted, then the matter raised by Edinburgh and Melbourne about the typology of Jonah in the fish's belly having a special significance in relation to the Lord's burial, would be reasonable. Similarly, with regard to the typology of resurrection as seen in Jonah's deliverance out of the great fish, we draw attention to the fact that the resurrection of the body involves the re-uniting of spirit, soul and body, a single divine miracle involving the whole person. Thus we would agree that, "as Jonah became a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of Man be to this generation", the whole experience of the one answering to the other within the limits of the incompleteness of all types of Christ.

*J. D. T.*

While appreciating the particular angle from which the foregoing comments are looking at this problem, the references in John

19. 42 and Acts 2. 27 would not in a more general context of discussion affect the truth that at His decease the spirit of the Lord Jesus went back to God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12. 7, Luke 23. 46), His soul went to Sheol (Psalm 16. 10) and His body was placed in the tomb, though not suffered to see corruption.

As to a physical location for the souls of those who have died, scriptural revelation on the point is limited. We can only accept by faith what is written without claiming to apprehend it. But do not the "great gulf fixed" (Luke 16. 26) and the souls "underneath the altar" (Revelation 6. 9) both suggest certain physical locations? As to a physical location for Sheol within the earth's substance, the language of Scripture would certainly seem to suggest this (c. f. "out of the earth", "bring me up"—I Samuel 28. 13, 15). I am personally disposed to the view expressed by Atherton and Leigh. *G. P. Jr.*

3. (*Atherton and Leigh*): The element of disobedience in Jonah's case, which led to his death in figure, does make one hesitate to draw a parallel with the Lord's sublimely precious self-giving in His death. Does this not once again underline to us the great inadequacies and incompleteness of so many types of the Lord Jesus, especially in the matter of His atoning death, and the perfect love and grace which was its motive power? *J. D. T.*

4. (*Atherton and Leigh*): It seems hardly justifiable to postulate that Jonah in his capacity as God's prophet would have a special knowledge of the future role of Assyria as the captors of the Israelites. There is no record that Jonah "spake... being moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1. 21) in this matter. However, the point is well made by other contributors that Jonah, in company with all percipient Israelites, could measure the growing military menace of Assyria and its calamitous possibilities. *J. D. T.*

5. (*Methil, Nottingham*): The attitude of the mariners to the God of Israel is an interesting consideration. In the first place, Jonah had told them of his evasion of his God (1. 10). They appealed to him to pray, appearing at that stage to regard Jonah's God as but another deity with their own. Jonah, however, then declared his God to be the Creator. "Then were the men exceedingly afraid". Subsequently they prayed direct to God, "feared the LORD exceedingly", offered a sacrifice and made vows. There seems to be

a clear progression here of conviction and faith, and while it would be impossible for us from the record to read each individual mariner's heart as the LORD would, their attitude certainly points to a truly saving faith in God, within the terms of Romans 10. 13. *J. D. T.*

6. (*Edinburgh*): Three suggested meanings are proffered for Jonah's fleeing from the presence of the LORD. Is it such an unlikely explanation to suggest simply that he was running away from God? Do not we all know and believe in the divine omnipresence and still "run away" with depressing regularity? With regard to standing in the presence of God it might be noted that the reference in 2 Chronicles 29. 11 is in fact to Levites. The group's subsequent comments on Jonah's non-acceptance of divine mercy for Gentiles relates interestingly to a point made in the supplementary study article, "Israel and Judah in the times of Jonah".

*J. D. T.*

### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. "Out of the belly of hell cried I" (2. 2). Does this imply that Jonah died? Was it necessary that Jonah should die in order that he might be a true type of the Lord (Matthew 12. 40)? (Kingston upon Thames).

There is no direct indication in the narrative that Jonah died when inside the great fish. Indeed the presentation seems entirely of an individual who was conscious (whether continuously or not) and in extreme distress. Thus the expression "belly of hell" is judged to be figurative, expressing the depth of Jonah's alarming experience. In regard to the second aspect of the question might not Isaac's experience be a helpful comparison as recounted in Hebrews 11. 17-19? We refer elsewhere to the inadequacy of types.

*J. D. T.*

2. How did Jonah become a sign unto the Ninevites? (Luke 11. 30) (Parkhead, Birmingham).

Reference might here be made to "Impressions" above, and to the comments on "the heart of the earth". Several contributors suggest the likelihood of Jonah's experience being recounted to the Ninevites, and thus becoming a sign to them.

*J. D. T.*

3. May we infer from the brevity of Jonah's message (as recorded in 3. 4) that the Ninevites had some knowledge of God prior to Jonah's visit? (Birkenhead).

If, as suggested above, Jonah gave a much fuller witness to the men of Nineveh, including an account of his fearful experience at God's hands, then what is recorded in 3. 4 must be but the central word of warning in his message. This seems a more likely explanation than a prior knowledge of God. On the other hand, a nation like Assyria, out for conquest and already threatening Israel, would in all probability know something of their national customs and religion if only as a matter of strategy. *J. D. T.*

4. Do the apparent references to the Psalms in Jonah's prayer inside the fish (e. g. 2. 3 and Psalm 42. 7) indicate that he was calling to mind actual passages in the Psalms, as descriptive of his own experiences? (Birkenhead).

Whether Jonah was consciously recalling passages of Psalms would be impossible to say with certainty, but the similarity of expression is striking in places. Even apart from direct reference in his turbulent mind at this point to the Psalms, it is not surprising that he should have produced similar expressions. After all, his experience was so deep as to foreshadow the sufferings of Christ, which Jonah passed through in *figure.* *J. D. T.*

# BIBLE STUDIES

'A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God (Acts 17. 11)'

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## EDITORIAL

What were the details of Jonah's message to the Ninevites? Was the God-given warning, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" followed by a promise of mercy to the repentant? Questions of this kind have arisen in some minds as we have pursued our study of the book of Jonah. The paper from Paisley points out that since it was a matter of conjecture as to whether God might turn away from His fierce anger (3. 9), Jonah could not have given any definite teaching on the matter. But there seems to have been some hint in the preaching that led the Ninevites to think on these lines. Perhaps the New Testament can supply the answer and also indicate why there was such a whole-hearted response to Jonah's warning.

The Lord's own words to the "evil generation" of His day were, "For even as Jonah became a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of Man be to this generation" (Luke 11. 30). A sign (Gr. *semeion*), according to Vine, can mean a distinguishing mark, a sign as a warning or admonition, a miraculous act or a token portending future events. Jonah the man, with his terrifying experience behind him, is thus evidently being referred to as a warning and a miracle so that the Lord's hearers would instantly be challenged with the proposition that He was to undergo a comparable experience. As far as we ourselves are concerned, we can view the Lord's death and resurrection in retrospect and profitably reason in the reverse direction, so by comparison obtaining a better understanding of Jonah's ministry.

"This generation" may not apply exclusively to people alive when the Lord spoke. The Greek word is *genea* which, although primarily applicable to contemporary members of a family, often denotes all those of like character (Matthew 17. 1) or all the people of a given period (Matthew 24. 34; Philippians 2. 25). So a reasonable interpretation would be that the preaching of the gospel throughout

**this dispensation is in view in Luke 11. JO and similarly a message concerning God's judgement and mercy would likewise have been given to Nineveh. It is therefore, we suggest, legitimate to infer that the warning words "yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown" were not the only ones spoken by Jonah as he trudged the streets of that Gentile city. They were his starting point and the theme of his message, but the rest of his message was himself. Whether or not, as some have thought, there was any visual evidence of his being swallowed by a great sea monster, he must have graphically recounted the details of the LORD's dealings with him during those dark days in the "belly of hell", culminating in what was to him nothing less than life from the dead. Jonah's unique experience was a living sign to the Ninevites of God's goodness and severity.**

*L. B.*

### TYRE AND SIDON

**Tyre and Sidon, two cities on the Phoenician seaboard north of Israel, are frequently linked in Biblical references. They stand for the great maritime power developed from Phoenicia, a power which reached out through its merchant and naval shipping to the far boundaries of the ancient world. Notice is taken of Tyre in the book of Joshua, for the border of Asher "turned to Ramah, and to the fenced city of Tyre" (19. 29). Five hundred years later, as Joab reluctantly conducted the national census for David, he "came to Dan-jaan, and round about to Zidon and came to the stronghold of Tyre" (2 Samuel 24. 6, 7). So the influence of Tyre and Sidon, abutting the extreme northern border of Israel, was a political factor with which the kings of Israel and Judah were concerned. The four centuries from David until Jehoiakim saw the rise of Tyre and Sidon to the zenith of their influence and power.**

**Scripture discloses a cordial relationship between Hiram, King of Tyre, and David and Solomon. "Hiram was ever a lover of David" (1 Kings 5. 2), and sent him cedars to provide material for his house (2 Chronicles 2. 3). This economic co-operation was carried forward into Solomon's reign. Hiram supplied not only fir and cedar in return for wheat and oil (2 Chronicles 2. 15, 16), but also a highly skilled craftsman (2 Chronicles 2. 13, 14). This friendliness in the times of David and Solomon later gave place to**

enmity **and rivalry**. Allusions to Tyre **and Sidon** during the prophetic period **under review** were consistently in **terms of judgement against them, often** linked with **references to** their **enmity** against God's people. **Why this change of attitudes?** It **may** have derived from **Hiram's** disappointment **in the** cities of Galilee **which** Solomon offered to him **as a gift**. For Hiram called **them** "Land of Cabul" (meaning **dry, sandy**), **and** chided Solomon: "**What cities are these which thou hast given me, my brother?**" (1 Kings 9. 10-14).

Israel's hegemony of the middle eastern nations was broken **after** Solomon's **death, when the** predicted division of the kingdom **came to pass**. "**This thing is of Me**", were the LORD's words **through the** prophet to Rehoboam, **and that** word **extended to the waning** influence of Israel in relation to Tyre **and Sidon as well as** other countries.

Nevertheless **the** very proximity of Tyre **and Sidon** to Israel's northern border **encouraged trade** relations. These **are referred to in** Ezekiel 27. 17—"Judah, **and the** land of Israel, **they were thy traffickers: they traded for thy merchandise** wheat of Minnith, **and pannag, and honey, and oil, and balm**". Mutual distrust **and conflicting interests** would doubtless **engender** political and economic rivalry. Of Sidon **it was** later **written**, "There shall **be** no more **a pricking brier** unto **the** house of Israel, nor **a grieving thorn of any that are** round about **them, that** did despite **unto them; and they** shall know **that I am the Lord GOD**" (Ezekiel 28. 24). The attitude of Tyre to Israel's discomfiture under **the** oppression of Assyrian **and** Chaldean invaders is significant: "Tyre **hath** said against Jerusalem, **Aha, she is broken that was the gate of the peoples; she is turned** unto **me: I shall be replenished, now that she is laid waste**" (Ezekiel 26. 2). Israel **had** commanded certain important **trade** routes from Tyre to other middle eastern areas, so **her** destruction was seen by Tyre as a political advantage.

Allusions to Tyre **and Sidon** in certain Old Testament prophetic books **present a** fascinating impression of **the greatness to which they attained, and the** foundation on which **their greatness was** built. Scriptural **references** accord convincingly with secular history's accounts of **the** Phoenician maritime empire, illustrating **yet again the vivid accuracy of the** Old Testament prophets **as they** described **the** contemporary situation. **Such references may be** conveniently **summarized under three** headings:

### 1. *Maritime Greatness*

"Thou... that wast inhabited of seafaring men, the renowned city, which wast strong in the sea" (Ezekiel 26. 17).

"O thou that dwellest at the entry of the sea, which art the merchant of the peoples unto many isles" (Ezekiel 27. 3).

"Thou wast replenished, and made very glorious in the heart of the seas (Ezekiel 27. 25).

### 2. *Political Power*

"Persia and Lud and Put were in thine army, thy men of war: they hanged the shield and helmet in thee... The men of Arvad with thine army were upon thy walls round about, and the Gammadim were in thy towers" (Ezekiel 27. 10, 11).

### 3. *Material Wealth*

"Tyre... heaped up silver as the dust, and fine gold as the mire of the streets" (Zechariah 9. 3).

"Tarshish was thy merchant by reason of the multitude of all kinds of riches... many isles were the mart of thine hand" (Ezekiel 27. 12, 15).

"Thou didst enrich the kings of the earth with the multitude of thy riches and of thy merchandise" (Ezekiel 27. 55).

As with so many other gifted and prosperous peoples, power and wealth led Tyre to a state of overweening pride. "Thou, O Tyre, hast said, I am perfect in beauty" (Ezekiel 27. 5). "Thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God" (8. 6). So much so that by the inspiration of the Spirit Ezekiel was moved to reveal the pride and sin of Satan within the context of his burden regarding Tyre. For the prince of Tyre is represented as having a heart so lifted up in pride as to say, "I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas" (28. 6). This lofty presumption in the rulers of contemporary Tyre is then projected back under the figure of the king of Tyre to the great crises of Satanic presumption against God, long before human history began: "Take up a lamentation for the king of Tyre, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord GOD: Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty... thou wast the anointed cherub that covereth... thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty... I have cast thee to the ground" (28. 12-19). Here we find one of those masterpieces of divine revelation which command our awe and wonder. For through greatness and

ability and power Tyre had been permitted to attain dazzling heights of human achievement.

Forgetting that this was all of divine permission and enablement she affronted God with her self-glorying. Here was an illustration in human experience through which God could convey to human thought the tragic elements of Satanic presumption against the prerogatives of Deity.

### *Religious Influences upon Israel and Judah*

There was a phase of Israel's experience when the false religion of the Phoenicians made serious inroads. This stemmed from a political move by Ahab, the son of Omri, who took Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians, to be his wife (I Kings 16. 31). Was it with a view to political advantage that Ahab schemed to gain by association with the wealthy northern Phoenician power? His action was in defiance of God's word (Deuteronomy 7. 3); it led Israel into even deeper spiritual decadence than what followed from the apostasy of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, originator of the worship of the golden calves in Dan and Bethel (2 Kings 13. 11). For with Jezebel was imported the worship of Baal, chief male deity of the Phoenicians, and under the queen's forceful imposition the northern kingdom was soon given over to this religion. Nor was that all. For Jehoshaphat, king of the southern kingdom of Judah, permitted the marriage of his son Jehoram to Athaliah, a daughter of Ahab (2 Chronicles 21. 6). Jehoram's eight-year reign was a tragedy of apostasy and defeat; he "departed without being desired". His son Ahaziah survived in kingship only one year, during which he "walked in the ways of the house of Ahab: for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly" (2 Chronicles 22 3). When he died, Athaliah destroyed all the seed royal of the house of Judah, assumed control of the kingdom, and further sponsored the Baal worship of the Zidonians. So the false religion of the Zidonians intruded to the heart of the Judean kingdom, to the very precincts of the house of God. The courage of Jehoiada and his wife in due course led to a coup d'etat which brought Joash to the throne and Athaliah to her ruin. "And all the people went to the house of Baal, and brake it down, and brake his altars and his images in pieces, and slew Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars" (2 Chronicles 23. 17). At such times of reformation the worship of Baal was suppressed in the kingdom of Judah, but it

was never eradicated. More than a hundred years later the prophet Hosea declared: "I will visit upon her the days of the Baalim, unto which she burned incense" (2. 13); and when the Judean kingdom was finally hurtling towards the doom of the Chaldean invasion Jeremiah included this charge against her: "They have forsaken Me . . . and have built the high places of Baal, to burn their sons in the fire for burnt offerings unto Baal; which I commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into My mind" (19. 4, 5).

### *judgement on Tyre and Sidon Foretold*

Several prophets foretold the decline and destruction of Tyre and Sidon, indicating that this would result from the hand of God in judgement. Isaiah 23 contains the prophet's burden concerning Tyre. He graphically depicts the discomfiture of Tarshish and Egypt, great trading centres in relation to Tyre, as they feel the impact of Tyre's destruction. "When the report cometh to Egypt, they shall be sorely pained at the report of Tyre . . . who hath purposed this against Tyre? . . . the LORD of hosts hath purposed it, to stain the pride of all glory, to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth" (23. 5, 8, 9). Zechariah says of Tyre: "Behold, the Lord will dispossess her, and He will smite her power in the sea; and she shall be devoured with fire" (9. 4). Jeremiah alludes to the cup of the wine of God's fury, which he was asked to take at the LORD's hand and make all the nations to drink it. Among them were "all the kings of Tyre, and all the kings of Zidon" (25. 15, 16, 22). In chapter 27. 1-10 Jeremiah further included Tyre and Zidon among those who would be brought under the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. It was the prophet Ezekiel who was granted the fullest burden of judgement against these cities, a burden which comprises the whole of chapters 26, 27 and 28. To those who knew the power and greatness of Tyre it must have seemed incredible that she could be reduced so radically: "I will make thee a bare rock: thou shalt be a place for the spreading of nets; thou shalt be built no more: for I the LORD have spoken it, saith the Lord GOD" (Ezekiel 26. 14). History records that Nebuchadnezzar captured the great stronghold after a thirteen years' siege. It was later rebuilt, but Alexander the Great conquered it after only seven months' siege. In due course the site of the original Tyre became literally but a place for the spreading of nets, a bare rock. As always, God had watched over His word to perform it.

*End-Time Aspects*

The prophets reveal that at the time of the end Tyre will again assume significance in relation to Israel. Joel 3. 1-16 clearly points to the gathering of the nations for judgement at the coming of the Son of Man. Closely associated with that great crisis, we find Tyre and Zidon directly implicated in divine judgement because of their attitudes to Israel: "Yea, and what are ye to Me, O Tyre, and Zidon?... swiftly and speedily will I return your recompense upon your own head. Forasmuch as ye have taken My silver and My gold, and have carried into your temples My goodly pleasant things; the children also of Judah and the children of Jerusalem have ye sold" (Joel 3. 4-6). Psalm 83 also names the inhabitants of Tyre among the alliance of Israel's neighbouring powers with the avowed object of eliminating the holy people: "They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel be no more in remembrance" (Psalm 83. 4). So in the prophetic picture of the Middle East at the time of the end, the coastal region of ancient Phoenicia is seen to be in solid alignment with the enemies of Israel, significant to a degree in the light of modern developments!

There is a remarkable word in Isaiah 23. 18 which would seem to indicate a role for Tyre in the millennial kingdom. For after referring to the revival of Tyre as a centre of commerce, and to her playing the harlot with all the kingdoms of the world upon the face of the earth (verse 17), the prophet points to a dramatic reversal of that corrupt trend: "Her merchandise and her hire shall be holiness to the LORD: it shall not be treasured nor laid up; for her merchandise shall be for them that dwell before the LORD". Again in Psalm 45, which clearly looks forward to the glory of Messiah's triumph and reign, there is included the revealing word, "the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift; even the rich among the people shall entreat Thy favour" (verse 12).

*G. Prasher Jr.*

### THE DAYS OF UZZIAH

Uzziah the son of Amaziah king of Judah commenced his reign in 807 B. C. when he was still quite young, and reigned for fifty-two years. Apart from that of Manasseh, his was the longest reign of the kings of Judah. The record of his reign is found mainly

in **2 Kings 15. 1-7** and **2 Chronicles 26**. In verse 22 of the latter portion we read, "Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, first and last, **did Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, write**". But whatever **Isaiah wrote has not been retained in the word of God, for his references to Uzziah are very brief; Uzziah's name is mentioned three times in Isaiah's prophecy.**

The kingdom of Judah enjoyed a time of great prosperity under Uzziah, such as had not been experienced since the revolt of the ten tribes. The reason for this is found in **2 Chronicles 26. 5**: "as long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper". He was apparently a God-fearing man, "he did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD", and "he set himself to seek God in the days of Zechariah". We know very little about this man Zechariah. All we are told is that he "had understanding in the vision of God" and was used of God to influence king Uzziah. It would be an interesting study to consider the people who were used of God to influence for good those in authority, and to contrast them with others whose evil ways brought disastrous results to the ones who were affected by them. One example of the former is Jehoiada the priest in the days of king Joash, while for the latter we would remind ourselves of Jezebel who had such a baneful effect upon her husband Ahab, king of Israel.

Although it is true that God had blessed the kingdom of Judah, it is also true that the spiritual condition of the people was anything but well-pleasing to the LORD. In **2 Kings 15. 14** we read, "Howbeit the high places were not taken away: the people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places"; and in **2 Chronicles 27. 2** we read "And the people did yet corruptly", suggesting that they were continuing in what they had been doing before. The words of **Isaiah 1. 4-6, 10-17** are very suggestive of the general condition of the people of Judah at this time; see also the quotation from **Isaiah 29. 13** in **Mark 7. 6, 7**.

During his long reign, God gave Uzziah victory over the nations round about; the Philistines and Arabians were subdued, and the Amorites brought gifts to Uzziah; he was now a famous king and "his name spread abroad even to the entering in of Egypt", His army was large and well equipped under the leadership of **2, 600 mighty men of valour**. In order to protect himself against his enemies he built towers in the wilderness. He also strengthened the defences

of Jerusalem by building towers at the most vulnerable places and setting up cleverly devised machines which were capable of shooting arrows and hurling large stones. Besides his military interests this able and energetic monarch took a great delight in agriculture and the rearing of cattle. He provided an ample supply of water by digging numerous wells and no doubt the towers in the wilderness would also be used for the protection of his cattle. If the story finished here it would be a happy ending, but we read, "he was marvellously helped, till he was strong". Here was the turning point in what had apparently been an unblemished life (see 2 Chronicles 27. 2).

"But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up so that he did corruptly, and he trespassed against the LORD his God". The words of Psalm 30. 6 bring a word of warning here: "As for me, I said in my prosperity, I shall never be moved". The danger of pride cannot be over-stressed; it is brought before us time and again in the word of God. Paul, who knew the danger of pride more than most men (see 2 Corinthians 12. 1-10), could say, "But by the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Corinthians 15. 10), and "Be not highminded, but fear" (Romans 11. 20).

Uzziah was a man who for most of his life had sought the LORD his God, and who on account of this had known much prosperity. He allowed success to go to his head and sought to usurp the priestly office. To appreciate the seriousness of this action it is needful to note that apart from the unique case of Melchizedek the two offices of king and priest were never combined; this honour has been reserved for Him of whom it is written, "Thou art a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek". Azariah and his fellows were brave men and prepared to withstand the wrath of the king for the honour of their God. It may be as Josephus suggests, that the king threatened to kill the priests and but for the intervention of God would have carried out his threat. If the king had listened to the advice of the chief priest, it may be that he would not have been smitten with leprosy, but he was so angry at the interference of the priests and so determined to have his own way, that it was only the judgement of God that brought him to his senses.

The dreadful disease of leprosy debarred Uzziah from participating in anything associated with God's house; he was unclean, a social outcast unable to mix with others apart from those who like himself

were leprous. It was a sad end to a life which in earlier years must have given God much pleasure.

Josephus says that the earthquake mentioned in Amos 1. 1 and Zechariah 14. 5 occurred at the time of the king's trespass, but this seems difficult to support from Scripture. Jeroboam and Uzziah reigned concurrently for fourteen years from 807-793 B. C. Amos prophesied during part of both reigns (Amos 1. 1, 7. 10), and at least some of his prophesying was two years before the earthquake. Amos 1. 1 would give the impression that the earthquake took place before the end of Jeroboam's reign. But when Uzziah committed the trespass it would seem from 2 Chronicles 26. 21 that his son Jotham was capable of exercising the regency. Since Jotham was 25 years of age when his own reign commenced in 755 B. C., it is unlikely that he would be able to exercise the regency before 765 B. C.

We know that at least three prophets were warning God's people during the reign of Uzziah. Amos was probably the first, and he and Hosea, who came later, were sent by God to the northern kingdom while Isaiah, who commenced his service for God in the year that Uzziah died, was sent primarily to Judah. Perhaps Isaiah was feeling sad as he thought of the king separated from the things of God by the dread disease of leprosy, for this was the only king he had known. But when God gave him that wonderful vision, reminding him that God is on the throne and that He *is* a holy God (Psalm 99. 1-3), it was an incentive to Isaiah, enabling him to dedicate his life in the service of God.

*D. H. Butler*

## STUDIES IN SEVEN MINOR PROPHETS

### JONAH 3 and 4

#### *THE REPENTANCE OF NINEVEH*

*From Derby.* — Nineveh was probably one of the largest and most ancient cities in the world, dating back as it did to the days of its founder, Nimrod (Genesis 10. 11, 12). The words, "and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee", made Jonah dependent on God for what he had to do and say when he arrived at the city. Jonah obeyed the command, but with little apparent change of heart. In the different wordings of this command, divine wisdom may be seen. Consider also, regarding the references to Nineveh (Jonah 3. 3, 4), how often these two numbers occur in Scripture, 3 and 40.

It is very significant that the preaching of Jonah was seen to be a message from God: "The people of Nineveh believed God". With this compare 1 Thessalonians 2. 13. The message was for all, and not only the people but also the nobles responded, so that the tidings reached even the king (the name of this king does not appear to be known). A wonderful united movement followed, obviously a work of the Spirit of God, who was to demonstrate His faithful principle as stated at a later date (Jeremiah 18. 7, 8). The sackcloth and ashes were indeed a token of humility, but repentance is seen in verse 8, "let them turn every one from his evil way", and this is what God saw (verse 10). This also is what the Lord Jesus called repentance in Matthew 12. 41, saying, "The men of Nineveh . . . repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, a greater than Jonah is here". They "shall stand up", He said, "in the judgement with this generation, and shall condemn it".

We were reminded of the words in Isaiah 55. 7, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon". God is ever ready and willing to be gracious: "Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked? saith the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should return from his way and live?" (Ezekiel 18. 23). However, Jonah was displeased exceedingly, and he was angry, whereas he should have praised God for His exceeding goodness and mercy. Jonah lacked compassion for the repentant ones. Under the New Covenant, what joy and thankfulness to God would fitly characterise His own at the news of even one sinner showing evident signs of true repentance! "There shall be joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15. 7).

The news of Nineveh's change of heart may well have caused a stir in Israel, and perhaps (as some have suggested) Jonah may have thought that an adverse effect would be produced, and that Israel would be tempted to sin yet more. Jonah himself must have realised that it cost him far more to disobey God than it did to obey Him. God's long-suffering is seen in the forty days of grace, and He is sovereign in deciding to whom He will show mercy (Romans 9. 15). God's dealings with His servant were most merciful and gracious, going out of His way (so to speak) in the matter of the gourd, to teach Jonah the utter unreasonableness of his atti-

tude, and how righteous and compassionate was God's own action in accepting the repentance of some 600, 000 people including the **120, 000** of the innocents and other irresponsibles.

As has been previously remarked, the important historical facts of the book of Jonah are nowhere touched upon until the Eternal Word speaks of them (and then very briefly but with deep profundity) in Matthew **12. 39-41**. God's dealings with men, to a very great extent, depend on man's attitude towards Him. To the sinner who forsakes his sins and turns unto God comes a promise of mercy and pardon flowing forth from God's holy throne. God testifies concerning His word, "It shall accomplish that which I please" (See Isaiah 55. 741).  
L. A. H., S. R. W.

*From Glasgow (Parkhead).* —From a quick reading of Jonah 3 & 4 one might think that the repentance of the people and the king of Nineveh was too easy a consequence of the warning of Jonah. They had been so wicked as to become objectionable to the LORD (see Jonah 1. 2). Why then the sudden repentance, sorrow and fasting in the hope that the LORD would have mercy and spare them? Were they superstitious people who feared the unknown and trembled before any prophet of doom? Suppose that Jonah were to appear in some modern city with the same message, would he get a hearing? Probably not. Why then the sudden change of mind at the preaching of a stranger? Surely there is but one explanation; God worked in their hearts to make them fear the consequences of their own sin.

It would seem that God, in His wide survey of men, took notice not only that the men of Nineveh were wicked but that there was something in them on which He could work. "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" (1 Samuel 16. 7). What a difference between the reaction of the king of Nineveh and that of a certain king of Judah to the warning of God's prophet! Compare Jonah 3. 6-9 with 2 Chronicles 36. 12-13). The former repented and was saved; the latter refused and was lost.

It may be that in His wide survey of time God foresaw the days described in Matthew 12. 38-41 and Luke 11. 29-32 and later days. So He caused the repentance of Nineveh to be recorded as an example for all succeeding generations. Jonah was the prophet of the LORD but he was only a prophet. The Lord Jesus through

whom God speaks today is a Son perfected for evermore, a greater than Jonah. When God speaks, men are obliged to listen and believe. "He that believeth not God had made Him a liar" (1 John 5. 10). See also the words of the Lord Jesus concerning the sin of unbelief as recorded in John 15. 22. As God worked in the hearts of the men of Nineveh so can He work today through the conviction of the Holy Spirit. The lesson of Nineveh is clear. Repentance towards God leads to salvation; rejection of His word leads to judgement.

*J. J. P*

*From Birkenhead.* —The population of Nineveh is understood to have been approximately 600, 000. It is said to have had walls 100 feet high, 50 feet wide, and 60 miles in circumference. Although its civilization was of a high order, the people had a reputation for great cruelty and violence (Jonah 3. 8).

To this city Jonah came at the second time of asking, and preached with such power that the people believed God and fasted. From the king came a proclamation that all should cry to God for forgiveness. God saw their true repentance, and did not destroy the people. This was contrasted with the outward show of the Pharisee in Luke 18. 12.

Jonah was deeply upset by this turn of events and felt that having preached a message of impending doom, God made him look foolish by granting the Ninevites forgiveness. He complained about the unnecessary journey of about 500 miles, and God had to use the lesson of the gourd to point out that pity can be shown to all, particularly those 120, 000 or more people and also the livestock, which were innocent parties in the matter.

We wondered whether Jonah's experience in the fish had taught him anything. We realized that God uses circumstances to teach His ways to men. Jonah realized the folly of trying to escape from God's presence, but he may well not have appreciated that when God gives His servants an assignment, it is not for them to choose whether or not to accept. The man who demurs may well be set aside by God, and another used to fulfil His purposes.

Our God is unchangeable, as Jonah trenchantly witnesses in his appreciation of God's character (4. 2). Yet God is sovereign. He chose to warn the Ninevites, and sent a messenger to them, but stored up judgement for Sodom and Gomorrah, and it was Abraham who took the initiative in pleading for the inhabitants.

It was through Israel that the nations were blessed. Jonah at Joppa had difficulty in accepting this, and centuries later Peter, at the same place, had the same problem to face. We wondered why Peter did not appear to realize that a precedent had been set.

*R. D. Williams*

*From Melbourne.* —In conformity with the general tendencies of men and nations, the developing might and wealth of Assyria had produced in its capital an atmosphere of pride and self-sufficiency. Evidently the basic claims of the Creator upon His creatures had been forgotten. Nations are held responsible to recognise the principles of Romans 1. 8, 19-23. In Nineveh the consciences of men had long ceased to respond thereto. We are not told specifically what was the wickedness of the city, but the cruelties associated with conquest would be coupled with the natural tendencies of man cited in Romans 1. 22-32. It appears probable that they had exercised themselves in many of these abominations to which man can be subject, and God could no longer forbear.

The ultimatum that Jonah was commanded to proclaim would expire at the end of forty days, and there was no offer of respite, although one of the outstanding characteristics of all God's dealings with men has been that "mercy rejoiceth against judgement". The physical appearance of the prophet however, was in the sovereignty of a merciful God calculated to confirm the message and the extreme urgency of the ultimatum, permitting Him to exercise His prerogative of mercy, should repentance be manifest. The word of the LORD wrought conviction and a deep consciousness of guilt, which is so essential ere He can reveal His salvation to any. Repentance, a turning again towards God and His righteous requirement, involved the cessation of evil doing, with corresponding conformity to His revealed will, whether through a given law or through the testimony of creation and the human conscience. The reality of Nineveh's repentance was seen in the proclamation of the king and the example set to his subjects. Although they heard no offer of mercy, yet the knowledge of His dealings with men had led them to hope for His mercy. The works which they produced were works worthy of repentance, and brought about for Nineveh a respite of approximately 200 years, ere succeeding generations gradually forgot and put away from them again that knowledge, and degenerated afresh to the wickedness of their forefathers prior to repentance.

There was in the heart of Jonah no desire that mercy should be shown to the city. For Israel's sake he was obsessed with the desire to see it overthrown. In his complaint to the LORD recorded in the early part of chapter four, we see a sense of wounded pride and injustice done to himself and his message. He had looked expectantly to see in what form the overthrow would take place, including the 120, 000 children found therein, who had as yet not partaken of the sins of their parents. Simply, forcibly and gently the LORD brings home to the prophet just how far removed from His thoughts and purposes of mercy are the thoughts of His servants. *T. W. F.*

### IMPRESSIONS FROM OTHER CONTRIBUTORS

Aberkenfig, and Barry, Atherton and Leigh, Birmingham, Edinburgh, Paisley, Nottingham, Methil, Toronto and Vancouver also contributed papers, from which the following points have been extracted.

Jonah disobeyed the command of God, and this disobedience almost cost him his life. But God took a direct dealing with him, causing him to pass through an experience which was an act of divine judgement, in which he became a type of the Lord Jesus (Matthew 12. 40). Jonah had to experience a figure of death, burial and resurrection. The belly of the fish was to Jonah as Sheol (Jonah 2. 2, compare Acts 2. 27). As though in a resurrection life Jonah was ready to proclaim God's message to the great Gentile city. Yet the failings of Jonah throw into relief the perfections of the Lord Jesus, who desired rather men's salvation (John 12. 47), and who was obedient even unto death (Philippians 2. 8).

Jonah's experience within the great fish had produced in him a deep fear of the Holy One of Israel (compare Hebrews 10. 31); yet he must have been a courageous man to go to a city which was likely to be hostile to his message. This message is summarized in the words recorded in 3. 4. He spoke plainly, and did not present the message in apologetic terms. We may fall into the danger of not proclaiming boldly and plainly such truths as sin and hell.

Although God's message to Nineveh had been delayed through Jonah's disobedience, God still granted the same period of grace to Nineveh before judgement. Jonah himself became a sign to the Ninevites (Luke 11. 30). His story of God's dealings with him would be a telling factor in support of the message he preached.

When the men of Nineveh heard the warning of judgement they

believed **God, which is the first essential (Hebrews 11. 6). Their belief was accompanied by works manifesting sincere repentance. From 3. 9 we would gather that they had not received any assurance that they would be spared by the grace of God.**

**The gracious character of the LORD is also seen in the fact that He was willing to explain His actions to His servant. Through the experience of the gourd, God explained how He is able to forgive and spare the worst of sinners.**

*Eds.*

### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**1. Was Jonah's attitude towards the forgiven Ninevites similar to the hard feelings of the Jews towards the Gentile converts in our last year's study in the Acts? (Aberkenfig and Barry).**

**It is not stated in the narrative that Jonah's attitude towards the Ninevites derived from his consciousness of belonging to the spiritually favoured people of God. Nevertheless, several contributors this month have shared the view that this was at least partly the reason for Jonah's feelings in the matter. To quote from Nottingham's paper: "To one of the chosen race, the thought of repentance and salvation being granted to a Gentile dog was beyond understanding". If this view can be sustained, there is an obvious reflection of a similar basic attitude in Acts 11. 1-3.**

*G. P. Jr.*

**2. Were the Ninevites saved eternally when they repented at Jonah's preaching? (Atherton and Leigh).**

**Care is needed lest we read into the Lord's words (Matthew 12. 41) more than they state. He was evidently speaking in general terms, for all the generation to whom He preached in Israel would not come under the stricture of His words; some had repented at the baptism of John and had received the Lord Jesus. So we must have regard to the main emphasis of the Lord's statement, the more responsive attitude of a less privileged people to the less important messenger, and the relatively great responsibility of Israel in His day. This will be reflected in the day of judgement. But the Lord was not specifically dealing with the matter of the eternal salvation of individual Ninevites. Each will be accountable on the principles of Romans 2. 6-11.**

*G. P. Jr.*

# BIBLE STUDIES

*'A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God (Acts 17. 11) '*

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## EDITORIAL

"And now I have told you before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass, ye may believe" (John 14. 29). These words of the Lord to the apostles in the upper room find their answer in the great faith that possessed them when the conviction dawned that the Lord was indeed risen again. During His life the Lord often alluded in clear terms to His approaching death and resurrection but His words were incomprehensible to the disciples (Luke 18. 31-34) although later they became as clear as crystal. Of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem it is recorded, "These things understood not His disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things unto Him (John 12. 9-16; see also Luke 24. 1-10; John 2. 19-22). Scripture thus emphasizes the importance for the confirmation of faith of the fulfilment of prophecy: it places the seal of divine perfection and truth upon both the Old Testament writings and the words of the Lord.

We experience something of the joy in the early disciples when we trace the detail of the gospel story in the Old Testament and note its perfect fulfilment in the New. However, when we embark, as we have done in this issue, upon a study of prophecy as yet unfulfilled, the way is less clearly marked. It is not that the prophetic scriptures are vague but, like the disciples when the Lord was on earth, we try to interpret Scripture in the light of that which is familiar to us, whereas prophecy has to do with events strange to human experience. No doubt men of a future day with a knowledge of the Scriptures will have their faith strengthened as they witness the unfolding of long foretold events leading up to the Coming of the Son of Man. Every detail will be seen to fit into its proper place and the intricate but perfectly woven pattern of divinely inspired prophecy will then become plain. In our day we have the privilege of prophetic fulfilment pointing unmistakably to the end times, but

of observing the trend of events worldwide which are the forerunners we do not at present look for the fulfilment of any prophecy except one, the Rapture of the Church the Body.

We should therefore consider carefully how far we ought to go in trying to unravel the details of prophecy which the Holy Spirit has purposely left intertwined in preparation for the last days (Daniel 12. 4). What is important to us is that we should see clearly the broad outlines, taking special note of the growing domination of mankind by Satan in his relentless antagonism to God and His King, culminating in the utter defeat of all God's enemies and the final establishment of His kingdom. The consideration of this aspect of prophecy will strengthen our resolve to avoid earthly entanglements, fearing to become associated with that which, although apparently good, may be used by the Antichrist in his opposition to God *L. B.*

## THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE MINOR PROPHETS

*(continued)*

### *2. Chronology of Joel and Micah*

Joel is undated, but a link seems to exist between Joel 3. 16 and Amos 1. 2 which gives a clue to the time of Joel. Amos had predicted an earthquake in Jerusalem two years before it happened in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah. This event must have been severe, because it was remembered three hundred years later by Zechariah (14. 5) and used as an illustration of the effects of the coming of the Son of Man. Now the passage in Joel 3. 16 reads "and the LORD shall roar from Zion and utter His voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake". This corresponds almost exactly to the words of Amos and hence it is assumed that Joel also prophesied of the same event. Thus Joel is taken to have been active in Judah about the same time as Amos was in Israel, perhaps 800-750 B. C. The message of Joel was warning of impending judgement by God through a Gentile power and a call to repentance. God's long-suffering is seen in the fact that the fall of Jerusalem did not take place till about 200 years later (B. C. 587). Israel could never say that God did not give them sufficient warning, for it was repeated successively through Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel among others long after Joel had gone to his rest. With

Micah we can be more specific because we are told he prophesied in the reigns of the following kings:

Jotham (755-740 B. C. )

Ahaz (739-724 B. C)

Hezekiah (723-697 B. C. )

Hence Micah's period of ministry is approximately 750-700 B. C. and he spoke chiefly to Judah. His call to repentance and a return to the LORD was not without some response. His influence, and that of Isaiah, with whom he was contemporary are seen as factors in the revival under Hezekiah. Some have wondered at the suddenness of the change after the wicked ways of Ahaz, but few have appreciated that Hezekiah was co-rex with his father Ahaz from B. C. 726-724 and that it was only in B. C. 723 Hezekiah became sole king that he was able to effect a coup for the LORD. The former three years were years of preparation when he was probably able to encourage the people's revulsion to his father's ways and their attention to the words of stalwarts like Micah and Isaiah. So many of God's prophets seem to have had little response to their messages, that it is good to contemplate Hezekiah's revival, which must have given Micah great satisfaction.

CL. P.

## THE REIGNS OF JOTHAM AND AHAZ

### *Change of tide*

On his deathbed, with his sons gathered around him, Jacob uttered those memorable words, "Judah, thee shall thy brethren praise... the sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the obedience of the peoples be" (Genesis 49. 8, 10). The reigns of the two kings Jotham and Ahaz focus our thoughts on the place Judah had in those days and provide sharp contrast with the place God has given to this royal tribe.

The days of Jotham coincided with a change of the tide. During his father's reign Judah was prosperous both materially and spiritually. All the people of Judah had gone the right way because Uzziah had set himself to seek God (2 Chronicles 26. 5). He waxed exceedingly strong (v. 8). It was at this point that events took a different turn: "for he was marvellously helped, till he was 26. 15, 16). Often when a leader takes the wrong step, the people

**strong. But when he was strong... he did corruptly"** (2 Chronicles follow; a shepherd relaxes his vigilance and the sheep wander and stray. So we have singled out for our learning and instruction the words **"In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord"** (Isaiah 6. 1). **This is the only antidote for a slipping, sliding people. There was plenty of work to be done by converted, consecrated, dedicated men, free from selfish pride, dependent upon God and committed to the task of telling this people** (Isaiah 6. 7-9). **From this passage in Isaiah 6 we see how the people were in unbelief. Only true belief in a fresh revelation of the arm of the Lord would cause them to turn again and be healed. The message is clear: "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established"** (Isaiah 7. 9).

### *The flow tide*

When Jotham came to the throne at 25 years of age he had a good start and an opportunity to follow the good example set by his father. It is written of Jotham that he built and he fought (2 Chronicles 27. 3, 5), but it was clearly evident that Israel and Judah were **"bent to backsliding from Me"** (Hosea 11. 7). Judah, however, still ruled with God (Hosea 11. 12). So Jotham became mighty because he was ordered his ways before the LORD his God, but of the people it says, **"The people, did yet corruptly"** (2 Chronicles 27. 2) also **"The high places were not taken away: the people still sacrificed and burned incense in the high places"** (2 Kings 15. 55). When we consider the flow of the tide we can understand the words. **"In those days the LORD began to send against Judah Rezin the king of Syria, and Pekah the son of Remaliah"** (2 Kings 15. 37). There is clear evidence that the seers and the prophets were making the people to err (Micah 3. 5). **Instead of having the power to declare transgression and sin they were causing error to multiply. Fulness of power, judgement and might can only come by the Spirit of the Lord** (Micah 3. 8). The ultimate effect of their actions was to **degrade the place of the Name, to bring Jerusalem to the state of a ploughed field. The ultimate effect of God's will is given to us in the description of the mountain of the LORD's house in the latter days** (Micah 4. 1-3; Isaiah 2. 2-4). Clearly Zion will be the supreme centre in which will be found the house of God. Into it all nations will flow. Out of it God will teach His ways to both His people and the nations. Radiating from this centre, in-

structions will flow until the earth is filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11. 9).

