Adult Lesson Commentary

2 Kings 21–23; 2 Chronicles 33–35
Zephaniah, Lamentations, Habakkuk

Sow the Wind
Reap the Whirlwind

Sunday School
Fall Quarter, 2007
September, October, November
## Contents

| Editor's Note | 2 |
| About the Writers | 3 |
| Second Chronicles Introduction | 5 |
| Lesson 1 The Foolishness of Idolatry | 6 |
| Lesson 2 The Word of God Discovered | 15 |
| Lesson 3 The Word of God Applied | 24 |
| Lesson 4 God's Judgment on Judah | 33 |
| Lesson 5 God's Judgment on the Nations | 42 |
| Lesson 6 God's Blessings and Restoration | 51 |
| Lesson 7 The Wondering Prophet | 60 |
| Lesson 8 The Watching Prophet | 69 |
| Lesson 9 The Worshiping Prophet | 79 |
| Lamentations Introduction | 89 |
| Lesson 10 Desolation of Jerusalem | 91 |
| Lamentations 1:1-22 | |
| Lesson 11 God's Just Judgment | 100 |
| Lamentations 2:1-22 | |
| Lesson 12 God's Faithful Mercy | 109 |
| Lamentations 3:1-66 | |
| Lesson 13 Prayer of Lamentation | 119 |
| Lamentations 4:1—5:22 | |
Our study for this quarter is sourced in two Old Testament historical books and three prophetic books. In 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, we will study the reigns of wicked King Manasseh and his son Amon. Following the death of Amon, good King Josiah came to the throne and immediately began repairing the Temple. During the extensive repairs Hilkiah the high priest found “the book of the law in the house of the LORD” (2 Kings 22:8). When God’s Word was discovered, read, obeyed and applied, good results were bound to follow, and they did. The Passover was restored and revival swept the kingdom, as many of the idolatrous abominations were removed from the land. However, this period of spiritual renewal did not prevent the judgment of God from falling on Judah, as it had upon Israel, because of decades of gross idolatry and unbelief.

The main focuses of study this quarter are three prophetic books: Zephaniah, Habakkuk and Lamentations. Zephaniah was a contemporary of Jeremiah and ministered during the reign of King Josiah. Though revival swept the land during his days, Zephaniah exposed the superficial moral and spiritual condition of the nation and revealed God’s coming judgment. Habakkuk ministered during the latter years of King Josiah and was most concerned with elevating the character of God among the people. God spoke through him, vindicating His holiness in the face of spiritual decay. Lamentations is a collection of five funeral dirges written about the fall of Jerusalem and Judah. Jeremiah witnessed the tragic events of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, along with the Babylonian captivity that awaited survivors of the siege. In Sow the Wind—Reap the Whirlwind, we will learn that God’s love is strong and His forgiveness is complete, but neither prevents Him from dealing with sin in the lives of His people. As God longed for His people to live holy lives for Him, and to walk by faith, so He expects His people today to be godly and Christlike as they walk through an ungodly world. Though this is inspired ancient Bible history, the moral and spiritual lessons are as true today as they were then. Biblical principles, when violated, carry adverse consequences. Though we live almost three millennia after these people, Bible principles are just as real and their violation just as costly today.

This Adult Lesson Commentary is an in-depth study of the Scripture passages in each lesson. Every lesson consists of three elements: the narrative of the Scripture passage; the manna, a discussion of interesting and informative topics related to the Scripture passage; and the word studies, which are based on specific words used in the Scripture text. The number following each word study identifies the word by the numbering system of Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible and is provided for the benefit of those who want to examine the Word of God in greater detail.

For this issue of the Adult Lesson Commentary, we appreciate Larry Crouch who wrote the lesson narratives, James Crain who did the word studies and David Butimore who prepared the mannas.

Larry E. Clements, Editor in Chief
Baptist Sunday School Committee
Recognized for their knowledge, wisdom and understanding of the Holy Scriptures, the writers of the Adult Lesson Commentary are faithful pastors, teachers and spiritual leaders among the Lord’s churches. Following are a few biographical notes about these men.

Brother Larry Crouch is a native of California, saved and baptized at Friendship Missionary Baptist Church in Sacramento, California, in 1952. He surrendered to preach on August 4, 1957, at Bayshore Missionary Baptist Church in Vallejo, California. Brother Crouch received his Bachelor of Theology degree from California Missionary Baptist Institute in Bellflower, California, in 1976. He remained with the school for several years and taught Major and Minor Prophets, Pastoral and Prison Epistles, Hermeneutics and Journalism. He is a member of the California and American Baptist Association History and Archives Committees. The Fresno Missionary Baptist Institute in Fresno, California, conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Divinity in 1998.