### *The Flood*

There does not appear to be any record of an actual invasion of Israel or Judah in the days of Jotham, so that we can assume that the statement in 2 Kings 15. 3 expresses the attitude to Judah of those two kings, Rezin and Pekah. The might of Jotham and the respect he had in the eyes of the LORD would account for the restraint. So when he died the restraint was removed and the two kings came up to Jerusalem to war (2 Kings 16. 5). The impact on the house of David was to move the hearts of both king and people like trees in a forest before a wind. Judah still ruled with God and to Ahaz was given the assurance: "It shall not stand". Only if he believed would he be established (Isaiah 7. 6-9). God was well able to deal with the two tails of smoking firebrands, but Ahaz rejected His counsel and appealed to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria (2 Kings 16. 7). Subsequent failure can be traced to the setting aside of the word of the LORD. In spite of the unique sign given to Ahaz concerning the virgin birth, he failed to grasp the purpose of God in Judah for his day. Consequently he squandered what had been wrought for God and made havoc of the testimony to His Name. In appealing to Tiglath-pileser, he took silver and gold found in the house, and sent it for a present (2 Kings 16. 8). He met Tiglath-pileser in Damascus and saw the altar, drew near to the altar and offered thereon. He caused a copy to be made and called it "the great altar", and displaced the brasen altar to the north (2 Kings 16. 14, 15). Not only did he despise the precious things associated with the house of God but considered them worthy of exchange. He departed from the God-given approach through the brasen altar, and accepted another altar to sacrifice to other gods. The message is again clear: "Yet I am the LORD... and thou shalt know no God but Me, and beside Me there is no saviour" (Hosea 13. 4). So greatly was Ahaz deceived that a copy of the altar of Damascus was made and used in Judah. Let us beware of copying other modes of service and forms of worship which displace our Lord Jesus from our high esteem. In all things He must have the pre-eminence. Ahaz sacrificed to the gods of the kings of Syria that they might help him, "but they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel" (2 Chronicles 28. 23).

In all God's dealings He has not changed. There are always gentleness and tender feeling, pity too and grace. "I am the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt" (Hosea 13. 4). His closing words through Hosea show His desire for the restoration of His people, "O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God" (Hosea 14. 1-2). His requirements are clearly outlined in Micah 6. 3-8, and if only they had remembered from Shittim to Gilgal, a westward journey, through Jordan's deep waters, they would have known the righteous acts of the LORD. The pronouncement is recorded for us in Isaiah 8. 5, 6, 7: "Forasmuch as this people hath refused the waters of Shiloah (the Sent One) that go softly... the Lord bringeth up upon them the waters of the River... the king of Assyria". And so the flood waters came up over all his channels, over all his banks. "He shall sweep onward into Judah, he shall overflow and pass through; he shall reach even to the neck" (Isaiah 8. 8). The final and ultimate effect on God's people was to bring them into bondage.

"Now these things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come" (1 Corinthians 10. 11). R. A. Parker

## STUDIES IN SEVEN MINOR PROPHETS

### JOEL 1. 1—2. 17

#### *SOUNDING THE ALARM IN ZION*

*From Birmingham.* —Little is known of the origin and history of the prophet Joel, or even, with a degree of accuracy, the date of his prophecy. However, it is possible that Joel was the first of the "minor prophets". His message, directed at the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, is sombre indeed. The portion under consideration is a solemn indictment of the measure to which the people had departed from the Lord, and a fearful warning of the judgment that would follow, together with a gracious plea from the Lord that they should repent. That the prophecy had immediate fulfilment there is no doubt, but we noted the frequent references throughout the prophecy to "the Day of the Lord" and were reminded that the coming "time of Jacob's trouble" (Jeremiah 30. 6-8) is also in view.

The portion for study gives us a graphic picture of the desolation brought about by the sinful condition of the people. Joel 1. 4

presents the scene of devastation caused by the invasion of the land by the four types of insect. The havoc they wrought would take years to restore. Every aspect of agricultural life was affected (1. 10-12). Even the services of the house of God ceased because of the lack (1. 9).

Even when on the point of executing His judgement, the Lord longed for the repentance and return of His people. "Even now, saith the Lord, turn unto Me with all your heart" (2. 12). How much sorrow Israel could have been spared, if she had responded to that call! The call of God, however, was to a wholehearted repentance: "Rend your heart and not your garments" (2. 13). It is possible to make an outward show of repentance, unaccompanied by the true repentance of the heart, and it is this latter which God required if his judgement was to be stayed and the people restored to their former blessings. Repentance is ever an exercise of the heart. The comment on the Lord's character in 2. 13, "He is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy", reminds us of the almost identical words of David in Psalm 103. 8. Truly, "If we are faithless, He abideth faithful" (2 Timothy 2. 13).

R. L.

*From Nottingham.* —Very little is known about Joel himself. His name means "Jehovah is God" and is a common name in the Old Testament. It seems clear from his prophecy that Joel's message was to Judah and not to the ten tribes, but the date of his prophecy is much more difficult to determine. Scholars' opinions vary, but there seems to be some evidence that the date was about 850 B. C., making Joel one of the earliest of the minor prophets [see chronological table, January issue].

The question arises as to whether or not the destruction by the palmerworm, locust, cankerworm and caterpillar represent the invasion of some human enemy, or whether it is to be understood as a literal happening, or both. In one discussion there was a difference of view, but there seems to be good reason, from the general tenor of the prophecy to think that it is both literal and figurative.

One question was, if Joel's message was to Judah, what is the identity of the "northern army" mentioned in 2. 20? Some thought this may well refer to the future attack on Israel of the host from the north [see Comment 1].

The **burden of the message seems to be contained in 2. 13. God looks not on the outward appearance, and it is true humiliation of heart and the bowing of the will that He seeks. It was the failure to do this which was going to result in the land which God wished to be flowing with milk and honey becoming desolate and barren. It is well for us if we learn this lesson in its application to the people of God today.**

The devastation caused by the invading army of locusts resulted in the cutting off of the meal and drink offerings because there were not the means to offer these sacrifices. Thus, through the people's sin, God was robbed of His portion [see Comment 2], Only repentance and a turning to God would restore these offerings (see 2. 13, 14 and 2. 18-27), but in this restoration the people themselves would also receive blessings, and praise would result (v. 26).

#### *R. Hickling*

*From Edinburgh.* —Joel lived about 800-750 B. C., and was possibly the earliest of the Minor Prophets. The Lord chose him to reveal to the old men and to all the inhabitants of the land (1. 2) a terrible calamity without parallel in living memory, to be related to succeeding generations (1. 3). He was to be the watchman sounding the alarm in Zion.

Opinions were divided as to whether the locusts mentioned were actual locusts or whether Joel used poetic language to describe an invading human army. Some thought the whole portion referred to men, reasoning that in the history of His people, God exercised judgement through the human agent and not through other creatures [see Comment 3]. By reason of sin, the meal and drink offerings ceased, although there was a remnant who remained faithful: "the priests, the LORD's ministers, mourn" (1. 9).

Others took the view that chapter 1 referred literally to locusts, but that chapter 2 witnessed a human enemy from the north, perhaps the Assyrians, "a great people and a strong" (v. 2). In chapter 1 the locust swarm caused the people to be deprived. "For the harvest of the field is perished. The vine is withered" (vv. 11, 12). In turn, because of the damage, the meal and drink offerings were cut off from the house of the Lord (v. 9). However, it was assumed that the other offerings and oblations continued in the Temple.

There was a further view expressed that the whole portion, including chapter 2, referred to locusts. Reference was made particu-

larly to the darkness and clouds of verse 2 as applying to the dense swarm covering the sky, the likeness to horses (v. 4), the entering in at windows like a thief (v. 9) and also to verse 25.

There was also a disagreement about whether this portion has a future application of the Coming of the Son of Man and prior related events. Attention was drawn to several verses which bore a marked resemblance to other verses in Scripture which refer to the Lord's second coming to the earth. In particular the cutting off of the meal and drink offerings (1. 9) was linked with the ceasing of the sacrifice and oblation during Daniel's seventieth week (Daniel 9. 27); the northern army (Joel 2. 20) was likened to the king of the North (Daniel 11); and comparison was made of 2. 10 with Matthew 24. 29 [see Comment 4]. If Joel was indeed the first of the Minor Prophets he was also, therefore, first to use the term "the Day of the Lord". It was recognized that this term is used to denote occasions in the history of God's dealings with men when He has intervened to exercise judgement on account of sin, but some felt that there was no distinction between the use of the term in 2. 11 and 2. 31, and the quotation from 2. 31 in Acts 2. 20. However, whether we are referring to the past, present or future, the principles regarding repentance are the same: "rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God" (2. 13). *L. Burgoyne*

*From Paisley.* —Joel, whose name means "Jehovah is my God", was one of the earliest of the prophets prophesying in the reign of king Joash. He was contemporary with, and perhaps knew, Elijah and Elisha, Hosea and Amos [See chronological table, January issue].

Because of the imagery Joel uses it is difficult to obtain a true meaning of his message. He prophesied in a day of spiritual declension, a "day of clouds and thick darkness" (2. 2). It was only in such days that God sent His servants the prophets to His people [see Comment 5]. In days of spiritual prosperity the life of the people revolved round the Temple, and they relied on the priests to give them the message of God, but in days of spiritual declension the people wanted neither God nor His message, and God had to rise up early and send His servants the prophets to bring His people back to Him. God wants His people even if they do not want Him.

God had visited His people in judgement, with drought, famine and pestilence. Moses and Solomon had warned them that God would send a plague of locusts upon them if they sinned against

**God** (Deuteronomy 28. 38, 1 Kings 8. 37). Perhaps they thought in their pride that such plagues were only for the Egyptians and their like, and not for the people of God. The four kinds of insect mentioned in 1. 4 are reckoned to be different species of locusts. The plague of locusts was a dreadful reality, spreading ruin on every hand, but it was only a type of another more terrible invasion, for God was going to send upon them not merely swarms of insects, but great and terrible nations who would carry them away captive from their own land if they did not repent.

If they did repent God said he would restore to them the years which the locust had eaten. This has a message for our own day. The locust-symbol of a destroying army is reproduced in Revelation 9. 7-9.

Joel's ministry was centred in Judah and Jerusalem, while Hosea and Amos prophesied to the ten tribes. There was an urgency about Joel's message as can be seen from the repeated pronouncement, "Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly". God sent him to sound the alarm in Zion to warn the people of impending judgement, but His warnings and entreaties fell on deaf ears. Joel received the same treatment that all the other prophets received. The Lord said, "Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute". He also got the same treatment that God received from His people. God could level the charge against Israel, after all His love, warnings and entreaties had gone unheeded, "All day long did I spread out My hands unto a disobedient and gain-saying people" (Romans 10. 21). Joel's poignant and plaintive prayer, "O LORD, to Thee do I cry" (1. 79), was uttered because he had cried to the people who had refused to listen. The only One who would listen to Joel was the One who sent him with the message.

*J. Peddle*

## IMPRESSIONS FROM OTHER CONTRIBUTORS

Papers were also received from Atherton and Leigh, Birkenhead, Derby, Glasgow (Parkhead), Methil and Vancouver, and the following are impressions from these.

A pre-exilic date of around 800 B. C. for the book of Joel was generally suggested, Joel's message being addressed to the southern kingdom of Judah. The land was being attacked in an unprecedented manner by a plague of locusts, and it was Joel's God-given task (1. 1)

to indicate that this was no mere chance or natural event, but an act of divine judgement. The people had become relatively affluent and were living as though they were independent of their God (2. 12, 13). It was needful for God to remove the "**prop**", their material prosperity and luxuries upon which they were leaning. Drunkenness was widespread, and possibly a stupor among the people was developing (1. 5), making them insensible to God's warnings. Divine service had become a formality, and before long a step moral decline would have set in. Their sin, and the consequent judgement, had put at hazard God's honour, reputation and glory (2. 17). In love God was chastening His people, to bring them back to Himself that He might bless them. "Behold then the goodness and severity of God" (Romans 11. 22). Judgement is God's "strange work" (Isaiah 28. 21).

Through Joel God called His people to collective repentance and confession. Twice in the portion before us Joel asks for the people to be called together for this purpose (1. 14, 2. 15) and in 2. 1 he asks for an alarm to be sounded in Zion. These requests would be made to the priests, who were responsible to assemble the people and sound the alarm in times of crisis (see 1. 13, 14 and Numbers 10. 1-8). The first two of these requests appear to have been ignored. Fervently did God's servant Joel pray for His people (1. 19) as he considered the sad devastation of the land he loved. How different it might have been: "Blessed shall be thy basket and thy kneading-trough" (Deuteronomy 28. 1-8). Joel 2. 2-11 prophesies a second more severe attack of locusts. This prophecy, along with the call to true-hearted repentance (verses 12-14), seems to have brought the people to their senses, and it may be inferred from 2. 18 that they repented.

Most of the papers being reviewed here suggested that the locust-swarms in Joel's book were literal. It is reckoned that 2. 3-9, for example, presents nothing less than an eye-witness account of an actual locust swarm. But the locusts were God's army not only literally, but allegorically (2. 11, 25). As in many Old Testament experiences through which Israel passed, God was given through this judgement a figure of a far more awful day of judgement associated with the time of the end. Thus while "the day of the LORD" of 1. 15, 2. 1, 11 was God's judgement day in Joel's lifetime, it foreshadowed "the great and terrible day of the LORD" of

2. 31. Some, however, considered the locusts to be figurative of literal armies of men, the armies of Syria and Greece being specifically mentioned.

The message to Israel through Joel may have a voice to some of God's people living in an affluent society today. Israel's great sin was that she forgot the Source of her prosperity and acted as if independent of the great Provider. The message to the Laodicean church (Revelation 3. 14-22) is a New Testament counterpart to Joel's message; and 2 Corinthians 7. 8-11 emphasizes the desirability at times of collective repentance "after a godly sort", which is to "rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God" (2. 13). *Eds.*

### COMMENTS

1. (*Nottingham*): The "Northern Army" will no doubt be more fully discussed in the next issue but we may say here that the greatly feared Assyrians or their successors were probably in view, and there seems to be a long-term prophecy linking up with Daniel 11. 44, 45 concerning the king of the North. *L. B.*

2. (*Nottingham*): As well as the people suffering and God being robbed, the priests lost their portion (Joel 1. 9; Leviticus 6. 14-18). *L. B.*

3. (*Edinburgh*): Locusts are in fact mentioned in Scripture as being the agents of divine judgement upon an erring people (Deuteronomy 28. 38, 39, 42) and various plagues of natural origin, albeit divine in purpose, are referred to in Deuteronomy 28. 21-24). *L. B.*

4. (*Edinburgh*): Four possible interpretations of the Joel prophecies are stated, but there is the further possibility, apparently alluded to by our friends in connection with events prior to the coming of the Son of Man, that more than one prophecy could be contained within a particular passage. In view of the difficulties confronting the student seeking to delve into the complexities of prophetic scripture, it is unwise to be dogmatic, but I venture the view that chapter 1 predominately concerns an existing or impending locust attack, although verse 6 could well apply to a human invasion, and in verse 7 "My vine" and "My fig tree" seem to portray God lamenting for His people rather than for the vines and fig trees of the land. The

second visitation is described in chapter 2 in language which would be extravagant in relation to locusts alone but would be appropriate as a figurative account of a human invasion. Again, this army, "a great people and a strong" (2. 2) could be typical of both the Babylonians or Assyrians of the immediate future to Joel and the hordes of the king of the North of the end time. *L. B.*

5. (*Paisley*): The proposition that God sent His prophets to the people only in times of spiritual declension is an interesting one but account must be taken of the fact that when the services of God's house were faithfully carried out in its very earliest days God's word came to His people through His prophet Moses. Furthermore the prophets Gad and Nathan were active during the reigns of David and Solomon, parts of which were the best days in Israel's history. Other exceptions are the New Testament prophets, many of whom prophesied before declension had set in (Acts 11. 27, 13. 1). *L. B.*

*The following comments were omitted from the January issue owing to lack of space.*

1. (*Methil*): "Some thought that the three days' journey referred to in Jonah 3. 3 did not indicate the distance that Jonah was from Nineveh when he heard God's call to go forth, but rather the period of time required to go right through the city. Others thought that this referred to the normal time taken to cover the journey from Joppa to Nineveh, but that God allowed Jonah to cover the distance in one day."

As pointed out in Birkenhed's paper, the distance from Joppa to Nineveh was of the order of 500 miles, which would have taken weeks rather than days by the means of transport then available. Several contributors have suggested that the three days' journey represented the time required to carry the message throughout the city. This is supported by verse 4: "And Jonah began to enter into the city a clay's journey". *G. P. Jr.*

2. (*Aberkenfig and Barry*): "We have no reason to think that the people of Nineveh were more easily brought to repentance than others to whom the message of judgement has come. Yet from subsequent remarks made by Jonah it is clear that his heart was not in the preaching at all. We know the vagaries of men make it possible for sincerity to turn quickly to insincerity but it would

appear from his words (which we have no reason to doubt) that he was hoping for the downfall of Nineveh. If this is true it points to a principle which we find difficult to accept completely: that the results of a man's preaching are not a safe guide to his sincerity, and that he may be able to speak the Lord's message without being, in the fullest sense, the Lord's messenger. We saw the latter borne out in Balaam the son of Beor, who spoke truth which he must have received from God and yet Balaam was not submitting himself to God's will. Is this a safe conclusion to reach?"

The interpretation of heart motives, apart from a direct word from the Lord, is always problematic. Jonah's sincerity is not brought into question by the Holy Spirit. It would seem that his message rang out in Nineveh with compelling force and conviction, a conviction doubtless sharpened by the impact upon his own spirit of conditions as he found them when he reached Nineveh (compare Acts 17. 16). As a prophet of impending judgement he emerges from the story as a man very much the LORD's messenger in the LORD's message. It was when the LORD's mercy later became apparent that Jonah was so much out of harmony with the thoughts of God. The general rule is that God prepares His servants to take His message, conditioning their thoughts to his own, so that they speak with divinely given conviction on His behalf. The effectiveness of the message is normally related to the sincerity and assurance of the messenger (c. f. Isaiah 6. 7-9; Jeremiah 20. 9; 1 Thessalonians 1. J). Nor is effectiveness necessarily measured by a positive response to the LORD's word, as Acts 7. 54 illustrates. The example suggested regarding Balaam belongs to a somewhat different plane of experience. He was constrained to bless rather than curse Israel when hired by Balak; he was not sent by the LORD with a challenging message to Nineveh or others. G. P. Jr.

3. (*Atherton and Leigh*): "Some considered that Jonah was still inwardly reluctant in some respects (see 4. 1-3). However, this view was questioned because Jonah had been faithful in his ministry. "

In the reference given (4. 1-3), Jonah expressed how he had felt before hasting to flee to Tarshish. There is nothing in the opening verses of chapter 3 to suggest further reluctance. One would have thought that after his tremendous deliverance Jonah would be so constrained by awe and gratitude as to obey the LORD without reservation. It was suggested also in the paper from Methil that

the vow referred to by **Jonah (2. 9)** related to his willingness to carry the LORD's word to Nineveh, and that in conformity with this vow he obeyed the LORD's command in **3. 2**. This seems to be in keeping with the record of his forthright witness and its results in chapter 3. *G. P. Jr.*

## PSALM 68

*(continued from November 1970)*

But let the righteous be glad; let them exult before God:

Yea, let them rejoice with gladness.

Sing unto God, sing praises to His name:

Cast up a high way for Him that rideth through the deserts;

His name is JAH; and exult ye before Him (verse 3. 4).

The joyous spirit of David bubbles up like a spring within him as he exhorts the righteous to be glad and exult before God. To exult means to jump for joy. So did David as he leaped and danced before the LORD (2 Samuel 6. 16). Michal his wife was like her father Saul; she had no interest in the Ark or the God of the Ark, and she despised David in her heart. David encouraged his people to exult and to sing praises unto God. He also calls upon them, "Cast up a high way for Him that rideth through the deserts; His name is JAH". This name means that He is the eternal, self-existing One. God having associated Himself with Israel, it was necessary that a high way should be cast up for Him, so that He might go with them, and they with Him. He dwelt in a tent when they dwelt in tents. Such was the humility of Jehovah the God of Israel. The A. V. gives "extol" instead of "cast up a highway". The Hebrew word *Calal* means, according to Dr. Strong, "to mound up (espec. a turnpike)" and may also mean to lift up, to elevate, to exalt. Gesenius says, "Specially to make a level way by casting up a bank, to embank". Dr. Young gives, "Raise up a highway for Him". Isaiah 57. 14 says, "Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumblingblock out of the way of My people". There seems little doubt that the sense of the R. V. is correct as to the casting up of a high way. The deserts are sterile places. The word used here is the plural of Arabah, which Dr. Strong says is "the sterile valley of the Jordan and its continuation to the Red Sea". The A. V. gives "heavens" for "deserts", and Mr. Newberry says of this, "In the infinitudes of the universe". A Jewish translation gives, "Extol Him that rideth upon the skies". It seems to mean that though God in going with Israel needed a high way, He who is the Eternal One rides through the deserts of space where He needs no way.

A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows,  
Is God in His holy habitation.

God setteth the solitary **in** families:

He bringeth out the prisoners into prosperity:

**But** the rebellious dwell **in** a parched land (verses 5, 6).

God made and **still** does make **special** provision for the fatherless **and** the widow. **He** was a **father** of the fatherless, and a **judge** of the widow **in** His holy habitation. In the tithe given to the Levites **in** the house of God there was provision **for** both **cases** of need. He also **set** the solitary **in** families. There were **many** widows **in** Israel when David reached the throne, and also lonely people who **had no prospects in** life, for Saul left Israel **defeated by** the Philistines, and, perhaps worse still, he left **the** kingdom **divided**; Israel under Abner supported the house of Saul, **and** the **men** of Judah were with David. But with Israel united under David **and** the **Ark** brought to Zion **and** placed **in** a **tent** of **its** own, there was going to be proper **care** for the needy and lonely people. For thus God had put it **in** His law: "**He** doth **execute** the judgement of the fatherless **and** widow, and loveth the **stranger, in** giving him food and raiment. Love ye therefore the **stranger: for ye were strangers in** the land of **Egypt**" (Deuteronomy 10, 18, 19; Psalm 146. 9). God said through Malachi, "Bring ye the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there **may be meat in** Mine house" (3. 10). Think of the **state** of the house, of God **in** the days of Saul when David came to God's house **asking** for bread and there was no common bread there. God's will was **against** loneliness from the beginning. **He** said, "It is not good that the **man should be** alone" (Genesis 2. 18); so here David **says**, "God setteth the solitary **in** families". Having given to **men** and women the mind **He** has, communion is not simply a pleasure, **it is** a necessity. **His** mind is that even prisoners should **be** brought out **into** prosperity. But **in** contrast to these, David **says**, "the rebellious dwell **in** a parched land". The rebellious **are** such **as** will not **be** subject to law and order; they **are** against the rules of human society, for when **men** dwell together **there** must **be** laws to regulate human conduct. **Hence at** the beginning of Israel's nationhood God **gave to** them the law which **He** had written to Moses and **He** promulgated **it** from the top of Sinai.

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# BIBLE STUDIES

*'A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God (Acts 17. 11).'*

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## EDITORIAL

Inevitably **the postal strike in Great Britain has complicated editorial arrangements.** Editors **are grateful to all who went to considerable trouble to ensure that papers were transmitted, but for others this was simply impossible.** It will **be appreciated that use has been made of the papers available, even though out of turn, and the order of supplementary study articles has been slightly affected.**

Nevertheless **it has been possible to introduce a variety of interesting material in connection with the further study of Joel's prophecy.** Joel **has been called "the prophet of the Day of the LORD".** His book is **a remarkable illustration of the contemporary dealings of God with His people, providing a medium for prophetic revelation regarding a greater crisis of judgement which still lies ahead for Israel and for the nations generally.** "Alas for **the day!**", **cried Joel, "for the day of the LORD is at hand, and as destruction from the Almighty shall it come"** (Joel 1. 15).

For Israel and **Judah in Joel's day it was a time of visitation in judgement, a day of drought, locust plague and ensuing famine (1. 4-12).** This **fearful situation presaged also the coming invasion of northern armies by which God's people would be chastened (2. 20).** Yet **the prophetic message was not limited to either of these visitations. It extended to the ultimate visitation upon Israel and the nations at the time of the end, "the great and terrible day of the LORD" (2. 31).** A **vivid impression of that climactic divine intervention in human affairs dominated the third chapter of Joel.**

Two of **the issues to be raised with the nations in that great and terrible day of accountability are stated in Joel 3. 2: they had scattered God's people among the nations, and had parted God's land. These two charges link our study significantly with the current Middle East situation.** Already **the student of scriptural prophecy can discern international attitudes to Israel which give substance to the charges. This will be more fully apparent as the predicted drama unfolds towards Antichrist's attempted elimination of the holy people.**

*G. P. Jr.*

## THE TIMES OF HEZEKIAH

Hezekiah, son and successor of Ahaz, was one of the greatest of the kings of Judah, and reigned in critical times at the end of the 8th and the beginning of the 7th century B. C. On his accession Judah seemed to be at the point of dissolution. To his activities she owed a recovery which lengthened the duration of the kingdom by nearly 150 years.

Of Hezekiah Scripture says "he did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD", "he trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel", "none like him among all the kings of Judah", "kept His commandments, which the LORD commanded Moses", "the LORD was with him; whithersoever he went forth he prospered" (2 Kings 18. 3-7).

Hezekiah was 25 years old when he came to the throne, and straight away he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them. The priests and Levites cleansed and purified the Temple, and restored the services. All the wrongs of Ahaz were corrected. There followed a large-scale sacrifice. The king then sent word to all Israel and Judah, inviting them to come to the house of the Lord in Jerusalem to keep the passover. Many treated the message with scorn and ridicule, but a few men of Asher, Manasseh and Zebulun came. These together with the people of Judah kept the feast of unleavened bread. They began by removing the altars in Jerusalem, throwing them into the Kidron gorge. At this time there was great rejoicing, the like of which had not been known since the days of Solomon (2 Chron. 30. 26).

When this was over, all the Israelites present went out to the cities of Judah and removed the high places, and broke down idols in Ephraim and Manasseh of the Northern Kingdom (2 Chron. 31. 1). The brazen serpent of Moses, now an object of superstitious worship, was broken in pieces (2 Kin. 18. 4).

Ahaz had solicited aid from Assyria, because he had been hard pressed by the armies of Israel and Syria. He bought relief at the expense of the treasures from the Temple and the palace (2 Kin. 16. 6-9). Dependence upon Assyria made Judah almost a vassal of that nation, but at times Hezekiah broke free. One occasion was when he conquered the Philistine country as far as Gaza and its boundaries (2 Kin. 18. 7-8).

Early in Hezekiah's reign Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, attacked and captured all the fortified cities of Judah. This caused Hezekiah to be cautious, and so he paid over silver and gold as had been done by his father Ahaz (2 Kin. 18. 12-16). These were sent to Lachish where the Assyrian army was encamped. Hezekiah set in motion plans for the defence of the city, and blocked up the springs outside the city, and the stream which flowed through the land. This would deprive the Assyrian army of water supplies. He also made good the city wall, and erected towers on it, and then built another wall outside it, and finally collected together many weapons and shields (2 Chron. 32. 1-5). The Assyrians sent a deputation to Jerusalem to Hezekiah. Representatives of the two kings met outside Jerusalem on the eastern side near the fuller's field, to try and resolve the situation. Hezekiah was expected to surrender, and to induce this the Assyrians tried to undermine the confidence of the people, some of whom were listening from the walls. The tactics of Rabshakeh, chief officer of the Assyrian army, were to reason with the people that it was useless to look to other nations to come to their aid. It was also suggested as futile to turn to the LORD their God, because Hezekiah purported to be suppressing the worship of the LORD by removing the high places and altars scattered throughout the land. He declared, erroneously, that Assyria had been sent by Jehovah, to cause the downfall of Hezekiah's kingdom. In return for surrender the people were offered 2, 000 horses for defence purposes, and also ample food and drink, until they were taken away to a land where there was food in abundance. They were warned that Samaria had lasted for three years, but had eventually succumbed to the seige. Now was their opportunity, nothing was to be gained by refusing to surrender (2 Chron. 18. 18-36).

All this was relayed to Hezekiah who rent his clothes at the blasphemy of Rabshakeh in conveying a false impression to the people. Hezekiah wrapped himself in sackcloth and went into the house of the LORD. The representatives of Judah were sent to Isaiah the prophet to give him an outline of developments, to ask for prayer on behalf of the people, and also to hear a message from the LORD through the prophets (2 Kin. 19. 7-5).

Meanwhile Rabshakeh returned to Sennacherib to find things fareing badly. The attack on Lachish had been abandoned and they were now attacking Libnah. News reached the Assyrians that Tir-

hakah, king of Ethiopia, was on the way to make war upon them. This meant that a speedy surrender of Jerusalem must be secured to avoid conducting wars on two fronts. As a result messengers were sent to Hezekiah urging a quick decision. He went again to the house of the LORD, and prayed that God would demonstrate His power to the surrounding nations by saving them from the Assyrians. Isaiah sent a message of hope and assurance that the Assyrians would be defeated, and that night the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 men of their army (2 Kin. 19. 55). This caused the immediate return to Nineveh of Sennacherib and his army, and shortly afterwards he was murdered by his sons and Esarhaddon succeeded him.

Soon after this Hezekiah fell ill, and Isaiah came to tell him that he ought to make out his will as he was going to die. Hezekiah prayed earnestly to the LORD that he might be spared, and the LORD granted his request, extending his life by fifteen years. (2 Kin. 20. 141).

During Hezekiah's reign the land prospered. He built treasuries for silver, gold and other costly things; barns for the rich harvests; stalls and sheepfolds for the many flocks and herds he had amassed. The fact that Hezekiah had resisted the Assyrian army was noticed by the nations around, and envoys were sent from Babylon with gifts, to enquire after the king's health, and investigate the victory he had achieved. King Merodach-baladan's men were shown everything in the king's treasuries and throughout the realm. The prophet Isaiah heard of the visit and enquired of its purpose, and then proceeded to give a message from the LORD that the time would come when all the wealth that had been amassed would be taken away, along with some of Hezekiah's offspring, to Babylon (2 Kin. 20. 12-21).

The death of Hezekiah after a reign of twenty-nine years was an event mourned by all Judah and the people of Jerusalem.

*R. D. Williams*

## AMMON

### *The Origin of the Nation*

The origin of the nation of the Ammonites can be traced to the cave where Lot fled with his daughters after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19. 30-38). It is evident that the licentious

and immoral behaviour of these cities had a deadening effect upon their spiritual lives. The subsequent illicit union of these two women with their father clearly indicates that they had learned the evil practices of the cities of the plain. This resulted in the birth of a nation which was to become the age-long enemy of the people of Israel.

### *Physical Location of Ammon*

The Ammonites settled near to their kindred race the Moabites, and their possession lay to the north of Moab stretching towards the river Jabbok (Deut. 3. 16). The eastern border of the tribe of Reuben was also the border of the Ammonites.

### *Chief Characteristics of the Ammonites and their Impact on Israel*

#### *Persecution*

Since the border between Israel and Ammon was common it is understandable that there would be frequent strife between the two nations. Ammon's defences were of prime consideration to them: "The border of the children of Ammon was strong" (Num. 21. 24). They were an implacable foe who sought as occasion arose to enlarge their own borders at the expense of Israel. When the women of Gilead were with child they found themselves the victims of the knives of the Ammonites. The ultimate result was to reduce the nation's resistance to attack (Amos 1. 13). Further evidence of the Ammonites' fierce incursions is to be found in 1 Sam. 11. 2, when they sought to put out the right eyes of the men of Jabesh-Gilead and so bring them to a state of subservience.

#### *Reproach*

There was another method characteristic of Ammon, a tool to be used whenever the opportunity presented itself. The Lord showed His disapproval of them in their reproach of Israel in border disputes. Speaking through the prophet He said, "I have heard... the revilings of the children of Ammon, wherewith they have reproached My people, and magnified themselves against their border" (Zeph. 2. 8). After the return of the remnant from Babylon, when they built the wall of Jerusalem under the hand of Nehemiah, it was Tobiah the Ammonite who with the help of others heaped scorn on the builders. The book of Nehemiah reveals that it was Tobiah's intention to ridicule the work and make it appear of little consequence in the eyes of the remnant (Neh. 4. 3).

### *Seduction*

Outright persecution and reproach were not the only weapons in their armoury. They were also skilled in the art of seduction. When Solomon was king on the throne he fell prey to the women of the Ammonites. He forgot the words of his own proverb, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life". In old age his heart was drawn away after Milcom and Moloch the gods of the Ammonites (1 Kings 11. 5-7). In the valley of Hinnom an altar to Moloch was set up and there the children of Israel participated in the terrible rites of human sacrifice setting aside the plain word of God which strictly forbade such practices (Lev. 18. 21). Nehemiah in his day bemoaned the fact that the Jews had followed in the footsteps of Solomon in the matter of mixed marriages. The national language of the Israel nation was in danger of extinction as the offspring of the marriages spoke the language of the stranger, undoubtedly the outcome of the powerful influence of their strange parentage. Perhaps this was the most subtle tool used by this wily enemy.

### *The Place of Ammon in Prophecy*

We have already mentioned how God took knowledge of the persecution of His people. Resulting judgement was foretold by the prophets. Sodom and Gomorrah always appear in the Word of God as typical of his terrible vengeance. Ammon is likened unto Gomorrah; it would become a place of perpetual desolation and a possession of nettles and sand pits. "This shall they have for their pride" (Zeph. 2. 8-10), Rabbah was their chief city wherein was the bedstead of Og the king of Bashan (Deut. 3. 11). They had overcome men great and tall as the Anakim and had taken their city (Deut. 2. 21). But the Lord decreed through the prophet Amos that He would kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah which would devour their palaces and their king would go into captivity (Amos 1. 13-15). Jeremiah also prophesied of the day when Ammon would come under the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 27. 2-8). In the prophecy of Ezekiel the Lord gives greater detail of the punishment of Ammon. Two ways were appointed for the king of Babylon, one for Jerusalem and one for Ammon. The king stood at the parting of the ways, and a sword was appointed for Ammon. The sword had already been in the hand of the furbisher "to cause it to devour, that it may be as lightning". It was ready to be used

in the hand of Nebuchadnezzar who was skilled in the art of destruction. The Ammonites who were used to human sacrifice by fire, were soon to find themselves as fuel for its searing flame (Ezek. 21. 20-28). Whatever the shape of the attack Ammon made on the people of Israel the Lord reveals the underlying motive behind it. In Ezek. 25 the Lord said, "Son of Man... prophesy against them: and say unto the children of Ammon, Hear the word of the Lord GOD... Because thou saidst, Aha, against My sanctuary... " The sanctuary of God was in the midst of Israel, and any persecution of the people of God in the day of their reproach was a reproach to the Lord God Himself. They stamped with the feet, they clapped their hands and rejoiced with all despite of their soul against the land of Israel. Therefore Rabbah would become a stable for camels and a couching place for flocks (Ezek. 25. 5, 6).

C. McKay

## STUDIES IN SEVEN MINOR PROPHETS

### *THE GREAT AND TERRIBLE DAY OF THE LORD*

#### JOEL 2. 18 — 3. 21

*From Methil.* —The day of the Lord will commence without warning, only the Lord Himself knows when (Matt. 24. 36; 1 Thess. 5. 2, 3). During the reign of Antichrist men will be living in apparent safety when sudden destruction will fall, thus announcing the coming of the Son of Man in great glory. His coming for those who remain on earth will be completely unexpected. In that day also the heavens and the earth will be dissolved (2. Pet. 3. 10). This will take place at the Great White Throne judgement (Rev. 20. 21) and we would therefore conclude that the day of the Lord will last from the coming of the Son of Man, throughout the Millennium, until the judgement of the Great White Throne.

Some of the happenings at the coming of the Son of Man are revealed in Joel's prophecy (Acts 2. 16-21; Joel 2. 28-32), We note that during the Great Tribulation, when the gospel is preached with great power, there will be a final opportunity to repent. "Who-soever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered". In every day there has been a means of divine deliverance (Romans 10. 13). Following the coming of the Son of Man will be the gathering of the armies of the world for destruction at Armageddon. Though

the armies will be gathered together to war with every available weapon (Joel 3. 9, 10), it will be of no avail, for all His enemies will be swept before Him as He goes forth in conquering power. As Armageddon will be the gathering place of the armies of the world to destruction, so also will the valley of Jehoshaphat (i. e. God will judge) be the gathering place of all the living nations for judgement. The Lord who had previously been rejected by these nations will be in full control, for all the world will be brought under the judgement of God (Romans 3. 19).

At this judgement the Lord will separate the sheep from the goats (Matt. 25. 33). Upon these who pass to the left hand of Christ must fall the words "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25. 41). This place of eternal torment was prepared for the devil and his angels and not for men. The fact that men will be there will be of their own choice, for God Himself has said, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked" (Ezek. 33. 11).

The Lord intends to punish the nations who have persecuted His people (Joel 3. 19). The gathering of all nations in the valley of Jehoshaphat seen in Joel will be a fulfilment of Matt. 25. 31, 32. Before God dwells in Zion, His enemies must be destroyed and His people will be blessed (Joel 3. 19-21) but only after they have confessed their sin, the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus (Matt. 27. 25).

*A. R. Smith*

*From Atherton and Leigh.* — Joel 2. 21-27 refers to the restorative blessing of God after Israel responded to His chastisement using the locust-plagues of 1. 2-12 and 2. 2-11. Chapter 2. 28 is the start of chapter 3 in the Hebrew Bible. From this point, Joel's message becomes prophetic, foretelling (in the main) events still future to us [Comment 1],

Joel looked to the future when God would pour out His Spirit. Peter cited this prophecy to account for the apostles' behaviour at Pentecost (Acts 2. 14-21) [Comment 2]. On the surface Peter's words, "This is that which hath been spoken by the prophet Joel", imply that the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost was the specific future event foretold by Joel, but we rejected this view for the following reasons: -

(1) Peter's words are not as definite as those in such passages as Matt. 1. 22, "Now all this is come to pass, *that it might be*

*fulfilled* which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet" (see also Matt. 2. 17; 12. 17; 21. 4; etc. )

(2) A consistent feature of Old Testament prophecy is the omission of specific references to the present Church period; note, for example, the parenthesis in Daniel's 70 weeks, the gap between "the acceptable year of the LORD" and "the day of vengeance of our God" (Isa. 61 2; Luke 4. 19, 20). One exception is the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70 (Daniel 9. 26) > but this event is related to the Church period; we do not, therefore, expect them to be specifically referred to in Old Testament prophecy.

(3) It is significant that Peter does not complete verse 32 of Joel 2: "In mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those that escape, as the LORD hath said, and among the remnant those whom the LORD doth call". Clearly this refers to "the great and terrible day of the LORD" (v. 31), a day of divine judgement from which some in Jerusalem will escape. It is difficult to fit this in with events surrounding the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). The fall of Jerusalem took place over 30 years after Pentecost, and we do not consider the escape of any from the city on that occasion to be related to the message: "whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered (or saved)" (2. 52, Acts 2. 21). So the second half of 2. 32 refers to some event other than Pentecost [Comment 3].

We conclude that Joel 2. 28-32 refers specifically to events at the time of the end. We had difficulty in relating this passage to other scriptural passages dealing with the time of the end, but one suggestion was that the pouring out of the Spirit (2. 28) may be related to the sealing of the 144, 000 (Rev. 7. 4-8), an event which may be of similar magnitude and significance to the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost, both events involving special preparation of God's servants for service of world wide implications [Comment 4].

The problem remains, however, as to what Peter meant by saying, "This is that which hath been spoken by the prophet Joel". We suggest that Peter meant the remarkable events of the day of Pentecost—the outpouring of the Spirit and the powerful witness of the apostles and others—had scriptural precedents in Joel's prophecy; that is, the events were of similar kind and significance to those foretold by Joel. Viewed in this way, Peter's inclusion of the words about the wonders in the heavens (Acts 2. 19, 20) do not present the same problem as they would on the view that Joel 2. 28-32 had a "partial

fulfilment" at Pentecost. We have to remember that reference to wonders of sun and moon would present a difficulty to Peter's audience if he put it to them that Joel's words were in some sense applicable to their time rather than just a scriptural precedent for the events they were witnessing [Comment 5].

The term "the day of the LORD" as used in the Scriptures does not always refer to the same period of time. In Joel 1. 15, 2. 1, 11 it refers to the day of impending judgement in Joel's own life-time, but in 2. 31 it refers to a time future to Joel; a day of extensive divine judgement, "the great and terrible day of the LORD". The former day of the LORD (1. 25) was but a shadow and figure of this great and terrible day (2. 31), which is also referred to in 1 Thess. 5. 2, 2 Thess. 2. 2. We take "the day of the LORD" (2. 31) to commence with the coming of the Lord Jesus in judgement to earth as the Son of Man. It will follow the great tribulation, and will be immediately preceded by the celestial wonders of Joel 2. 30 (see also 3. 15, Matt. 24. 29, 50).

Associated with this momentous occasion is the battle of Har-Magedon (Rev. 16. 14-16, 19. 19-21). Advice to make preparation for this battle is given in Joel 3. 9-11. Some considered that this advice is continued in verse 12, and that the armies gather in the valley of Jehoshaphat. The battle itself is not referred to by Joel, but it has terminated by verse 16. "Thy mighty ones" (v. 11) refer to the great kings of earth at that time.

Another view was that "Thy mighty ones" refer to the LORD's army, possibly angels. Verse 12 is a call to the surviving peoples of the world to gather to the valley of Jehoshaphat for the judgement of the living nations (Matt. 25. 31-46), those individuals in the nations who do not participate in the battle of Har-Magedon. At verse 13 the battle takes place. Verse 14 gives the surviving nations as gathered for judgement, and at verse 16 the judgement takes place in the valley of Jehoshaphat. All agree that the Millennium is referred to in verses 17-21 [Comment 6].