He has pastored in Washington and California and currently pastors Bethel Missionary Baptist Church in Oakley, California. He and his wife, Joyce, and son, Zachary make their home at 4580 El Monte Court, Oakley, CA 94561.

Brother James “Jim” A. Crain was born in Longview, Texas, and reared near McNeil, Arkansas. He was saved at the age of sixteen. He served in the military during the Vietnam conflict. He was baptized and licensed to preach by Mount Zion MBC of Cale, Arkansas, in 1972. He received Bachelor, Master and Doctor of Theology degrees from the Louisiana Missionary Baptist Institute and Seminary, where he serves as an instructor. Since beginning writing in 1983, he has written in the Missionary Baptist News, Baptist Sunday School Committee publications and various other publications. He has twice served as a local missionary. He presently pastors the Calvary Missionary Baptist Church in Minden, Louisiana. Beverly, his wife, is the daughter of a Baptist minister and a native of Texas. They have two children and grandchildren.
Brother David Butimore, Sr. was born in January, 1951 in Lynwood, California. He graduated from Westminster High School (Westminster, California) in 1969. He attended and graduated (AA degree) from Orange Coast College in 1972. He was saved August 20, 1970, at a Missionary Baptist Encampment in Northern California. He was baptized by the authority of Community MBC, Orange, California. He enrolled at California Missionary Baptist Institute and Seminary (CMBI) and graduated with a Doctor of Theology in 1990. He was ordained by the authority of Olive Hill MBC, Oroville, California (1975), and has held pastorates in California and Washington. He is currently the pastor of First MBC, Fresno. He served as faculty member and administrator of CMBI (1987-1993) and is currently President of Fresno Missionary Baptist Institute and Seminary. In the California Association, he has served as moderator, music director and parliamentarian. He has served in the Washington Association as moderator. He has served as Music Director, Assistant Parliamentarian, Parliamentarian, Vice President and President of the American Baptist Association. He is currently serving on the Baptist Sunday School Committee and is Treasurer of the American Baptist Association of Theological Schools. He is the author of six books. He has been married to his wife, Debby, since 1977, and has two sons, a daughter and son-in-law and one grandson.
As with the books of Samuel and Kings, the books of the Chronicles form one book in the Hebrew text. The Hebrew title is “Events of the Days.” First Chronicles 27:24 has the word chronicles in the text. In this verse it is from two Hebrew words meaning “Word of the Days.” The division of two books was first done in the Septuagint Version of the Old Testament in about 150 BC. The name Chronicles was first used by Jerome when he translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Latin between AD 385 and 405.

The book of Chronicles has no statement as to its author or date. The last event recorded is Cyrus’ decree in 538 BC, which allowed the Jews who had been captives in Babylon for seventy years to return to Israel and Jerusalem (2 Chron. 36:22). The list of genealogies extend to Pelatiah and Jesaiah, two of the grandsons of Zerubbabel (1 Chron. 3:21). First Chronicles 6:15 and 9:1 show that the book was put together after Judah was carried away captive to Babylon. By comparing 1 Chronicles 9 with Nehemiah 7:45; 11:3-32; 12:25, 26 and Ezra 2:42, we are brought to the return of the remnant to the cities of Judah and Jerusalem. This would bring us to the latter years of Ezra or Nehemiah. Hebrew scholars agree that the language of the Chronicles fits that of the post-Exilic period of Israel’s history. The Talmud attributes the gathering of material and writings to Ezra. He is called “a ready [skillful or diligent] scribe” (Ezra 7:6).


The purpose of the writing was to awaken the Jews, fresh out of exile, and encourage them to adhere to the Law (Ezra 7:10). One of Ezra’s goals was to see the Temple worship fully restored (Ezra 7:19-27; 8:33, 34). Both he and Nehemiah sought to do away with the mixed marriages with pagan unbelievers (Ezra 9; 10). When compared with the histories of Samuel and Kings, one quickly sees the emphasis is on worship, the Temple, the ark, the Levites and the singers (1 Chron. 13, 15, 16, 22). Thus our lessons from 2 Chronicles this quarter clearly show the foolishness of idolatry and the glorious blessings of having and following the Word of God.
The Foolishness of Idolatry

2 Kings 21:1-26; 2 Chronicles 33:1-25

The horrendous sins of which Manasseh and the people of Judah were guilty are in a number of ways comparable to present day conditions. Idolatry in various forms is witnessed around the world. It is witnessed among a number of so-called Christian organizations in their manner of worship. The Lord Jesus Christ is not presented in a manner that is compatible with the gospels. Another gospel is being preached, which is not another (Gal. 1:6-8). Paul clearly stated that all those who preach a strange gospel are to be accursed. The people of Judah too often played follow-the-leader without proper consideration for God’s law and His prophets. Such behavior eventually led to the nations downfall. “Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 14:34). The Lord’s New Testament churches around the world, regardless of what country they are in, first and foremost must “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3).