Joel 3. 13 appears to be parallel with Rev. 14. 14-20, and indicates two separate events:

(1) the reaping of the harvest (Rev. 14. 14-16), referring to the gathering in of the elect as in Matt. 24. 31.

(2) the treading of the winepress (Rev. 14. 17-20, 19. 15), referring to the judgement on the armies at Har-Magedon [Comment 7].

*D. S. Jones*

*From Birkenhead.* —Peter on the day of Pentecost pointed out that Joel's prophecy concerning the outpouring of the Spirit was taking place before their eyes, though it seems certain that sections of these verses have a further fulfilment in a day yet future. Paul in Romans 10. 12, 13 quotes 2. 32 and shows that salvation is for both Jew and Gentile in this present day, thus indicating a wider application of the word "whosoever". There seems to be a balance struck between human faith and divine election in the two uses of the word "call" in 2. 32.

The surrounding nations are to be dealt with on the basis of their treatment of God's people (3. 3, 8). They are to gather in the valley of Jehoshaphat near Jerusalem, and there the Lord will judge the nations (see Zechariah 14). It appears that 3. 9 is a preparation for war, whereas Isaiah 2. 4 tells of a subsequent state of peace.

After the judgement, with its accompanying disturbances (3. 15), the centre of God's blessing will be Jerusalem. With evil overthrown, symbolised by Egypt and Edom (3. 19), God's people will enjoy an abundance of good things, the land will be inhabited for ever, and the Lord will be dwelling in their midst.

*T. J. Sands, R. D. Williams*

*From Derby.* —This theme carries on from our last month's study and is pre-figured by Jehovah's judgement in the sending of His great army (2. 25). Although an extremely serious condition of things prevailed through the destructive operations of numberless locusts and their kind, in reality it was but a faint picture of a far more terrible day yet to come, when it will be the gigantic armies of Gog and Magog, which we believe to be associated with the Beast, who will be men out to kill and destroy all before them.

True repentance toward God is ever the condition for divine blessing, especially the rending of the heart and the weeping accompanied with the Spirit-given words as in 2. 17, What follows in verses 18-32, would also seem to be a figure of a far greater blessing God has in store for His people in the Millennium after the true repentant spirit as seen in Zech 12. 10-14.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is an application of verses 28 to 32 as quoted in Acts 2. 17-21. Joel 2. 28-32 fore-

tells an even greater outpouring during the Tribulation. For then there will be need for courage and power at a time when persecution will be at its highest peak of severity, when multitudes of men and women will be given grace to bare their necks to the executioner's sword rather than bend the knee to the image of the Beast.

Power will also be needed to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom fearlessly. All who believe its message will receive the Holy Spirit.

*Arthur Neal, S. R. W.*

*From Vancouver.* —Joel uses the word "afterward" (2. 28) to point the prophetic finger far beyond the present dispensation and trace an arc embracing time's end, when the heavens will pass away and the earth will be burned up. This period is summed up in the words, "The great and terrible day of the LORD" It would seem to extend from the descent of the Son of Man from heaven with power and great glory, until the Great White Throne judgement ushering in of the Day of God (see Peter 3. 10-13). Joel's prophecy is first focussed on that great display of divine power when in the power of the Spirit of God the Israelites become the heralds of the gospel of the Kingdom to the whole world. At Pentecost Peter said, "This is that which hath been spoken by the prophet Joel". But the outpouring of the Spirit of God during the Great Tribulation will result in the salvation of a great multitude which no man can number, out of every nation, and of all tribes and peoples and tongues.

*William Young*

### COMMENTS

1. (*Atherton and Leigh*)-. Can we really make a hard and fast distinction which categorically limits 2. 21-27 to the contemporary experience of Judah in response to God's chastisement through locusts? "My people shall never be ashamed" (verses 26, 27) would rather indicate that this section also has in view the ultimate crisis and Israel's triumphant emergence into millennial blessing. In the prophetic books there is often a close intertwining of future prediction with contemporary developments. Many have considered this to be the case in Joel chapters 1 and 2, a view which is usefully summarized in the following extract: "The great theme of Joel is the day of the LORD, that coming day when the LORD is manifested, when the enemies of Israel are judged, when the LORD restores and redeems Israel. The occasion of the book and prophecy

of Joel was a dreadful scourge which swept over the land of Israel. Locust swarms had fallen upon the land and stripped it of everything green. Then the vision widens in the second chapter. The locusts appear no longer as a scourge of literal insects, but become typical of an invading army. This hostile army invades the land from the north and makes the land a wilderness. The alarm is sounded in Zion, and repentance of the people follows. Then comes the great change in the picture of desolation and despair. The day of the LORD is announced: He restores what the locusts have eaten, the land is restored, and the latter rain renewed... The last chapter is the great finale of this symphony of prophecy. Here the judgment of the nations is vividly portrayed; what the day of the LORD will bring, and what will follow in blessing is the final theme".

2. (*Atherton and Leigh*): Peter quoted from Joel not only "to account for the apostles' behaviour", but to account for the startling phenomenon which had aroused the people of Jerusalem and caused them to flock in great numbers to see what was happening—"a sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind" (Acts 2. 2); "When this sound was heard" (2. 6).

3. (*Atherton and Leigh*): The three points proposed seem an inadequate basis for rejecting that Joel's prophecy was in measure fulfilled at Pentecost. Taking the points in order:

(1) Peter's words could hardly be more definite! "This is that" clearly states that Joel was speaking of this very event.

(2) Far from not expecting this event to be referred to in Old Testament prophecy, would it not be very strange if the great dispensational landmark of the effusion of the Spirit at Pentecost were passed unnoticed? There are various Old Testament prophetic references to certain features of the present dispensation (e. g. Acts 15. 4-18; Romans 15. 9-12).

(3) It is certainly significant that Peter did not complete verse 32 of Joel 2, just as it was significant that the Lord Jesus did not complete verse 2 of Isaiah 61 when reading in the Nazareth Synagogue (Luke 4. 19-20). But it does not follow that there was no application of Joel's prophecy to the Day of Pentecost just because the second half of 2. 32 refers to some event in a later era. God has chosen in His wisdom to include such close-knit complexities as part of the pattern of prophetic revelation.

4. (*Atherton and Leigh*): It would seem that Joel's prophecy about the special outpouring of the Spirit at the time of the end explains for us a vital aspect of the work of God during that fearful period. For when Satanic power finds its ultimate intensive expression through the man of sin, there will be granted a complementary outpouring of the Spirit of God to sustain His saints. Significantly the two witnesses of Revelation 11 are described as "the two olive trees and the two lampstands, standing before the Lord of the earth" (11. 4), associating their witness with the special enduement of the Holy Spirit (Zech. 4. 6-14). That "a great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation, and of all tribes and peoples and tongues" will suffer martyrdom during the great tribulation, is further evidence of a mighty work of the Spirit at that time. (Rev. 7. 944).

5. (*Atherton and Leigh*): Is there really any problem about a straightforward acceptance of what Peter said, that Joel's prophecy had a direct application to the day of Pentecost? The alternative explanation suggested seems rather abstruse. Would the references to wonders of sun and moon really appear so irrelevant to Peter's audience? Would not the inhabitants of Jerusalem have been deeply impressed by the unnatural darkness on the day of the crucifixion only seven weeks earlier (Matt. 27. 45)? Had not the earthquake made any impression (Matt. 27. 51)? Now followed this strange supernatural "sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind". So that taking into account the background of Peter's audience this reference to supernatural phenomena in the Joel quotation would be significant indeed!

G.

P.

Jr.

Peter's "This is that..." (Acts 2. 16) refers to Pentecost. I do not think its scope can be extended to include the events of the previous Passover.

J.B.

6. (*Atherton and Leigh*): It seems clear that the great military confrontation between the armies of the beast and the King of Kings (Rev. 19. 19) will take place in the Plain of Esdraelon, an area ideally suited to the deployment of vast armies, and usually identified with "the place which is called in Hebrew Har-Magedon" (Rev. 16. 16).

The valley of Jehoshaphat is thought by many commentators to be the Kidron valley near Jerusalem. Zech. 14. 4 indicates that the topography of this area will be considerably changed when the

Lord's feet stand upon the Mount of Olives. Joel 3. 15, 16 would appear to answer Matt. 24. 29, 30, describing the great climax of the Lord's manifestation in glory and judgement as Son of Man. Then verses 9-14 may be viewed as a clarion call by God to the nations of the world in anticipation of the coming of the Son of Man. Verses 9-11 challenge the world powers to gather their armies for the final military conflict. Verses 12-14 declare the inexorable purpose of Almighty God to summon all nations to judgement in the valley of decision.

7. (*Atherton and Leigh*): It seems rather out of harmony with the context of the judgement of the living nations to introduce the gathering of the elect into the imagery of Joel 3. 13. A more consistent interpretation, it seems to me, would be to regard the imagery as confined to the grape harvest (see marginal reading—"vintage"). Rev. 14. 18 confirms that the sickle is associated with gathering the vintage.

8. (*Denmark Hill, extract*): "But the Lord will call every nation to the valley of Jehoshaphat (i. e., the present valley of Kidron, east of Jerusalem between the City and the Mount of Olives) and there He will plead one final plea to the enemy on behalf of Israel. But the valley of decision will ring out the last hostile "No"! In reply the LORD will roar his disapproval. Mercy will be put behind Him, and how terrible that will be".

(1) This contribution appears to be based on a chronological interpretation of Joel 3. 9-16; preparation for the battle, a decision to reject God's final appeal, and then the manifestation of irresistible divine power in overwhelming victory. But can this interpretation be sustained? Where in other scriptures is there any suggestion of "one final plea to the enemy on behalf of Israel"? Do not other prophetic scriptures present the Antichrist as wholly committed to Israel's destruction from the moment of breaking the covenant in the middle of the week? It seems more in harmony with the prophetic word as a whole to regard Joel 3. 9-16 as presenting two impressions from the divine viewpoint, challenging the world's maximum military preparedness, anticipating the universal judgement of the nations, and then declaring the great climax by which divine purpose will be translated into tremendous execution. *G. P. Jr.*

(2) Is there not a valid argument for the more direct chronological interpretation of 3. 9-16? The usually accepted interpretation out-

lined above carries with it the difficulty that the Joel prophecy fails to mention the righteous nations, which are an essential feature of the Matthew prophecy. Furthermore, the gathering of the vintage of the earth (v. 13) is connected in Rev. 14. 17-20 with the defeat of the Beast and his armies (Rev. 19. 11-21) rather than with the matter of eternal judgement (Matt. 25. 41). There is insufficient scriptural evidence to enable us to fix with certainty the location of the valley of Jehoshaphat, so that some commentators prefer the R. V. marginal reading, which gives the sense of the valley where the judgement of the Lord will take place. The valley of decision could well be another description of the same place, which according to this interpretation is elsewhere in Scripture called Har-Magedon. This view has the advantage of avoiding fragmentation of the passage but it does not necessarily embrace Denmark Hill's interpretation in detail. For instance, in Scripture, a plea is not always a verbal appeal. "I will plead with them there" (Joel 3. 2) means that at Armageddon the Lord will plead for Israel, in the sense of maintaining her cause, by executing judgement upon her enemies. The word is used in the same sense in Isaiah 66. 16, "For by fire will the LORD plead" and in Ezekiel 38. 22, "And I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood". It may also be noted that the word "judge" in verse 12 can carry the meaning of "execute judgement" as in Ezekiel 7. 8.

*L. B.*

### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. Who are the "all flesh" of Joel 2. 28? (Atherton and Leigh).

Remembering the often localized sense of spiritual privilege which obtained among Old Testament Israel, it is suggested that the pouring out of God's Spirit upon all flesh indicates the widening of God's purpose in all nations of the world. This was in fact a prominent feature of the new dispensation beginning at Pentecost, when an application of the Joel prophecy obtained. As to its further fulfilment at the time of the end, the Spirit of the LORD will be poured out upon certain of all tribes and tongues and peoples, enabling them to suffer for the sake of the Lord Jesus (Rev. 7. 9, 14). *G. P. Jr.*

I agree. This "all flesh" is not "all without exception", it is "all without distinction (of race)".

*J. B.*

# BIBLE STUDIES

'A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God (Acts 17. 11) '

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## EDITORIAL

Most of our contributors have at least implied the clearly discernible structure of the book of Micah and, we are happy to note, our friends in Kingston have based their paper on it. This property of the book is of more than passing interest, for all the books of the Bible are set in characteristic patterns, a circumstance not at all surprising in view of the fact that the Old and New Testaments are both set in the same pattern. God indeed is not a God of confusion: order is one of the marks of His inspired Word; and consequently it behoves us to be orderly in our study of the Scriptures.

There are three main sections in the book (chapters 1 and 2; 3, 4 and 5; 6 and 7). Each begins with "Hear . . ." and then sets out the reasons for God's displeasure and defines the impending judgement from God; finally each promises restoration to God's favour with attendant blessing. In each case the proposed judgement is condign to the offence, for it is ever true that the Judge of all the earth will do that which is right (Gen. 18. 25). This has been characteristic of God's dealings with men from the beginning, for, when God was dealing with Adam's sin, He pronounced judgements and also gave the early promise of the Seed that should bruise the serpent's head (Gen. 3. 75). Herein is solemn warning for those who seek to serve God in the house of God; God's word in judgement is as sure and certain as His word in blessing. Neither will fail to come to pass.

In the papers submitted due notice was taken of Micah 1. 1, which defines the prophet's times, showing him to be a contemporary of Isaiah and Hosea. As is to be expected, their times are reflected in their prophecies, and as a result there is a distinct element of parallelism in their messages. Some pairs of parallel passages readily come to mind. For example, Micah 2. 11 and Isa. 28. 7 both refer to strong drink in their descriptions of the errors and misdeeds of the leaders of the people. Micah 3. 5-11 and Isa. 29. 9-14 portray the nation completely out of touch with God—no vision; no answer

from God; prophets, seers and diviners confounded and also prophets and priests corrupt. Micah 3. 12 and Isa. 32. 13, 14 deal with the desolation of the land, the cities and the places of worship, Again, Micah 4. 1-5 and Isa. 2. 1-4 present a millennial scene in which Jerusalem is pre-eminent and is the place of worship for all the nations, a scene of universal peace. Further, if we may be permitted a brief incursion into next month's portion, Micah 5. 2-4 and Isa. 7. 14, 9. 5 *J* gladden the heart with the promise of the Messiah, presenting Him in His excelling greatness and in His universal power and rule. Similar parallels may be found in Hosea, though they are not so obvious, being parallel in thought if not in word. Clearly then God gave to His prophets messages suited to their times, expressing judgments upon His erring people, and, at the same time, giving promises of future blessing.

*J.*

*B.*

## MOAB

When Lot lifted up his eyes and beheld all the Plain of Jordan that it was well watered everywhere and chose to dwell there, a train of events was set in motion which proved to be disastrous to Lot and his family, for he lost all that he hoped to preserve, and became the forefather of a nation that was to be the enemy of Israel in a day when they needed help. Spiritually Lot and his two daughters had reached a low ebb in the cave in the mountain above Zoar when those two women made a sinful pact and Lot allowed himself to become drunken with wine, resulting in their incestuous offspring, Moab and Ben-ammi.

Moab, with whom our study is particularly concerned, was probably the more civilized half of Lot's descendants, and Ammon, the nation that sprung from Ben-ammi, the more fierce Bedouin-like half, because of the relationship between Abraham and Lot, was granted Moab, despite its beginning, became a nation of mighty men, and a special place amongst the nations, for to the Moabites was given Ar for a possession and Israel was instructed not to vex them, or to contend with them in battle (Deut. 2. 9). These privileges were not valued by Moab, and so they failed to meet Israel with bread and water in the day of their need (Num. 20. 14-21; Judg. 11. 17). Edom acted in a like fashion, as a result of which Israel was caused to take a circuitous route round these two kingdoms.

**When Israel pitched in the plain of Moab beyond the Jordan, trembling took hold of the mighty men of Moab, for they feared this people because of what they had done to the the Amorites. So great was Moab's fear that Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, confessed that Israel was too mighty for him, and so he sought an alternative means of overcoming them by hiring Balaam that he might curse Israel and enable him to drive them out of the land. But Balak learned on that occasion that it is impossible to curse when God has not cursed, or defy when the LORD has not defied, and so Israel received a three-fold blessing, for the LORD their God loved them, and to Balak was revealed what Israel would do to Moab in the latter days (Num. 22. 23, 24).**

**Within a short time the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, for some of their number began to associate with the Moabites, having been called to partake in the sacrifices to their gods. A similar happening took place in the days of Solomon when his heart was turned away after other gods by his strange wives, and he built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab in the mount that is before Jerusalem, as a result of which the kingdom was divided in the days of Rehoboam (1 Kin. 11. 12), Thus Moab was more successful in spiritual assaults on Israel than in actual physical onslaught.**

**Moab was not permitted to sin against God's people with impunity, for as a result of their acts it was commanded that they would not enter into the assembly of the LORD, even to the tenth generation, and Israel from henceforth was not to seek their peace nor their prosperity for ever (Deut. 23. 3-6).**

**After this there was strife between the two nations, sometimes because of Israel's sin when God used Moab to punish His people. This was the case in the days of Eglon, when God strengthened Moab against them and caused their cities to be occupied, and Israel to be brought into bondage for eighteen years (Judg. 3. 12-14). On other occasions it was Israel who were the assailants, as in the early days of the reign of Saul when he sought to establish himself in his kingdom by fighting against his enemies on every side (1 Sam. 14. 47). David too, fought against the Moabites. He subdued them, and they became servants to him, and the silver and gold which he won from them was dedicated to the LORD (2 Sam. 2. 11, 12).**

Nevertheless the grace of God is seen on more than one occasion in regard to this nation, for of them there were some who found a place amongst the people of God. Doubtless when Ruth the Moabitess met the Ephrathite family of Bethlehem-Judah, she did not dream that this was the beginning of an association which would eventually lead to her being the wife of Boaz and being listed in the book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ. Because of her great desire that she should stand in the same relationship to God and Naomi's people as Naomi herself, and shelter under the wings of the LORD, the God of Israel, the LORD recompensed her. She became the wife of Boaz the mighty man of wealth, and the mother of Obed the father of Jesse, the father of David, and her name is eternally recorded in the genealogy of Jesus Christ (Ruth 1. 16, 2. 11, 12, 4. 9, 10, 17, Matt. 1. 1, 5).

Ithmah, the Moabite, is another who is given a place of special mention, being listed as one of David's mighty men (1 Chr. 11. 46). Nevertheless Moab was characteristically a people who trusted in their works and in their treasures. Their pride and arrogancy and the haughtines of their hearts were well known. Despite the fact that God had granted, them a favoured place in a good land, so that they were able to be at ease from their youth, they attributed their place to their own right and magnified themselves against the LORD; Israel they regarded with derision (Jer. 48. 1, 7, 14, 26, 27, 29; Ezek. 25. S).

It is recorded in the words of the Preacher, son of David, king of Jerusalem, that because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is emboldened in them to do evil (Eccles. 8. 11, R. V. M. ). This was verily true of Moab, of whom the LORD said through His prophet Amos, "For three transgressions of Moab, yea, for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof" (Amos 2. 1, 2), and Isaiah prophesied that the judgement would be fulfilled within three years, when in a night Ar of Moab and Kir of Moab would be laid waste and brought to nought (Isa. 15. 1, 16. 14).

Jeremiah too, prophesied of judgement, which judgement was performed by Nebuchadnezzar, for to him was given their land and their beasts of the field to serve him and his son and his son's son (Jer. 27. I'II). But the LORD promised that he would bring again

the captivity of Moab in the latter days (Jer. 48. 47), and so when the king of the North (Dan. 11) sweeps down to conquer the king of the South, Moab, the old enemy of Israel, will escape judgement, for they are to be numbered amongst Israel's enemies at the time of the great regathering for the reign of the One whose Name is the Branch. Then will follow the judgement of Moab by Israel, when they will put forth their hand upon Edom and Moab and the children of Ammon will obey them (Isa. 11. 14). *J. McIlvenna*

## STUDIES IN SEVEN MINOR PROPHETS

### *JUDGEMENTS ON SAMARIA AND JERUSALEM*

#### MICAH CHAPTERS 1 to 4

*From Kingston upon Thames.* —Micah prophesied contemporaneously with Isaiah and Hosea in the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah (Isa. 1. 1; Hos. 1. 1; Micah 1. 1). Three distinct messages are addressed to (i) the "earth, and all that therein is" (1. 2—2. 13), (ii) the heads of Jacob, and rulers of the house of Israel" (3. 1—5. 15), (iii) "My people" (6. 1—7. 20), and all concerned Samaria and Jerusalem. Since Micah's ministry is dated against the line of Judah, it is probable that it was primarily intended for that kingdom (cf. Jer. 26. 18), although it was addressed to a wider circle concerning events at home and abroad. We thus learn that whatever the state of mankind, the LORD's first concern is His people.

It is not clear whether these three messages were spoken on three separate occasions by Micah, and are perhaps a part of his ministry, or whether they summarize the burden of his long prophetic career to each of the three groups of people mentioned above. If the former, then it is possible that one message was spoken during each of the three reigns. Since each message views the then present existence of the northern kingdom (1. 5, 1. 14, 3. 1, 3. 8, 6. 2) they must all have been uttered before the fall of Samaria, i. e. before the sixth year of Hezekiah (2 Kin. 18. 10). The second message must have been spoken in Hezekiah's reign (compare Jer. 26. 18 and Micah 3. 12). The other two messages must predate Hezekiah since both indicate the presence of high places in Judah which were destroyed by Heze-

kiah when he came to power (2 Chron. 31. 1). [These conclusions are *possible*, but the repeated "must" overstates the case. *JB*]

Micah 1. 9 suggests that the sin of Samaria had not yet penetrated to the very core of the southern kingdom. This describes the position under Jotham who did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD though the people "did yet corruptly" (2 Chron. 27. 2) and were idolators (2 Kin. 15. 55). Jotham's relatively good behaviour is in contrast to that of the thoroughly iniquitous Ahaz whose deeds (2 Chron. 28. 23, 24) are well described by Micah's third message: "The statutes of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab" (Micah 6. 16). Thus the three messages may not be in chronological order, possibly having been spoken in the reigns of Jotham, Hezekiah and Ahaz respectively [see Comment 1],

Although Micah's ministry may be understood in the light of the character of the southern kingdom, his message is universal and contains two principal themes of contrasted aspects. The first deals with the sin of Samaria and its wages, while the second deals with the blessings to come upon the remnant of those who will be spared from the judgement (2. 12, 5. 2, 7, 8, 7. 18). Although first seen in the fall of Samaria, this pattern of events has been cyclically repeated, so that we may look for more than one application of prophetic fulfilment [see Comment 2].

The syllabus calls, however, for comment on the first of these themes. The message is simply that certain destruction awaits those who attempt divine service contrary to the will of the LORD. It is the warning (Micah 1. 7) of Proverbs 7. 20-25 and Proverbs 9. 13-18. Spiritual fornication, whether in the high places of Samaria, the plains of Babylon or the altars of Christendom (Rev. 18. 1-24), may be outwardly attractive but ends in Sheol. Not only is there future judgement but the first message of Micah goes on to show (2. *III*) that failure in service Godward inevitably leads to a deterioration of service manward and the misery of every man's hand being against his neighbours.

The part played by leaders in bringing about this sorry situation is taken up as this theme is developed in the second message. Those who should have set the spiritual example neglected to do so. They could only pride themselves in their divine position (3. *II*) and, missing its claims on their heart in the self-centred, materialistic am-

bitions (3. 7), the leaders became parasites (3. 2-3) on the people of God. How could they be saved when, as with the Pharisee (Luke 18), to such "there is no answer from God" (3. 7)?

The first theme of all the messages of Micah, that "fornicators... God will judge" (Heb. 13. 4), is true in spiritual as well as physical things. The judgement may take place in this life as well as in that which is to come [see Comment 3].

*Ian E. Venn*

*From Hayes.* —Micah was a native of Moresheth, which was a small town in south-west Judaea near Gath. He was contemporary with Isaiah, Hosea and Amos, being probably the youngest of that group. He prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, covering the period 755 B. C. to 697 B. C. (see Chart in *Bible Studies*, Jan. 1971, page 4).

The writer's character comes through as being stern and fearless, yet with evident tenderness of heart (1. 10). His style is vivid and poetic, yet clear and concise. Micah's prophecies predict the destruction of the northern kingdom, Israel, and its capital Samaria (1. 6-8) and that of Jerusalem (3. 12). They also foretell the Captivity (4. 10) and the establishment of the Messianic kingdom (4. 1-5).

The book divides into three sections: chapters 1-3, 4-5, 6-7. Our study covers the first four chapters which we shall look at in turn. *Chapter 1.* Micah prophesies the LORD's impending judgement against Samaria and Jerusalem and gives also the prophet's lament over them. In verse 6 there is a striking picture of desolation; proud Samaria is to become a heap of rubble. In verses 7-9 is stated the offence—spiritual adultery. What is to happen to Samaria is for a warning and a lesson to Jerusalem (verses 9, 12) and Judah, with whom Micah is most concerned.

*Chapter 2.* The cause of the warning is found in the oppression within Judah of the poor by covetous men, who take away their fields and their houses. This is a calculated evil and the abuse of power (verses 1, 2). God is going to punish the oppressors for their pride and injustice, and they will not escape (verse 3). There will be a re-distribution (verse 4) and they will get nothing (verse 5). Those who are upright have nothing to fear (verse 7). God's land is polluted and no longer a place of rest for His people (verse 10) so the LORD will start again with the remnant (verse 12).

**Chapter 3.** The offenders are identified as the leaders and rulers of Judah, and they are condemned in graphic language as being "butchers" of the people. They will pray, religious men that they are, but the LORD will not listen because of their wickedness. The prophets are also criticized for looking for material gain (verses 5-7, 11). In contrast to this Micah prophesies that he is "full of power by the spirit of the LORD, and of judgement, and of might" (verse 8) in denouncing the sin of Israel and Jacob. It is sad when religious leaders rely on the LORD being with them, when because of their sin He is about to bring judgement on them (verses 11, 12).

**Chapter 4.** A wonderful contrast regarding Jerusalem is introduced in this chapter. All the nations will flock to the city, to the house of God, in order to find out His ways and walk in His paths (verse 2). The LORD will judge among all the nations. A graphic description is given of the change of the weapons of war into implements of peace (verse 3) and of fear into freedom (verse 4). The remnant of Israel, though weak, will become strong and mighty for God (1 Cor. 1. 27, 25).

Man's wrath may be used by God to work out His purpose (verses 11-13). Judah's enemies knew not that in their fighting against Jerusalem God was bringing them to destruction. They will be trodden under foot and the spoil will be given to God who saved Zion.

*R. F. Robertson*

*From Denmark Hill*—Micah's ministry coincided with the later half of that of Isaiah and Hosea, who also prophesied during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah (B. C. 755-697). For the most part, the first three chapters of Micah's prophecy outline the sins of Israel and Judah, and register God's overwhelming sorrow and the terrible judgement which God in righteousness must mete out on them. The contents of these three chapters may be listed as follows:

<i>Sins</i>	<i>Results</i>
<p>Made graven images and worshipped them (1. 7)</p> <p>Became harlots (figuratively) (1- 7)</p> <p>Coveted and unjustly took lands (2. 2)</p>	<p>Samaria would be destroyed (1. 6)</p> <p>Evil would come to Jerusalem (1. 12)</p> <p>God going into mourning (1. 8, 9)</p>

Stripped garments from passers-	
by (2. 8)	Punishment for Jerusalem (2. 3)
Robbed mothers of children and	
homes (2. 9)	God would not answer prayer (3. 7)
Tortured people (3. 2)	
False prophets would bite people's	
hands unless food was put	Jerusalem would become a heap
in their mouths when they	and the people would be taken to
foretold "peace" (3. 5)	Babylon (3. 72, 4. 10)
Leaders, priests and prophets	
judged, taught and divined only	
if bribed (3. 11)	

This is a dreadful list for any nation, let alone the people that God so longed for, so desired to be His people in deed and truth. They would not listen to Micah and God's other messengers and they had to endure the bitterness of defeat and captivity. Samaria fell to Shalmanezar in B. C. 719, when the people were carried to Assyria. This was in the middle of Micah's prophetic span. God spared Jerusalem till long after Micah had passed on, and it was not till B. C. 587 that Nebuchadnezzar finally sacked the city. Literally the prophecy of Micah was fulfilled—the city became a "heap".

In all this gloomy story, there are three wonderfully bright patches: 2. 12, 13, 4. 1-5 and 4. 13. The great all-seeing God, whose ways are so little understood by man (4. 12), caused Micah to see a glorious future for Israel, despite her waywardness. Taking 4. 7-5 first, Micah told of the days yet to be, when God's house will be established high (4. 1); the nations of the whole world will come to Jerusalem for teaching from God's law and judgement by God's priests; Christ will cause war to cease; Christ will completely satisfy every family—there will be no more strikes.

But before this, as shown in 2. 12, 13 and 4. 13 Israel will be assembled with its true King and move on to victory over her adversaries, and will later be used by God as a threshing instrument on the millennial nations to cause men to devote their gain to the Lord Christ and not to themselves,

*C. L. Prasher*

*From Birkenhead.* —Micah came from Moresheth in S. W. Palestine. His prophecies, spoken towards the end of the 8th century

B. C., dealt with **Jerusalem** predominantly, and also with Samaria. He attacked the social sins and the religious attitudes of his time, particularly the view that God would protect Jerusalem irrespective of the people's conduct

The fall of Samaria in 722 B. C. was predicted. The LORD would come down in judgement, and Samaria would be reduced to ruins, a place fit only for growing vines. Idolatry would be stamped out (1. 6, 7). Micah mourned for Samaria, but was also concerned that Jerusalem might fall in the same way and warned of this danger (1. 5, 9, 12),

The concluding verses of the first chapter seem to give the route of an advancing army, maybe that of Sennacherib coming to Jerusalem [Comment 4]. Against this background the parents in Jerusalem were exhorted to mourn at the prospect of being parted from their children.

The prophet moved on to condemn the land-grabbing upper classes of Judah and supported the rights of the working class to keep the land which they tilled to provide their necessary food. He assured them that the LORD would re-apportion the land and the wealthy would have nothing (2. 4, 5). The upright would have nothing to fear, but wrong-doers would be evicted and God would start again with the remnant (2. 12) [Comment 5].

Micah pointed out that it is possible to be in such a bad condition that prayer to God is pointless. He will not hear or answer (3. 4). It was a dark day spiritually, as in the days of Samuel; there was no vision (3. 6). All in responsible position were corrupted by money (3. 11). They were seeking to build up the confidence of the people that all was well, but they were out of touch with God. This was in contrast with Micah who claimed to be "full of power by the Spirit of the LORD" (3. 8). He pronounced that because of the declension, God's judgment would fall on Jerusalem (3. 12). Following on the black picture of the fall of Jerusalem came words concerning the bright future of Zion, when peace will reign and nations will come to her.

Finally (4. 9-13) the prophet gives a picture of the people crying out under siege, then being delivered into captivity in Babylon. The picture changes to that of the nations gloating over Jerusalem's

imminent downfall. They little realized that the LORD's plan is **to lure** them **around** the city, and then they are to be threshed to pulp. The gain and substance of the nations will be devoted to the **LORD**.  
# *D. Williams*

### *IMPRESSIONS FROM OTHER CONTRIBUTORS*

Below are impressions from the remaining papers from Birmingham, Derby, Leigh and Atherton, Methil, Nottingham and Vancouver.

The mention of kings of Judah and not of kings of Israel in Micah's introduction seems to indicate that his message was mainly directed at his own people of Judah. It is largely a message of coming judgement on Judah and Jerusalem, but also included are details about judgement on Samaria and Israel. Samaria's downfall is dealt with first because it was to happen first in point of time, and because it was intended as a warning and illustration of what would later befall Jerusalem.

Israel's chief sin was gross idolatry, centred at Samaria, the capital (1. 5, 7). Idolatry is a serious sin by its very nature, but also because it quickly leads to deterioration of moral and social standards and degradation of the human mind and society to superstitious and bestial practices.

Micah predicted the fall of Samaria because of its sin; it would be reduced to ruins (1. 6-8). The prophecy began to be fulfilled when the city was taken by Shalmaneser king of Assyria after a three-year siege, and its inhabitants were removed to various foreign cities (2 Kin. 18. 10, 11). No mention is made in 2 Kings, however, about Samaria being desolated. The cities of Samaria were repopulated by people from other nations, but this may not have included the city of Samaria itself. Partial evidence that Samaria was in fact hopelessly ruined by the Assyrians is provided by the lack of reference to the city in later Biblical writings (except in retrospect), in contrast of course to several references to the region of Samaria. One paper suggested that this prophecy regarding the destruction of Samaria, though having partial fulfilment as outlined above, was more completely fulfilled in later history. After having been rebuilt several times, the state of Samaria in A. D. 1697 was described by H. Maundrell: "This great city is now wholly converted to gardens.

It has upon it many olive and fig trees. The ground has been ploughed for centuries". Van der Velde is said to have recorded: "Samaria has been destroyed, but her rubbish has been thrown down into the valley., her foundation stones... are discovered... and lie scattered about on the slope of the hill".

The people of Judah were not inclined to listen to Micah (2. 6), preferring prophets who foretold pleasant things (2. 11, 3. 5, cf. 2 Tim. 4. 3). Micah had scathing comments to make about the smug complacency of the leaders of Judah, who, in saying, "Is not the LORD in the midst of us? No evil shall come upon us" (3. 11), could not have been further from the truth.

Micah warned Judah that the enemy who was to attack Samaria would not leave Judah untouched, and even Jerusalem would be affected (1. 9). In fulfilment, the Assyrian armies swept south after subduing Samaria, and took the fenced cities of Judah; an army then advanced on Jerusalem (2 Kin. 18. 13, 17). Of all this Micah gave warning in detail (1. 9-15), so that Judah would understand when it happened, and repent; but this was not to be.

The spiritual deterioration of Judah, as always, led to serious social injustices. Weaker land-owners, householders and farmers were having their property seized without remedy by a more powerful and influential group of men (2. 2, 9). But the LORD would one day rerapportion the land and the wealthy would have nothing (2. 4, 5).

In chapter 3 Micah singles out the ruling classes for special blame. Corruption was rampant among the judges, prophets and priests (3. 11). To bolster up their positions, these leaders encouraged complacency among the people, and favouring only those able and willing to pay for their services, they were swiftly leading the whole people into serious error, virtually preparing them for divine judgement (3. 3).

Not surprisingly, Micah announced impending judgement on Jerusalem, the centre of much of Judah's evil (1. 5, 3. 10, 12). Like Samaria, it was to be desolated. The people of Judah were to be taken captive to Babylon (4. 10). This prophecy, given at least 130 years before its fulfilment, is remarkable in that Assyria was the dominant centre of power at that time, Babylon not having yet begun to show signs of ascendancy.

The reference in Jeremiah 26. 18 to Micah 3. 12 indicates that this part of Micah's prophecy was given in Hezekiah's reign. Some contributors commented on the apparent discrepancy between what is said about Judah in Micah 3 and what is said about Hezekiah (2 Kin. 18. 5-7). One thought was that possibly the earlier parts of Micah's prophecy, especially about the high places in Judah (1. 5), may have been responsible for Hezekiah's attitude and action in removing the high places (2 Kin. 18. 4). Another thought was that though Hezekiah was a good king, the people, and even the leaders, did not closely follow his example. It is noteworthy that the king is not included in the denunciation of Micah 3. By this time there had been such a succession of good and bad kings that the people did what was right in their own eyes.

In sharp contrast to the pronouncement of Jerusalem's downfall, Micah 4. 1-5 presents the bright future of millennial Zion. Jerusalem was guilty and must be punished, yet overriding all, God's purposes must stand, and so the prophet's message is not without hope. At last peace will reign in Israel, and all nations will come to worship at Jerusalem.

This was a vision for the encouragement of the faithful in Judah (4. 5). But Israel has much to pass through before the purifying is done. The nations have yet to vent their full hatred against God's people (4. 11), and God has also something in store for the nations (4. 12, 13). Though He has used them to chastise His people, they are not guiltless.

*Eds.*

### COMMENTS

1. (*Kingston-upon-Thames*): There are various views on this matter, and all are largely speculative and so must be considered with caution. Such scriptures as Luke 24. 27 and Acts 2. 40, 8. 35 make it clear that not all spoken words are recorded. This is probably true of Micah and the rest of the prophets, but we rest assured that we have the inspired record of these things, given by the Lord the Spirit. Let faith rest there; speculation is of little or no profit.

*J. B.*

2. (*Kingston-upon-Thames*): Just what is meant by "cyclically repeated" is not clear, but if this is another way of saying that

"history repeats itself", it should be borne in mind that that aphorism will not bear scrutiny. Throughout history God, His righteousness and His requirements of man have remained, while man's fallen nature remains too. Nevertheless, history has a course to follow, and that course has been determined by God and is controlled by Him.  
J. B.

3. (*Kingston-upon-Thames*): The "first theme" as defined in this paper is considerably more comprehensive than this. But we agree with this remark.  
J. B.

4. (*Birkenhead*): As far as I can trace, this interpretation is based on a very extensive emendation of the text, an emendation which takes unjustified liberties with the text, and much of it is speculative and fanciful. It is better to take the Scriptures to mean what they say, and to admit difficulties when they arise. While we give an ear to what present day scholars have to say, we must at the same time bear in mind that our English Revised version is the work of a committee of very learned men and is almost certainly the best English version of the Bible, accuracy of translation as well as style being taken into account.  
J. B.

5. (*Birkenhead*): Our friends appear to have in mind some such event as the return of the remnant from Babylon. That remnant was of Judah. This restoration has in mind Jacob ("all of thee"), that will include the entire nation in all its tribes.  
J. B.

### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. What significance has the mention of "daughters" and "handmaids" in Joel 2. 28, 29? (Atherton and Leigh) [Carried forward from April Study],

Sons and daughters, old men and young men, servants and handmaids, all these different categories of people are specified in the passage, emphasizing the wide outworking of the Spirit's power in believers of varying age groups and social conditions. That daughters and handmaids are mentioned alongside sons and servants illustrates the place that women often have in divine purpose, including times of special crisis. There are well known Bible examples of women prophetesses in other contexts (e. g. Judges 4. 4; Acts 21. 2).

G. P. Jr.

**2. Who are the speakers in Micah 2. 6, 7? (Leigh and Atherton).**

The speaker is the LORD (2. 3). In verse 4 He commences to quote the future sayings of certain of His people, and in verse 6 He makes another quotation in advance. The sense is made more apparent if we drop the inserted "thus", and read "Prophesy ye not, they prophesy".  
*J. B.*

**3. Is there judgement throughout the entire millennium? (Micah 4. 3, cf. Isaiah 65. 20) ? (Leigh and Atherton)**

Micah 4. 5-5 describes the beneficial outcome of a judgement that has already taken place. Isaiah 65. 20 is not at all in conflict with this.  
*J. B.*

**4. Could the location of the "the LORD's house" be a figurative description in contrast to the idolatrous high places so rife in Micah's time (4. 1)? (Leigh and Atherton).**

This is not an identification of the location of the house of the LORD, nor is it a description of it. Micah 4. 1 has to do with the notable ascendancy of the place of the Name. Worship of idolatrous deities will cease and "people shall flow unto it". The worship of the LORD will have among the nations, a place such as it never had before, and such as no other form of idol worship ever had.  
*J. B.*

**5. How could Micah's audience know at the time that he was speaking from God? (Leigh and Atherton).**

The LORD gave His people a means to test the genuineness of any man claiming to be a prophet (Deut. 13. 7-5, 18. 20-22). This would be operative in marking Micah as a true prophet speaking from God. Further, in terms of their own times Micah would not be guilty of the abuses perpetrated by the prophets, seers and diviners of Micah 3. 5-7.

**6. When were the two and a half tribes taken away captive? (1 Chr. 5. 25, 26) (Derby).**

According to some authorities the two and a half tribes were taken by Tiglath-Pilneser III (also known as Pul) in 734 B. C. *J. B.*

## PSALM 68

*(continued from March Bible Studies)*

O **God**, when Thou wentest forth before Thy people,  
 When Thou **didst** march through the wilderness; (Selah)  
 The earth trembled,  
 The heavens also dropped **at** the **presence** of God:  
 Even yon Sinai trembled **at** the **presence** of God, the God of Israel  
 (verses 7, 8).

Here David in his song **speaks** of God marching before His people through the wilderness, which He did **in** the pillar of cloud and of **fire**. God was again moving with His people in **the** bringing **up** of the **Ark** from the house of **Abinadab** in the hill (2 Samuel 6. 1-3, **10-12**) to Zion, the **city** of God **and** of David. But while there were visible **signs** connected with the march of God with Israel **in** the **wilderness**, there were no such signs when David and Israel moved **the Ark** to Zion. Indeed, **at first** the **Ark** **was** **being** moved to some extent **in** the **way** that the Philistines moved **it**, **in** a new **cart**, but **in their case** it was drawn by **kine** whose calves called on **their** mothers. If their mothers went straight on to **the** land of Israel, the Philistines would know **that** **it** was God's **mind** that **it** should **be** returned to Israel His people. This the Philistines learned **by** the acting of the **kine**. **But David** **put** oxen, draught animals, in the new **cart**, the oxen stumbled, and when **Uzzah** put forth **his hand** to the **Ark** and took hold of **it** God smote him. David had to learn **the** lesson **that** **the** **Ark** should **be** **carried** on the shoulders of **the** Levites. So **in** contrast to **the** miracles in **the** wilderness, **there** was nothing miraculous for good when **David** brought **the** **Ark** to Zion, **save** in the **fact** that God blessed the house of Obed-edom who took the **Ark** in. But who **can** doubt **that** **the** **act** of **David** **bringing up** the **Ark** **was** **as** truly a work that pleased God **as** the going of Israel through the wilderness from **Egypt** to **Canaan**? Some people think that miracles should always continue, for **they** **seek** to walk **by** sight **and** not **by** faith.

Thou, O God, **didst** send a plentiful rain,  
 Thou didst confirm Thine inheritance, when **it** was weary.  
 Thy congregation dwelt therein:  
 Thou, O God, **didst** **prepare** of Thy goodness for the poor  
 (verses 9, 10).

In these verses **David's mind** travels from the wilderness to the land of promise, **and** there God **sent** a plentiful **rain**, unknown **in** the wilderness, **and** confirmed the land, His inheritance, when **it** was weary. Israel dwelt therein, **and** there God **prepared** **by** sending abundant **rain** for the poor, for He **is** ever good **and** does good.