MANASSEH’S HERITAGE

2 Kings 20:20—21:1, 2; 2 Chronicles 32:32—33:1

Manasseh’s father, Hezekiah, is ranked with David, Solomon, Uzziah and Josiah. However, Manasseh was the most wicked and cruel king to ever reign over the kingdom of Judah. He is compared to Jeroboam who introduced idolatry to the Northern Kingdom of Israel and Ahab who married the wicked Phoenician, Jezebel. Ahab and Jezebel led the people of Israel in open rebellion against the worship of Jehovah. Manasseh ruled over Judah for fifty-five years, which was longer than any other king of Judah or Israel. Yet, for all his years as king very little space is allotted him in Scripture. There are a total of thirty-eight verses in 2 Kings 21 and 2 Chronicles 33. For much of his rule he lived in wickedness and stands as the archetype of wickedness and mockery toward God. The Scriptures tell us that he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. Studies concerning Manasseh’s life and reign usually focus upon the terrible sins he committed and how he led the nation of Judah to do likewise. However, let us not overlook the fact that he repented and was restored to God’s favor.

When Hezekiah became ill unto death, there is no record that he had children. Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign which would put
his birth in the third year after Hezekiah’s recovery. There is no mention in Scripture of Hezekiah’s having other children. Some have concluded that the people of Judah would have been better off if Hezekiah had died. But, we have no way of knowing how things would have turned out otherwise. One thing is for certain, the will of the Lord and His glory triumphed in the end. Manasseh was not raised on the wrong side of town. He was born and reared in the king’s palace of Judah. He had the best that material life could offer. As for food, clothing and shelter, Manasseh wanted for nothing. Having material wealth does not guarantee that one will grow up to be a productive citizen of society. Often riches have an adverse effect rather than a positive one. Even in Manasseh’s day, the love of money was the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:10). Any man or nation that puts their trust in riches is destined for a fall. Righteousness is the key to a flourishing life and a stable economy for any people (Prov. 11:28; 22:1, 2). Our trust must be in the living God and not the uncertain riches of this world (1 Tim. 6:17).

Manasseh was privileged to have godly parents. His father was highly respected and honored in life and in death. The writer of Chronicles speaks of his “exceeding much riches and honour” (2 Chron. 32:27). Mention is also made of his “goodness” (verse 32). When Hezekiah passed from this life he was buried with honors “in the chiefest of the sepulchres” (verse 33). The people of Jerusalem and Judah “did him honour at his death” (verse 33). Manasseh’s mother was named **Hephzi-bah** meaning, “my delight is in her.” Isaiah used this name in his description of the New Jerusalem, saying of the city, “thou shalt be called Hephzi-bah [my delight is in her], and thy land Beulah [to be married]: for the LORD delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married” (Isa. 62:4). If her name is any indication of her character, she, too, was a godly person. Some scholars have theorized that Hephzi-bah, as queen, was co-regent during Manasseh’s younger years; but there is no biblical basis for such conjecture.

Although not the youngest to ever take the throne of David, Jehoash, age 7 (2 Kings 11:21) and Josiah, age 8 (2 Kings 22:1) were younger, the age of twelve is a young age to assume the responsibility of being king over the Lord’s people (2 Chron. 33:1). However, in that he reigned for fifty-five years, he was certainly old enough and had time enough to change his ways and be held totally accountable for his actions. The name **Manasseh** means, “one who forgets.” Being born to Hezekiah three years after his illness, perhaps the name was chosen to reflect that his past ills and wars with the Assyrians were forgotten. The name is also befitting of a king who, during most of his lifetime, forgot the Lord God and the good of his nation.

**MANASSEH’S GREAT SIN**  
2 Kings 21:2-9; 2 Chronicles 33:2-9

For those in Judah who tried to live a godly life, the reign of Manasseh was a rule of terror. He “did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord” (2 Chron.
Abominations: to loathe a thing in the sense of abhorring it. The object of this loathing may be actions that others look upon with disdain and condemnation. It may also be a thing itself that is the object of this loathing. An abomination usually is an object of hate or extreme dislike. The acts of the heathen are said to be abominations before the eyes of the Lord. Word Study #8581.