# BIBLE STUDIES

*'A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God (Acts 17. 11). '*

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## EDITORIAL

In a recent editorial comment in our study of the prophets, a quotation contained the words, "this symphony of prophecy", an expression singularly apt for many of the Hebrew prophets. The element of true art in the form of poetry is undoubtedly present in Micah as in some other prophets and, particularly in chapter 5, commentators define areas regarded as pure Hebrew poetry. It is of passing interest that a notable contemporary Bible translator has chosen the four historically grouped prophets, of whom Micah is one, as the first in a work which aims specifically to represent the poetic force of these ministries. It is, of course, tragic when any Scripture comes, as it often does, to be valued by men primarily as an art form, be it prose or poetry, rather than respected as the living, all-authoritative word of God. It is those whose attitude is right as to the latter who are in a position to appreciate and enjoy the former.

Then again, the thought of the "symphony" encompasses the recurrent and related themes of these great divine oracles, and it is not to be wondered at that various structural elements have been seen in prophecies such as Micah's—an important and striking structural presentation was commented upon helpfully last month. It is good to see that contributors have not allowed a division of the book for our two months' study to conceal in any way the unity of the prophecy or the rich variety of patterns superimposed on one another. A related feature may be the fact that the central "core" of the book, as represented by chapters 4 and 5, contains most of the specific prophecy of millennial glory and the coming of the Christ; flanked as it were by the sombre facts of contemporary conditions and spiritual ill-health.

That exquisite distillate of wisdom which is chapter 6 and verse 8 graces the prophecy perfectly. It is sad to hear this verse misused and mis-applied in terms of a salvation of works and personal piety alone. "Shall two walk together, except they have agreed?" asks

**Amos (3. 3). So today the gospel ministry of reconciliation and "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" is the essential prerequisite to the application and enjoyment of this pearl of divine wisdom.**

*J. D. T.*

## EDOM

**The name Edom was derived from Esau (Gen. 36. 1) and is applied both to the descendants of Esau (Num. 20. 20-21) and to the country in which they lived (Jer. 49. 17). Geographically it was a mountainous range and as such it provided natural rocky fortresses against enemy attack. It stretched from the Dead Sea to the Red Sea. In the north it bordered with Judah and Moab and in the south with Midian and the desert of Sinai.**

**Among its towns mentioned in Scripture are Dinhabah, Bozrah, Teman, Avith, Pau (Gen. 36. 32-39) and Ezion-geber (1 Kin. 9. 26). Most important of all was Sela—the rock (2 Kin. 14. 7), now identified as Petra, its Greek name having the same meaning. It was approached on one side by a chasm so narrow that no more than two horsemen could ride abreast through it and on the other side by an ascent so steep as to daunt any who would consider assailing it. It is not surprising, therefore, that when Amaziah captured it he changed its name to Joktheel, which means "yielded by God", although despite this implied recognition of the LORD giving him victory the same king adopted the idolatrous worship of the Edomites (2 Chr. 25. 14).**

**Prior to its occupation by the descendants of Esau, Edom was called Mount Seir (Gen. 32. 3) and its original inhabitants were the Horites (Deut. 2. 12). The Greek equivalent of Edom is Idumaea, but the New Testament reference (Mark 3. 8) is to an extended land area annexed by the Edomite exploitation of the defeat of Judah by the Babylonians. Kings were appointed in Edom "before there reigned any king over the children of Israel..." but the turbulent nature of the Edomite is perhaps shown by the fact that none of their kingships passed from father to son (Gen. 36. 31-39). Nonetheless, in the days of Solomon's defection from the God of Israel an adversary raised up against him was Hadad who "was of the king's seed in Edom" (1 Kin. 11. 14).**

"Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite; for he is thy brother" (Deut. 23. 7). Considered in the light of the statement "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (Rom. 9. 13, Mai. 1. 2-5), this may seem difficult to understand unless careful consideration is given to the righteous principles which underlie both statements. The Israelite was to harbour no contempt for the Edomite because he was the descendant of Esau the brother of Jacob, the father of the nation of Israel. On the other hand, Israel were the people of God and as such governed by divine truth diametrically opposed to that pattern of life which characterized Esau and Edomites. Israel's separation from Edom was in no way to be relaxed because of the commandment of Deut. 23. 7. Moreover it cannot be argued that Jacob and Esau, either in their individual or national characters, became what they were because God loved or hated them. Rather it is true that God's love or hatred resulted from what they were and what their character was. Esau was a profane person (Heb. 12. 16)—a man who despised spiritual values. The attitude of life which he represented was perpetuated in his descendants, who were characterized by arrant self-sufficiency and pride (Obad. 3).

The antagonism of Esau and Jacob and that of their posterity were prefigured before their birth. The wrestling of the unborn children of Rebekah was declared by God to be reflective of the bitter opposition which would exist between Israel and Edom (Gen. 25. 23).

Historically this found expression in: -

(1) Edom's refusal to allow Israel, at the time of the Exodus, to pass through their land on the way to Canaan (Num. 20. 18);

(2) King Saul having to contend with Edomites, among others, who threatened the security of his kingdom (1 Sam. 14. 47);

(3) King David needing to establish garrisons in Edomite cities (2 Sam. 8. 14);

(4) Edom being among the named enemies of God who were allied in the common purpose "that the name of Israel be no more in remembrance" (Psa. 83. 4).

The record of 2 Chronicles 20 is considered by some scholars to describe the circumstances which prompted the writing of Psalm 83. Each views the same confederacy in which Edom was involved (2 Chron. 20. 10; Psa. 83. 6, 7), and each declares the fact which

is sustained throughout the sacred writings that, in their opposition to Israel, the Edomites were the enemies of God (2 Chron. 20. 11; Psa. 83. 5).

The Bible student is left with a terrible picture of Edom's cruelty and violence to Israel. Obadiah tells us how the Edomite, from his high mountain fortresses, watched in aloof and gloating delight the sufferings of God's people and then in the day of calamity entered the cities of Judaea and robbed Jacob of his substance. From the land of their exile the Jewish captives asked the LORD to remember the part Edom played at the fall of Jerusalem, and to recall that then the Edomite cry was "Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof" (Psa. 137. 7). It is against this background of cruelty and hate that we must read the prophetic utterances of judgement contained in such scriptures as Jer. 49. 7-22; Lam. 4. 21; Ezek. 25. 12-14; Ezek. 35; Joel 3. 19,

Edom's arrogance was reflected in his boast "Who shall bring me down?" (Obad. 3) to which the LORD replied "I will bring thee down . . ." (Jer. 49. 16)—"As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee" (Obad. 75). The story of Edom emphasizes how inescapable are the consequences of defiance of God, and witness clearly to the truth, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6. 7; Matt. 7. 2).

The site of the fortress city of Petra can still be viewed today. The casual tourist may see it as a reflection of a bygone age, but to the spiritually sensitive its ruined palaces, overgrown with briars and weeds, its desolation except for the presence of wild goats and birds, demonstrate the clear fulfilment of scriptural prophecy (Isa. 34. 5-17) and the certainty of divine judgement.

Today men are still dominated by minds that have no spiritual concepts, like Esau and the Edomites, having no vision of the unseen in arrant pride reflecting attitudes which declare "Who shall bring me down?" The ultimate expression of this will be in a confederate rebellion against the LORD and against His anointed, as depicted in Rev. 16. 14, 17. 3, 12-14; a rebellion which also will include in its aims that Israel should be cut off from being a nation (Psa. 83. 4). Then the cry "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah?" will herald the revelation of the divine Conqueror, mighty to save who having trod the winepress of

judgement (Isa. 63. 1-6) will establish **that** final triumph which ends the prophecy of Obadiah. "The kingdom shall be the LORD's".

L. G. *Shattock*

## ASSYRIA

### *Origin*

The Assyrian nation was of **great** antiquity. A reference to it is found in **Gen. 10. 11** in connection with Nimrod's activities, and **though there appears some doubt in the text as to whether** Nimrod founded **that kingdom**, **Mic. 5. 6** refers to Assyria as the land of Nimrod. **There is no doubt about the early civilization that was in existence in Nineveh, the capital city, which was contemporary with Ur of the Chaldees.** The country was situated in the upper Mesopotamian plain, bounded **on the west by the Syrian desert, on the south by Babylonia and on the north and east by the Armenian and Persian hills.**

### *Effect on Israel*

A long scriptural silence follows this early reference in Genesis until **the days of the kings of Israel and Judah, when God used the Assyrian nation to chastise and afflict His people.** The following **kings are mentioned by name: -**

1. Pul, who exacted **money** from **Menahem**, king of Israel (2 Kin. 15. 19); probably **the same person as—**

2. Tiglath-pileser, who **came** against some of **the cities of Israel and carried the captives to Assyria** (2 Kin. 15. 29);

3. Shalmaneser, who **beseiged Samaria in the days of Hoshea, king of Israel, and carried Israel captive to Assyria. This same king brought men from Babylon to dwell in Samaria, where they feared the LORD and served their own gods** (2 Kin. 17. 24);

4. **Sennacherib came up against the fenced cities of Judah in the days of Hezekiah, and then later against Jerusalem. Here he met a crushing defeat at the hand of the LORD, when the angel of the LORD went forth and slew 185, 000 in the camp of the Assyrians. Some idea of Sennacherib's power can be seen in his vain boast of victory over other nations** (2 Kin. 19. 12, 13), **but he reckoned without the God of Israel. Hezekiah's prayer and the reply he re-**

ceived from the **LORD** are a remarkable demonstration of the power of **prayer and the LORD's intervention on the behalf of His people**. Sennacherib **returned** to his own land **greatly humiliated**, later to **meet an untimely death at the hands of his sons** (Isa. 37. 38).

### *Prophetical references*

As mentioned earlier, **the Assyrian nation was an instrument in the hand of the LORD for the chastisement of His people**. Through Isaiah (7. 17, 20) **Ahaz was warned of punishment because of his sins and provocation of the LORD** (2 Chr. 28. 25). In Isa. 10. 5 **the LORD refers to the Assyrian as "the rod of Mine anger, the staff in whose hand is Mine indignation"**. He also reveals **that the Assyrian king was unaware of this, and when the LORD had accomplished His purposes He would then punish the king of Assyria for his pride. Further, the LORD would stir up a scourge against the king of Assyria and his yoke would be broken** (Isa. 10. 26, 27). Then finally, **when the Shoot came forth from the stock of Jesse, the LORD would set His hand to recover the remnant of His people from Assyria and elsewhere** (Isa. 11. 1, 11). **In the glorious days of the reign the Prince of peace, Assyria, together with Israel and Egypt, would be a blessing in the midst of the earth** (Isa. 19. 24). **Micah also refers to Israel's deliverance from the bondage of the Assyrian, when the Ruler of Israel would be manifested, and the land of Assyria would be laid waste with the sword** (Mic. 5. 2, 6).

It is remarkable how two of **the minor prophets, Jonah and Nahum, devote the whole of their written prophecies to Nineveh**. Consideration **has already been given to the LORD's mercy towards that great city and the impact of Jonah's message upon the king and inhabitants of the city**. It is obvious **that the LORD had a particular purpose in sending Jonah there. Was it to remind them of the sovereignty of the God of Israel? The message had its due effect and led to some correction of the violence and the evil that were practised in the city**.

**Nahum (3. 1-4) reveals more of the conditions prevalent in the city (though possibly at a later date)—lies, rapine, rattling wheels, prancing horses and jumping chariots, in short a nation drunken with power and military victory; upon such a nation God was about to stretch forth His hand in judgement and Nineveh would be des-**

troyed. What was once a populous city would become a desolation and the inhabitants scattered upon the mountains with none to gather them (Nah. 3. 18).

Zephaniah also refers to this in his prophecy. The joyous city would become the habitation of beasts, and a lodging place of the pelican and porcupine (Zeph. 2. 13-15). This scripture has been literally fulfilled, and the modern name of the city is "Tell Kuyunjik" which means "mound of many sheep".

Jeremiah refers to the punishment of the king of Assyria (50. 18). History records that a combined force of Medes, Babylonians and Scythians laid seige to Nineveh which fell as a result of breaches in the defences made by flooding rivers. Thus was fulfilled the word of the LORD through His servants the prophets.

*J. Renfrew*

## STUDIES IN SEVEN MINOR PROPHETS

### *GOD IN WRATH REMEMBERING MERCY*

#### MICAH 5-7

*From Aberkenfig and Barry,* —It is interesting to compare the conditions of the people depicted in Micah 5 to 7 with the conditions of the kings given in 2 Chr. 27-29. From Micah's prophecy it is clear that the condition of God's people was bad. The usual sins were prominent; witchcraft and soothsayers still had a following (5. 12); graven images and the worship of idols found a place in opposition to the worship of the true God (5. 13, 14); there were unjust practices with traders using deceitful weights and wicked balances (6. 10, 11); violence and falsehood were quite common (6. 12); bribery and corruption were prevalent amongst the princes and judges (7. 3); treachery was the order of the day and even one's closest relatives could not be trusted (7. 5, 6). A society like this could never know prosperity and so we see that productivity suffered and good honest effort brought no satisfaction (6. 14, 15).

This condition of things is in contrast to the general tone of God's words to two of the kings who reigned in this period. Jotham and Hezekiah were good kings and God was pleased with them. Ahaz, it is true, was a wicked king, and the land suffered as a result, but

there does not seem to be any reference in Micah to the sad events recorded in 2 Chr. 28. 5-15. Perhaps editors could comment on this point [Comment 1].

The main point of interest in the passage has been identified in the heading—God in wrath remembering mercy. The LORD had just reason for a controversy with His people after their wicked ways, but instead of judging in His anger, He pleads with them. How revealing of the ways of God are verses 1-8 of chapter 6! It would appear that the people maintained their sacrifices, but without the right condition of heart these were valueless to God. This is a lesson for God's people today; the well-known verse 8 contains a principle which remains true always.

Through the dark gloom of the prophet's message we see shining the rays of divine hope in God's salvation. In spite of man's wickedness God's eternal purpose is to provide a Redeemer in His appointed way and time. So it is that we see here foreshadowings of Messiah's coming. The godly man or woman would doubtless appreciate the meaning of these words as Micah spoke them and probably be able by faith to look forward to the day when as a result of His mercy God would justly be able to pardon iniquity and cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

R. C. Jones

*From Birmingham.* —"Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" was asked in consideration of the theme. "Where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly". It should be unthinkable that anyone would sin because of the knowledge of grace and mercy; nor would we consider that the children of Israel entered into sin and disobedience because they had experienced the mercy of God.

One thing we learn from our study of Micah is the righteousness of God. "God could not pass the sinner by; his sin demanded he should die". This is true of whatever era we consider. The children of Israel were warned of the consequences of disobedience to God. Many perished because of their sins and we have seen how they were delivered up as captives. We may well feel that was the finish of Israel as far as God was concerned. Why, after all, should He be patient any longer? But even before this we often read of the long-suffering of God, at times when Israel might well have perished under the righteous judgement of their God. Though God has cast off His people, it is not for ever.

**For their disobedience Israel must suffer many things, especially during the Tribulation, and yet God's eye is always upon them to protect them from the evil intentions of men. In such protection we see the mercy of God. But the utmost wonder of God's mercy is that He will bring them into His blessings during the Millennium, blessings that no doubt they would have experienced much sooner, had they obeyed their God [Comment 2].**

**Mercy is only possible because of the work of Christ on Calvary, "But in the cross of Christ we see, how God can save, yet righteous be". God must indeed be righteous, and to be righteous He must punish sin, and He has exacted this punishment from His own beloved Son instead of us. Thus a basis was found for mercy. D. P. Brown**

*From Methil.* —It is basic to the proper understanding of the teaching of Scripture with respect to repentance and forgiveness that God cannot gloss over sin; it must be dealt with, for our God is of purer eyes than to behold evil (Hab. 1. 13). It is also true that the LORD is a God of love and mercy, even as He revealed Himself to Moses: "The LORD, the LORD, a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth" (Ex. 34. 6, 7). It is indeed a recurrent theme in Scripture that in keeping with His absolute holiness God cannot overlook sin and yet He loves the fallen sons of Adam's race, though they are prone to sin.

This principle is fully demonstrated in the book of Micah. Thus, after witnessing against the "earth and all that therein is", and seeking to induce repentance, the LORD says, "I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of thee;... as a flock in the midst of their pasture,... the LORD is at the head of them" (1. 2-2. 13). There will therefore surely come the day when a repentant and forgiven Israel will, with all the tribes present, rejoice in restoration to the loving shepherd care of the LORD. Next the denunciation of the malpractices of the leaders in Israel is accompanied by a brief pronouncement of judgment (3. 1-12) and followed by a promise of better things to come in the latter days (4. 1—5. 1). Chapter 5 continues this promise of blessing with one of those delightful Old Testament sure promises of the Messiah; not only will Israel know rule free from corruption and oppression, but Israel will also have the Ruler "whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting" (5. 2), a Ruler who will purge out the things that offend (5. 10-15). This passage is redolent

of some of the most majestic and poetic passages in Isaiah's grand measure. The last section of the book begins with the **LORD's** controversy with Israel. Argued like a lawsuit, it is a most touching example of God's love and mercy in that He even condescended to plead with His people, setting out in order His wonderful works on their behalf from the day he brought them out of Egypt, and setting over against these the unprofitableness of the prevailing evils. And yet again the message ends with a happy prophecy of future blessing. It was then for the truly repentant to say, "As for me, I will look unto the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation" (7. 7). So in each of the three main sections of Micah there is this rhythmic denunciation of current evils, pronouncement of judgement and promise of blessing.

Thankful we are that this God is ours, and that we can receive the seeming paradox that God is a jealous God who is plenteous in mercy. While it is true that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10. 31), and also that "our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12. 29), it is nevertheless equally true that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1. 9). As those who have had dealings with God and have tasted of His goodness, we can say with Micah, "Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity?" (7. 18). J. B.

### *IMPRESSIONS FROM OTHER CONTRIBUTORS*

Papers were also received from Birkenhead, Denmark Hill, Derby and Nottingham, and the following are impressions from these.

In 5. 2 the mercy of God is revealed in the prophecy concerning a Ruler, thus answering the cry (4. 9) "Is there no king in thee?"

Jehovah is to give Israel up (5. 3) until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth (see Rev. 12. 2). The return of Jehovah's joy in Israel after Israel's travail can be seen in two phases: at the birth of Christ, when Israel was marked as the honoured nation by whom the Messiah was to come into the world, and as the return of a believing remnant out of a dispersed and still unbelieving nation.

In 5. 7 some understood the grass as the remnant which receiving blessing from Jehovah increases without the help of man. Others

thought that as the dew causes the grass to flourish, so the remnant will bring prosperity to the nations which receive them, though these very nations are powerless to make them more permanent than dew. As the dew betokens blessings received, the lion character may portray the fierce attitude towards the nations who oppose. It was also seen by some as symbolizing strength through faith (Dan. 11. 32).

5. *10-15* describes the day when Israel will be restored, and everything which could be a substitute for trust in the LORD will be removed.

Chapter 6 takes the form of a trial with the mountains as witnesses, Israel the defendant, and Jehovah as prosecutor and judge. In 6. 3-8 Jehovah is seen to be a longsuffering God who requires the obedience of His people rather than sacrifice (compare Ps. 51. 16, 17). God's judgement on them for spiritual departure would bring them ultimately to renounce the things in which they had trusted. By altogether removing prosperity in the commercial sphere, He would ensure that they did not enjoy their ill-gotten profits. Unjust rule could only lead to dishonour for the rulers, and transgression in the social and domestic realm would bring the fear of death close to the individual, making it hard to break away (7. 4-6; see Mat. 10. 36). As an individual, Micah gave expression to his faith, but forgiveness for the nation must still depend on God's mercy. The triumphant close to the book expresses confidence that when the nation has known the paths of judgement, genuine repentance will meet with the compassion of the LORD, who will bestow glory upon Israel to the confusion of her enemies. *Eds.*

### COMMENTS

1. (*Aberkenfig and Barry*): The disastrous events which befell Judah and Jerusalem in the reign of Ahaz, as recorded in 2 Chr. 28; 2 Kin. 16; and alluded to in Isa. 7 do not indeed appear identifiable in Micah's prophecy. In fact this is one of the prophets we have under study, who seems to point clearly only to major historical events, e. g., the ultimate captivity of Israel and later Judah (1. 6-9), the millennial portrayals and the coming of the "Ruler in Israel". On the other hand, might not such a verse as 6. 13 be interpreted by Micah's hearers in terms of such events as are recorded in 2 Chr. 28?

2. (*Birmingham*): At many points in the history of divine puposes we find ourselves wondering how things would have worked out *if* certain people had responded differently to God's voice. While all is wrapped up in the deep truth of "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God", His grace and favour have always been rich towards the believing individual of Israel, offering in this dispensation, "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ".  
*J. D. T.*

### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. Is it possible to identify the "seven shepherds and eight principal men" of 5. 5? (*Aberkenfig and Barry*)

We agree with the contributors who suggest that it is not possible to identify these numbered individuals. However, the fact that numbers are given in this context underlines we suggest, the truth that God has men in readiness for every circumstance in which they will be required in fulfilling His purpose—men of type and numbers raised up to meet the situation.

Nottingham friends discuss this point and suggest that this reference might be a figure of speech indicating leaders under different characteristics; shepherds having the care of the people and principal men having the thought of leaders and teachers guiding the people by instructing them.  
*J. D. T.*

I agree with both the above comments on Mic. 5. 5; but I regard the manner of use of the numbers seven and eight as a Hebrew method of indicating an indefinite number. There will be no shortage of men of the sorts needed.  
*J. B.*

### PSALM 68 (*continued*)

The Lord giveth the word:

The women that publish the tidings are a great host.

Kings of armies flee, they flee:

And she that tarrieth at home divideth the spoil (verses 11, 12).

The word that the Lord gives is concerning victory, and the women that publish it as good news are a great host or army. David's words about the victory are vigorous and you can almost see mentally the defeated in flight: "Kings of armies flee, they flee". There is nothing here that encourages the thought of women preachers or evangelists, but we see what the women of Israel did after Moses and the children had sung of the LORD'S victory over the Egyptians in the Red Sea, Miriam led the women of Israel to sing the same song;

"Sing ye to the LORD, for *He* hath triumphed gloriously;  
The horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea"

(Exodus 15. 20, 21).

Similarly, the women of Israel sang after David had slain Goliath, which led to the defeat of the Philistines:

"Saul hath slain his thousands,  
And David his ten thousands" (1 Samuel 18. 6, 7).

Paul makes plain the place of the women in all public assemblies, "Let the women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but let them be in subjection, as also saith the law" (1 Corinthians 14. 34; see also 1 Timothy 2. 9-15). The place for the women to speak is in the home, and of old it was not only the place for the women's song, but also, "She that tarrieth at home divideth the spoil" of the victorious fighting men of Israel.

Will ye lie among the sheepfolds,  
As the wings of a dove covered with silver,  
And her pinions with yellow gold?  
When the Almighty scattered kings therein,  
It was as when it snoweth in Zalmon (verses 13, 14).

These words remind one of what is said in the song of Deborah. Though the men of Reuben had great resolves of heart by the watercourses, these resolves were never implemented, so they were asked,

"Why satest thou among the sheepfolds.  
To hear the pipings for the flocks?  
At the watercourses of Reuben  
There were great searchings of heart (Judges 5. 16).

It was a day of war and the men were few, and Deborah the prophetess sent and called Barak, and told him what to do, to take men of Naphtali and Zebulun and go against Sisera. He would not go unless she went with him, and she told him that this would not be to his honour. She went, but the men of Reuben never came. They sat among their sheepfolds and by their watercourses. Jacob said of Reuben his first-born,

"Unstable as water, thou shalt not have the excellency"  
(Genesis 49. 4).

And Moses said,

"Let Reuben live, and not die; yet let his men be few"  
(Deuteronomy 33. 6).

There were men of Reuben's type in David's day, men who lay among the sheepfolds; they appeared very beautiful, like doves as though their wings were covered with silver and yellow gold, but they were useless in a day of battle and war, when God scattered kings in His land, and such scattering was like the heavy snows of Zalmon, supposed to be a mount in the south of Shechem.

A mountain of God is **the** mountain of **Bashan**;  
 An high mountain is **the** mountain of Bashan.  
 Why look ye **askance**, ye high mountains,  
 At **the mountain** which God hath desired for His abode?  
 Yea, the LORD will dwell **in it** for **ever** (verses 15, 16).

Bashan **in** Gilead **in** the north-east of **the** land of Israel **is** said by David to **be** a mountain of God, a **high** mountain, or a mountain of **peaks** or **heights**. The question **is** asked, "Why look ye **askance** (**in** **envy**) ye mountains **of** **peaks**, **at** the mountain which God hath **desired** for His abode?" Mount Zion was not a high **mountain** as mountains go **in** height. It was high enough to **be** outstanding **and** beautiful **in** the **eyes** of all lovers of God. It was not too high for the **aged** and infirm to reach **up** to. God **did** not choose a dwelling place **in** a **mountain** that only skilled mountaineers could **climb**. When God reached mount Zion **in** the **days** of David He **never** chose another dwelling place. It was the will of God to dwell there for ever. For though for long **centuries**, **because** of the **sin** of His people Israel, He has not **been** there, He will again **return** to Zion, **and** that will be God's dwelling place while the Lord **Jesus** **reigns** for a thousand years. Earthly Zion **is** a shadow of the heavenly Zion (Hebrews 12. 22).

The chariots of God **are** twenty thousand, even thousands upon thousands:

The Lord **is** among them, **as** **in** Sinai, in the sanctuary.  
 Thou hast **ascended** on high, Thou hast led Thy **captivity** captive;  
 Thou hast received **gifts** among **men**,  
 Yea, among the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell with them (verses 17, 18).

David **uses**, it **seems** to **me**, the thought of military chariots to show the strong defence of God's people **against** the powers of darkness. These chariots **are** innumerable. This **may** **be** similar to what we read of **in** **2 Kings** 6. 17: "And Elisha prayed, **and** **said**, LORD, I **pray** Thee, open his **eyes**, that he **may** **see**. **And** the LORD opened the **eyes** of the **young** **man**; **and** he saw: **and**, behold, the **mountain** was full of horses **and** chariots of **fire** round about Elisha" (see also **2 Kings** 2. 11, 12; 13. 14). The LORD of Hosts (1 Samuel 1. 3, etc. ) **is** LORD of the angelic hosts of heaven, which **may** **at** His command **be** organized for war. There will **come** a **time** when Michael the archangel **and** his angels will go forth to war against the **Dragon** (**Satan**) **and** his angels. **Satan** **and** his **angels** will not prevail, **and** will **be** **oast** down to earth, **and** he will have no more **any** place **in** heaven. This will **be** the **beginning** of his and their final crash, **at** the **end** of which **Satan** will **be** **cast** into the Lake of **Fire** (Revelation 12. 7-12; 20. 10). The LORD **in** the **sanctuary** which Israel **made** for Him **at** **Sinai** in the wilderness was **in** the **midst** of the chariots of **God**, which were later called the chariots of Israel. The words, "Thou hast **ascended** on high, Thou hast led Thy captivity **captive**", had an application to Israel as led forth from Egypt. The **first** use of this statement, "lead thy **captivity** **captive**", **is** **in** the **song** of Deborah, when she calls to **Barak**, the victorious leader of the forces of Israel over **Sisera**: "**Arise**, **Barak**, **and** lead thy **captivity** **captive**" (Judges 5. 12). **Captivity** **is** a state of being captive. Is this to

be understood in an abstract sense, to lead in a state of captivity, or is it to be viewed in a concrete sense, as those who have been captives to be freed by the victorious leader? The abstract noun captivity is, I judge, used of persons who have been in that state and the victorious leader is leading them captive to liberty. This was true of Barak. It was also true of Moses, the deliverer and leader of Israel, who led that people from captivity in Egypt to liberty in the wilderness with the goodly land of promise in front of them. It was also true of Israel who had been defeated by the Philistines at the end of Saul's wasted life, when David was anointed king over all Israel, and when the Ark was brought to Zion. God ascended on high, using David in the complete deliverance of His people from all their enemies round about, so that they might recommence the service of God without hindrance from their enemies. God ascended on high over His people and received gifts among men; these gifts were the priests and Levites who were vital to the service of God in connexion with His house. Alas, David at first failed to give the Levites their work, and oxen yoked to a new cart were given the work of the Levites, part of whose work was to carry the Ark upon their shoulders. After the death of Uzzah, when the Ark was carried into the house of Obed-edom where it was for three months, David heard that God had blessed the house of Obed-edom, and he also learned that the Levites should have carried the Ark. When the Levites got their God-given work, then we read, "God helped the Levites that bare the Ark of the covenant of the LORD" (1 Chronicles 13. 7-14; 15. 1-3, 12-15, 25, 26). God's work must be done in God's way. The appointing of gifts, of priests and Levites to God's service was in order that God might dwell among His people whom He called the rebellious.

Part of verse 18 is quoted by Paul in Ephesians 4. 8:

"When He (Christ) ascended on high,  
He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. "

The Lord could not have ascended if He had not first descended, but He first descended from heaven to earth. Following His death on the Cross He descended to the lower parts of the earth, even to Hades (Hell) (Psalm 16. 10, Acts 2. 27, 31). The part of Hades to which He descended He called Paradise (Luke 23. 42, 43), and also Abraham's bosom (Luke 16. 22), and from thence He led captivity captive ("a multitude of captives", A. V. marg. ). Captivity, usually an abstract noun, should not in this context be regarded as a state, but should be viewed in a concrete sense as indicative of a multitude of captives, even the blessed dead who were in Hades, to which the Lord went at death. We must be careful not to say that the Lord emptied that part of Hades when He ascended on high, for, I judge, there will be persons raised from the dead at the time of judgement of the Great White Throne (Revelation 20. 11-15) whose names will be found written in the book of life, who will receive eternal life (Romans 2. 7). But those who are "accounted worthy to attain unto that world (age), even that of Christ's reign on earth, and the resurrection from (*Ek* out of) the dead" (Luke 20. 35); are those of the first resurrection (Revelation 20. 6). These blessed dead must be distinguished from the dead in Christ who are members of the Church which is His Body. All the blessed who died before the dispensation of grace: went down to Paradise

(Hades) when they died; **but** in contrast, the **dead** in Christ **go to be** with Christ **at** death, that is, **to** their home **in** heaven, the place which the Lord went **to prepare** for **them** (John 14. 1-3). The gifts of the **past** dispensation of law were priests **and** Levites, **but in** the; **present dispensation these are** "apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers". These were **given** for the **perfecting** of the **saints** by the **ministry** of the word, till all **attain unto** the **unity** of the faith, **and** the (full) knowledge **of** the **Son** of God (Ephesians 4. 8-13).

Blessed **be** the LORD, who daily beareth **our** burden.

**Even** the God who **is** **our** salvation. (Selah

God **is** **unto** **us** **a** **God** of deliverances;

**And** unto JEHOVAH the Lord belong the **issues** from death

(verses 19, 20).

It would **seem** that the Hebrew word *Amos*, which **means** "to load", **does** not **carry** the thought of "**bearing** our **burden**" or **again**, of "**loading** us with **benefits**"; "**with** **benefits**" has no Hebrew equivalent. It will **be** **seen** that "**with** **benefits**" is in italics in the A. V. It may **be**, however, that the idiom of the Hebrew **conveys** the **idea** of imposing **a** **burden** as well as **bearing** one. This **burden** may have a similar **meaning** to that of Matthew 11. 30, "**My** **yoke** **is** **easy**, **and** **My** **burden** **is** **light**". The One who **gives** such **a** **burden** is the God of **our** salvation, who **saves** **us** **from** **our** own heavy **burden** and then **gives** **us** His light **one**. In **verse** 20 the A. V. **gives** "salvation", **but** the word salvation is plural, hence the R. V. **gives** "deliverances", **for** **unto** Jehovah the Lord (*Adonahy*, the **Lord** in blessing, plural), belong the **issues** from death.

**But** **God** shall smite through the head of His **enemies**,

The hairy scalp of such **an** **one** as goeth **on** still in his guiltiness.

The Lord **said**, I will **bring** **again** from Bashan,

I will **bring** them **again** from the depths of the **sea**:

That thou **mayest** **dip** thy foot in blood,

That the **tongue** of thy **dogs** may have its **portion** from thine **enemies** (verses 21, 22, 23).

Here we have **a** **great** **contrast** from the **previous** **verses**, showing how **God** will **in** His **own** **time** **deal** with His **enemies**. He will **smite** through the head of His **enemies**, **and** of such **as** **go** **on** stubbornly in their guiltiness. **But** He will **bring** His people **from** Bashan, the land of **Og** on the north-east of Israel, **and** He will **bring** them **from** the depths of the **sea**, perhaps **a** **figure** of speech, or it may refer to those who have perished in the **sea**. Then the **redeemed** of Israel, who will **be** the **victors**, will **dip** their **feet** in or wade through, **blood**, **and** the **tongues** of their **dogs** shall have their **portion** from their **enemies**. These will **be** **days** of fearful happenings **to** the **enemies** of **God** and of Israel, as the **book** of **Revelation** clearly shows. J. M.

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## EDITORIAL

Did the Ninevites of Nahum's day feel the impact of the burden of judgement which the prophet pronounced against their city? Did they even know that the prophecy had been given? More than a century earlier Jonah's warning had brought Nineveh to repentance and judgement had been deferred. There is no evidence that Nahum had been sent to Nineveh with his message or that it was transmitted by any other means to the Ninevites. Then what was God's purpose in revealing through the prophet such graphic detail about the impending doom of the Assyrian capital?

There was certainly an immediate value to contemporary Judah. The prediction of judgement was linked with a description of the vice and corruption which had invited it, a salutary reminder to backsliding elements among God's people. For the godly there was strong encouragement. The nation's existence seemed at the mercy of the massive Assyrian power. To those who believed the LORD's word through Nahum there was now assurance that Nineveh itself would be visited in judgement.

To later generations of God-fearing Israelites the fulfilment of the prophetic word about the destruction of Nineveh would be yet further evidence of the truth of the oracles of God. This testimony carries forward to successive generations of believers, wherever these aspects of God's word are understood. The fulfilled predictions of Nahum's book have assumed fresh interest and power as a result of modern archaeological developments.

It is an interesting but inconclusive study to enquire how far the burdens of other prophets regarding Gentile peoples were known outside Israel. There is little positive evidence to support the possibility of this. Yet such prophecies represent a significant proportion of certain books (e. g., Isaiah 17-20; Jeremiah 46-51; Ezekiel 25-29). It was clearly the divine intention that prophetic utterances regarding Gentile nations should be interwoven in the warp and woof of Old Testament revelation. In the longer term view, the accumulative

evidence of fulfilled prediction over many centuries emerges as of even greater importance than the immediate effect on Israelite or Gentile at the time the prophecies were given.

A noteworthy aspect of certain of these prophetic messages is their use by the Holy Spirit to incorporate far-reaching predictions about certain nations, including their attitudes at the time of the end, or their prospect in the millennial kingdom (e. g., Jer. 48. 47, 49. 6; Isa. 19. 24-25).

*G. P. Jr.*

## THE REIGNS OF MANASSEH AND AMON

In spite of God's goodness and miraculous interventions in the history of Judah during the reign of Hezekiah, the policies of the next king, Manasseh, were calculated to lead the people further away from God and deeper into evil. It could be argued that as a boy of only twelve years of age the new king would be much influenced by his political advisers, but the written record lays the responsibility of leadership fairly and squarely on Manasseh's shoulders; it reads "he did that which was evil", "he built again the high places", "he also made his children to pass through the fire" (2 Chr. 33. 2, 3, 6). At least seven times this sort of indictment is made. He may have been given unsound counsel, but his were the ultimate decisions and his the obstinate refusal to listen either to the voice of experience calling from the past or to the voice of the LORD in his own time, for "the LORD spake to Manasseh, and to His people: but they gave no heed" (2 Chr. 33. 10).

The catalogue of Manasseh's sad failures makes terrifying reading. The progress made in the twenty-nine years of his father Hezekiah's rule was largely wiped out, and when Manasseh had gone as far as God allowed, the spiritual welfare and moral state of the people were worse than those of the nations which had previously occupied the land.

Manasseh became known as a builder, a builder of shrines to false gods, a builder of altars for sacrifice to idols, and it was under his instruction that a graven image was erected in God's house. The worship of Baal and Asheroth, the chief male and female gods of the Canaanite nations, was encouraged, and the sexual licence and perversion which accompanied such service became commonplace. Bribery, corruption, violence and alcoholism became accepted,

and the people who had known freedom of action within the reasonable bounds of God's law, having trespassed over those boundaries in the search for greater freedom, found themselves decadent, undisciplined and shackled by evil. Those who today preach complete freedom for the individual without reference to God's moral law would do well to read 2 Chronicles 33.

A man without God can be reduced to desperate measures; and having turned his back on the true God, having lost the assurance that simple faith brings, Manasseh turned to communication with the evil spirit world in order to plan his future. He attempted to placate these frightful imaginary gods by offering and sacrifice, even though this involved the death of at least two of his own small children in the furnace contained in the statue of the god Molech.

The record proclaims Manasseh as one of the most perverted of Judah's kings, one of the chief sinners of Old Testament times, and yet it also proclaims our God as One with tremendous patience, grace and compassion. When judgement fell on Manasseh, and the army officers of the Assyrian king transported him in chains to distant Babylon, then he "came to himself" and in sorrow and humility turned to his God. The great supplication of king Solomon—"If they sin against Thee... and Thou be angry with them, and deliver them to the enemy... unto a land far off or near... if they return unto Thee with all their heart... then hear Thou from heaven... and maintain their cause; and forgive" (2 Chr. 6. 36-39), was remembered by the LORD and Manasseh's prayer was answered. We might have written Manasseh off as having gone too far into the ways of sin to be of any further use to God, "but where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly" (Rom. 5. 20) and the contrite, repentant king returned to his land, his capital and his throne, a sadder and wiser man.

In his new-found enthusiasm for God, Manasseh again began to build, but now he improved the defences of Jerusalem and other cities; he removed the false gods and the idol from the house of the LORD; he rebuilt the altar of the LORD and led the people in a great revival. True it is that the hill shrines were still used by Judah (albeit for the worship of God and not the heathen deities) and that they had lost sight of the truth that in Jerusalem only was

to be the place of sacrifice. Nevertheless the people followed their leader, and the degradation of the early years was replaced by devotion to the God who always keeps His promises. Of Manasseh's long reign of 55 years it was certainly true that "better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof" (Eccl. 7. 8).

After Manasseh's death, his twenty-two years old son Amon became king and in two tragic years undid the good work that had apparently been done by his father. Again the voice of the LORD through the prophet and the voice of experience were ignored, and sacrifice at heathen altars was encouraged with all that this entailed. Once more spiritual and moral decay pervaded the land. How we need to pray for our leaders, both secular and spiritual, when their influence, if evil, can be so devastating! Amon died as a result of a plot amongst his own servants, so closing a period in the history of God's people which portrays to a remarkable degree the unreliability of man and also the absolute faithfulness of God—"He abideth faithful" (2 Tim. 2. 13).

V. Matthews

## THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE MINOR PROPHETS

(continued)

### 3. *CHRONOLOGY OF NAHUM AND ZEPHANIAH*

Nahum is undated in that no mention is made of the kings during whose reigns he prophesied. This is rather to be expected, since the whole book is a message directed against Ninveh. Chapters 2 and 3 contain a forecast of the destruction of the city as a judgement for the sins of its inhabitants. This forecast came true about B. C. 604, when the Medes and Persians took the city. Hence Nahum was effective some time before the fall of Nineveh, but how long before it is not easy to be sure. The Oxford Helps puts him in the reign of Hezekiah without saying what justification exists for this. All that can be said with certainty is that he prophesied some time in the 7th century B. C. He thus worked for his God at a later phase than Jonah. There *is* no record that the Ninevites repented at the preaching of Nahum as they had under the message of the reluctant Jonah, but God rewards *faithfulness* in service, not necessarily success in service [See Editorial],

Zephaniah prophesied in the days of Josiah who reigned from 640-609 B. C. His ministry was therefore concurrent in part with that of Jeremiah, who commenced for God in 627 B. C. and was active in the days of Josiah (2 Chr. 35. 25). Zephaniah's message is one of severity against God's people, which may seem strange in view of the tremendous reformation for good which Josiah effected. Perhaps the key is found in 2 Kin. 23. 26 where it is indicated that the LORD turned not from the fierceness of His great wrath which had been provoked by Manasseh. However, the chronology brings out a feature which must have brought joy to the weeping prophet Jeremiah at the beginning of his service, namely, to see a king so wholeheartedly seeking to serve His God.

C. L. P.

## STUDIES IN SEVEN MINOR PROPHETS

### *THE DIVINE RECKONING WITH ASSYRIA*

#### NAHUM

*From Vancouver.* —Some of the characteristics of Jehovah are clearly stated by Nahum. Whether men as individuals or as nations acknowledge God or not, it is certain that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men (1. 5-5). There is only one living and true God. He is a jealous God. Upon His enemies He will take revenge with fury (1. 2). He is a God of great and irresistible power, His majesty is seen not only in the ordinary and orderly course of nature, but also in the violent disruptions of that course. "Who can stand before His indignation? And who can abide in the fierceness of His anger?" (1. 6). These are terrifying questions. Yet God is not easily provoked. He is good in that He uses that same great power to protect those who have placed their trust in Him (1. 3, 7).

Nineveh, a great and glorious city, was the capital of the Assyrian empire. It was to this wicked city that Jonah had come about 150 years ealier. In God's name Jonah had foretold the speedy overthrow of the city. Then the Ninevites had genuinely repented and were thus spared. Soon afterwards they returned to their evil ways with greater intensity. This time Nahum the prophet warned that

**there would be no second chance. Their doom was inevitable. They were to be totally destroyed (1. 9). Unlike Jerusalem, Nineveh would never be rebuilt. It was a vile city, full of robberies and injustices. Truth and honesty were replaced by lies and deceit. Immorality was rampant. Innocent people were victimised. Witchcraft and demon worship had replaced the honour and reverence that were due alone to Jehovah (3. 1, 4).**

The second chapter of the book of Nahum depicts in very poetic language the siege of the city. Its nefarious and corrupt activities would be frankly exposed so that the people would become a laughing-stock and also a warning to other wayward nations. Her allies would flee and desert her. There would be no recovering from the desolation. "Thy wound is grievous" (3. 19). Destruction would be by fire, from which there would be no escape. The end result would be oblivion. "Their place is not known where they are" (3. 17).

*John Robinson*

*From Melbourne.* —The book of Nahum was written approximately 150-180 years after the record of the repentance of Nineveh (see Jonah) and 50 to 20 years prior to its ultimate fall. The repentant generation had gone, and was followed by successive generations pursuing the normal downward tendencies of men who had forgotten the warnings of the past.

Little is known of the prophet, save that he was a native of Elkosh, a place which has disappeared, though believed to have been in Galilee. It is probable that, when the ten tribes were carried away into Assyria as recorded in 2 Kings 17 and 18, Nahum escaped to the land of Judah, and possibly to Jerusalem. It is very possible that he witnessed the destruction of the hosts of Sennacherib at Jerusalem, when 185, 000 died in one night (2 Kin. 19).

The Assyrian empire was a rod in the hand of Jehovah to chastise surrounding nations, not least of these being God's wayward and erring people who had taken to idolatry. Having accomplished God's purposes against the ten tribes, the Assyrians were permitted to invade Judah where about forty cities were laid waste, and according to Assyrian records 200, 000 people taken captive, many of them subjected to terrible cruelties in common with captives of other nations.

But at Jerusalem the advance of the invader was stayed. His boasting, the result of unrestrained conquest, *is* described in 2 Kings 18 and 19. He had failed to understand that he was but the rod of Jehovah's anger, and an axe to hew (Isa. 10. 5, 15) in the hand of Him who said, "He that chastiseth the nations, shall not He correct?"<sup>77</sup> (Psalm 94. 10, 15). At Jerusalem the rod was turned aside in the hand of Him who had formed and used it. Had not Jehovah said, "I will defend this city... for My servant David's sake" (2 Kin. 19. 34) ?

In Nahum 1 we have a poetic description of the greatness and majesty of Jehovah, together with the comforting reminder that this Mighty One is "good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that put their trust in Him"<sup>77</sup> (v. 7). Then comes the promise of the Messiah (v. 15), not to be hindered by the wicked; Judah together with Israel will eventually keep the festivals of the LORD with the joy that is becoming to those occasions. Is it not possible that words such as these may have been spoken in the ears of Hezekiah in the days of distress described in 2 Kin. 19? [See Answer to Question 3].

Emphasis is laid in the remaining portion of the book upon the vileness of the city of Nineveh and the futility of any form of defence against the wrath of Jehovah. The final and complete destruction of both empire and city is described in 1. 14 [See Answer to Question 2]. A remarkable prophetic statement is "I will make thy grave; for thou art vile"<sup>77</sup>. After the fall of the city about 612-606 B. C. at the hands of the Babylonians, Medes and Scythians, this was literally fulfilled; gradually all trace of its existence was blotted out and forgotten. For over 2, 000 years the dust of ages buried the once proud city. Critics of the Bible began to look upon the Biblical records concerning Assyria and its capital as but Jewish myth and legend; but about 1843-1848 the mound (grave) of Nineveh was discovered by Botta and Layard, the archaeologists. The wonders of a lost empire were laid bare, and the Bible record vindicated. As excavations proceeded at the grave of the ancient city, amongst other wonders was unearthed the palace of Sargon (whom critics said had never existed) with its library of cuneiform inscriptions, describing the conquests of the once mighty empire, confounding the critics, and demonstrating the veracity of the Word of God.

T. W. F.

*From Derby.* —Apart from the mention in Genesis 10 of Nimrod, the builders of Nineveh, the Assyrians are not noticed in Scripture until 2 Kin. 15. 19 referring to the days of Menahem king of Samaria and Azariah king of Judah. Apparently, up to this time they had not interfered with the people of God.

Little is known of Nahum the prophet, but he is called the Elkoshite, which some have thought to be associated with a place called Al-kush in Assyria, but a village in Galilee is more likely. The date also is in doubt, but a date 720 to 698 B. C. is suggested, following the carrying away of the ten tribes in the reign of Hezekiah [See Comment 1]. Through the writings of Nahum the God-fearing in Israel and Judah would be comforted by the assurance that God would punish their enemies and eventually destroy their capital city Nineveh. Words of encouragement are also seen in chapter 1. 7, 15. We thought verse 7 would help the God-trusting both in Judah and Israel and even among the Assyrians (see Acts 10. 35—"every nation"). The bringer of good tidings (verse 15) may refer to Nahum, whose name means "comforter" [See Comment 2]. He was comfort and peace to Judah who knew of the designs of Sennacherib, already concentrating his forces at Lachish. God heard every word of blasphemy by the king of Assyria's messengers and through the humble supplication of king Hezekiah He was moved to destroy the major part of the Assyrian army (185, 000) by one angel (Isa. 37. 36). Sennacherib their king was thus caused to return to Nineveh where he was slain by his own sons in the house of his god Nisroch. "God is not mocked".

Nahum presents a vivid prophetic portrayal of the effect of the devastations on the Assyrian capital, which is said by historians to be a true picture of what actually did take place. In many respects Nahum depicts a condition of things actually in existence within the city as he wrote, notably the Assyrians' vile and merciless treatment of their helpless prisoners who dared to offer any resistance to their wanton lust for conquest.

The longsuffering patience of God is seen in that His final reckoning was delayed by approximately a century. The writings of the prophet Zephaniah (2. 14, 15) add a brief and final confirmation to Nahum's prophecy, the fulfilment of which is said to have taken place about the year 606 B. C. by the joint operations of the Medes and Chaldeans.

Nahum reminds the Assyrians of the overthrow of the ancient Egyptian city of No-amon (Amon being the name of their god), illustrating the powerlessness of the false idols of the nations [See Comment 3]. Although No-amon had been protected by its situation between the sea and the waters of the Nile delta, it had been destroyed; and so would Nineveh be, though well protected by massive walls and towers.

Assyria's attitude is summed up in Eccl. 8. 11: "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil". "Behold, I am against thee, saith the LORD of hosts" (Nahum 3. 5). S. R. W.

*From Edinburgh.* —In some respects Nahum's prophecy is a sequel to that of Jonah. More than one hundred years previously the LORD had heard the repentant cries of Nineveh. However, during those hundred years the Assyrians had made repeated attacks on Palestine, ending the kingdom of Israel in 720 B. C., and occupying parts of Judah, but failing to capture Jerusalem some eight years later. This was the occasion when the angel of the LORD smote 185,000 men of king Sennacherib in one night, causing him to return to Nineveh (2 Kin. 19. 55).

Although Nineveh's repentance was short-lived, we read "the LORD is slow to anger" (1. 3). Young's Concordance gives the year of Nahum's birth as 713 B. C., and so it was probably the middle or latter half of the seventh century before the warning of the destruction was issued to the Assyrians [See Comment 4]. For although the LORD was slow to anger, "He will by no means clear the guilty" (1. 3). After several attempts, it seems that Nineveh was finally overthrown by the Babylonians in 604 B. C.

The Assyrians were certainly a great power. They had access to the mineral wealth of Egypt and Ethiopia, and had trading allies in Libya, but they had forgotten their repentance at Jonah's prophecy and had spurned the mercy of God. Nahum's prophecy then is two-sided, a forecast of doom for the enemies of the LORD, but a word of comfort and hope for the people of God; indeed "Nahum" means "comforter", and amidst all the fury of the LORD's judgement on the Assyrians are these words to His people: "The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that put their trust in Him" (1. 7).

*L. Burgoyne*

*From Leigh and Atherton.* — "Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD, saying, The LORD will surely deliver us" (Isa. 36. 75). With these words the envoy of Sennacherib the Assyrian tried to demoralise the defenders of Jerusalem and to undermine their faith in the LORD. Through Nahum the LORD expresses His anger with Nineveh, the proud capital city of Assyria. The prominent person mentioned in Nahum 1. 11-14 could well be Sennacherib. His boastful words are recorded by Isaiah and in 2 Kings. Sennacherib was himself assassinated while at worship in the house of Nisroch (Isa. 37. 37-38). Preparations made to defend Nineveh would not save them from their fate, the army provided by the LORD could not be defeated. A combined force of Medes, Babylonians and Scythians opened the sluice gates which controlled the river Chaser, flooding the city and undermining the walls (Nahum 2. 6).

The early verses of chapter 3 seem almost like an eye-witness account of the battle within the city. War chariots jostle one another, cavalry charges, infantry advances. The slaughter is great and the corpses are piled everywhere. This awful judgement on Nineveh was because of moral corruption. The description of Nineveh as a harlot refers to its revolting idolatrous worship, which was associated with witchcraft, ensnaring the unwary and exciting the passions of the hardened. Things done in secret would be revealed. Instead of honour and praise, shame and mockery. To impress upon the Ninevites the certainty of destruction they are reminded of the overthrow of No-amon (Thebes), which in spite of its greatness had been destroyed by the Assyrians themselves [See Editorial], The men would be like women, having no stomach for battle. The stockpiling of water and repaired city walls would not prevent the city from perishing in flames.

Leaderless refugees would take to the mountains with no hope of even a remnant being saved (cf. Israel's hope, Zech. 13. 9). The nations would shed no tears at the ruin of Nineveh. Instead there would be satisfaction among those nations who had had experience of the oppressive and cruel Assyrian.

*L. deVille*

*IMPRESSIONS FROM OTHER CONTRIBUTORS*

Papers were also received from Birkenhead and Methil, and impressions from these are given below.

The date of Nahum's prophecy is limited by references to the past fall of the Egyptian city of No-amon or Thebes around 665 B. C. (3. 8) and to the future fall of Nineveh about 612 B. C., which is the main theme of the book.

Nineveh was a city of considerable size, with a population of about half a million. Commercially, she is compared to a *pool of water* (2. 8); everything flowed into her, goods, trade, riches and people. Politically, she was a *den of lions* (2. 11), preying on other nations for herself and her whelps. As a centre of idolatry and witchcraft, she is termed a *harlot* (3. 4), having seduced many nations by her charms. Nahum announces the dispersal of her ill-gotten gain (2. 10), the total cessation of her political influence (2. 13) and a public exposure of her corruptions (3. 5). Nineveh was not to decay gradually; despite extensive defence preparations, her destruction was to be catastrophic. It is solemn to realise that this very prophecy, preserved for us in our Bibles, was at a certain point in history the definitive statement of God's sentence on Nineveh, and that it was the working out of this very decree which brought this influential centre of civilisation to a sickening stop. History may record that the Chaldeans and others overthrew Nineveh, but Scripture here insists that Almighty God alone controls the destinies of all nations, and that it is by His determinate counsel that Nineveh in particular was overthrown when and how it was.

From another angle, Nineveh's tyranny of her subjects was breeding its own destruction. What she was sowing she would inevitably reap. She could not expect to be shown mercy by nations she had kept subdued by cruelty and plundering. None would bemoan her overthrow (3. 7); indeed all her victims would rejoice (3. 19). Under God, they would make quite certain that never again would Nineveh be able to gain power over them (1. 9). "There is no assuaging of thy hurt; thy wound is grievous" (3. 19).

Especially would Judah have cause to rejoice at Nineveh's downfall (1. 15) for Assyria's shadow had darkened her land for long

**enough. No longer would Assyria attack her towns (e. g., 2 Kin. 18. 12), exact temple tribute (2 Chron. 28. 20, 21) and continually trample through along the coastal route to Egypt. The entire administrative apparatus of which Nineveh was the nerve-centre would be demolished. No more emissaries would arrive unbidden from the court of Nineveh (2. 13). Even her own people would be without governmental control (3. 18). And twice Nahum reveals the underlying and overriding cause of Nineveh's imminent fall: "Behold, I am against thee, saith the LORD of hosts" (2. 13, 3. 5; see also 1. 6, 8, 9).**

Nevertheless Nahum gives a balanced view of God's character, stressing not only His severity but also His goodness (Rom. 11. 22). Despite Nineveh's wickedness, God had been slow to anger; and not because of weakness, for He is "great in power" (1. 3). Her repentance at Jonah's preaching had not been lasting, and divine vengeance must soon fall (1. 2). Yet to those who put their trust in Him, "The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble" (1. 7). *Eds.*

### COMMENTS

1. (*Derby*): Admittedly it is difficult to find sufficient agreement among authorities as to be certain of precise dates. But a useful point is offered in Birkenhead's paper—that the fall of Thebes (No-amon) is referred to by Nahum, and this took place about 665 B. C., in that case it would follow that Nahum's prophecy was given at a rather later date than our Derby friends suggest.

2. (*Derby*): It is an interesting suggestion that the bringer of good tidings may have been Nahum himself. But this is more generally regarded as a Hebrew form of expression for one who announces welcome news, in this case probably the news of the annihilation of the Assyrian army which threatened Jerusalem.

3. (*Derby*): Is it suggested that Nahum actually took his message to the Assyrians? Or is the question in 3. 8 a rhetorical question, much as the style of address from verse 9 to the end of the chapter? This is further discussed in the Editorial.

4. (*Edinburgh*): See Comment 1 for a stronger basis on which to suggest that Nahum probably gave his prophecy regarding Nineveh about the middle of the seventh century B. C. It would seem difficult to find agreement among competent commentators on the precise date of Nahum's birth.

G. P. Jr,

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### *From Vancouver*

1. Isa. 19. 22-25 suggests that Assyria will be converted. How does this fit in with what is written in the book of Nahum?

Isaiah refers to the Assyrian people as a whole and to their ultimate blessing in the Millennium. Nahum's prophecy deals particularly with the capital Assyrian city of that time, and the judgement about to be visited on her. This judgement on Nineveh would not preclude longer term purposes through Assyrians of later generations.

2. Isa. 19. 22-25. What does it mean when it says that Israel will be *third*?

It is clear from such scriptures as Isaiah chapters 60, 61 that during the Millennium Israel will be head of the nations under the rule of the King of kings. Isa. 60. 12 envisages all nations and kingdoms as servants of Israel. This precludes the thought of Israel being subordinate to Egypt and Assyria. It has been suggested that the three nations will form one great area of dedication to God and political amity, "a blessing in the midst of the earth". This will be in happy contrast to former millennia, during which Egypt and Assyria have been in spiritual darkness and continually at variance. Then at last will be fulfilled God's promise to Abraham that his seed would possess the land from the river of Egypt to the river Euphrates (Gen. 15. 18). The blessing will overflow these long-promised boundaries to adjacent Assyria and Egypt.

3. Does Nahum 1. 15 have a millennial application? Can the evil one in 1. 11 also have a future application?

The language of verse 15 is similar to that of Isa. 52. 7, but the context of the latter is much more clearly related to the great crisis of Israel's deliverance when Messiah comes to take His power and reign. What is there about Nahum 1. 25 to establish a connection with the pre-millennial crisis? Perhaps the statement that "the wicked one shall no more pass through thee". If this is to be construed as the final deliverance of Israel from the malignancy of her foes, then the millennial advent may be in view. But I would personally incline to regard verse 11 as referring to the immediate threat to Judah's security, and verse 15 as an assurance of that crisis overpast.

*G. P. Jr.*

PSALM 68 (*continued*)

They have seen Thy goings, O God,  
 Even the goings of my God, my King, into the sanctuary.  
 The singers went before, the minstrels followed after,  
 In the midst of the damsels playing with timbrels.  
 Bless ye God in the congregations,  
 Even the Lord, ye that are of the fountain of Israel.  
 There is little Benjamin their ruler,  
 The princes of Judah and their council,

The princes of Zebulun, the princes of Naphtali (verses 24-27).

We have here a description of the procession of those who gathered to bring up the Ark to the tent which David had pitched for it in Zion. The goings of God means the procession of God his King. David never agreed in thought with those who rejected God as King of Israel (1 Samuel 8. 4-7). God was King to him. The procession was led by the singers who blessed God, the fountain of Israel, and after them came the minstrels, and the damsels surrounded them playing with timbrels.

Then came the Ark, I judge. Then followed the princes of the tribes, and Benjamin, Judah, Zebulun and Naphtali come in for particular mention. It was a time of great rejoicing to God's people. David mentions Benjamin first, the tribe that King Saul belonged to, as though to honour that tribe for they were heartily in this great movement, even though David of Judah was king and leader of Israel. We are told that thirty chosen men of Israel were gathered to bring up the ark.

Thy God hath commanded thy strength:  
 Strengthen, O God, that which Thou hast wrought for us.  
 Because of Thy temple at Jerusalem  
 Kings shall bring presents unto Thee (verses 28, 29).

David said that God had commanded the strength of His people, and he sought God to strengthen that which He had wrought for them, for it had been a wonderful time of revival the like of which had not been since the victorious days of Joshua. The times of the Judges were largely dark **times**, and in the early days of Samuel, **the** last of the judges, the **Ark** was taken **by the** Philistines. Then **came the** long barren period of Samuel's judgeship **and the reign of** Saul, when the Ark was in **the** house of **Abinadab**. God would **need to strengthen** His work **in** Israel, for **they** were surrounded **by enemies and** nations hostile to them. I **take it that** **verse 29** is a **prophetic reference** to the temple which was **yet to be** built in Jerusalem, when kings would **bring** presents to God in **the times** of Solomon, which they certainly did in abundance.

**Rebuke** the wild **beast** of the reeds,

The multitude of the bulls, with the calves of the peoples,

**Trampling under** foot the pieces **of** silver;

He hath **scattered** the peoples that delight in war (**verse 30**).

Here are the enemies that **Satan** would use to bring the results of revival through David to nothing, against whom he besought divine strength in verse 28. God, using David, scattered the people that delighted in war. We know in a greater day than David's, when the Lord comes again in glory and majesty, *He* will deal with the wild beast of the reeds (the wild beast of Revelation 13 and 19), and with the bulls (literally the strong ones; Gesenius says, "a metaphor of princes"). The calves according to Gesenius were bullocks, indicative of "leaders of the people". At the last battle, that of Armageddon, there will be the wild beast, and the princes and leaders of the peoples with their armies gathered against the Lord; these will be scattered and perish and then will come the antitype of the glorious reign of Solomon. In the past the sufferings came before the glories of Solomon. Even so the sufferings of Christ came before the glories that would follow (1 Peter 1. 11).

Princes shall come out of Egypt;

O sing praises unto the Lord; (Selah)

Ethiopia shall haste to stretch out her hands unto God.

Sing unto God, ye kingdoms of the earth;

To Him that rideth upon the heavens of heavens, which are of old;

Lo, He uttereth His voice, and that a mighty voice

(verses 31, 32, 33).

Here we have a brief reference to what it will be **in** the Millennium, when princes of Gentile peoples will come out of Egypt and other lands. Men **in** their eagerness, like Ethiopia, will hasten (stretching out their hands as they run) to stretch out their hands to God, for only in hastening to the Lord **and** trusting **in** Him will their safety lie. All kingdoms **of** the earth will then **sing** praises to the Lord (*Adonahy*, Lord, plural, in blessing), for men will tremble when they hear His

**Ascribe ye strength** unto God:

His excellency is over Israel,

**And His strength is in the skies.**

O God, Thou **art** terrible **out** of Thy holy places:

The God of Israel, He giveth strength **and** power unto **His** people.

**Blessed be** God (verses **34, 35**).

To ascribe is to **impute** or to say what is true, that **God is** the God of **strength**. Gesenius **says** of this verse, "to **ascribe** glory or strength to anyone". The Hebrew word *Nathan* means "to give". **His** excellency or **majesty** was over Israel, and will be over them in **the** future. His **strength is** in the skies. When **we** think of what we read of **men's study of the stars**, of their vast dimensions, **the great** speed at which **they** travel, the inspired words of David **are seen to be** literally **true**. God **is** terrible (Hebrew *Yare*, to **be afraid** of, to be feared) out of His holy **places**, for when He reveals His power **men will flee to the** caves and rocks of the mountains **for** shelter. But we know, **as** we sometimes **sing**, that

"His love is as **great as** His power,

And knows neither **measure** nor end".

How terrible it will **be** for **men** who have not received **the gift** of His love! God gave strength unto His people **when** they walked **in His** law, but how sadly **they** failed **in** this! How sadly **we** fail too! David closes the **psalm** with, "Blessed be God". Blessed **is** the **Hebrew** word *Barak*, which means **to** bend the **knees**, and **is** an expression of worship.

*J. M.*

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# BIBLE STUDIES

'A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God (Acts 17. 11). '

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## EDITORIAL

During the period covered by our recent studies important developments were taking place among the nations which were to have a fundamental effect upon the history of Judah, and usher in the "times of the Gentiles". Egypt, Assyria and Babylon were engaged in a critical struggle, the result of which remained in the balance for many years before Babylon finally triumphed. The politicians of Jerusalem, seeking alliances with the most powerful nation, sometimes erred in their choice, with disastrous results (2 Kin. 24. 1; 2 Chron. 36. 13; Isa. 30. 1-3; Jer. 28; Ezek. 29. 6, 7). Josiah's mistake in opposing Pharaoh-necho's army seems to have been at least in part due to such a miscalculation of the trends of power-politics in his day. Strange that such a godly man should forsake divine counsel for political scheming! It has been suggested that Josiah's action so delayed the Egyptians on their way to help Assyria against Babylon that Babylonian victory was assured, hastening the rise of that empire and the downfall of Jerusalem. This view relies on the Revised Standard version of 2 Kin. 23. 29: "In his days Pharaoh-necho king of Egypt went up to the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates". However, "Against the king of Assyria" as in A. V. and R. V. is supported by 2 Chron. 36. 1-4, from which we understand that three months after the battle of Megiddo, Pharaoh-necho returned from his expedition to the north, entered Jerusalem, levied taxes upon the inhabitants of Judah, deported the king and enthroned his brother, actions possible only to one who had gained control over the land. He must therefore have prevailed over the Assyrians, either in battle or at the conference table. But about four years after Egypt's victory over Assyria, Nebuchadnezzar, leading the Babylonian army, utterly routed a powerful Egyptian force at Carchemish on the river Euphrates (Jer. 46. 1-12) so establishing his supremacy over the land of Israel as well as Egypt and Assyria (2 Kin. 24. 7).

Inevitably this ebb and flow of empires strongly influenced internal conditions in Judah, as witness the contrast between Hezekiah's

day and Josiah's. Although early in Hezekiah's reign he carried out a purge in Ephraim and Manasseh (2 Chron. 30. 1), in his sixth year the Assyrians occupied Samaria, invested most of the cities of Judah (2 Chron. 32. 1) and confined Hezekiah and his people within the walls of Jerusalem. Before long the enemy were at the very gates of the city (2 Kin. 18. 17) demanding surrender and uttering blasphemies against the God of Israel. This was in fact the turning point in the fortunes of the Assyrian empire. Hezekiah prayed and God drove Sennacherib and his army back to their land. From that time the Assyrian influence waned so that, when Josiah came to the throne, foreign forces no longer controlled the land, making it possible to travel without restriction throughout the former territories of Israel, so enabling him personally to visit all the cities of Samaria in his task of destroying all signs of idol-worship in the land.

The most serious result of alien influence was the adoption by some of the kings of Judah of foreign deities (2 Chron. 28. 3, 23; 33. 22). It may have been politically expedient to do so, but the experience of both Hezekiah and Josiah was that, in view of the sovereign power of their God over the mighty nations, trusting Him they could dwell in safety, in spite of menacing armies and the calculations of political advisers. Hezekiah said, "With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God" (2 Chron. 32. 8).

*L. B.*

## EGYPT—INFLUENCES ON ISRAEL DURING PROPHETIC PERIOD

In examining Israel's historical background the striking phenomenon is the rise, fall and disappearance of several great world empires—Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Greece and Rome, and withal the survival of the Jews, not, it is true as a complete nation but as a distinct racial unity living through the vicissitudes of exile, subjection, persecution and independence. At the end of it all, though crushed and scattered, they remained virile and indestructible. There is no doubt however that a major impact on the life of the nation of Israel over its past history was that of the enduring menace of the Egyptian regime.

The prophets that form the basis of our current study lived between the years 850-550 B. C. approximately. Listed below are some of

**the major historical events recorded in the Scriptures relating to Egypt's activities against the people of God.**

*Approx.*

<i>date</i>	<i>B.</i>	<i>C.</i>	<i>Event</i>	<i>Reference</i>
930	Shishak	invades	Judaea and takes the treasures of Jerusalem.	1 Kin. 14. 25 2 Chron. 12. 2-9
916	Invasion of Judah	by Zerah	the Ethiopian.	2 Chron. 14. 9-15 2 Chron. 16. 8
722	Alliance with Hoshea	king of Israel.		2 Kin. 17. 4
610	Pharaoh-neco's war with Israel—Death of Josiah.			2 Chron. 35. 20-27
605	Pharaoh-neco	defeated by Nebuchadnezzar		Jer. 46. 1-2 Ezek. 29. 19, 20 Ezek. 32. 31
581	Nebuchadnezzar	deposes Pharaoh Hophra.		Jer. 44 30 Ezek. 31. 18

Mizraim (son of Ham) was colonized by the descendants of Ham, but the first recorded point of contact between Egypt and Israel is that in Genesis 12. 10 "And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was sore in the land". Of the spiritual consequences of this move there can be no mistake, and the influences resulting from such association form the fundamental pattern in the disastrous effects upon Israel throughout these vital years of prophetic history.

One of the most traumatic experiences of the Israelites in all their history was their stay in Egypt resulting from Joseph's rise to power and from Jacob going to live in Goshen. 1 Kings 6. 1 indicates that the building of the temple in the fourth year of Solomon's reign took place 480 years after the exodus.

Such references as Joel 3. 19, Micah 6. 4, 7. 25 clearly indicate the significance of the exodus and God's calling of a nation for His own possession out of a land where culture and worldly ambitions had so forcibly made their imprint on the lives of His people. A continual reminder of God's redemptive work—"Remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee thence" (Deut. 24. 18)—should have had the salutary effect of humbling their minds; and the prophets were undaunted in their efforts to achieve this end. Paul's words to the Corinthians have a

solemn meaning to us; "For ye were bought with a price; glorify God therefore in your body" (1 Cor. 6. 20).

The period of the Judges and the early part of the Israel monarchy provide no mention of Egypt. With the accession of Solomon, however, a period of alliance was re-established. 1 Kings 3. 1 indicates that "Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh's daughter, and brought her into the city of David". The wedding gift that the king of Egypt gave to his daughter is of considerable importance—"Gezer... for a portion unto his daughter, Solomon's wife" (1 Kin. 9. 16). Gezer was one of the towns from which the Israelites had never succeeded in dislodging the Canaanites (Judg. 1. 29), and after Solomon's death, the Egyptians, having secured this flank in the wasted plain, invaded Judah through Shishak, the first Egyptian ruler of the Libyan 22nd Dynasty (2 Chr. 12. 2).

The extravagances and excesses of Egypt began to find their place in the lives of the leading classes of Israel. Throughout the history of the divided monarchy there is abundant evidence as to the level of this prosperity. Contemporary prophets, such as Amos and Isaiah, spoke gravely of this menace to Israel's spiritual welfare as in Isaiah 5. 11, 12 and Amos 6. 1-8.

Apart from the Rechabites and Nazirites the people became oblivious to the perils in which the nation stood and the prophets felt they must exercise the profoundest influence in seeking to draw them back to God and the divine principles which underlay the Covenant. Through faith their critical faculties were unimpaired and undimmed by the existing evils of their generation. The God of Israel demanded fair and righteous dealings amongst His people, and that which was morally evil to the prophets could not possibly be pleasing to Him. Isaiah's utterances to the people on the subject of Egyptian alliance are vigorous and contemptuous. In Isaiah 19. 1 a pronouncement of doom is made against Egypt, and in chapter 30 Egypt is again bitterly denounced. Trust in Egypt would be the shame and reproach of Judah. Compare also with this the words of Rabshakeh in 2 Kings 18. 21 "Thou trustest upon the staff of this bruised reed, even upon Egypt; whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it". Again in Isaiah 31. 1-3 there is a further denunciation of the pro-Egyptian policy. To the prophet, God was holy and His people must be holy. To secure this end it was needful to be separate from the other nations. Egypt in

particular was a nation that stood in contrast and opposition to all that was for God—flesh as opposed to spirit—and Judah must not be allowed to be contaminated by close association with Egypt. Isaiah's call must find a place in our hearts, for wholehearted consecration to God is the paramount demand upon us.

Egypt's influence on Israel during the time of the prophets reached its climax when in 605 B. C. the battle of Carchemish saw the defeat of Pharaoh-neco by Nebuchadnezzar, Jeremiah perhaps the noblest prophet of all, realised the significance of the battle, and his account of the overthrow is both lucid and vivid. He saw that this defeat would put an end to Egypt's hopes of further world dominance (Jer. 46. 3-12). Then followed the invasion of Israel by the Chaldean army under the direction of Nebuchadnezzar, the destruction of Jerusalem and the subsequent placing of Zedekiah on the throne. Zedekiah was essentially a weak man and few words in the Old Testament carry a deeper pathos than his reply to the princes who demanded that Jeremiah should be put to death. "The king is not he that can do anything against you" (Jer. 38. 5).

From Jeremiah's account there appears to have been two sectional interests in Israel, pro-Babylonian and pro-Egyptian. With the rise of Hophra in Egypt support was given to a further invasion, but the Egyptians were decisively beaten (Jer. 44. 30). To the survivors the position was desperate, and led by Johanon they determined to make their way to Egypt although they consulted Jeremiah (chapter 42), who, after seeking God's face for ten days, forbade them to go. They disregarded Jeremiah's word and took him with them despite his strong protests (2 Kin. 25. 26). This was the break up of the Israelite nation as a political entity as is clearly indicated in Jeremiah 44. 26-28.

From the perusal of the Scriptural record, without controversy or exception, the effect of Egyptian influence was harmful to God's ancient people. Egypt is a clear type of the world. Its land was near to the land of God's choice. Let us not lose the spiritual import both in our personal lives and in collective testimony as the Israel of God. "Love not the world" (1 John 2. 15-17). *L. H. Taylor*

#### PROPHETIC ASPECTS OF EGYPT'S DESTINY

Egypt, an advanced civilisation when Abraham came out of Ur of the Chaldees, is spoken of in Scripture from Genesis to Revelation

and, apart from Israel, is referred to in the divine record more than any other nation. Perhaps the first and last references to Egypt epitomise the contrast of the spiritual and the natural, for Abraham "went down into Egypt" (Gen. 12. 10); and the ultimate sin of Israel in the rejection of Messiah provoked the divine reproach against "the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified" (Rev. 11. 8). Immediately adjacent to the Holy Land, Egypt's fortunes have run parallel with those of Israel for the four thousand years or more of Jewish history, prior to which Egypt had produced some of the world's structural masterpieces in its pyramids and mighty temples. But Egypt, type of the world, was earth-bound, and though eventually in the divine purpose to be linked with Israel, was to be a snare to God's people down through the ages.

### *Egypt's History*

Before outlining the fulfilment of the prophecies, especially of Isaiah and Ezekiel concerning Egypt, it is necessary briefly to review its history. Recorded secular history commences with the ancient Egyptians, though there is considerable divergence in the dating of the thirty-one dynasties which ended with Cleopatra and the assimilation of Egypt into the Roman Empire in 31 B. C. Its first inhabitants, after the Flood, were descendants of Ham (see Psalm 105. 23, 27 and 106. 22) and in the Old Testament the common name for Egypt is "Mizraim" or "the land of Mizraim" (Gen. 10. 6). About 800 years before Abraham visited Egypt, Menes, Egypt's first king, founded the first dynasty, and united the two kingdoms of Upper and Lower Egypt, the 750 mile tract of land, irrigated by the Nile, from 10 to 30 miles down to the Mediterranean Sea and including the Delta. It was a land which was "watered with thy foot" in contrast to Israel which drank "water of the rain of heaven" (Deut 11. 10, 11). Egypt was a veritable "gift of the Nile" and with its brilliant leadership became the first great civilisation and "the granary of the world".

Memphis (Noph) first, then Thebes (No-Amon), became the capitals, the former, in the Upper Kingdom, being taken by Hyksos (shepherd kings of Semitic origin) who established their dynasty at about the time that Abraham was leaving Ur. Into this period of Egypt's history moved Joseph and Moses, the exodus of Israel taking

place about 1500 B. C. The God who brought Abraham from serving other gods "beyond the River" (Euphrates—Josh. 24. 2, 3) now delivered his descendants from the bondage of Pharaoh and from the idolatry of Egypt (with the "calf-worship" of Memphis) by way of the Red Sea.

### *Fulfilled Prophecy Concerning Egypt*

"These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" was, alas, indicative of the recurrent sin of God's people, against whom His wrath waxed hot, so that He would have consumed them (Ex. 32. 1-10). But Egypt, of whom "in that day" God shall say "Blessed be Egypt My people" (Isa. 19. 25), was yet to know His righteous anger poured out on her cities and land. Isaiah prophesied against the princes of Noph (Memphis) who "caused Egypt to go astray" (19. 13), a refrain taken up by Jeremiah (46. 25), by Ezekiel (30. 16) and by Nahum (3. 8-10). Of the fulfilment of these prophecies John Urquhart wrote, a hundred years ago, "In no land have the prophecies of the Old Testament received a more striking fulfilment than in this [Egypt]. In the misery of its people and the ruin of its cities it bears overwhelming, though involuntary, testimony to the claims of Scripture". A visitor to the ruins of Thebes in B. C. 50 wrote, "The sun had never seen so magnificent a city" and still today the stupendous ruins of Luxor and Karnak excite the same feelings of admiration and amazement. But there was to be no extinction of the kingdom or its people, though it should be "a base kingdom" (Ezek. 29. 14); there should nevertheless be "no more a prince out of the land of Egypt" (Ezek. 30. 13). From that time to the present day there has been no native ruling prince! Today the majority of the people as well as their rulers are Arabs, i. e. Semitic in origin, only a minority of the original Mizraites, the Copts, remaining. And what of the "rivers" and "canals" of Egypt of which both Isaiah (19. 5-8) and Ezekiel (30. 12) prophesied? The country's prosperity required that a third of its revenue should be expended on the maintenance of its canals, especially in the Delta area, but Herodotus records that in his day (500 B. C. ) two only of the seven branches of the Delta remained open and it has yet to be seen what, in the long-term, will be the resultant effect on Egypt's economy of the vast schemes of dam construction and particularly of the closure of the Suez Canal.

*Egypt's Destiny*

The divine record of Egypt's glory and subsequent decay has been fulfilled to the letter, but still it remains "a base kingdom" (Ezek. 29. 14). Isaiah wrote of a day when there should be a "highway out of Egypt to Assyria" and the Lord would bless them saying "Blessed be Egypt My people and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel Mine inheritance" (19. 23-25). Interest in developments in Western Europe, following the Treaty of Rome (1958) may have tended some students of prophecy to the view that the existing group of six nations in the European Federation were indeed six of the ten nations eventually to constitute the resuscitated Roman Empire of Daniel's prophecy. The territorial limits of this Empire we do not know, but we suggest that Egypt may be one of the kingdoms of the eastern part of the Ten Kingdom Confederacy. That the present regime in Egypt is shifting from its Communist alliance is certainly of interest, together with the evident desire to reach some sort of agreement with Israel over the alignment of territories taken over in 1967 in the Six Day War. We see in our day and generation accelerating world movements which presage for us the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ; but, sadly also for the world, the emergence of Antichrist to rule over this great Ten Kingdom Confederacy.

A. Chamings

## STUDIES IN SEVEN MINOR PROPHETS

*DESOLATIONS ON ISRAEL AND HER OPPRESSORS*

## ZEPHANIAH 1 AND 2

*From Derby.* —All our knowledge of this prophet is derived from the introduction (verse 1) which informs us that he prophesied during the reign of king Josiah, and records his ancestry through four generations, from Cushi to Hezekiah (not the king, there are four Hezekiahs) [Comment 1]. Though king Josiah effected a partial reformation in Judah (see 2 Kin. 22. 15-17), the searching words of Zephaniah and Jeremiah confirm that in general the people only refrained from idolatry through fear of zealous king Josiah's threat of the death penalty on all who continued it in any of its forms. There was probably little true-repentance and turning to God (Jer. 3. 6-11).

Both Zephaniah and Jeremiah prophesied in Josiah's reign, their ministries probably overlapping, and then Jeremiah continued to plead **and** to warn God's people faithfully until the end, until there was no remedy but judgement (see 2 Chron. 36. 16).

The statements in the opening verses of chapter 1 become progressively more particular until verse 4, which singles out Judah and Jerusalem. The work of king Josiah commences here, and would cover also verses 5 and 6. These verses also have their application after Josiah's death, for "the LORD turned not from the fierceness of His great wrath—and the LORD said, I will remove Judah also out of My sight, as I have removed Israel, and I will cast off this city which I have chosen, even Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there" (2 Kin. 23. 26, 27).

The words of verses 2-6 describe that devastation the purpose of which was "to fulfill the words of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths—to fulfil threescore and ten years" (2 Chron. 36. 21). God had the power to fulfil His word. The statement in verse 4, "I will stretch out Mine hand upon Judah and . . . Jerusalem", then the prophecy of verses 7 and 8 are in accord with what king Josiah had been doing as brought before us in 2 Kin. 23. In verse 7, "The day of the LORD is at hand" reminded us of our study of the prophecy of Joel, where we saw that in the main this expression refers to a day yet future. We thought, however, and the context itself would show this, that these words in Zephaniah are in their reference limited to Judah and Jerusalem only; notice for instance the expressions "the ground" and "in the land" [Comment 2].

In Zephaniah 1. 9-2. 8 the prophet *is* still addressing the people of God, and he reminds them that "neither their silver nor gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD's wrath". Equally forcible today *is* the verse "Knowing that ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold . . . but with precious blood . . . even the blood of Christ" (1 Pet. 1. 18, 19).

In 2. 1, "Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together" may possibly have reference to the days of solemn assembly. Concerning 2. 3, "Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought His judgement . . . it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD's anger", it is worthy of note that Zephaniah means

"Jah is darkness" or "Jah will cover". God will be able to hide His trusting ones.

In 2. 4-7, the Lord decrees that His fierce judgement shall fall upon the Philistines who were Israel's enemies from the days of their first king, with whom Saul had so much trouble. The four cities of the Philistines were destroyed by the Assyrians. Moab and Ammon, Ethiopia and Assyria (2. 8-15) all in turn tried to capture the Holy City, but were not allowed by the Lord to do so. This was reserved for their conquerors the Chaldeans. The Assyrian was, however, used as the "rod of Mine anger" (Isa. 10. 5-15).

It is noticeable that Syria is not mentioned in Zephaniah, for although that nation made several attempts to war against Samaria, they were not allowed to take that city. Even king Ahab was granted the victory over Ben-hadad and his army. But Syria is not forgotten by the Lord in the day of divine reckoning (Isa. 17; Amos I. 3, 4) [Comment 3].

A. Smith, S. R. W.

*From Edinburgh.* —Zephaniah's name means "Jehovah has guarded or hidden". He prophesied around the year 627 B. C.

Outline of study: -

1. a. Judgement declared 1. 1-6.
- b. Judgement defined 1. 7-75.
- c. Judgement described 1. 14-18.
- d. Judgement may yet be avoided 2. 1-3.
2. a. Philistia 2. 4-7.
- b. Moab and Ammon 2. 8-11.
- c. Ethiopia 2. 12.
- d. Assyria 2. 13-15.

Zephaniah's prophecy contained both warnings and promises.

During the long reign of Manasseh (696-642 B. C. ), the evil son of good king Hezekiah, the moral and religious state of Judah had sadly deteriorated (2 Chr. 33. 1-11).

Zephaniah was the first prophet for two generations. Probably seventy years had passed since the voices of Isaiah and Micah had been heard. It is evident that Zephaniah was an inhabitant of Jerusalem both from the reference in 1. 4 to "this place", and from his knowledge of the area (verses 10 to 12). In the city he observes a populace bent on living by force and fraud among themselves, and idolatrous and sceptical towards God. His early prophecies are, on that account, almost unrelieved gloom, but while Zephaniah fore-

told the judgements upon Judah, he foresaw these as a necessary prelude to Judah's becoming the blessed of the Lord and His hand-  
maiden to die whole world.

*David B. Renfrew*

*From Glasgow (Parkhead).* —Zephaniah's name means "Hidden of Jehovah". It may be he had this before him as he wrote (2. 3). He seemed to be linked with Hezekiah, perhaps a great-grandson. He worked in conjunction with Josiah, and prophesied against idolatry, so that Josiah caused it to cease (1. 4, 5). The key to the prophecy is the repeated phrase "The day of the LORD", mentioned 7 times. Being like other prophetic books, Zephaniah contains stern denunciations and dire threatenings to Israel on account of their sin. The Lord wanted their wholehearted devotion and service, but if they continued in their sins he would visit them in judgement. The prophecy was fulfilled during the reign of Josiah, but it also points forward to the time of the end. "I, the LORD Thy God am a jealous God".

*R. Shaw*

*From Birkenhead.* —The theme of the prophecy is "The day of the LORD". The message was given during the reign of Josiah in the latter part of the 7th century B. C. Much background detail of this period is available in 2 Kin 21-23. It is clear that Josiah's reign commenced at a period when Judah was at a low ebb following the 57 years of evil deeds of Manasseh and Amon. It would appear that Josiah's efforts to correct the sins of the people followed upon this prophecy, yet in spite of this the Lord pronounced that He would not turn "from the fierceness of His great wrath wherewith His anger was kindled against Judah because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked Him withal" (2 Kin. 23. 26).

In such circumstances Zephaniah indicated that the day of the Lord was imminent (1. 7, 14), and also something of its character (1. 15-18). In 1. 8, 9, 12 people are told clearly of the reasons for the coming judgement: some were "clothed in foreign apparel", there was "violence and deceit", there were those who had "settled on their lees" who were careless and complacent (Jer. 48. 11).