33:2). The sins he committed and led the people of Judah to follow were “after the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel” (2 Kings 21:2). It is a sad day when those who know the truth and have tasted of its sweetness choose to return to the beggarly elements of this world. God promised punishment upon those “who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace” (Heb. 10:29).

The judgment that fell upon Manasseh and the kingdom of Judah is proof that “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31). Manasseh did not follow in the steps of David, or his godly father Hezekiah. Manasseh is compared to Ahab, a king of Israel, “which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up. And he did very abominably in following idols, according to all things as did the Amorites, whom the LORD cast out before the children of Israel” (1 Kings 21:25, 26). The idols and groves Hezekiah had destroyed, Manasseh rebuilt “as did Ahab” (2 Kings 21:3). These high places originally served as monuments to God’s glory, but now they were covered with statues and images of Baal and other heathen gods. The quickness and ease with which they were restored shows two things: (1) For many the revival under Hezekiah was only on the surface. This is the way of man today; they only desire a surface cleaning. They will join different groups, attend meetings, will be-

Groves: listed in some texts as Asherahs, the root meaning of the word points toward something that is straight in a positive and beneficial manner. It also portrays an item that is happy, or blessed. Referring to a place of worship of false gods, the grove was claimed by its worshipers as a source of happiness, or blessing. Word Studies #833 and #835.

Manna

Heathen Nations God Cast Out (2 Chronicles 33:2): Under the reign of King Manasseh of Judah, who had the longest reign of all the monarchs of either Israel or Judah, the nation began a downward spiral of spiritual decline from which the people never recovered. Such was quite a contrast to his father, King Hezekiah, who was a godly monarch who provided his son, as well as everyone else, an example to follow. As a warning to him and the nation, it was pointed out that the surrounding nations which had immersed themselves in pagan worship that the people of Judah were able to observe were utterly cast out and destroyed. Such should have served as a deterrent for King Manasseh never to embrace the folly of idolatry and certainly repent. Due to physical infirmity, he later repented, but not until the damage of his early reign proved irreversible.
gin to attend some church services and turn over the proverbial new leaf. When the day of real commitment comes, these people become scarce. (2) It also showed the lackadaisical, listless, sluggish and spiritless disposition among the people of God. Many say they are saved, born-again, church members, but, they want to serve the Lord when it is fashionable, convenient, or agreeable with their life-style. After preaching the funeral services of a dear brother I was visiting his oldest son, who in the past had been a member of a scriptural Baptist church in the area. He was now attending a community church. Why did he change churches? He said that at the church he now attends there are about eighteen hundred members, and they have three services on Sunday mornings. Therefore, if he decided to hook up the fifth-wheel and be out of town, he wouldn’t be missed. How many others fall into this same category?

The greatest sin Manasseh committed was his defilement of the house of God, and indeed, God Himself. He had the audacity to put a statue of Astarte in the Holy of Holies (2 Kings 21:7). Astarte, also called Ashtaroth, was the fertility goddess of the Canaanites and a spouse of Baal. These two idol gods were worshiped with licentious rites. Their worship lasted for some three and a half centuries in Judah and Israel, from the later years of Solomon (1 Kings 11:4-8) until Josiah finally demolished them (2 Kings 23:13, 14). All of Manasseh’s actions were in direct violation of God’s written Law. Through Moses, God thoroughly instructed the children of Israel, “When thou art come into the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee” (Deut. 18:9-12). All of the abominations named here were practiced in Judah during the reign of Manasseh.

Praise the Lord, God never forgets the faithful. It may be difficult for some to imagine that under the severe wicked conditions of the leaders and most of the
people in Judah at that time, there were those who were faithful to God. To these faithful ones God promised that He would put His name forever upon Jerusalem and the tribes of Israel (2 Kings 21:7, 8; 2 Chron. 33:8). During the wicked reign of Ahab the Lord told Elijah that He had seven thousand souls who had not bowed a knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:18). At the time of the Babylonian captivity there was still a faithful remnant that stood by Jeremiah and the Word of God (Jer. 35:18, 19; 42:1-5). The rebellion against God and His Word is worse today than anytime in the history of mankind. Yet, the Lord has never left Himself without a witness (Acts 14:17). Jesus assured His disciples that faith and the faithful will be here when He returns (Matt. 16:18; Luke 18:8).