Before the prophet turns to pronounce the fate of the heathen he utters a brief oracle against Judah (2. 1-3), and indicates that for those who seek the Lord, it may be they will be hid in the day of the Lord's anger. The judgements on the surrounding nations are then outlined. Firstly there are the Philistines in the west (2. 4-7),

and their cities are mentioned: **Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod and Ekron. To the east are the Moabites and Ammonites (2. 8-II) who showed arrogance and pride towards God's people. Their fate is to be as Sodom and Gomorrah, "a perpetual desolation". Ethiopia in the south and Assyria in the north will also be overthrown. As regards the latter, this passage augments Nahum's prophecy.**

**Thus we see the overthrow of mighty nations, the punishment of God's unfaithful people, and the preservation of a remnant. All this will be accomplished when the day of the Lord comes.**

*R. D. Williams*

### ***IMPRESSIONS FROM OTHER CONTRIBUTORS***

**Papers were also received from Aberkenfig and Barry, Atherton and Leigh, and Vancouver, and the following are impressions from these.**

**Besides the thorough-going idolators (1. 4, 5) and the superstitious who worshipped Jehovah as well as heathen gods (1. 5), the Judah of Zephaniah's time contained a nucleus of potential atheists: "Them that are turned back from following the LORD; and those who have not sought the LORD, nor inquired after Him" (1. 6). In Micah's time it was customary to say, "Is not the LORD in the midst of us? no evil shall come upon us" (Mic. 3. II). By Zephaniah's time this had become: "The LORD will not do good, neither will He do evil" (1. 12). The indulgent God had become the indifferent God; the next step would be no God. Such flippant attitudes, not uncommon today, are surely incompatible with genuine belief even in the existence of the Almighty.**

**The day of the Lord was understood by the people of Zephaniah's day to be the time when God would intervene to place Israel at the head of the nations. The figure in 1. 7 is of a feast to which the Lord has invited guests. These guests would be those who are going to be used by the Lord to punish the disobedient. They will benefit from the Lord's judgement as those who come up to do His will, and carry away the spoil. Judgement fell upon Judah when Nebuchadnezzar came with his army, and he was allowed by the Lord to bring desolation upon His people because of their sin. A similar figure is used in Rev. 19. 17 at the end of the great tribulation when God invites the birds to gather to the great supper where they will feast on the flesh of kings and captains. These will be the ones**

who come against the Lord's people and who will be destroyed by the sword which cometh forth out of His mouth. The reference to apparel in 1. 8 might suggest comparison with the wedding feast and uninvited guest of Matt. 22.

God begins His condemnation of men with His own people, since they have the least reason for turning their back on Him. God, however, did not forget the unbelieving nations and widened out His judgement to the nations who had persecuted His people (2. 3). It was noted that the fowls of the heaven and the fishes of the sea would suffer as a result of man's wickedness (1. 3). The lower creation has often suffered as a result of sin on the part of man, who was placed at the head. In Eden when man fell, the beasts of the earth also shared in the results of man's error, and in the time of the Flood, not only was man destroyed, but, apart from the creatures in the ark, every living thing on dry land perished. If this seems hard to us, we may rely on God to exercise "lovingkindness, judgement and righteousness, in the earth" (Jer. 9. 24).

It is clear from Zephaniah 2 that the period of the rise of Babylonian supremacy was one of intensive divine judgement on the eastern nations, many of whom lost their independent and distinctive identities in the great and ruthless Gentile empires which God brought successively to power to further His purposes. *Eds.*

#### COMMENTS

1. (*Derby*): We can safely say that there were four Hezekiah\* only if the Hezekiah of Zeph. 1. 1 was not the king, but that is not at all certain, in fact the little evidence there is points the other way. Consider the following: -

(a) Zephaniah was almost certainly an inhabitant of Jerusalem and belonged to the tribe of Judah, as did Hezekiah the king.

(b) It was chronologically possible for Zephaniah to be the great-great-grandson of king Hezekiah.

(c) Hezekiah's name is mentioned in Zeph. 1. 1 without any identification but followed by the name of Josiah the king. Some would consider this to suggest a connection, particularly as both kings were zealous for the house of God.

2. (*Derby*): The immediate purpose of Zephaniah's prophecy was certainly to warn the people of Judah of imminent judgement. Some of our contributors however consider that the future day is also in view. The argument that Zephaniah views the day of the Lord

only in relation to Judah and Jerusalem, does not exclude a future application, for the day of the Lord as depicted in many prophetic scriptures concerns God's people distinctively (e. g. Joel 1. 14, 15; 2. 1). There are of course other scriptures in which the thought is extended to embrace the judgement of Gentile nations (e. g. Isaiah 13).

3. (*Derby*): In Zephaniah's day there was no nation of Syria in existence, for her people had been deported by Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria. That is an adequate explanation for the absence of any reference to Syria in the book of Zephaniah. The fact that both Isaiah and Amos prophesy her downfall is similarly explained. They prophesied over 80 years before Zephaniah and prior to Syria's destruction.

4. (*Vancouver*) (extract): "It seems difficult to link the awful prophecies of Zephaniah and Jeremiah with the rule of Josiah, until we read about Josiah's later life and how he declined and lost contact with the Lord, The events leading up to his death show he had to be told by a pagan king what the Lord's will was. So the last ten years or so of Josiah's reign would have culminated in the need for Zephaniah's prophecy of doom".

This proposition is an unusual one and is not supported by other contributors, who have shown how the prophecy fits in well with the earlier years of Josiah's reign before idol-worship had been completely eliminated. We should distinguish, as Scripture does, between good king Josiah and treacherous Judah (Jer. 3. 6-9; 2 Kin. 22. 16-20), for Josiah's heart was right but the people's repentance was, in the main, only superficial.

Zephaniah has no word for the king but speaks to the princes, the king's sons, the inhabitants of Jerusalem and such like, so that nothing can be deduced from the prophecy as to the character of the closing days of Josiah. His error was indeed serious and may indicate a measure of spiritual pride but Jeremiah's lamentation of the king's death, and the testimony of the sacred record (2 Chron. 35. 24-26) hardly supports our friends' assessment of Josiah's character.

L. B.

#### QUESTION AND ANSWER

*From Edinburgh:* Is there a future application relating to Judah in this judgement, or has it been completely fulfilled?

With the possible exception of 1. 3, it is difficult to find a prophecy in chapter 1 which could not be applied to the events from Zephaniah's day to the carrying away to Babylon. The scorched earth policy and the inhuman atrocities inflicted by the Chaldeans are in complete accord with the prophet's description of the day of the Lord. Nevertheless, a future application is not excluded by a past application however apt [see Comment 2].

L. B.

## THE BOOK OF JOB

*What is its chronological place in the sequence of the Scriptures?*

Job is an historical person, attested to by God through the prophet Ezekiel (14. 14, 20) where he is linked with Noah, a man who lived about 1, 500 years before Ezekiel, and with Daniel, a man contemporary with Ezekiel. The book of Job has been widely placed in time by commentators. It may not be possible to determine when the book was written but we can estimate approximately when Job lived and flourished. Since the book tells of his death we may assume that it was written after that event. We cannot tell whether it had a Jewish or Gentile author nor how it came into Jewish hands and was recognised as part of the canon of Scripture. Sufficient to say that it is divinely inspired and God has watched over it. In it is revealed the end or purpose of the Lord, spoken of by James as he referred his readers to the patience of Job.

Of the period in which Job lived, estimates have varied by as much as one thousand years. Some hold that he lived before Abraham, and would place him about the twelfth chapter of Genesis. Others place him in or after the captivity in Babylon. In view of the reference in Ezekiel it is obvious that Job did not live during or after the captivity. Because of the reference to Ophir some have thought that he lived during or after Solomon's time, but there is nothing to support the implication that Ophir was unknown for its gold before Solomon's day. Ophir (the man) was a great-great-great-grandson of Shem, and was born about 150 years after the Flood. So the region settled by Ophir may well have been producing gold 150 years before Abraham.

Four points are selected from the book itself to identify the time of Job's existence. These are Job's character, his length of life, the ancestry of one of his friends and the religious practices of his day.

Of his character God said: "There is none like him in the earth" (1. 8). So he is a man that stood out above others at some point of time, and is unlikely to have been a contemporary of Abraham, Isaac or Jacob, Moses, Joshua or Daniel. He probably lived when there was no man of like spiritual stature in Israel.

Job lived one hundred and forty years "after this" (42. 16), and since he had been old enough to form an opinion of the fathers of the men of his own day (30. 1) we may safely assume that he lived for some two hundred years or more. If we assume that his years were doubled after the manner of his possessions then possibly he lived 240 years (twice the 120 years in Genesis 6. 3). However, his age suggests that he may have lived in the patriarchal era rather than any period after Moses and Joshua, remembering that the divine decree in Moses' time was threescore years and ten" (Psalm 90. 10).

Eliphaz was one of Job's friends and he is described as a Temanite (2. 11). Teman was a great-great-grandson of Abraham through Esau. It was in Abraham's grandson's time (Jacob) that the twelve sons of Israel went down into Egypt. These considerations point to the likelihood that Job lived during the dark days of Israel's bondage. He probably did not live before or during the days of Abraham.

Finally, although Job refers to priests (12. 19) we are not to assume that these are the Levitical priests. Job himself offered sacrifices on behalf of others, his children (1. 5) and his friends (42. 8), a practice which would not have been blessed with divine favour if the Levitical priesthood had come into existence.

We suggest therefore that Job lived in the middle and later part of the bondage in Egypt. These were days when Israel was far from God. They clung to the idols of Egypt and the abominations of their eyes which almost prevented their deliverance at all out of their bondage (Ezek. 20. 5-11). Perhaps while they engaged in their idolatry, a Gentile was saying: "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand up at the last upon earth... Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another" (Job. 19. 25-27). Blessed Job! *Geo. K. Kennedy*

# BIBLE STUDIES

*'A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God (Acts 17. 11).'*

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## EDITORIAL

As we conclude this month our brief study of the short prophecy of Zephaniah we may well pause to consider the pattern and timing of divine introduction of these various prophets to God's people. The sustained and powerful prophecy of Jeremiah commenced close to the time of Zephaniah's oracle, and there is wide acceptance of the co-incidence of the latter with the early years of Josiah. Habakkuk and Obadiah are the other two "minor" prophets whose writings we are presently studying and whose ministry was also in the closing half-century or so of Judah's independent history. Each has his own Spirit-given blend of divine warning and promise of ultimate deliverance and grace. While we can, and wisely do, attempt to relate these individual prophecies to contemporary events and personalities, it seems probable that many of the subtleties of these aspects are lost on us as compared with the discerning Israelites of the days when they were written. The quite widely differing opinions on the precise dates of these prophets would suggest this in itself. Then again there is the arresting possibility that, in some instances, the Lord was directing His challenging message primarily to an individual, a situation which seems not at all unlikely in the case of Zephaniah. Indeed it is advanced by many that Josiah's reforms in Judah were a direct response to the words of Zephaniah. Yet the words of Rom. 11. 33 come to mind, "... how unsearchable are His judgements and His ways past tracing out!" For although the temporary spiritual revival of Josiah's day must have greatly pleased the Lord, yet Zephaniah's appeal (2. 1-3) to the meek, both of Israel and of the nations, is in the context of an inevitability of divine judgement (2 Kin. 23. 26) with only a remnant envisaged to form a nucleus of a future national restoration and blessing. In return for his godly response Josiah found grace himself (2 Chr. 34. 26-28) but judgement could not be deflected from the nation.

There is a striking contrast in Zephaniah between the fierceness of God's projected judgement, especially on the various classes of leaders, and the touching tenderness of the closing millennial picture. The Lord's jealousy for His people and land are referred to in the strongest terms, first in relation to Judah and Jerusalem (1. 18), and then in the wider context of the nations (3. 8). Yet the restoration depicted in the closing verses of chapter 3 is not one which emphasizes the glory and majesty of the millennial kingdom. Rather does it almost exclusively concentrate upon the tenderness and intimacy of the Lord's purified relationship with His people. It is, in fact, exactly the spirit of the "beatitudes" (Matt. 5. 1-12) which is portrayed, a point indicated by several contributors this month. It is this Eden scene of unimpaired mutual joy and peace which illumines the concept of "jealousy" as applied to God; a sentiment which expresses most tenderly the fierceness of His longing for sweet unbroken communion with His own. Josiah's passover (2 Kin. 23. 22) must have brought a happy foretaste of this.

As we contemplate "thy God in the midst of thee, a mighty One who will save", our thoughts also turn with solemn joy to the source of all ultimate restoration: "... where they crucified Him... Jesus in the midst" (John 19. 18). J. D. T.

## JOSIAH OF JUDAH

Josiah was only eight years old when he became king of Judah. It was a responsible position for one so young and many may have wondered how the boy king would develop. To any in Judah who were God-fearing the accession of so young a king may have brought hope, while to others, bent on retaining evil ways, the possibility of change would not be welcome. Josiah would be at the centre of many varying influences brought to bear by those who were trying to mould him into the cast of their own thoughts.

The first eight years of Josiah's reign were formative years. Humanly speaking there was little to encourage him to seek the right ways. The land was full of idols and the worship of the Baalim had been established. The heavenly bodies were worshipped (Zeph. 1. 5). The lives of Josiah's father and grandfather had been evil in the sight of the Lord (2 Chr. 33. 22) and set no example for the young monarch. Yet, in the eighth year of his reign when he was sixteen years of age and "yet young" he began to seek after the

**God of David his father. What a splendid picture of determination and hope! A youth indeed, but passing into the full strength of manhood, determined in his heart to seek after the God of heaven in spite of all the surrounding distractions and adverse circumstances.**

**Herein lies a lesson for young people today. Josiah's was a positive decision. Discipleship is sometimes thought to be negative only in character, but this is not so. In Rom. 12. 2 we are told to be "not fashioned according to this world... ", but we are also exhorted "be ye transformed". While there is a casting off of the things which belong not to God there is also the embracing of that which is of Him. This is the positive aspect, and both experiences should be ours.**

**What influenced Josiah in his early life to make such a decision? God is ever good to men and we cannot doubt He would give the young king ample opportunity to learn the right ways and seek after Him. The very use of the phrase "... the God of David his father" (2 Chr. 34. 5) suggests one influence. The exploits of David his ancestor prove that seeking after God brings blessing. Many of his experiences stood in marked contrast to those of the wicked kings Manasseh and Amon. They had failed to walk in the ways of God and their acts had brought Judah into degradation and were also to bring the kingdom to judgement.**

**Positive determination led to positive action which was progressive in character. Discipleship is not only positive; it should be progressive. It was not sufficient for Josiah to know of the evil of the high places and to ignore it. He must take action to destroy them and remove the worship of the Baalim. The land must be purged. Here was scope for vigorous action and at about twenty years of age Josiah set about the task. It was not going to be easy. It would certainly make him unpopular in many places, but it must be done. Ease and popularity are seldom the experiences of true disciples.**

**At some time during the reign of this young king the word of the Lord came to Zephaniah (1. 1). The precise time of the commencement of his ministry is not known, but certainly it was against this general background of false worship and of a kingdom which had forsaken the true God. But the king was young and had an open ear. How the searching word of Zephaniah's message must have reached him with power and made him more determined to seek after God and do away with that which was evil in His sight!**

**The** denunciation of idol priests and worshippers was clear and **strong**. **The great** day of the Lord was at hand and all things **were to be consumed** from off the land. The complacent were to be searched out and punished; it was to be a day of wrath, trouble and distress (Zeph. 1).

In Josiah's thirteenth year as king the word of the Lord also came to the great prophet Jeremiah. His was the unpopular but serious task of proclaiming, year after year, the judgement of God upon disobedient Judah and also upon the heathen kingdoms. Although in the historical accounts of Josiah's reign we do not hear of Jeremiah until the death of the king (2 Chr. 35. 25), it may well be that the burden of the prophet had a significant influence upon the young man on the throne.

So with God's message in his mind and heart, Josiah's purging work went forward, until with altars, idols and groves broken down and graven images beaten into powder, he returned to Jerusalem. The destruction of the wrong was followed by the building of the right. Restoration must follow the cleansing. This constructive work needed money which the people contributed. Stone, timber and the skills to use these commodities were all required and each had its place and purpose. But these were entrusted into the hands of those who had the oversight of the house of the Lord and in full fellowship with them the work proceeded (2 Chr. 34. 10). This is a valuable lesson for us today. It is not a question of service being done in an independent way, regardless of those who have the responsibility of overseeing the work, but service should be rendered to the Lord in full fellowship with them.

While this work was proceeding there occurred an event of great significance. Hilkiyah the priest found the book of the law of the Lord in the house of the Lord. It is not to be wondered at that the word of God was found in the house of God. This is the place in which it should be found and where expression should be given to it. It is sad that the book of the law had become so neglected as to become lost. It will be a tragic day if the word of God *is* lost sight of in the house of God of the present dispensation and the opinions of men substituted for the divine instruction. The news of the discovery was brought to Josiah; and we do well to learn from his resulting attitude. He wept (2 Chr. 34. 27). But this was no show of empty emotion, no sudden demonstration to

impress the onlooker. It was a manifestation of a deep and real heart-working. The inspired record is that he humbled himself before God and had a tender heart (2 Chr. 34. 27). These qualities are essential if God is to use us to His glory and in His service.

The result of this exercise was again positive and progressive. Repentance for failure was followed by determination to do right and a covenant was made by the people of Judah, led by the king, to walk according to the law of the Lord (2 Chr. 34. 31). The revival that had been the result of Josiah's humility, tenderness of heart and seeking after the things of God, led to the keeping of a most wonderful Passover feast, the like of which had not been experienced in the history of the kings of Israel. It was a tremendous act of worship. The king's positive and progressive actions, in accordance with the will of God, had led to revival, which, in turn, led to a deeper appreciation and worship of God. God seeks worshippers; and humbled, subjected hearts in the house of God will know the richness of this service as a holy priesthood.

Josiah was only thirty-nine years old when he died. No doubt there was divine overruling in taking him away that he, who had humbled himself before God, should not suffer the inevitable judgment that was to fall on Judah because of sin (2 Chr. 34. 23-28). But the circumstances of Josiah's death are sad. He interfered with things that did not concern him. The Assyrian empire was now tottering to its fall and, for the moment, it may have seemed that Egypt was to take its place as the great power of the Middle East. Pharaoh Necho II seems not to have wished to interfere with the kingdom of Judah but, in spite of warnings, Josiah attempted to check the Egyptian advance. The armies met in the valley of Megiddo and Josiah was mortally wounded. He paid for his mistake with his life at the relatively early age of thirty-nine years. Alas, many children of God have ruined their spiritual lives by dabbling in matters which do not concern them. The sovereign workings of the Lord are on every hand, but from active participation in many things we are precluded. Let us learn the lesson of the closing days of Josiah, and seek to benefit from the example of the brighter days of his young life.

*R. Hickling*

#### SYRIA

Syria is the Revised Version term for Aram or the country of the Arameans, the descendants of Aram, son of Shem (Gen. 10.

22). It lies to the north-east of Israel. Besides the Arameans proper, peoples from various Semitic tribes settled in Aram, such as Terah's family in Paddan-aram. So Laban and even Jacob are referred to as Syrians or Arameans (Gen. 31. 24; Deut. 26. 5 and RVM). Damascus was well-known in Abraham's time (Gen. 14. 15, 15. 2), and later became the Syrian capital. Partly because of continual immigration, the peoples of Syria were never a fully united nation until after the Old Testament history closed. At various periods, however, local leaders attracted sufficient support to influence and make raids on the surrounding countries (e. g. Judg. 3. 8-10, RVM). In later years, several local concentrations of power developed in Syria, and with these Saul and David had to contend (1 Sam. 14. 47; 2 Sam. 8. 3-9, 10. 6-19). Towards the end of his reign Solomon had trouble with Rezon, who achieved power in Damascus (1 Kin. 11. 23-25). From then on, in the history of 1 and 2 Kings, we find Syria engaged in constant warring against Israel and Judah (1 Kin. 22. 1; 2 Kin. 6. 8) or in alliance with Israel against Judah (1 Kin. 15. 19; 2 Kin. 16. 5, 6). The last of these alliances was the memorable confederacy of Isa. 7. 2 between Rezin and Pekah. That ended, as Isaiah foretold, in the subjugation of Damascus by the Assyrians (2 Kin. 16. 9). The Syrians continued subject till the downfall of the Assyrian Empire, when they easily fell before the power of Nebuchadnezzar.

Being so close together geographically, Israel, Judah and Syria would naturally have become involved in each other's affairs. The Scriptures show however, that in God's general supervision of these nations, many of their initiatives for or against each other were prompted by Him (e. g. 1 Kin. 11. 23-25; 2 Kin. 10. 32, 13. 3, 15. 37). It is impossible for us to weigh the counsels of the Most High in such matters. The outcome of a particular battle did not always indicate God's approval of the ways of the victorious nation. And although the Lord may have used a certain nation to chastise His people, that did not give it licence to perpetrate atrocities on His people; for these they themselves would be chastised.

The Old Testament teems with references to Syria, and space forbids us to mention even all the main portions. We wish to comment on some of the prophetic statements about Syria, especially in her relations with Israel and Judah, briefly placing them in his-

**torical context, but making no claim that the statements are presented in strict chronological order.**

**1. *Unknown Prophet speaking to Ahab* (1 Kin. 20 28-42)**

**The Syrian's contempt of God as a God of the hills but not of the valleys brought swift judgement. The Lord seems to have regarded certain battles as part of a general education about Himself to the Syrians and to Israel. On this occasion the Lord was instructing them in a language they understood! Ahab did not take seriously the task of executing God's judgement on Ben-hadad, and he let Ben-hadad live when it was in his power to kill him (20. 33, 34). This bears comparison with king Saul's attitude in sparing Agag's life (1 Sam. 15. 8, 20). We learn the awesome responsibility laid on leaders under God, and the penalty exacted of them when they lead the people astray. Ahab lost his life under this prophecy from the arrow shot "at a venture" in a further battle against Ben-hadad, this time with king Jehoshaphat of Judah on Israel's side (1 Kin. 22. 34-38).**

**2. *Prophecies through Elisha***

**(a) "The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee" (2 Kin. 5. 27). Elisha's dealings with Naaman in 2 Kin. 5 may be thought of as an outreach in grace to Syria. Elisha fervently strove to impress on Naaman that God alone could and did cure him, and Gehazi's action in asking gifts of Naaman threatened to cloud Elisha's clear witness; hence this prophecy. However an unmistakable beam shone to Syria from God's faithful servant in most unfavourable circumstances, when Israel was low spiritually and she and Syria were at loggerheads. Our Lord's words about Naaman the Syrian are pertinent (Luke 4. 27).**

**(b) 2 Kin. 6. 8-23 presents two further features through which God appealed to Syria: (i) Elisha was able to give to the king of Israel warnings about Ben-hadad's plans; (ii) kindness was shown to the captured Syrian army because of Elisha's advice. As a result, the Syrian raidings ceased, but not for long.**

**(c) "Tomorrow about this time shall a measure of fine flower be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria" (2 Kin. 7. 1). A lengthy siege by Syria had reduced Samaria, Israel's capital, to dire straits. God intervened in the remarkable events of 2 Kin. 7; the Syrian army was caused**

to hear "the noise of a great host" (verse 6) and fled in fear, leaving their camp full of provisions, as God had said through Elisha. In these events God chastened both Israel and Syria, and used them to speak to His people through the prophet. Probably there were individuals who responded, but the nation as a whole became hardened. At least in Syria Elisha was gaining respect (2 Kin. 8. 744).

(d) "Go, say unto him (Ben-hadad), Thou shalt surely recover; howbeit the LORD hath showed me that he shall surely die... thou shalt be king over Syria" (2 Kin. 8. 10, 13). Elisha wept before Hazael as he thought of all the evil and distress Hazael would bring to Israel. Hazael was a wicked man, yet God was appointing him king of Syria (see also 1 Kin. 19. 15, 17) to be the executor of His judgements on His people. This was history in the making.

(e) To Joash of Israel: - "Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice" (2 Kin. 13. 19). Joash's response to Elisha's death-bed request was half-hearted, and the prophet's final blessing on the king was only appropriate. For the fulfilment see verse 25.

### 3. *Jonah*

Jonah prophesied that Israel's border would be restored from the entering in of Hamath unto the sea of the Arabah (2 Kin. 14. 25). Hamath was many miles north of Damascus, so this prophetic statement implied the occupation of Syrian territory, which took place under Jeroboam II of Israel (2 Kin. 14. 24-28). Not since the days of David and Solomon had Damascus and Syria been subject to Israel to this extent.

### 4. *Amos*

"For three transgressions of Damascus, yea, for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron: but I will send a fire into the house of Hazael, and it shall devour the palaces of Ben-hadad. And I will break the bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitant from the valley of Aven, and him that holdeth the sceptre from the house of Eden: and the people of Syria shall go into captivity unto Kir, saith the LORD" (Amos 1. 3-5).

This prophecy seems to refer to the barbarous military enterprises of Hazael and his son Ben-hadad. 2 Kin. 10. 32, 33 records that Hazael attacked Gilead, and Elisha foretold Hazael's barbarity. Such atrocities called for decisive judgement on Syria. Not all the military campaigns against Syria are recorded in Scripture, so it may not be possible to identify in Scripture all the features of Amos's prophecy about God's judgements on Syria; but the final statement of Amos 1. 5 seems to refer to the Assyrian destruction of Damascus and the taking of its people to Kir (2 Kin. 16. 9). This prophecy was given at least twenty years before its fulfilment, probably much longer.

### 5. *Isaiah*

(a) Isaiah 7. 4-9, 1446, 8. 5-7. The armies of Israel and Syria, under kings Pekah and Rezin, were besieging Jerusalem (Isa. 7. 1; 2 Kin. 16. 5). Ahaz king of Judah was greatly perturbed, and Isaiah was sent by God to reassure him that Israel and Syria would not be allowed to gain their objective, which was to set up their own, king in place of Ahaz. Ahaz asked and paid for help from the king of Assyria against Israel and Syria (2 Kin. 16. 7-9), and received it, resulting in the very destruction of Damascus which Isaiah had foretold to Ahaz (Isa. 7. 16, 8. 6, 7). A detailed sequence of events here is difficult to determine. 2 Chr. 28. 5, 6 indicates that the Israelite and Syrian armies did much damage to the kingdom of Judah, but Jerusalem was not overcome. Even at this late hour, prior to their own destruction, the Syrians were still being used by God to bring home to Judah and Ahaz the seriousness of their idolatrous practices (2 Chr. 28. 1-6).

Isa. 7. 8 gives a further 65 years before Israel (Ephraim) would be finally broken as a nation, although Samaria was to be sacked fairly soon. The same can probably be said of Syria and Damascus. Though Damascus and other principal cities, (see Isa. 10. 9) were spoiled soon after the Isa. 7 prophecy, a residual power to raise armies was yet to be dealt with by God, as later prophecies outline.

(b) Isa. 17. 1-3. "Behold, Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap . . . "

So at last the final destruction of Damascus is foretold. Already, as Isaiah wrote, Damascus was no longer to be regarded as a city, but soon it would be a heap of rubble. That the Syrian kingdom

would cease probably means that the residue of the population allowed to remain in Syria would become subject to the occupying power, Assyria.

#### 6. *Jeremiah*

"Hamath is ashamed, and Arpad; for they have heard evil tidings, they are melted away... Damascus is waxed feeble... And I will kindle a fire in the wall of Damascus, and it shall devour the palaces of Ben-hadad" (Jer. 49. 23-27).

This possibly refers to the state of mind of, and what was done to, the Syrian populace on the advent of Nebuchadnezzar's troops to subjugate this part of the Assyrian Empire to Babylonian domination.

#### 7. *Ezekiel*

There are minor references to Syria in Ezek. 16. 57 and 27. 16-18. But the references in 47. 16-18 and 48. 1 to Damascus and other Syrian cities relate to the dividing up of the land of Israel at the beginning of the Millennium. Note the mention of Hamath, which was given as the northern extremity of the territory designated for Israelite use by God through Moses (Num. 34. 8). As Hamath was well to the north of Damascus, this implied that a large part of Syrian territory was originally included in the Promised Land. Also in God's promise to Abraham, the northern boundary of the land was given as the river Euphrates (Gen. 15. 18). As mentioned in this paper, the inclusion of much of Syria within the actual borders of Israel was only attained for brief periods, during the reigns of Solomon and Jeroboam II of Israel. Ezekiel's prophecy shows, however, that this will be a permanent feature of Israeli territory during the Millennium. D. S. Jones

### STUDIES IN SEVEN MINOR PROPHETS

#### "THE LORD IN THE MIDST—A MIGHTY ONE TO SAVE" ZEPHANIAH 3

*From Aberkenfig and Barry.* —The prophet had reproved the people for not receiving the correction which the Lord had delivered to them. Four classes of people who were responsible for the prevailing situation receive particular reproof.

1. The princes were cruel. They were likened to roaring lions tearing and devouring their prey; for they had devoured the poor who had come to them expecting help, but the princes showed no mercy.

2. **Her judges were corrupt. They were as evening wolves that prowl hungrily around. They failed to mete out justice but devoured the innocent in their greediness for gain.**

3. **Her prophets were unfaithful, they were frivolous, light, and treacherous. They obviously had no message from the Lord and could only speak of things that suited themselves and those who were likeminded, bringing neither guidance nor revelation to God's people.**

4. **Her priests were polluted, they desecrated God's sanctuary and distorted His holy law.**

The Lord, who is **just in all His ways**, appealed yet again. **He reminded them that He had cut off the surrounding nations. He had brought desolation to their cities, leaving no inhabitants. In the light of this the Lord had expected some response on the part of His own people. Surely they would believe Him and receive instruction so that they might not suffer the same fate. It apparently made no impression on this stiff-necked and rebellious people, instead they corrupted themselves more and more.**

The **prophet**, however, is not a pessimist. Beyond the impending judgement he sees a **better day. God must bring His people through the afflicting fires in order to prepare them to be a means of blessing all mankind. And so we have the words "Therefore wait ye for Me, saith the Lord". These words were probably intended for the Jews who had remained faithful to the Lord. God's people had rebelled against His commandments and God would punish their rebellion (2 Kin. 22. 16-17). However, God's justice is coupled with mercy.**

Although **no doubt there was a local setting to the prophecy yet Zephaniah speaks of greater things. He points beyond the days of the Tribulation, beyond the judgement of the great day of the Lord, to the millennial rest, when in peace and quietness Israel will dwell in the land and all nations will flow unto it (Isa. 2. 2-3). Israel will be restored, comforted and exalted. They will be the head of the nations. The poor people (verse 12) are possibly of the type to which the Lord refers in Matt. 5. 3, poor in spirit. It could however refer to what we have in 2 Kin. 25. 12.**

*D. H. Butler*

*From Methil.* —The **spiritual condition of the people of God had reached a very low ebb for God to lay on them such strong accu-**

sations. They had ceased to obey the voice of the Lord and had long since forgotten His words spoken to their forefathers when He brought them out of Egypt: "Fear the LORD thy God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments" (Deut. 6. 2). It is sad that the princes and the priests were among those who defiled themselves. Satan, even in the present day, is anxious to overcome the leaders of God's people. If the leaders are turned aside from God, what hope is there for the rest of God's people?

We felt that this portion spoke very much of coming millennial days, and particularly in respect of the "pure language" (3. 9) which appeared to indicate that in those days when all will be under God's control, there will be a return to the condition seen in Gen. 11. 1 when all the earth was of one language and one speech. What this language would be we did not venture to suggest. [see Comment 1].

God, because of the sad condition of things among His people, required to purge out from them those who were disobedient to His will and only a remnant was left. The words "in that day" (v. 11) we felt had already known a partial fulfilment, but would only be completely fulfilled in the coming millennial day. Only the remnant would be blessed of God.

*A. R. Smith*

*From Denmark Hill.* —Zephaniah's prophecy is directly aimed at the ungodly citizens of Jerusalem. 2 Kin. 22 and Zeph. 1. 1 support the suggestion that this prophecy was given and had partial fulfilment between the commencement of Josiah's reign and his eighteenth year; that is, within a period of only ten years.

In chapter 3 Zephaniah details in vigorous terms the reasons for Jerusalem's debasement: filth and pollution (v. 1), disobedience (v. 2), evil and greedy rulers (v. 3), blasphemous religious leaders (v. 4), shamelessness (v. 5) and corruption (v. 7). This state of things can be compared with the ungodly reign of Manasseh detailed in 2 Kin. 21. What would be more abhorrent to the Holy One who was in their midst? Yet the Lord promises to change the whole scene radically (3. 8-20). Surely the section 3. 8-20 refers to the glorious millennial reign of Christ; yet as with all the other minor prophecies it had a partial fulfilment immediately after it was written, for king Josiah brought about such a great revival among the people that they began keeping the passover which had not been kept since the Judges judged Israel (2 Kin. 23. 22, 23)

[see Comments 2 and 3]. **But in 3. 17 the mighty Saviour is the theme of wonder, joy and love, and v. 20 refers to the complete restoration of Israel. What Adam lost in the beginning Christ will restore completely in the end. Israel's Lord and His people will be the blessing of the whole earth.** *Mark McKaig*

*From Paisley.* —It was generally agreed that the city referred to in 3. 1 is Jerusalem, although it is depicted in very bad state. It had gone astray in its leaders who refused to listen to the voice of God and were unimpressed by His earlier dealings with Israel and the nations around. Instead of justice and judgement being carried out there was violence, treachery and oppression. Such conduct is abhorrent to God in any age and Zephaniah's warning is a voice to us in our day. The eye of God was upon the godly remnant who were enduring the burden of sorrow and reproach, and from amongst them He would remove the proudly exulting ones who were a blight in His holy mountain. The remnant, though an afflicted and poor people, would trust in the name of Jehovah.

Some discussion centred on 3. 9 regarding the turning of the people (A. V. ) to "a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD". There was thought to be a similarity here with what is expressed in Psalm 81. 5 where we read of God going out over Egypt "where I heard a language that I knew not". Verse 6 speaks of the burden being removed from the shoulder and hands being freed from the basket, which refer to the release from the slavery of building cities for Pharaoh. Thus the psalm commences: - "Sing aloud unto God our strength: make a joyful noise unto the God of Jacob". The groan of oppression was turned into the song of praise and thanksgiving. Although the chapter has an application to remnant times, quite clearly from the closing verses, the Millennium is in view.

*D. Black, J. Miller*

*From Vancouver.* —In chapter 3 we have the transition from judgement to promise. First God remembers the general sins of the whole city of Jerusalem (vv. 1, 2), and then He singles out four specific groups (princes, judges, prophets, priests) for special reproach (vv. 3, 4). Yet in all this iniquity Zephaniah goes on to say that the Lord is in the midst of them as a mediator of the change [see Comment 4]. In 3. 8 the Lord begins with a prime requirement for change. He must be awaited in order that He may have His way. In Josiah's time, this command could have been a warning for

him in taking **the law into his own hands when he went out against the king of Egypt** [see Comment 5].

Verses 9, 10 and 11 have some interesting points. Verse 9 refers to the people having a pure language. We note that any immigrants to Israel at present must learn Hebrew. Verse 10 speaks of offerings being brought by God's people to Israel from far away points (as the phrase "beyond the rivers of Ethiopia" would suggest) [see Comment 6}. Today Jews are returning to Israel from all over the world. Verses 11 and 12 give God's formula for cleansing a nation, the opposite to man's idea (e. g. Hitler's). God takes away the proud and leaves the afflicted and poor.

The whole section 3. 9-20 gives us a picture of the Millennium. Among God's people, shame will give place to praise. Jehovah will be in the midst of them, so they will have joy and love. They had been lacking the solemn assembly and were sorrowful. To have this same solemn assembly restored to them brought peace and happiness. A similar occurrence happens in our Remembrance of the Lord Jesus which should be solemn and yet bring us happiness. *J. C. Bell*

### **IMPRESSIONS FROM OTHER CONTRIBUTORS**

Below are impressions from the remaining papers from Birkenhead, Birmingham, Derby, Glasgow (Parkhead), Kingston upon Thames, Leigh and Atherton and Nottingham.

There are several indications that "the oppressing city" of Zeph. 3. 1 is Jerusalem and not the city referred to at the end of chapter 2, which is Nineveh. The Lord is "her God" (v. 2). She is subject to "the law" (v. 4). "The sanctuary" is within her walls (v. 4), and the Lord is "in the midst of her" (v. 5).

The same charge of oppression is also made by the Lord through Jeremiah: "She is wholly oppression in the midst of her . . . violence and spoil is heard in her; before Me continually is sickness and wounds" (Jer. 6. 6, 7). The chief oppressors were the leaders of Judah, the princes, judges, prophets and priests (Zeph. 3. 3, 4), who had disregarded the corrective warning of earlier prophets (v. 2; see Micah 3). Ezek. 22. 25-29 gives some indication of what forms their oppressions probably took, mostly against the poor and weak. One contributor pointed out the interesting similarities between Zephaniah's descriptions of these leaders and Jacob's death-bed characterizations of some of his sons (compare Zeph. 3. 3, 4

with Gen. 49. 3-5, 9, 27), reminding us that the evil traits seen in these leaders sprang from their inherited sinful natures, with the consequent rebellious ignoring of God's warning word.

Zephaniah pointed out that the righteous God could not allow this state of affairs in Jerusalem to continue much longer (v. 5). Daily (v. 5) had He given adequate proof that His intentions to punish the evils of the surrounding nations had been fulfilled. Never had the promised judgements failed to take place (v. 6). Judah had been given ample opportunity to heed these warnings, so that they might not suffer the same fate. For though God's judgement had already been "appointed concerning her", she would have been readily pardoned had she turned to Him; but Judah by even greater evil had firmly rejected every appeal (v. 7).

Prior to the Millennium, Israel will be purged of her "proudly exulting ones" (3. 11; cf. Ezek. 20. 39). The purified remnant will be "an afflicted and poor people" (v. 12); most took this phrase to have a spiritual sense, in that Israel will be "afflicted" or humbled by the remembrance of former wickedness (Zech. 12. 10-14) and she will be "poor in spirit" (Matt. 5. 3). Some, however, took verse 12 to refer to the physical poverty of those who were left in the land at the time of the Babylonian captivity (2 Kin. 24. 14, 25. 12).

As Israel rejoices, her King, who once had wept over Jerusalem, will now "joy over her with singing" (v. 17; cf. Psa. 22. 22). She will dwell at peace in her own land, and with her true King, Jehovah Himself, once more "in the midst" of her (vv. 15, 17). Her spiritual condition will be very healthy (v. 13). But Israel's chief glory will be her King, recognized at last as her mighty Saviour and Lover (v. 17).  
Eds.

### COMMENTS

1. (*Methil*): The two main views of the meaning of this expression which emerge clearly in several papers, relate it to a suggested resolution of international language barriers on the one hand and, on the other, to a purification of a common expression of praise towards divine service "with one consent" (see Impressions). It is pointed out that the Hebrew means, literally, "a purified lip" and this inevitably links in our minds with Isa. 6. 5 "unclean lips". The thought of singleness of purpose seems to be emphasized in v. 9—"with one consent" ("shoulder" in R. V. M. ). Thus it is suggested

**that the primary thought is of purified lips in the spiritual sense. But is it feasible to contemplate this great divinely restored millennial service of worship hampered by language barriers? Surely the Lord will facilitate the acquisition where necessary of an understanding of a common tongue, which Isa. 19. 18 certainly seems to suggest as Hebrew. A dogmatic interpretation of this expression one way or the other, however, does not seem justifiable on the limited scriptural reference.**

2. (*Denmark Hill*): It would certainly appear from the history of Josiah's reign that the impact of Zephaniah's prophecy was felt very early by that young monarch. The latter's eighteenth year, however, was a great crisis for good in Judah and the beneficial effects of this prophecy probably spread over most of Josiah's reign. The special study article on "Josiah of Judah" in this issue illuminates this subject very helpfully. It seems questionable as to whether it is appropriate to speak of this healthful effect of the prophecy as a partial fulfilment. While it is true that certain aspects of the divine pleasure mentioned in v. 17 must have been felt in some measure when the service of the sanctuary was restored by Josiah, the latter part of ch. 3 presents such a composite picture of millennial conditions that one cannot but feel that "fulfilment", even partial, is a rather ambitious description of Josiah's achievement [see Editorial].

3. (*Denmark Hill*): It should be pointed out that 2 Kin. 23. 22 says that "*such a passover*" had not been kept from the days of the Judges.

4. (*Vancouver*): Is not the thought that, as a result of the cleansing effect of divine judgement on "thy proudly exalting ones", the Lord is able again to assume His rightful place "in the midst" and thoroughly effect reassurance and salvation?

*Owing to pressure of space the remaining Comments and Questions and Answers are held over until next month.*

# BIBLE STUDIES

*f*A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God (Acts 17. II).<sup>9</sup>

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## EDITORIAL

"Wherefore lookest Thou... and holdest Thy peace when the wicked swalloweth up the man that is more righteous than he?" Habakkuk's question (1. 13) is one that has engaged our attention as we have traced in recent studies God's dealings with the nations. We have seen how Assyria and Babylon were used by God to chasten Israel and Judah, although these Gentile nations were themselves wicked and truly worthy of punishment. We may observe that the nations are viewed in Scripture as being directly under divine control; indeed they were God's instruments to execute His purposes among men. Assyria is called "The rod of Mine anger" to carry out God's judgements on Israel, but Assyria's own intention was to destroy nations indiscriminately (Isa. 10. 5-11). Regarding Babylon God said, "I shall put My sword into the hand of the king of Babylon" (Ezek. 30. 25). It is also worthy of note that the Lord pays wages to those nations that do His work. Nebuchadnezzar, at great cost, brought about the downfall of Tyre, but there was no spoil from that conquest, so "because they wrought for Me" said the Lord, "I have given him the land of Egypt as his recompense for which he served" (Ezek. 29. 18-20).

Notwithstanding the efficiency and completeness with which Assyria and Babylon brought down the wrath of God upon Israel and her neighbours they themselves suffered divine retribution (Obad. 75) not only, as some have suggested, for their excesses, but primarily because their motives were wrong; their every action was lawless and completely out of sympathy with God's purposes. In contrast, when the Lord gave His people direct instructions to go to war against godless nations (1 Sam. 15. 1-3; 1 Chron. 14. 8-17), there followed intelligent, purposeful execution of divine judgement of a different character from that which we are now considering. No punishment for taking up arms in such circumstances was merited, except for failure, as in Saul's case, to obey God.

**Habakkuk asked God another question: "How long?" (1. 2). God is righteous, and the apparent injustices of Habakkuk's day were rectified in a few short years. There is much injustice today and God's people cry, "How long?" God's method, if not His time, is disclosed to us in the book of Revelation, which we are to begin studying (D. V. ) next year. L. B.**

**The following two articles deal with prophecies concerning Babylon, its decline and end-time aspects. Certain elements in the remarkable history of this nation are touched on in both articles but treated differently. Students are invited to compare the two and to comment, particularly on the matter of the scriptural prophecies of the fall of Babylon. Eds.**

## BABYLON: DECLINE FORETOLD

### *Introduction*

The city of Babylon was founded, as Babel, by Nimrod, according to Gen. 10. 10. It was subsequently destroyed or sacked several times, and was subject to the dominance, first of Ur, then of the Assyrians. Babylon repeatedly struggled for its independence, rebelling against the various governors appointed by the Assyrian power. Sargon II of Assyria sacked the city, deporting some of the chief rebels to Samaria, but there was another revolt against Sennacherib in 689 B. C., despite these measures. Sennacherib's grandson Samas-sum-ukin was later appointed governor of the city, but he quarrelled with his brother Ashurbanipal of Assyria, and in the subsequent war Babylon was damaged by fire. At length the decline of the Assyrian empire enabled Nabopolassar, a Chaldean, to assert Babylonian independence, and occupy the throne in 626 B. C. Nabopolassar drove back the Assyrians, capturing Nineveh in 612 B. C. His son, Nebuchadnezzar, gained a decisive victory over the Egyptians at the battle of Carchemish in 605 B. C. In the same year he carried off hostages from Judah, inducting Daniel, to Babylon. Judah rebelled against its Babylonian overlords, despite warnings by the prophet Jeremiah, and in 597 B. C. Nebuchadnezzar besieged and took Jerusalem, carrying away Jehoiachin (2 Kin. 24. 10-17). Zedekiah, appointed as a puppet king by Nebuchadnezzar, also rebelled; Jerusalem was again besieged, and Zedekiah was taken captive to Babylon (2 Kin. 24. 20-25. 7). Jerusalem was eventually

destroyed by the Babylonians in 587 B. C., and its citizens further deported to Babylon (2 Kin. 25. 8-21). Under Nebuchadnezzar Babylon was at the zenith of its power, and it is against this background of apparently secure dominion that the prophecies of Babylon's downfall should be examined.

### *Prophecies*

Three Old Testament prophets prophesied against Babylon: Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel. Of these, Daniel's prophecies of the fall of Babylon were in response to the requests of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar for interpretations of visions, and were not so detailed as those of Isaiah and Jeremiah. The three prophecies are reviewed below—

#### (a) *Isaiah*

Isaiah's ministry extended from the end of Uzziah's reign at least until Hezekiah's reign, and probably into the reign of Manasseh, although he apparently played no public part in this last reign. Even at the end of his life, the fall of Jerusalem was more than 100 years in the future, and the fall of Babylon over 150 years away. This gap in time makes his prophecies the more remarkable, since they contain specific and accurate allusions to persons and nations, and in places read as though the events referred to had actually occurred.

There are two principal passages dealing with Babylon: 13. 1 to 14. 23 and 44. 24-45. 7. The first reveals God's intention to bring the Medes against Babylon (13. 17). God reveals Himself as Lord of the nations, able to use Gentile armies to fulfil His purpose, for they are referred to as "My consecrated ones" (13. 3). The passage lays special emphasis on the pride of the Babylonians and contrasts the splendour of the city with the desolation to which it will ultimately be reduced. "It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall shepherds make their flocks to lie down there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there" (13. 20, 21). It should be noted that the passage presents Babylon as the oppressor who has taken Israel captive (14. 1, 2).

Chapters 44 and 45 seem to present the situation near the end of the exile, when God has raised up one who is to break the power of Babylon. This one is revealed in 44. 28 to be Cyrus, whom

**God has called by name, although Cyrus himself was not yet born.**

**(b) *Jeremiah***

Jeremiah wrote his **prophecy against Babylon in the fourth year of Zedekiah's reign (Jer. 51. 59, 60). The idols of Babylon, Bel and Merodach, could not save her from the nation which the Lord would bring from the north against her (50. 2, 3, 9). Prosperous Babylon would become a wilderness and a desert because she had plundered Jerusalem, the Lord's heritage (50. 11, 12). The land which irrigation made fertile would be dried up, and not inhabited from generation to generation (50. 38, 39). The Medes are again given as God's instrument in the destruction of Babylon (51. 11).**

**(c) *Daniel***

Daniel, in interpreting the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, told him that his kingdom would be overthrown and replaced by another. This happened in the regency of Belshazzar, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, when Daniel, interpreting the writing on the wall, prophesied the immediate downfall of the kingdom (Dan. 5).

***Prophecy fulfilled***

Events occurred just as the prophets had foretold. Cyrus, the ruler of the kingdom of Anshan, took over the province of Persia. By 550 B. C. he defeated Astyages, king of Media, and himself became king of the Medes. He conquered Croesus and his kingdom of Lydia, and in 549 B. C. marched through Assyria. In 539 B. C. his armies entered Babylon, having by a considerable feat of civil engineering diverted the flow of the Euphrates, enabling troops to enter the city along the river bed (see Isa. 44. 27). The surprise was complete; the city fell literally in a day, as it had been predicted. Cyrus permitted the captives to return to their native land, but did not himself destroy Babylon. Xerxes destroyed the city in 478 B. C., and although Alexander planned to restore it, he met his death there before the work progressed far. The city fell completely into ruins, until all that was left when archaeologists began to investigate the site was a number of ruined mounds. The Euphrates has changed its course, flowing some distance from the ruins. No one now lives in the dry and desolate area; the little Arab settlement of Babil preserves the name, but lies some miles to the north. Fallen is Babylon the Great—according to the word of the Lord.

P. L. *Hickling*

*BABYLON: PREDICTION OF END-TIME ASPECTS*

The Old Testament prophets had a good deal to say about Babylon and its kings, which is only to be expected having in mind the city's importance to Israel over a long period, but these prophecies also have in view parallel events future to our day, and it is not always obvious which period is being dealt with. Perhaps there is a tendency to assume that Isaiah and Jeremiah, in giving the Lord's message to their contemporaries, would naturally refer to present or imminent events, but is that necessarily so? There are a number of considerations suggesting that the important prophecies in Isaiah 13. 1 - 14. 25 and Jeremiah 50. 1 - 51. 64 contain direct references to a Babylon yet to be built which will be associated with the momentous world events preceding the coming of the Son of Man. That the rebuilding will take place on the original site seems to follow from the intimate blending of prophetic allusions to both phases of the city's history.

Now consider such statements in Isaiah as: - "The day of the LORD cometh, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger; to make the land a desolation" (13. 9), "The sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine" (13. 10), "I will punish the world for their evil" (13. 11), "I will make a man more rare than fine gold" (13. 12), "The day of His fierce anger" (13. 13). These and many similar ones, although couched in poetic language, can only be understood to describe events far greater than those attending any of the assaults made upon Babylon from the time of Isaiah until it disappeared from the page of history. Again, the astronomical and terrestrial catastrophes described in 13. 10, 13 point strongly to pre-millennial days (Matt. 24. 29, 30).

Isaiah 13. 17 seems at first sight to be a clear reference to the taking of Babylon by Darius the Mede in Daniel's day (Dan 5. 30, 31). But the following verses describe an overthrow like that of Sodom and Gomorrah; the use of such a comparison implies that Babylon was to be quickly and completely destroyed, never to rise again, a prediction which has so far had no fulfilment either in Biblical or secular history. When Darius "received the kingdom" (Dan. 5. 31) Babylon was not destroyed. History records that the army of Cyrus entered the city by stealth; Scripture testifies that it was still a city of some importance in the days of Ezra (Ezra 7. 9)

and it is likely that the same place is referred to even in the New Testament by Peter (1 Peter 5. 15). It is said that Alexander the Great once entered the city but thereafter it suffered a gradual decline. Clearly Babylon has not yet experienced sudden destruction, so that much of Isaiah 13 and 14 must have a future application.

Did Joshua and Zerubbabel and their friends, lately emancipated from Babylon's oppression, say, "How art thou fallen from heaven, O day star, son of the morning!... thou saidst in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; and I will sit upon the mount of congregation" (Isa. 14. 12, 13)? It is submitted that the "rest from thy sorrow" (verse 3) must have a more important application than to that faithful remnant, for Nebuchadnezzar's pride, although great, was limited to the earthly sphere (Dan. 4. 30). The king described in Isaiah 14. 13, 14 is more satisfactorily identified with the king of the north (Dan. 11. 36) who will dominate all the nations in the last days and will even aspire to the position of deity.

When Seraiah gathered the exiled Jews around him in Babylon and read Jeremiah's message (chapters 50, 51) no doubt they were encouraged and reassured by the prophecy that Babylon would soon be punished for her wickedness. Their sad spirits would be revived as they were reminded of the Lord's care for them (50. 19, 34, 51. 24, 28). As in the Isaiah oracle, however, Jeremiah's message has running through it the theme of complete and sudden destruction (50. 13, 51. 29). Sodom and Gomorrah are again used illustratively (50. 39, 40). Babylon's crisis is to have world-wide repercussions (50. 46). So Israel's two great prophets jointly witness to the revival to unprecedented power of the city of Babylon, only to be destroyed for ever under divine judgement for its wickedness.

That these two prophets have to do with events yet to come is further confirmed by their similarity to the undoubtedly end-time New Testament Revelation (17. 18). For instance, Revelation mentions "the great harlot that sitteth upon many waters" (17. 1) and identifies the harlot with "Babylon the Great" (17. 5) and Jeremiah describes Babylon as dwelling upon many waters (51. 13). In both books the end of the city is likened to a stone sinking in water (Jer. 51. 63, 64; Rev. 18. 21). Whereas John says, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great" (Rev. 14. 8, 18. 2), Isaiah says, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen" (21. 9) and Jeremiah says, "Babylon

is suddenly fallen" (51. 8). Old and New Testaments agree that heaven will rejoice over Babylon (Rev. 18. 20; Jer 51. 48) and they both record the Lord's call to His people to escape from Babylon's evil influence and impending doom (Jer. 51. 6, 45; Rev. 18. 4).

This short study shows the threefold emphasis placed by Scripture upon Babylon's wickedness and its consequences. The satanically inspired alliance of commerce and false religion centred in the revived city of Babylon will sink under its final catastrophe, never to rise again. Men of all ages are thus warned of the extreme spiritual clanger of succumbing to the attractions of an ungodly world. "Come forth, My people, out of her, that ye have no fellowship with her sins and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Rev. 18. 4).

*L. B.*

## THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE MINOR PROPHETS BEING STUDIED IN 1971

### 4. *HABAKKUK AND OBADIAH*

Both Habakkuk and Obadiah appear to be associated with the fall of Jerusalem (B. C. 587) but in very different contexts.

Habakkuk, though undated in that no mention is made of the kings who were his contemporaries, prophesied at the time when the invasion of the city was imminent. 1. 6 records his prediction of the fall of the city, and in 2. 3 he says "the vision is yet for the appointed time, and it hasteth toward the end... it will not delay". This might indicate a time close to 600 B. C. but the Oxford Helps and other similar sources indicate an earlier date without giving any reason for it. It is clear, however, that Habakkuk would coincide with part of Jeremiah's span, who commenced his ministry in B. C. 627 and he may have been alive when Ezekiel commenced his prophecies in B. C. 594. It is just not possible to be more precise than this. What is clear is that Habakkuk could hear the prancing of advancing horses' hoofs as revealed through the Spirit and his words were vivid. The tragedy is that Judah was not equally discerning.

Obadiah prophesied against Edom and denounced the Edomites roundly for their despicable action against Judah, as described in verses 10-14, when they were being attacked by other enemies, and in no position to defend themselves against the Edomites. If

**this occasion was the sack of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in B. C. 587 then Obadiah prophesied after that date. Since Edom was also destroyed by the same king five years later, some, like Smith (shorter dictionary of the Bible) have placed Obadiah within these five years, for the prophet also foretold the doom of Edom. However, since Jerusalem was the scene of attack before B. C. 587, it could have been on the occasion of one such invasion that Edom employed her devious tactics which incurred divine wrath. This, together with the position of the book along with earlier prophets, has caused some to place Obadiah at an earlier date. Little weight can be placed on the dating argument based on placing in the order of the books in the Bible, as is evident from examples in both Old and New Testaments. Hence the weightier evidence points to the later date, but it is not possible to be absolutely sure of the period of Obadiah's ministry.**

*C. L. P.*

## THE VISION MADE PLAIN TO FAITH

### *HABAKKUK 1. 1-2. 8*

*From Melbourne.* —As the prophet makes no mention of Assyria, but speaks of the nearing Chaldean invasion of Judah, we judge that this would place his ministry in the closing years of the kingdom of Judah, and probably during the reign of Jehoiakim, in which case he would have been contemporary with Jeremiah. During this period apostacy was rapidly enveloping the nation, and as the prophet of Jehovah he was responsible to cry out against their backsliding, and also intercede with Jehovah concerning His people. Dwelling in the land and city of His choice, there should have been seen amongst them both righteousness and peace, the result of divine rule and government in their midst. But instead, Judah had learned the ways of the nations which were abhorrent to Jehovah. Despite their apostate condition they looked for continued blessing and protection from Him, from whose ways they had turned aside. It may be that the remarkable intervention on behalf of Jerusalem nearly a century before, when the hosts of the Assyrians perished (2 Kin. 19. 22-35), had caused them to forget the warning of Deut. 28 that His continued presence and protection in their midst was conditional upon their obedience. This too in more recent times had been the burden of the prophets who spake by the Word of the Lord.

The narrative in the portion before us is in the form of question and answer. The prophet is perplexed. Questions arise in his mind, and he places them before the Lord. The answer increases his perplexity. In 1. 2-4 he cries out to the Lord because of the low spiritual condition prevailing among His people. He is heavily burdened because of their backsliding and evildoing. The summary given is a terrible one. The cries of the prophet on their behalf are seemingly unheard. Neither does the Lord appear to be doing anything towards turning their hearts again towards Himself. "The law is slacked, and judgement doth never go forth". The perplexing answer reveals that the Chaldeans, whom He has raised up to chastise the nations and whom He has permitted to possess their dwelling-places, will shortly do likewise to Judah and Jerusalem. Many captives had been brought to Babylon to become servants to its king in executing his ambitious schemes to make Babylon the glory of the kingdoms, a city beyond comparison in the earth. The Chaldean nation knew not the God of Israel; they recognized a number of deities, of whom Merodach appears to have been the chief. To these, and their own might, they attribute their conquests [Comment 1].

In verses 12-17 the prophet reasons with Jehovah, for although Judah has erred and turned away from the law of the Lord, there are still some who mourn their departure therefrom. Why should His people share the same fate as those nations that had no knowledge of Jehovah? The Chaldeans have boasted in their own strength. Are they going to be permitted to empty their net, in which they have taken, men as the fishes of the sea, in order that they may spread it again for Judah and Jerusalem? Surely, despite their backslidden condition, they are still more righteous than the godless Chaldeans. Having thus reasoned with the Lord, he waits for an answer.

In 2. 1 the prophet speaks of himself as a watchman looking from a tower, as in time of war, to discern what messengers are coming, and to hear what messages they carry. He looks expectantly to God for an answer to his reasoning and his complaint. He is told to write what is revealed to him, making it plain upon tables, that passers by, even though they run, may be able to read the message. The judgement *is* not to be immediate, but is hastening towards its fulfilment. The soul of Judah is puffed up, and chasten-

ing is needed for correction. There is **now no other course that will heal their backslidings. Chastening cannot be averted. But the righteous, of whom there are some remaining, are to recognise the perfect equity of the judgements of the Lord in dealing thus with His people. Faith must discern that though for a time the enemies of Judah are used by Him to accomplish His purposes in chastisement, and although no chastisement for the present seems joyous, but grievous, yet when it is finished, it yields the fruit of righteousness. Then He will again have mercy upon Judah, recompensing His and their enemies by the hands of the people of the nations whom Babylon had gathered in its net. They would rise up, spoiling and vexing it, because of the violence done to Jehovah's land, city and people.**

*T. W. F.*

*From Birkenhead.* —In 1. 2-4 the prophet is asking questions, not because of unbelief with regard to God's plans, but in the spirit of sincere enquiry. It seemed unaccountable that God had not intervened to deal with the growth of violence and perversion of justice amongst His people. Wickedness appeared to go unpunished.

God's answer (1. 5-71) concerned the Chaldeans, who were already sweeping westward across the world and whose military prowess was formidable. This cruel and barbarous nation was not just tolerated by God but had been raised up by Him with the chastisement of His people in view. They were the instrument of divine judgement against Judah.

How can God use an evil nation to punish a more righteous people? This problem engages the prophet's mind in verses 12-17 and appears baffling in the light of God's infinite purity. Although the Chaldeans were being used as a divine agency, they attributed their victories entirely to their military might. However, God's sovereign will is above the sphere of human reason. In 2. 1-8 Habakkuk is comforted by the thought that the prosperity of the wicked is short-lived. The Chaldeans would eventually be spoiled by "the remnant of the peoples".

The principle of 2. 4 is unchanging. It is quoted three times in the New Testament and on each occasion emphasis is laid on a distinct facet of truth. Rom. 1. 17 contrast the just with the unrighteous, in Gal. 3. 11 faith and law are counterbalanced whilst in Heb. 10. 38 living by faith is the principle stressed.

*T. J. Sands, R. D. Williams*

*From Derby.* —**Habakkuk** is thought to **have been** contemporary with **Zephaniah**. Thus we suggest his call to **office** would be during the reign of king **Josiah** and possibly also **Amon**, about the year **640 to 609 B. C.** [Comment 2], As **Nahum** foretold the divine reckoning with **Assyria**, so **Habakkuk** foretells the judgement which will overtake the **Chaldeans** after they have completed the **captivity of Judah and Benjamin**.

The chronological events may be gleaned from the writings of **Daniel and Jeremiah**. The **rise** to power of the **Chaldeans** was essential to the carrying out of the divine **purpose** relating to the punishment of God's people for their persistently sinful and provoking ways and their indifference to God's **warnings** through His **prophets**, **Joel, Micah, Isaiah and Jeremiah**. As the day of reckoning drew near, "the **LORD**, the God of their fathers, sent to them by His **messengers**, rising up early and sending; because He had compassion on His **people**, and on His dwelling place: but they **mocked... and scoffed** at His **prophets... till there was no remedy**" (2 Chron. 36. 15, 16). There could only be **judgements**.

The destruction of the **Assyrians** and the fall of **Nineveh** must first be accomplished, and the **Chaldeans** must be brought to full power before they could do what the **Assyrians** were not allowed to do in the days of king **Hezekiah** (2 Kin. 19. 35-37; Isa. 37. 36-38). In chapter 1. 1-4 **Habakkuk** complains that the iniquity of God's people is not corrected. "How long shall I cry", he says, "and Thou wilt not hear?" The godly **prophet** is justly **grieved** that the **righteous are contended** against by the lawless elements within the city, and is informed by a gracious God that He is **preparing** the proud and cruel **Chaldeans** to use them as His scourge (1. 6-11). The apostle Paul quotes **verse 5** in Acts 13. 41, where once again it is a **warning** against unbelief.

The prophet **watches** and waits for God's answer: "Write the vision and make it plain". It was to be in clear, legible characters that even the **hasty passer-by** might read it. How clear do we make the word of the gospel? Man is without **excuse**, and **judgement is sure**, "for the vision is yet for the appointed time". Compare Hab. 2. 3, "It will surely come, it will not delay" with 2 Pet. 3. 9, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise". In 2. 4-8 God comforts His **servant** concerning His **fixed** purpose to correct the spoiler of nations, and says of that one, "all the **remnant** of the peoples

shall spoil **thee**". Isaiah is led by the Spirit to describe vividly the downfall of the Chaldeans (see Isa. 47). God deals severely (Dan. 4. 33) and wonderfully with Nebuchadnezzar that proud monarch, the "head of gold" of Dan. 2. 38. Not in his days was the nation destroyed but in his son's days. As indicated by the hand that wrote on the wall, Belshazzar's kingdom was given to the Medes and Persians (Dan. 5. 25), and "in that night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain". He had been weighed in the balances, and found wanting. It is by God's grace and mercy that our all-sufficiency is found in our Lord Jesus, "in whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins" (Col. 1. 14). G. C., A. S., S. R. W.

*From Leigh and Atherton.* —Habakkuk 2. 3, 4 refers to one of the chief functions of prophecy, which is to give to God-fearing individuals an understanding of the true meaning of events through which they are passing or are about to pass. If God revealed his hand in events only at the time of their occurrence, frail human hearts might regard the revelation as merely the prophet's private interpretation of the events. But God consistently reveals the part He is going to play well in advance; and down the centuries many faithful hearts have been greatly strengthened in times of adversity to realise that God knew long beforehand what would happen, and in fact was the prime Mover of events (cf. John 13. 19, 14. 29). The Lord describes this quiet confidence in His revealed word by the statement: "The just shall live by his faith" (2. 4). This refers to the faithful acceptance of and reliance upon the prophetic vision given to Habakkuk by God (vv. 2, 3) about the imminent judgement on Judah for her sins and the eventual overthrow of the nation through which this judgement would be carried out. "The just" is contrasted with the person whose "soul is puffed up" and "is not upright in him"; it means the Jew who feared God and was trying to do His will. God's vision of Judgement to Habakkuk came to such a person and, whether the judgement was still future or already present, his whole life was affected by his acceptance of the divine message. So "the just shall live by his faith".

We discussed at length the three-fold use of this scripture in the New Testament. To some of us Paul's use in Rom. 1. 17 and Gal. 3. 11 of Habakkuk's statement "the just (or righteous) shall live by faith" seems clearly to refer to the initial faith of the sinner, who is thereby given eternal life and made just (or

righteous). **Others saw difficulty in that in Hab. 2. 3 "the just" was just before he exercised faith in Habakkuk's message, whereas the sinner is not just before he accepts the gospel message.** It might have seemed more appropriate to say, "the unjust shall live by his faith" (cf. Rom. 4. 5) [Comment 3]. **In Heb. 10. 38 we perhaps have a closer analogy to Habakkuk's situation. A prophetic vision is again presented to the faith of the existing believers, the vision of the Lord's imminent return, enabling him to carry on his life for God.**

D. S. Jones

### *IMPRESSIONS FROM OTHER CONTRIBUTORS*

**Papers were also received from Denmark Hill, Hayes, Methil and Vancouver, and the following are impressions from these.**

Almost nothing is known of **Habakkuk's** personal history, although rabbinical writers **assert that he was of the tribe of Levi, perhaps from the musical directions attached to 3. 19.**

**Because the prophet forecast the invasion of the Chaldeans, Habakkuk must be dated prior to the invasion of Jerusalem in B. C. 587 by Nebuchadnezzar, and though otherwise undated, it is generally assumed to apply to the reigns of Josiah and Jehoahaz of Judah, perhaps around 620-600 B. C.**

The whole prophecy of **Habakkuk** is a conversation with the Almighty. **The prophet complained that iniquity, violence, oppression and contention were rife, and yet there was no administration of law and justice to counteract their effect.** No immediate answer had come. **The Lord was apparently not willing to intervene.** God does not always answer us immediately, nor necessarily in the way we expect. **Faith is always severely tested when under oppression and where there appears to be no intervention by God on behalf of His people.** Prayer is often suitably made to God in times of pressure. **Yet seldom is it realised that God has already intervened in a wonderful way yet to be revealed.** It is always faith's privilege to recognize God's hand in the afflictions and persecutions of His people. God is purposeful in His judgements. Compare Psa. 119. 67, 71: "Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now I observe Thy word", "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn Thy statutes".

**Habakkuk was himself a man of faith. He not only trusted fully in Jehovah but also waited upon Him, in spite of extremely trying**

circumstances and the apparent hopelessness of the future. The Lord promised **divine intervention**. The means to be used would be so startling **that they** would not believe **it to be His work**, even though **they were being told in advance**. **Habakkuk asks why the holy God who cannot regard iniquity should choose as His executors a people who are more violent and corrupt than Israel, and are themselves greater oppressors.**

**The events of the future may not be easily understood by God's people. It is when we ascend the watchtower that the perspective changes and we see the panoramic view of the divine purposes.** Those who **read God's word** will benefit, for **in believing faith they will understand some of the purposes of God, and will realise that in the end justice will be done.** Confidence **in God** is our **perfect security.**

**Even under the law God looked for faith in Himself by His earthly people. In all ages there have been men who believed God and His revelation to them in their own particular times, and this has been the means of their being justified in His sight.** The **truth of justification by faith was revealed to those who were active in the days of the Reformation.**

In **Habakkuk's day the vision looked to the full deliverance of God's people. The time of our Lord's coming has been appointed. "For yet a very little while, He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry"** (Heb. 10. 57). *Eds.*

### COMMENTS

1. (*Melbourne*): **Did the Chaldeans attribute their victories in part to their deities? The prophet seems rather to be saying that their military might took the place of idols in their lives.** In view of Hab. 1. 11, "**he whose might is his god**", it is suggested that **the sacrifices and burning of incense (1. 16) are figurative; the Chaldeans elevated their military machine to the position of a god in their estimation.**

2. (*Derby*): **The exact placing of Habakkuk's prophecy in the chronological sequence of the kings of Judah is difficult, but could it have been in the reign of Josiah? Habakkuk says, "Therefore the law is slacked and judgement doth never go forth" and so on**

(1. 3, 4). **There was probably much wickedness during the reign of that good king but it does not seem possible that judgement of wrong would be neglected by the man who was renowned for his zeal for God's law. A more likely period for the prophecy would be in Jehoiakim's reign, before Nebuchadnezzar's first raid on Jerusalem. "The LORD is in His holy temple" (Hab. 2. 20) refers to God's dwelling place in heaven, not the neglected temple in Jerusalem.**

3. *{Leigh and Atherton}*: **No man is just apart from his faith; furthermore the exercise of faith and the divine conferment of imputed righteousness are simultaneous, so that it would be incorrect to say, "the unjust shall live by his faith". Whether the Habakkuk scripture contemplates initial faith and the receiving of life, or day-by-day faith and godly living, or both, is immaterial. Both aspects are referred to in the New Testament citations. L. B.**

## **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

*From Denmark Hill:* (1) **The Lord's words may be paraphrased, "Do not fret—the spoiler will be spoiled in due time (2. 6-8), but the just of Israel shall live by faith" (2. 3, 4). Is the force of this word "live" that he will be saved from the spoiler, the Chaldeans, and not be killed?**

In **the immediate context of an earthly kingdom and a material form of worship and service the prophet points out the way of salvation for the individual in a day when nations were being judged. In this respect the suggestion contained in the question may have been applicable, but of course the oracle has the deeper and wider application indicated by the New Testament quotations.**

(2) **Is there anything to be learned from the fact that God took Judah back to the same area as that which Abraham left fourteen and a half centuries earlier?**

In **His perfect justice God exactly matches the punishment to the offence. A feature of Babylon was its idol-worship. When the men of Judah became irrevocably attached to their idols they were taken to the place to which they had already gone in heart (Acts 7. 42, 43), back to the country from which their forefather Abraham had been called because of its idolatrous associations. L. B.**

*Held over from September issue: -*

### COMMENTS

5. (*Vancouver*): It is an interesting suggestion that the "wait ye for Me" of v. 8 is a warning to Josiah. This might well be so even though the general context of the word seems to suggest a primary application to inevitable, decreed judgement on those who are told to wait.

6. (*Vancouver*): While the Jews are returning to Israel from many parts it is in unbelief. Would "Mine offering" not rather point to scattered Jews returning in a future day to offer acceptably to an acknowledged Lord? J. D. T.

### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

*From Aberkenfig and Barry*: (1) Is the "pure language" (3. 9) a particular language, or does it describe the character of the language? [See Comment 1 September issue].

(2) Are the words "afflicted and poor" to be taken in a literal or a spiritual sense?

Verse 11 contrasts "thy proudly exulting ones" with "an afflicted and poor people", indicating, I would judge, the Matt. 5. 3 character of the latter—"poor in spirit".

*From Birmingham*: Do verses 1-8 of Zeph. 3 refer to Israel or the nations generally? Is the city of verse 1 Nineveh?

This question is touched upon helpfully in September "Impressions". The weight of evidence favours reference to Gods people in these verses and from Jerusalem as the city.

*From Leigh and Atherton*: Does 3. 11 indicate that the remnant will be ashamed or will not be ashamed?

Since the Lord speaks in this verse of removing the cause of the shame of His people, I see this as a comforting reassurance to the remnant that they will not be ashamed. J. D. T.

# BIBLE STUDIES

*f*A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God (Acts 17. 11). '

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## EDITORIAL

"Yet I will rejoice in the LORD,  
I will joy in the God of my salvation"

(Hab. 3. 18)

Habakkuk's exultant joy in the Lord shone out against a sombre background of spiritual declension and resulting economic dearth among God's people in his day. He had learned the secret of rejoicing in the God of His salvation whatever the circumstances. Chapter 2 portrays him standing upon his watch-tower, looking forth to see what God would speak with him. Habakkuk knew what it was by spiritual experience to discern God's purposes amidst all the confusion of contemporary problems. His faith grasped that divine purpose would ultimately triumph despite the depressing failure of his own generation.

"These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be fulfilled" (John 15. 11). The Lord Jesus gave this assurance to His disciples at the same time that He warned them of the inevitable difficulties they must face as a result of the world's attitude to Him and to them. The world would hate and persecute them, but abiding in Him they could know peace: "In the world ye have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16. 55). Paul knew the world's hatred and persecution in deep intensity. Yet in the same spirit of faith as Habakkuk he declared, "Yea, and if I am offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all... in the same manner do ye also joy" (Phil. 2. 17, 18).

*G. P. Jr.*

## THREE ASPECTS OF SALVATION THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

Recent events have served to sharpen the interest of disciples of our Lord Jesus in unfulfilled prophecy. Undoubtedly the coming of the Lord for His own is very near, to be followed by the period known to all Bible students as Daniel's 70th week. This period,

according to the Scriptures, is a week of years, and will probably be preceded by a period of transition of unknown length. It *is* a period in which a multitude of events are to be fulfilled. One of the principal features of the 70th week will be the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom. It is our intention to show that this gospel will offer to men and women of every tribe and tongue and nation a threefold salvation in a similar way to which salvation *is* offered during the present dispensation of grace. Today, as disciples of the Lord Jesus, we may know salvation from sin's penalty (Eph. 2. 8), salvation from sin's power (Phil. 2. 12), and when the Master returns, how glorious it will be to experience salvation from sin's presence (Rom. 13. 11). During the 70th week men and women will have the opportunity of knowing salvation from sin's penalty, and when Messiah returns to know salvation from sin's power operating through the Beast, and deliverance and salvation from the vanity to which the whole of creation has been subjected.

#### *Salvation from sin's penalty*

It is a fundamental fact that God has made provision for all sinners, men and women, in the death of His son. If eternal life is to be offered by God at any time, in any age, it can only be offered to man on the basis of three pre-requisites: - (1) faith, (2) shed blood, (3) a revealed and preached message.

One often hears of disciples speaking of those who will endure the fearfulness of the 70th week as though they will obtain salvation from sin's penalty by their endurance to the end, as if their works will be the basis of acceptance before a holy and righteous God. This appears to be contrary to the whole tenor of Scripture. Works have never been the basis of eternal salvation. Even those who will be rewarded with eternal life at the Great White Throne will receive it on the basis of faith in a revelation and repentance toward God, their works being worthy of their repentance. Even so, Abraham will yet have seed during the days of the 70th week, men whose faith will be counted for righteousness. Even though the Beast may overcome them, and we know it will be given to him to do so (Rev. 13. 7), nothing will alter the promise, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10. 13).

The context of the Scripture in Romans 10. 13 shows clearly the universal nature of the statement made and the scope and character

of the salvation obtainable. Clearly it is a salvation arising out of faith, and such faith procures for its recipient "righteousness which is of faith" (Rom. 10. 6). There can be little doubt that eternal salvation is in view, salvation from hell and the lake of fire. The sequence is outlined fully in the passage. Sent ones will preach of Him and make men hear Him. Hearing they will believe on Him; believing on Him they will have capacity to call upon Him. Within this pattern of His will, men will preach the gospel of the kingdom. It will concern One who is coming to reign, One "who is mightier than I", One who, at present, is seated at God's right hand, "until I make thine enemies Thy footstool" (Psalm 110. 1). It will be a message which warns men to flee from the wrath to come (Luke 3. 7), a message concerning flaming fire and "vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (2 Thes. 1. 8). Those who refuse its message, "shall suffer punishment, even eternal destruction from the face of the Lord and from the glory of His might, when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be marvelled at in all them that believed... in that day" (2 Thes. 1. 9, 10).

When the apostle Peter was used by the Spirit of God to speak on the day of Pentecost to the multitudes gathered in Jerusalem, he was led to recite from the prophet Joel. Speaking of the last days "before the day of the Lord come" (Acts 2. 20) he quotes, "and it shall be that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2. 21). Here is confirmation of God's purpose to save a man on the grounds of faith by the work of the Spirit of God. The significant change in emphasis from the Joel scripture which speaks of deliverance and escape (Joel 2. 32) to salvation in the Acts scripture shows the importance of verse 21.

### *Salvation from the Beast*

There are many scriptures which tell us of the conditions which will prevail during the 70th week. One of the most important related to our subject is found in Mat. 24. 13, 14, "But he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations". The following verses show the nature of the endurance. It is essentially a physical one: "When therefore ye see... let them... flee... let him that is on the housetop not go down

to take out the things that are in his house: . . . pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on a sabbath" (Mat. 24. 15-20). Those who wish to be faithful to the Lord, as believers on Him who is coming, and who call upon His name, will have to endure persecution. When they are opposed, and not received, they are commanded to flee, to move on, to go to the next town, the next city, the next village. This is the message first given by the Lord and confirmed by them that heard, God bearing witness (Mat. 10. 5-8), To the messengers with the Lord's message He said, "Ye shall be hated of all men for My name's sake: but he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved. But when they persecute you in this city, flee into the next: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone through the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come" (Mat. 10. 22-23).

Careful consideration of the passages in which the phrase, "endureth to the end", occurs, will reveal that they appear for the first time in the New Testament and are not quotations from the Old Testament writings. There is no thought of salvation from sin's penalty in Mat. 10. 22 or Mat. 24. 13 or in Mark 13. 13. The salvation of the Spirit-filled men presented in these portions of Scripture is one of physical endurance against the persecution of the Beast. The point in time referred to as "the end", is not the end of their lives but the end of the 70th week, when Messiah comes as the Deliverer. Many of those who will preach the gospel of the kingdom will not endure to the end but will be overcome. They will not be saved from the Beast but their lives will be taken. If these Scriptures therefore refer to eternal salvation, many faithful witnesses will lose their eternal salvation through being overcome by the Beast. Such is contrary to the saving power of the Coming One and the unalterable promise, "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2. 21; Rom. 10. 13).

### *Salvation from Vanity*

When Solomon the king uttered his saying, "Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; vanity of vanities, all is vanity" (Eccles. 1. 2), he was echoing the burden of the creation under the sun. At the advent of sin, God in His wisdom subjected the creation to vanity (Rom. 8. 20). Thorns and thistles as well as those things he needs for subsistence have since been the product of man's toil. The

cursed ground has ensured the fulfilment of the Lord's words, "In toil shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life" (Gen. 3. 17). Man has been subjected to sweat and toil from the day Adam fell through disobedience. The reason for this is given to us in Rom. 8. 20. It was subjected in hope. Creation itself *is* to be delivered from the bondage of corruption. The salvation of the creation will involve the setting aside of the groaning and travailing which corruption has brought into being. In its place will be the liberty of the glory of the children of God, a glory which this world has never before seen or thought possible (Rom. 8. 21, 22).

There can be no doubt in our minds that the passage in Rom. 8 outlines the events and changes which the Son of Man will bring about when He comes to earth with His saints. The changes He will effect in the earth have been the subject of much thought by all who long for the establishment of peace and righteousness. How full of promises are the Old Testament writings in respect of the salvation which the earth and its inhabitants will experience! "And the LORD shall be king over all the earth... all the land shall be turned as the Arabah... and men shall dwell therein, and there shall be no more curse" (Zech. 14. 9-11). The prophet Isaiah frequently refers to the glorious change which is to be established by our Lord Jesus. The Shoot that shall come forth out of the stock of Jesse will produce a Branch out of his roots which shall bear fruit. The fruit of the branch is displayed in those lovely verses of Isa. 11. 2-9, "... And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox... They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain". The lifting of the curse from the earth will cause the wilderness and the solitary places to be glad, and the desert to rejoice and blossom as the rose (Isa. 35. 1-2). There shall be abundance of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains (Psa. 72. 16). Man will again enjoy longevity (Isa. 65. 20). The curse in relation to the serpent, which began at the fall of man, however, will remain. "Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life" (Gen. 3. 14). This will not be rescinded. "And dust shall be the serpent's meat" (Isa. 65. 25).

Perhaps the greatest and most effectual change, which will have a mighty impact upon the creation when the vanity to which it is subjected is lifted, will be the regeneration (Mat. 19. 28). The veil which lies upon men's hearts and minds at present will be removed. The Devil, who is blinding the minds of the unbelieving (2 Cor. 4. 4) will be placed in the abyss (Rev. 20. 1-5). What a regeneration and renewing of the Spirit of God this earth will know! "For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11. 9). All peoples will enjoy and rejoice in "a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined" (Isa. 25. (5)). They will enjoy the Lord as never before. "He will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering that is cast over all peoples, and the veil that is spread over all nations" (Isa. 25. 7). What a Millennium! What a joy it will be to know and to share the glories of the Christ and the revealing of the sons of God!

Then all the earth shall rise and bring  
 Peculiar honours to its King;  
 Angels descend with songs again,  
 And earth repeat the loud Amen.  
 Then come, O Lord, to earth again,  
 Come, take Thy mighty power and reign;  
 Bid tumults wars and conflicts cease,  
 Rule far and wide, Thou Prince of Peace.        Amen

*R. A. Parker*

### *Editorial Note*

The main issue raised in this article is the constancy throughout the dispensations of faith and not works on the part of man as the basis of eternal salvation from the penalty of sin. The divine ground of salvation throughout is, of course, the redemptive work of Christ. The meaning of the statement, "He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved" (Mat. 24. 13) is examined in its tribulation context, a time when Scripture would indicate that the gospel of the kingdom will again be preached; a message proclaiming the approaching kingdom of heaven under the rule of Christ. If the presence of true faith in the work of Christ, whether clearly perceived since Calvary or less clearly appreciated before, brings eternal salvation, the "shall be saved" which follows "enduring to

the end" in the tribulation may be taken to mean deliverance from the horrors of the persecution and into the joy of the Lord's presence and the special honours indicated in Rev. 7. 9-17. This may be either by the Lord's appearing at the end of the tribulations, or through the physical death of the saint. The "enduring" would then refer to standing fast against the pressures of the Beast to take his mark. What if the saints did succumb? Is this possible? Many believe that the issues in that terrible day will be so clear-cut that only true believers will stand, and that they will not be tempted "above that they are able", the "way of escape" for many being death. The main passages in the book of Revelation referring to these matters are in chapters 13. 1 — 14. 12 and 7. 9-17. Editors would welcome correspondence on this subject as presented in the article and as commented on above. *Eds.*

## ETHIOPIA

The name "Ethiopian" comes from a Greek word meaning "burnt face" and was applied by the Greeks to dark-skinned people from the countries south and east of Egypt.

There is very little known of the ancient history of these lands and a study of relations between Israel and Ethiopia in Old Testament times will get little help from contemporary history. One historian has written "We do not know the precise connotation of the Hebrew word "Cush" which the Septuagint translates into Greek as Aithiopia (Ethiopia) and many of these Scriptural references are of difficult interpretation". Modern Ethiopia is very different from the Cush of the Old Testament. It appears that the Semitic tribes of South Arabia began to trickle over to the Horn of Africa about the days of Solomon and continued to colonize the land of Cush for many centuries, giving rise ultimately to the "Semitic-Hamitic" race which rules today over the land and over a people which is "a complex variety of ethnic elements representing a veritable mosaic of races, tribes and linguistic groups".

It is necessary to mention the claim of the modern royal dynasty to be descended from the royal line of Judah, as a result of a union between the queen of Sheba and king Solomon; this claim is embodied in Article 2 of the 1955 Constitution of Ethiopia. Researchers are satisfied that this is a historic fiction, although the legend has

been very strong for many centuries, being committed to writing about the 14th century A. D. in the Kebrä Nagast which are regarded as the sacred writings. Owing to Jewish migrations by way of Arabia, an early form of Judaism existed (alongside paganism) for centuries before Christ. Some of this has been carried over into the Ethiopian practice of "Christianity" today.

Isaiah was given a divine charge to speak concerning Ethiopia in the days of Hezekiah. To understand the mention of Ethiopia in Isaiah's words and prophecies, it is necessary to take 2 Kings 18-20 and the whole of Isaiah 18, 20, 30 and 31 together. When the Assyrians under Sennacherib first came against Hezekiah he bought temporary respite with gold and silver taken from the house of the Lord. When Sennacherib returned, he was opposed by Egypt under the rule of an Ethiopian dynasty (see 2 Kin. 19. 9). Isaiah (chapters 18 and 20) issues a divine prophecy and warning against placing any hope or expectation in the strength of Egypt and Ethiopia (20. 5, 6). Hezekiah listened to the word of God rather than the counsel of man and, because he trusted in God instead of Egypt, witnessed a great deliverance from a mighty enemy. However, as in so much prophecy, Isaiah is enabled to see beyond the immediate events and foretells a future time when Ethiopia, linked with Egypt, will submit herself to God (see Psa. 68. 31, 87. 4) and will revere the Lord in Zion.

At the time of the prophets, Ethiopia was closely connected with Egypt, coming under one government for some of the time and being linked with Egypt not only in the divine prophecies of judgment (Ezek. 30), but also in the blessings to be enjoyed by the nations who will recognize the God of heaven at the time when He will enter into His earthly heritage and find joy in Israel, His inheritance. So we find Ethiopia mentioned in the great visitations of chastisement upon the nations of the earth by the Almighty, who orders the destinies of the nations and whose work of judgment is directed to the end that all nations should worship Him and recognize Israel as His people (see Zeph. 2. 11-13). This finds its fulfilment in Zeph. 3, where the Lord is seen in the midst of Israel; verses 9, 10 seem to indicate that God reverses the discord of Babel and enables the dispersed peoples of the earth, including those from Ethiopia, to draw near with an offering and to serve Him in a pure language.

The sacred writings include with honour records of two individual Ethiopians: the eunuch who readily received the gospel through Philip (Acts 8), and the devotion of Ebed-melech to God's servant Jeremiah (Jer. 38, 39). Ebed-melech was a foreigner in a very difficult situation, for the reigning king was weak and the ruling princes hated Jeremiah and the word of the Lord which he spoke, and they sought to kill him. Nevertheless Ebed-melech with great courage went to the king, and with his authority drew Jeremiah with tender care from the dungeon. It was a time of great danger, for Jerusalem was about to be destroyed and burnt. However, God's eye was not only watching over His servant Jeremiah, but was also upon Ebed-melech for good, who surely received God's promise to the stranger that has joined himself to the Lord, as recorded in Isa. 56. 3-6, which should be read in this connection. Through the mouth of His servant Jeremiah the Lord gave to Ebed-melech one of the most remarkable personal divine assurances ever given to a Gentile (apart from the words of the Lord Jesus Himself): "I will deliver thee in that day, saith the LORD; and thou shalt not be given into the hand of the men of whom thou art afraid. For I will surely save thee... because thou hast put thy trust in Me, saith the LORD". By his brave intervention Ebed-melech saved Jeremiah from death and influenced the history of God's people.

*D. W. Millar*

## STUDIES IN SEVEN MINOR PROPHETS

### *TRIUMPHANT CONFIDENCE IN GOD AMIDST APOSTASY*

#### HABAKKUK 2. 9 — 3. 19

*From Derby*, —The Lord through His prophet, is still voicing His condemnation and judgement against the Chaldeans because He foresees what they will do against many nations. "Mine eyes are upon all their ways: they are not hid from My face, neither is their iniquity concealed from Mine eyes" (Jer. 16. 17). In the "woes" uttered by the prophets, we noticed the singular pronoun *him*, and thought the Chaldeans were being addressed through their king, as is often the case. The details following each of these woes mostly refer to the cruel and heartless practices seen in many who are allowed to come to exceptional power. The Lord's all-seeing eyes

are "open upon all the ways of the sons of men; to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings" (Jer. 32. 19).

Verses 14 and 20 of chapter 2 are refreshing: In verse 14 we see the "times of the Gentiles" about to begin, and the prophet is given by the Spirit of God a glimpse of what will prevail after they are finished. In the meantime, verse 20 reminds us that "the LORD is in His holy temple"; He ever was and still is: "The heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool" (Isa. 66. 7; Acts 7. 49; Matt. 5. 34).

We suggest that the song or psalm of chapter 3 was set to music in three stanzas. The instruction "For the Chief Musician (or Singer), on my stringed instruments", indicates that this sublime psalm was probably designed for public use. The prophet, alarmed at the approaching chastening of his nation, beseeches that God would "in wrath remember mercy". This we connected with Jer. 21. 8, 9: "Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death". Habakkuk sees Jehovah interposing, as of old, in power and great glory like the rising sun and destroying the oppressors of His people. Yet the prophet's fear of coming judgement is not removed, but he confides in God and rises in the assurance of faith and joyful expectation of future glory.

This attitude is seen in many of the godly ones of Old Testament times, and should be seen in us too, who have been blessed with a much fuller revelation, for "God... hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son" (Heb. 1. 2).

The song of Habakkuk is set to "Shigionoth" (erring). In verse 16 of this psalm a different form of the same word, with a similar meaning, is used to refer to his enemies. The psalmist says: "His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violence shall come down upon his own pate" (Psa. 7. 16).

The first three verses of the song are a distinct stanza addressed to Jehovah Himself. The next stanza speaks of divine power as seen in natural phenomena governed by the perfect wisdom of God, ending with the words "the oaths to the tribes were a sure word". No other nation on earth ever had such close contact with the great God of heaven as did Israel.

In 3. 16, the prophet speaks with similar language to that in verse 1, and reminds us of the word in Isa. 66. 2: "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at My word". Yet withal the prophet finds comfort; "That I should rest in the day of trouble, when it cometh up". The fields yielding no meat (verse 17) refer, we suggest, to the sabbath rest of the land during the captivity, but it may also suggest the "scorched earth" policy of the Chaldean army [Comment 1].

S. R. W.

*From Hayes.* —In chapter 2 God gives five woes against the Chaldeans, even though they were raised up to be His instruments in punishing Judah (see 1. 6).

The woes, which some consider to be songs, can be summarized as follows: -

- (1) *Their conquests* resulted in the accumulation of wealth by force. They had plundered and would be plundered themselves in turn (2. 6-8).
- (2) *Their extortionate dealings*, with the purpose of becoming exalted and making themselves secure over their enemies, would finally result in dishonour (2. 9-11).
- (3) *Their oppression* of those whom they had conquered would be halted and God's glory would be seen in all lands (2. 12-14).
- (4) *Their tormenting of their victims*, including immorality and corruption, would boomerang on them, and their proud haughty spirits would be broken (2. 15-17).
- (5) *Their idolatry*, which was vanity and had no life-giving qualities (2. 18-20), was considered the worst sin of all, for it was against God.

In contrast to all this evil, God was in control in His holy temple.

Habakkuk, having heard God's replies and knowing His judgments, makes a wonderful prayer to God in chapter 3. The prophet's plea is for mercy (3. 2). The language is marvellously descriptive, likening God's glory to the sun's radiance spreading through the skies. Pestilence, plague and thunderstorm come from God (3. 5, 7). The whole of creation is affected by the majestic power of God

(3. 8, 9), who deals directly with the nations and wicked men who slay the innocent (3. 12, 14). Habakkuk reflects on God's power and longs for the day when He will reveal Himself against the invaders (3. 15, 16).

In the last three verses of the chapter we have a wonderful declaration of faith, even though from a natural viewpoint everything that made life worth-while was non-existent, due to calamity after calamity. The prophet exulted and rejoiced in the God of his deliverance and his strength. He would be like a hind on high places, ranging far above the desolate scenes of earth.

Teman and Mount Paran (3. 3) are in the region of Sinai, south of Palestine, reminding us of God's revelation of the law. Pestilence and plague (3. 5) recall His dealings in Egypt; and Cushan and Midian (3. 7) the march of Israel to the promised land. In bringing the mighty acts of God enacted in the past to our remembrance we can be assured that we have the same God who changes not and who will in judgement and mercy deal with the nations of mankind.

*R. F. Robertson*

*From Birkenhead.* —The second chapter consists of a taunting proverb, outlining the evils of the Chaldeans under a number of headings. Firstly there is the greedy capitalist (2. 6-8), then the man who gets evil gain and imagines himself secure from all retribution (2. 9-11). There follows the man that builds with the blood and labours of others (2. 12-14), and the lascivious man who uses alcohol as a prelude to perversion (2. 15-17). Finally there is the idolator who worships inanimate objects (2. 18, 19). There is a great contrast between the gods of the Chaldeans who could do nothing to help their worshippers, and Jehovah who was and is almighty.

Amidst all the gloom of these verses there are the glorious promises "that the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD" (v. 14) and that "the LORD is in His holy temple" (v. 20), to cheer the people of God in a day of adversity. In a world of constant hurry it is good to realise that there are times when God wishes us to keep silence before Him and wait for Him (2. 20).

Habakkuk's prayer in chapter 3 demonstrates that he knew the Lord in a remarkable way. He commences with an acknowledge-

ment of his sense of awe and then pleads with God to work on His people's behalf as in former days; His works of old are then listed. The language of this chapter was compared to that of the Psalmist in Psalms 78, 105 and 106, where a long catalogue of God's mighty acts are given. In 3. 16 we read of trembling before God. In Psalm 119. 120 a similar thought is expressed. In all ages danger is not far away when the fear of God is cast aside. In 3. 17-19 there is a remarkable affirmation of faith by the prophet, that God will be trusted and praised irrespective of the fertility of the crops. God will be adored for His own sake and not simply for the blessings that He brings.

An interesting item on Habakkuk 3 which came to our notice is its place in the readings at the feast of firstfruits in the modern Jewish calendar. There is a daily reading from the law and the prophets and the aim is for two readings to be complimentary. On the second day of the feast the readings are as follows: from the Law, a passage in Deuteronomy; from the prophets, Habakkuk 3 (This has been verified at the local synagogue).

*T. J. Sands, R. D. Williams*

### *IMPRESSIONS FROM OTHER CONTRIBUTORS*

Papers were also received from Atherton and Leigh, Melbourne and Methil, and a summary is given below.

Although the "woes" of Hab. 2. 6-19 are addressed as to an individual, the context of the whole book shows that the Chaldean or Babylonian nation is being referred to (see 1. 6 and 2. #). On the other hand, an inescapable warning is given in this section that each individual in the Chaldean army would be held responsible by God for his own acts of cruelty.

In conquering many nations and annexing their territory, the Babylonians would hope permanently to secure their position of dominance over a vast empire (2. 9). Their might, increased by the peoples and nations allied to them through conquest, would render them impregnable to every assault. Such reasoning, however, failed with succeeding generations. A system based on evil is self-defeating. The time would come when "the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it" (2. 11). The con-

quered peoples would restively await an opportunity to join hands in overthrowing Babylon's malign tyranny.

The Babylonian oppression would not pass unrequited (2. 12); but meanwhile the oppressed nations must learn God's lesson, that all labour is futile when He is forgotten. It is He who permits one nation to chastise another (2. 13); this is just another step towards the time when "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (v. 14). The conquerors, too, must learn how misplaced had been their trust in idols which they had made. Kingdoms may come and go, but the Lord reigns and it becomes the earth to "keep silence before Him" (2. 20).

The Lord had previously said to Habakkuk, "The just shall live by his faith" (2. 4). Resting upon the word of the Lord, the prophet himself now sees beyond the imminent judgement on Judah and the seeming invincibility of Chaldean might to Judah's eventual renewal under God: "O LORD, revive Thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy". One paper suggested that this two-fold mention of "the years" seemed significant, perhaps referring to an earlier prophecy through Jeremiah, in which a limit of 70 years was set on Judah's servitude to the Chaldeans (Jer. 25. 11, 12; see Dan. 9. 2). If so, Habakkuk would here be praying for the fulfilment of this prophecy before the 70 years had even started: it therefore seems more logical to consider Habakkuk's prayer as a longing for immediate revival among God's people, despite the years of spiritual dearth which had been experienced.

Hab. 3. 3-6 seems to refer to the awful revelation and acts of God at Sinai (Ex. 19. 16-19; cf. Deut. 33. 2). and Hab. 3. 7-15 to various occurrences during the periods of Israel's wilderness journey and the Judges, though it may be difficult to identify every feature mentioned. Habakkuk contemplates before God His mighty acts of renown in former times. If only Judah could have seen what the prophet saw; if only they had remembered Jehovah's doings for Israel, saving His people, they would have been humbled to repentance, and judgement would have been averted. Judah, however, must learn through chastisement. The prophet, in contrast, looks confidently to the Lord to show mercy to His people in reviving

their hearts once more towards Him, so that there will be eventually a fresh exodus. All the nations are to fall, but a remnant from Judah will be preserved.

Habakkuk concludes his prayer on a note of triumph and joy, his former despondency and complaints banished by the divine vision and his remembrance of God's great power. *Eds.*

### COMMENT

1. (*Derby*): Both these suggestions are interesting, but I should have thought the most obvious interpretation would be that God had been chastising His people for their backsliding as predicted in Deut. 28. 3840. *G. P. Jr.*

### QUESTION AND ANSWER

*From Atherton and Leigh*: Does Hab. 2. 14 refer to the Millennium or to divine intervention in the Chaldean oppression of the nations?

It is true that those of various nationalities who happened to know of predictions by Israel's prophets about the destruction of the Chaldean power would be impressed by their fulfilment. But this impression would be limited, and does not at all answer to the fulness of the declaration of Hab. 2. 14. That this applies to the world-wide knowledge of God in millennial times is confirmed by such scriptures as Isaiah 11. 9 and Jeremiah 31. 33, 34. *G. P. Jr.*

### PSALM 69

Whilst Psalm 68 tells of the glories of Christ, Psalm 69 speaks of His sufferings. It is well that God should tell us of the glories that we may be fortified in the sufferings. It is even said of the Lord, "Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12. 2).

Save Me, O God;

For the waters are come in unto My soul.

I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing:

I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow Me.

(verses 1, 2)

This Psalm of David is set to Shoshannim (Lilies, thought by some to be instruments of music resembling lilies). Compare Psalm 45 by the sons of Korah, which is a psalm of the glories of Christ, but this one deals with His sufferings. See also Psalm 80 of Asaph.

Verses 1 and 2 have for long and by many been taken as the Lord's heart cries to God in His sufferings on the Cross. Death was siezing on the Man Christ Jesus. There is hope for a vessel battling with the waves of a storm if they do not burst through the hull or down the hatches, but once the water gains ingress there is little hope that the vessel will outride the storm. So it was with the Lord. When the waters of death entered His soul, all He could do was to cry unto God to save Him. Paul in Hebrews 5. 7 says of the Lord, "Who in the days of His flesh, having offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from (*EK*, "out of") death". He knew that He must die on the Cross, but He cried to God to save Him out of death. As the waters of death entered His soul and He was sinking, He cried, "I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing"; the floods of deep waters overflowed Him. He was heard in that He feared. While these two verses of the psalm deal with His sufferings at the end of His life, there is much in the psalm concerning His sufferings during His lifetime.

*J. M.*

# BIBLE STUDIES

*A magazine for the exploration of the Word of God (Acts 17. 11). '*

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## EDITORIAL

Now **that we have reached the final issue of the year**, editors wish to **express** appreciation of **the work of our contributors during what must have been a heavy year**. We are convinced **that the labour involved in the study of difficult portions is more profitable than coasting along in the reading of easy portions**. "In all labour **there is profit**" (Prov. 14. 23); also "God is not unrighteous to forget your **work**" (Heb. 6. 10). These **and other encouraging verses of Scripture are as applicable to the study of the Scriptures as to any other labour in the Lord**. It is to **be hoped, therefore, that our studies in 1971, though difficult, have proved profitable to all interested**. In 1972 our reading is in **part of Revelation, another difficult but profitable study**. **Let us not be dismayed at the thought of the difficulty, but rather let us gird ourselves to the task, so that the difficulty may stimulate rather than inhibit progress**. We look to God for blessing on **our past and future studies, and that the gracious Holy Spirit may find in us vessels meet to receive His ministrations**.

There is hidden in Obadiah's prophecy **a striking contrast between two days, "the day of thy brother (Jacob)" (verse 12) and "the day of the LORD" (verse 15)**. The gravity of **the former of these is conveyed by such terms as "the day that thou stoodest on the other side", "the day that strangers carried away his substance" (verse 11), "the day of his disaster" (verse 12), "the day of their destruction" (verse 12), "the day of distress" (verses 12, 14), and "the day of their calamity" (verse 13)**. They leave no doubt **as to the severity of God's judgement on Judah and Jerusalem, and also as to the treacherous perfidy of Edom. But the Judge of all the earth ever does that which is right (Gen. 18. 25), and when He chastises His own, He does so for their good, that they may be drawn closer to Him, not that their enemies may exult over them and do them ill. He never afflicts beyond what is just: man is prone**

to **overdo** punishment. In all **this Edom** failed. Consequently, **there must come another day when Edom's** wrong **treatment** of Israel will **reap** its due reward, and the day for that in its fullest sense is the day of the Lord. This opens up an **extensive subject** which we leave our readers to pursue. *J. B.*

## PHILISTIA

*Geographical Situation.* Philistia, the land of the Philistines, lay along the western flank of Judah, sitting astride the land corridor that ran between Egypt and Syria and is known today as the Gaza Strip. From ancient times Philistia was on the highway between the great nations lying to the north and south of the land of Israel and it was strategically important to them.

The boundaries of the land were the Mediterranean from Gaza to Jaffa on the west; the plain of Sharon on the north; the hills of Judah on the east; and the Egyptian desert in the south. Its five great cities of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron and Gath (1 Sam. 6. 17) were fortresses built to withstand attacks from north or south and it is recorded that Ashdod withstood the might of the Egyptian army for 29 years, the longest siege on record.

The land was very fertile and its produce, together with the revenues from the caravan traffic along the coastal road, made the Philistines a powerful and prosperous nation. They were renowned as skilful mariners, and no doubt sea-going trade brought more wealth into their coffers. In addition they excelled in the smelting of iron and in its uses for both peaceful and warlike purposes.

*History.* It appears that the Philistines came originally from the Aegean; moving by stages to Crete, anciently known as Caphtorim (from which they gained their early name), they came to Cyprus and then to the coastland of Palestine, which itself received its name from the Philistines. There they established themselves after several invasions at different times from the days of Abraham until the Exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt.

The land of the Philistines and their five principal cities are mentioned in the book of Joshua (13. 3) as land that still remained to be possessed, but Israel never succeeded in doing this, although Judah for a time captured the cities of Gaza, Ashkelon and Ekron.

In the book of Judges (3. 3, 4) God expressly states that He was leaving the five lords of the Philistines with others to teach the children of Israel war and to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the Lord. They remained there as a constant thorn in the side of Judah until she was finally taken captive into Babylon.

God finally punished Philistia and her inhabitants for her unrelenting hostility towards Israel and particularly for her treachery in the time of His people's greatest need when Israel's land was invaded and overrun by the armies of the Chaldeans. He brought about the sacking of her cities and the pillaging of the land by Nebuchadnezzar and completed His vengeance when Alexander the Great swept through the land, razing their cities and depopulating the country (Zeph. 2. 4-6) so that no trace of Philistine occupation remains today.

*Influence upon Israel.* Unlike the Edomites or the Moabites and the children of Ammon, there existed no blood relationship between the Philistines and Israel, for the Philistines were descendants of Ham.

As we noted in Judges, they were left close at hand to Israel so that their idolatrous worship and soothsaying, and the evil practices that go along with these things, should test her faithfulness to God, and there they remained, a constant source of attraction to pleasure-loving Israelites. Samson, the one-time saviour of Israel, consorted with Delilah, and was finally bound by his enemies. With eyes put out he was made sport of before the rejoicing crowds of Philistines. Such is the humiliation that the enemies of God can bring to His people.

After this, in the early days of Saul's reign, the Philistines dominated Israel. Permission had to be asked to sharpen any cutting instrument such as an axe or ploughshare. David on the other hand, always appreciated the true character of the Philistines. When he did battle with the giant, he did not rely on his own prowess, but on the help of the Lord. Later, in the destroying of Ziklag by the Amalekites and the capture of his wives and his friends' dependants, he learned not to compromise with the enemy and afterwards declared unceasing war upon them until they should trouble him no more.

*Prophetic denunciations of Philistia.* God was not unmindful of the continual hatred of the Philistines for His people, stemming possibly from the fact that Israel had taken much of the land of Palestine which they considered belonged to them, and He foretold their ultimate destruction.

In the days of Ahaz king of Judah who associated himself and his people with the vile idolatrous practices of the nations surrounding his land, God beset Judah with enemies on all sides, even allowing the king of Israel to invade the land and take many of the people captive. The Philistines saw this as their opportunity to avenge their defeats at the hands of David in past years. Entering the land they took the cities of Beth-shemesh, Aijalon, Gederoth, Soco and Timnah (2 Chron. 28. 18).

Both Jeremiah and Amos denounce this treacherous act. Jeremiah says, "Thus saith the LORD: Behold, waters rise up out of the north, and shall become an overflowing stream, and shall overflow the land and all that is therein, the city and them that dwell therein:... because of the day that cometh to spoil all the Philistines, to cut off from Tyre and Zidon every helper that remaineth: for the LORD will spoil the Philistines, the remnant of the isle of Caphtor. Baldness is come upon Gaza; Ashkelon is brought to nought" (Jer. 47. 2-5). Amos speaks of the ultimate destruction of the Philistines: "Thus saith the LORD: For three transgressions of Gaza, yea, for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they carried away captive the whole people, to deliver them up to Edom: but I will send a fire on the wall of Gaza, and it shall devour the palaces thereof: and I will cut off the inhabitant from Ashdod, and him that holdeth the sceptre from Ashkelon; and I will turn Mine hand against Ekron, and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish, saith the Lord GOD" (Amos 1. 6-8).

So the armies of Nebuchadnezzar swept down from the north, ravaging the country of the Philistines and isolating Tyre and Zidon from their last ally, preparatory to the destruction of these two great cities, foretold in the prophecy of Ezekiel.

Finally, Zechariah has to say that Ashkelon and Gaza, seeing the destruction of Tyre, will, together with other Philistine cities be destroyed but: "I will take away his blood out of his mouth, and his abominations from between his teeth; and he also shall be a

remnant for our God: and he shall be as a chieftain in Judah, and Ekron as a Jebusite" (Zech. 9. 5-7). Despite the predictions of punishment and near extirpation of the race of the Philistines, here is a promise that God will one day give them a place alongside Israel in the coming Millennium, when they will be taught no more to eat blood or food sacrificed to idols, which is abominable to the Lord. They will, it seems, occupy a similar position of inferiority as did the Jebusites in the time of David. T. Belton

## STUDIES IN SEVEN MINOR PROPHETS

### OBADIAH

#### EDOM AND THE DAY OF THE LORD

*From Atherton and Leigh.* —Although Israel and Edom were of a common ancestry, there was a bitter hatred between the two nations. Apart from the rivalry which must have existed between the families of Jacob and Esau, the most probable reason for this state of affairs existing was that Edom refused Israel permission to use the "king's highway" (Num. 20. 14-21). In spite of Edom's aggressive attitude, Israel was to respect Esau's possession, because it had been given them by the Lord (Deut. 2. 5). In addition Israel was instructed not to abhor an Edomite (Deut. 23. 7).

It seems reasonable to accept that Obadiah takes the words of Jer. 49. 14 as his starting point. The Holy Spirit now reveals the judgement that is to fall upon Edom. Deceived by national pride, the Edomites overrated their own importance, whereas in fact they were greatly despised (verse 2). Safe in their mountain stronghold (i. e. Petra), they considered themselves to be invulnerable to any outside attack. The Lord would bring them down (verse 4). The destruction which the Lord would bring upon Edom would leave them completely destitute. Robbers only take what can be easily carried; at least something is left; but God would search out their hidden wealth and nothing would be left. The nations with whom they had alliances (Babylon, Ammon and Moab) would turn against them. When the Lord moved against Edom the wise men of the nation would fail to provide a plan of action, and the mighty men of the army would be of no effect against their former allies.

The reason for the Lord's anger against Edom is the violence done against Israel. The civilization and culture of Edom was to

**pass away; and attempts to revive the nation to its former glory would be fruitless (Mai. 1. 4). When Jerusalem was captured and plundered by the Babylonians, the Edomites joined in the pillage. They also took sadistic delight in Israel's plight and gloated over their agony. They even laid ambushes for any refugees fleeing for their lives, and delivered them up to the Babylonians. Instead of being a help to Israel in their need they became an enemy. There is, it would seem, an implied moral obligation on them, because of their close relationship, to aid Israel [Comment 1]. Although Israel was being punished for her sins by a nation God chose, it was presumptuous of Edom to join in. Those who drank wine in their victory-feasts upon God's holy mountain would drink of the Lord's fury at a future date. A reunited Israel (verse 18) would take vengeance on Edom and dispossess her of her land. One feature which is of interest is that, while many nations have waxed and waned and finally disappeared, Israel always has a remnant preserved.**

*L. de Ville*

*From Denmark Hill.* —Obadiah's prophecy is a fearful invective against the Edomites, foretelling their final destruction. Edom was the name given to Esau when he sold his birthright to Jacob for the red pottage (Gen. 25. 30). Following this the Lord gave Esau the "field of Edom" (Gen. 32. 3). Edom was highland country, extending along the eastern side of the Arabah from the northern end of the gulf of Elath to the southern end of the Dead Sea (approx. 2, 000 sq. miles). Its boundary with Moab was the brook Zered (Deut. 2. 13). It is noteworthy that certain of the Edomites are said to have been troglodytes (cave dwellers). 2 Chron. 25. 14 states further that they were idolators.

Yet though they felt secure in their high habitations (Obad. 3, 4), the Lord will bring them right down and take vengeance on them for all that they did to Israel (verse 15). Esau's hatred towards Jacob for acquiring his birthright has been passed on to every generation since. This was borne out in Num. 20, when Edom flatly refused Israel permission to pass through her land. Israel was in no fighting mood then, but several hundred years later Saul attacked Edom. Then David and Joab slaughtered Edom. Israel however, never really subdued Edom completely. Thus Edom grew again until the day Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem, and then she joined in and helped in that terrible slaughter and captivity of the

Jews. Much of Obadiah's prophecy deals with this incident, especially verses 11-14. Psalm 137. 7 highlights the cowardly deed: "Remember, O LORD, against the children of Edom the day of Jerusalem; who said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof". Indeed the Lord will remember Edom, but He will also remember Israel and raise her to glories unknown to her in the past. Obadiah's vision is two-fold: (1) looking forward to Israel's blessing on Mount Zion, and (2) Edom moving towards final destruction. The struggle started as a small thing in the womb, grew as the youths strove for the birthright, but neither rival will be able to deny in the future that "the kingdom shall be the LORD's" (verse 21).

*Mark McKaig*

*From Methil.* —Obadiah, whose name means "Servant of the Lord", was the writer of the shortest book in the Old Testament. The theme of his prophecy is the law of retribution, showing the just judgement of God, the God who knows and will not overlook wrong done by evil men or nations. "As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee", is a major principle of the prophecy [Comment 2],

Edom was the nation that sprang from Esau (Gen. 36. 8, 9). We know from Malachi 1. 2, 3 that God loved Jacob but hated Esau. The Edomites were proud and defiant: they thought that because of where they dwelt no one could bring them down to the ground (Obad. 3), for they had their habitation high up in the clefts of the rocks where eagles built their nests. But God is omnipotent. He opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble (1 Pet. 5. 5). The Edomites would soon learn that "pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16. 18).

The law of retribution is clearly stated in verse 15: "as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee; thy dealing shall return upon thine own head". What had Edom done? She rejoiced at the fall of Jerusalem as the city was smitten by the armies of Babylon. The children of Edom also entered into the city and said, "Rase it, rase it" (Psa. 137. 7, Obad. 11). They rejoiced over the children of Judah's destruction. They laid hands on their substance and they prevented their escape from the enemy (Obad. 12-14). For this Edom would suffer at the hand of Almighty God, she would drink the cup of His indignation, and Edom's fall would be complete (Obad. 16, Lam. 4, 22). Obadiah reveals in his prophecy the severity of God rather than His goodness (Rom. 11. 22). In the

day of the Lord (still future) things will be put right and justice will be done.

God loved Jacob; and He loves His people today. Obadiah clearly teaches that those who do mischief to God's people can expect divine retribution.

*Neville Coomer, Ian Lithgow*

*From Vancouver.* —Scripture does not reveal anything regarding the background of this prophet of the Lord. His message has reference to both Israel and Edom, but is chiefly a condemnation of Edom. His prophecy does not reveal whether he personally (as an ambassador, verse 1) carried his message to Edom or Israel [Comment 3]. Obadiah commences with the words, "Thus saith the Lord GOD", and this characterizes him as a prophet of whom it could be said, "There came a man sent from God". As to the date of Obadiah's message, we can but say it was possibly just after the fall of Jerusalem which was approximately 587 B. C. At a later date Malachi the prophet said, "Was not Esau Jacob's brother? Yet I loved Jacob; but Esau I hated, and made his mountains a desolation". The wicked and cruel behaviour of Edom, as graphically set forth by Obadiah, confirms the reason for God's hatred of Edom's sinful ways.

Dwelling in the cleft of the rocks which made offence against them almost impossible, Edom proclaimed with pride, "Who shall bring me down?" However, Edom must learn the power of God, and the answer comes, "I will bring thee down from thence, saith the LORD". Verses 5 to 9 in very illustrative language would seem to indicate that Edom's judgement would be extreme. However, we know from Dan. 11. 41 that in the time of Jacob's trouble, Edom, Moab and the chief of the children of Ammon will escape. It may be that there were very few who escaped the destruction prophesied by Obadiah and the descendants of these will form the nation spoken of in Dan. 11. 41.

We learn from verse 7 that Edom was part of a confederacy of nations who opposed Israel, and now his confederates have deceived and forsaken him. In Psa. 83. 1-8 we find the names of the confederates and the peoples who were linked together. We note the names of Ishmael, Moab, Hagarenes, Ammon and the children of Lot, all of whom were kinsfolk of Jacob. The same confederates are linked together against Israel in the present day in the Middle East. When God in righteousness punished Israel because of their

departure from Himself, the nation of Edom rejoiced and would even join with the nations that were oppressing Israel. Psa. 137. 7 reveals Israel's grief of heart because of their sorrows and appeals to the Lord to punish Edom.

We have noted that most of the minor prophets which we have studied this year were very faithful in denouncing Israel's departure from the Lord, but before the book closes there is outlined the glory of the Lord that lies in the future when the nations will know repentance and restoration to Himself. Then Israel will be the head and not the tail, and their land will be the desire of all nations. All the Lord's promises will be fulfilled and the last words of the prophet will be fulfilled: "The kingdom shall be the LORD's".

*J. Bell*

#### *IMPRESSIONS FROM OTHER CONTRIBUTORS*

Papers were also received from Birkenhead, Derby, Edinburgh, Hayes and Melbourne, and the following are impressions from these.

It was suggested that Obadiah's prophecy to Edom was given after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans about 588 B. C. The character of the Edomites was seen in the meaning of the name Edom. Edom was the name given to Esau, whose name means "rough" or "hairy" (Gen. 25. 30). The name "Edom" reminds us that Esau sold his birthright; Edom means "red", the colour of the pottage Esau so desired. The selling of his birthright showed that Esau was a profane person who placed a sinfully low estimate on its value and was concerned only about earthly things. It was a tremendous thing that Esau sold, the right to become the progenitor of God's holy nation through which the promises concerning the Messiah would be realised. For this Esau found no place of repentance (Heb. 12. 17). Enmity throughout the generations of Jacob and Esau was the result. There is a great contrast between God's promise to Jacob in Genesis, "Thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad", and God's word to Esau in Obadiah, "Behold, I have made thee small among the nations: thou art greatly despised".

God knew that when they grew, the characters of the two sons would be entirely different, and made His choice before they were born (Rom. 9. 11-13). Isaac prior to his death prophesied by the

spirit of God: To Esau he said, "Thou shalt serve thy brother", and also, "Thou shalt shake his yoke from off thy neck". These brief prophecies foreshadowed the conflict which there would be between the descendants of Jacob and Esau.

Perhaps the first evidence of this conflict is seen in Num. 20. 14-21, when Israel, journeying from Kadesh, asked permission to pass through the borders of Edom. Though the Edomites had replaced the Horites in Mount Seir (Deut. 2. 72), the descendants of Esau had dwelt securely in this land for many generations. Regarding the people of Israel as mere wanderers, they threatened war, and ungraciously refused permission. Yet God's grace is seen too in the words of Deut. 23. 7, 8, "Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite... The children of the third generation... shall enter into the assembly of the LORD".

Edom became subject to Israel in the days of David (1 Kin. 11. 15, 16), although Saul had previously fought with them (1 Sam. 14. 47) but had not brought them into subjection. Later Edom revolted, in the reign of Jehoram (2 Kin. 8. 20-22). Though Bozrah was the ancient capital of Seir, in Obadiah's day the capital was Sela, also called Petra. Because of this natural rocky fortress, they are said to have mounted high like the eagles, their nest being set among the stars (verse 4). To make themselves more secure they had made alliances with the nations surrounding them, only to discover that their neighbours were deceptive (verse 7).

Verses 10 and 11 were thought to refer to Edom's attitude during the Chaldean invasion. The Edomites blocked the way out of the city for the escaping Jews, a thing which the returning remnant could not forget (Psa. 137. 7). Although Jehovah was using the Chaldean to chastise His people, He could not look lightly upon those who with covetous eye desired a share of their substance which was being carried away.

Edom's downfall, though seemingly to be accomplished by military power, was in fact a work of God. The prophecies about the Edomites emphasize their pride as seen, for example, in their self-confident assertion that they were invulnerable. They had not reckoned that in contending against Israel they were contending against God. Edom sought to build in his own strength what Esau lost by despising his birthright. "Them that honour Me I will honour", says God, "and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed".

The Edomites sowed treachery (verses 11 and 12), and reaped the same (verse 7). They were guilty of robbery (verse 13), and they themselves were robbed (verses 5, 6). They were violent (verse 9), and for that they would be destroyed (verses 12-14). Balaam said (Num. 24. 18, 19) "Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession, which were his enemies; while **Israel** doeth valiantly. And out of Jacob shall one have dominion, and shall destroy the remnant from the city". Ezekiel (25. 12-14) speaks of the Lord's vengeance to be executed through Israel. Esau had taken vengeance. The Lord would show the truth of His words, "Vengeance belongeth unto Me".

In contrast to Jacob's day of disaster, destruction, distress and calamity (Obad. 12-14; see Jer. 30. 7), the day of the Lord was near upon all the nations, and Edom would receive the reward of his doings. It was expressed that the day of the Lord mentioned here is not necessarily future entirely, and that in a limited sense Edom has already experienced something of the day of the Lord in the judgements of God.

Only four years after Jerusalem was burned, the land of the Edomites was raided and laid waste (582 B. C. ) by the Chaldeans whom they had aided against Judah. In 126 B. C. they were absorbed into the Jewish state by John Hyrcanus, and their territory became known as Idumea from the time of the Persian Empire until about A. D. 70. The Idumeans have disappeared, the land now forming part of Jordan: yet the occupiers of the land in a coming day are identified with Edom.

In Mat. 24. 15-31, referring to the time of Jacob's trouble, the Lord uttered a warning for future generations: "Then let them that are in Judaea flee unto the mountains". It was believed by some contributors that this place of refuge is referred to by Daniel as lands delivered out of the hand of "the king of the north", and is identified as Edom, and Moab, and the chief of the children of Ammon (Daniel 11. 41), a place prepared of God (Rev. 12. 6).

Though Nebuchadnezzar, the first ruler of the "times of the Gentiles", was allowed to deal with Edom, at the appearing of the Lord as Son of Man in glory, it would appear to be indicated in Isaiah 34. 5, 6 and 63. 1-6 that Edom will be the scene of terrible slaughter by the sword of the Lord. From this time onwards, although the prophetic scriptures indicate that it will be a land unfit for

human habitation (**Jer. 49. 13, 17, 18; Joel 3. 19**), yet it is to become a possession of Israel (**Num. 24. 18; Obad. 17, 21**).

*Eds.*

### COMMENTS

1. (*Atherton and Leigh*): There need be no doubt as to the obligations involved in near relationship. That the answer to rebellious Cain's question, "Am I my brother's keeper?", is in the affirmative is surely clear from Gen. 4.

2. (*Methil*): There is much more in Obadiah than this severe principle, as is evident from the closing verses. Nevertheless, the principle is there, but it is worth noting that, even in acting in accordance with it, God does not go beyond due measure in judgement.

3. (*Vancouver*) Is not the ambassador sent among the nations that are to be used in judgement against Edom? *J. B.*

### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

*From Derby*: We wondered whether the prophecy of the Lord to Rebecca, "The elder shall serve the younger", might have had a long term view, so that a remnant might become servants to Israel in the Millennium.

Gen. 25. 23 applies to the two nations that should descend from Jacob and Esau, and would appear to apply at all times. But the subservience was not to be passive and peaceful (Gen. 27. 40); Esau's descendants would at times rebel and throw off the yoke.

*From Edinburgh*: Obadiah said the people would be cut off for ever and so complete would it be that nothing would remain (verses 10 and 18). Was this fulfilled at the destruction of Edom soon after that of Jerusalem? Or has this a future application?

There are those who hold that the fulfilment took place soon after the fall of Jerusalem. But, even so, this does not completely rule out the possibility of the revival of Edom, perhaps through a few that escaped. See Vancouver's paper. *J. B.*

Students may also be interested to refer to *Bible Studies* Vol. 31 (1963), pages 109-110 for a summary of prophetic references to Edom at the time of the end. *Eds.*

PSALM 69 (*continued*)

I am weary with My crying; My throat is dried:

Mine eyes fail while I wait for My God.

They that hate Me without a cause are more than the hairs of Mine head:

They that would cut Me off, being Mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty:

Then I restored that which I took not away (verses 3, 4).

Here was the daily experience of the Man of Sorrows, particularly during His public ministry. His crying to God was continuous. One has only to be in continual supplication, crying to God about a matter of great anxiety to know how exhausting it is. The Lord was weary, His throat was dried, and His *eyes* failed as He waited for His God. Those that hated Him without cause were more than the hairs of His head, and they are still as numerous. His wrongful enemies were mighty. His was a causeless love and theirs a causeless hatred. What was it that the Lord restored, to what or to whom? Was it peace on earth among men in whom He is well pleased? (Luke 2. 14), *peace* He made by the blood of His Cross (Col. 1. 20), or was it that "He restoreth unto man his righteousness" (Job 33. 26)? "Restoreth" in Job is the same word as in Psalm 69. 4. The Hebrew word for restored is *shuw*, to turn about, return, as well as "to be restored", and there are other renderings.

O GOD, Thou knowest my foolishness;

And my sins are not hid from Thee.

Let not them that wait on Thee be ashamed through me, O Lord God of Hosts:

Let not those that seek Thee be brought to dishonour through me, O God of Israel (verses 5, 6).

These verses cannot, I judge, have any application to the Lord, but must be the psalmist's view of himself and his sins, which, perhaps, showed themselves to him the more he thought of the One of whom he was writing. It is ever, either through physical or mental nearness to Christ, that the state of men is revealed to themselves. It was so in the case of Peter in the boat, when he saw the miraculous draught of fishes, he fell down at the Lord's knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5. 8). The psalmist did not wish any that prayed or waited on God to be ashamed or

brought to dishonour through him. This is ever a proper desire that others should be helped by us rather than hindered, and honoured by our conduct rather than dishonoured.

Because for Thy sake I have borne reproach;  
Shame hath covered My face.

I am become a stranger unto My brethren,  
And an alien unto My mother's children.

For the zeal of Thine house hath eaten Me up;

And the reproaches of them that reproach Thee are fallen upon  
Me (verses 7, 8, 9).

Here we return to the Lord in His speaking through David. The Lord said to the Jews in Jerusalem, alluding to the Jews in the time of the end, "I am come in My Father's name, and ye receive Me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive" (John 5. 43). Shame covered His face, for He was despised and rejected of men. He was a stranger to His brethren, for even His brethren did not believe on Him (John 7. 3-5). He was also an alien to His mother's children. This is a statement which cuts right across the teaching of those who hold that Mary was "ever virgin". This is not so, for she had other four sons and at least two daughters. They said of Him, "Is not this the carpenter's Son? is not His mother called Mary? and His brethren, James, and Joseph, and Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us?" (Matt. 13. 55, 56). It is said also that Joseph knew not Mary his wife "till she had brought forth a Son", and that Son was called Immanuel, "God with us". This Greek word *Heos*, till, would smash to dust all doctrines built up around Mary as the queen of heaven, and the prayer and worship offered to her as being both immaculate and "ever virgin". It is well for those who believe the Scriptures that she was not immaculate, and also that she was a wife and mother of children.

Here in verse 9 we have two statements concerning the Lord which are quoted in the New Testament. "The zeal of Thine house hath eaten Me up". The disciples remembered this scripture after the Lord's first cleansing of the Temple (John 2. 13-17). The second part of the verse is quoted by Paul in Romans 15. 3, 4, "For Christ also pleased not Himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached Thee fell upon Me". This shows, speaking generally, that this is a psalm of Christ.

When I wept, and chastened My soul with fasting,  
That was to My reproach.

When I made sackcloth My clothing,

I became a proverb unto them.

They that sit in the gate talk of Me;

And I am the song of the drunkards (verses 10, 11, 12).

Nothing that the Lord did or said pleased men, nor are they pleased with Him yet, for His ways are quite contrary to theirs. When He wept and fasted it was to His reproach; when He put on mourning apparel, He became a proverb. The elders talked about Him in the gate in no worthy manner. And to the lowest class, the drunkards, he was their song in their carousals. He *is* still treated the same in so-called Christian countries, in a manner that Mohammed and Buddha would not be spoken of in Mohammedan and Buddhist countries.

But as for Me, My prayer is unto Thee, O LORD, in an  
acceptable time:

O God, in the multitude of Thy mercy,

Answer Me in the truth of Thy salvation.

Deliver Me out of the mire, and let Me not sink:

Let Me be delivered from them that hate Me, and out of the  
deep waters.

Let not the waterflood overwhelm Me,

Neither let the deep swallow Me up;

And let not the pit shut her mouth upon Me (verses 13, 14, 15)

The Lord here turns to God, after stating men's attitude to Him, and speaks of His prayer being made in an acceptable time, and He pleads with God in the light of the fact that He is rich in mercy (Eph. 2. 4), that He will answer Him in the truth of His salvation, that is, in the certainty of salvation which is firm and stable. He seeks deliverance from the mire, the deep waters, the waterflood, and asks that the pit may not shut its mouth upon Him. These words of His prayer cast our mind back on verses 1 and 2.

Answer Me, O LORD; for Thy lovingkindness is good:

According to the multitude of Thy tender mercies turn Thou  
unto Me.

And hide not Thy face from Thy servant;

For I am in distress; answer Me speedily.

**Draw nigh unto My soul, and redeem it:**

**Ransom Me because of Mine enemies (verses 16, 17, 18)**

Having described in pictorial language what death meant to Him, the Lord cries to God to answer Him, for his lovingkindness was good, and He seeks God to turn to Him according to the multitude of His tender mercies. He was His Servant (Isa. 42. 7), who had entered into death for the iniquities of others (Isa. 53. 11), and He asks God not to hide His face from Him, for He was in distress. He asks God to redeem His soul, and to ransom Him from His enemies. "Redeem" and "ransom" here must not be confused with what caused the need of *our* being ransomed, even because of sin, original sin and sin committed by us; for our redemption is associated with the forgiveness of trespasses and sins (Eph. 1. 7; Col. 1. 14). In contrast to this the Lord knew no sin, but He was made sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5. 21). The Lord seeks to be ransomed from His enemies, from those who were external to Himself. Our sins were internal in ourselves and from such we needed redemption.

Thou knowest My reproach, and My shame, and My dishonour:  
Mine adversaries are all before Thee.

Reproach hath broken My heart; and I am full of heaviness:

And I looked for some to take pity, but there was none;

And for comforters, but I found none (verses 19, 20)

The treatment of the Lord by Jew and Gentile in His judgement and crucifixion will ever be a shame to them. Annas and Caiaphas the high priests, Pontius Pilate and Herod Antipas, each played his part, but Peter and others laid the charge of the Lord's death on the Israel people. The Lord loved the Israel people, and still does, and the reproaches which were hurled against the Divine Sufferer on the Cross broke His heart. As He looked down upon the rabble mob of priests, elders and common people, while hanging on the Cross, He looked for some to have pity and for comforters, but He found none. J. M.

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