Manasseh and the people of Judah demonstrated a more lascivious lifestyle than the heathens God drove out before them (2 Kings 21:9-11; 2 Chron. 33:9). Often this is the case with the perpetual backslider; once he turns his back on the things of the Lord, he sinks deeper into the mire of sin.

**MANASSEH'S WARNING** 2 Kings 21:12-16; 2 Chronicles 33:10, 11

God issued the warning Himself directly to the one responsible, Manasseh. “And the LORD spake to Manasseh, and to his people: but they would not hearken” (2 Chron. 33:10). “They would not hearken” says it all. If one is not ready and willing to listen to God’s message, there is no hope. The Word of God issues sufficient warning for all those who want to hear. “For all have sinned” (Rom. 3:23). “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). “He that believeth not is condemned already” (John 3:18), and “the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36).

God will not relinquish His Word. The way of life and death was established by divine law centuries earlier. The consequences of sin and rebellion were well-known. The “evil” the Lord was bringing upon Jerusalem and Judah, would cause one’s ears to “tingle” (rattle together, as ears reddening with shame, or teeth chattering with fear; quiver) when they heard of it. The same plummet God used to judge Samaria and the house of Ahab was brought to

---

**Manna**

All the Host of Heaven (2 Chronicles 33:3): The Assyrians and the Babylonians were renowned for their propensity toward astrology and occult practices. The worship of the stars was an old practice; a practice Moses had to, likewise, deal with in his time. The occultic worship of the “hosts of heaven” was such an addiction in Assyria that some scholars note that the people made it a policy to enforce their religious practices on the nations which were made subject under their rule. That could possibly explain what took place when the son of Assyria’s King Sennacherib, Esarhaddon advanced against Egypt, and, while heading toward Egypt on his westward route, King Manasseh submitted to him in 676 BC which provided the stimulus for the easy concession for the astrological worship practices of the people of Judah. Such was supposed to serve as an appeasement toward the Assyrians, but ultimately provided yet another element of spiritual demise and decline.
Jerusalem and Judah. They no longer measured up to God’s standard of righteousness (Amos 6:7-9).

It wasn’t long before God’s punishment came. 2 Chronicles 33:11 tells how Manasseh was taken in “thorns” [to pierce and put a ring in the nose or lip], and bound with fetters. Little is known about this captivity. It appeared to take the form of a personal captivity, no others of Judah are mentioned. The exact time is not stated, but it would have been brought about by Sennacherib’s grandson, Ashurbanipal (669-663 BC). This time marked the zenith of Assyrian power. Ashurbanipal and his father, Esarhaddon, made significant conquests into Egypt for the first time in Assyrian history. Sennacherib devastated Babylon, but Esarhaddon rebuilt it and made it an extension of the Assyrian empire. Scripture references indicate that Manasseh’s captivity came near the end of his reign after many years of evil. This would best place the time of his captivity when Ashurbanipal marched against Egypt and Babylon. Ashurbanipal listed Manasseh and twenty other kings who submitted to him during this time (652-648 BC).

Songwriter, J. H. Stanley wrote in 1909, “Careless soul, O heed the warning, For your life will soon be gone: O how sad to face the judgment. Unprepared to meet thy God.” With such a lesson before us and the warnings it presents, why would any reasonable individual continue in sin? Why would anyone hesitate in making his life right with God? Amos’ warning to the people of Israel is still a good admonition today, “prepare to meet thy God” (Amos 4:12). It is the responsibility of the Lord’s churches to send out the warning that unbelievers and sinners will be judged (John 16:7-11). If they do not listen and heed the message of Christ, they shall die in their iniquity; but, we will have delivered our soul (Ezek. 3:17-19). It is the Lord’s will that all men hear the Word and see the hope of glory that is in Christ; therefore, we are to do our utmost to preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15; Col. 1:25-28).

MANASSEH’S REPENTANCE AND RESTORATION

Like many others past and present, Manasseh was not ready to turn to the Lord God until he was down and out and there was no other way. It was when “he was in affliction” that he “besought the LORD his God.” David was in the miry clay (Psalm 40:2) and the prodigal son was in the hog pen (Luke 15:15, 16). Regardless how low one may sink, our God is able to deliver. However, like Manasseh, we must be willing to humble ourselves greatly before God.
In his humbled position Manasseh cried unto the Lord. Perhaps for the first time in his life Manasseh worshiped the true and living God. Manasseh burned incense in worship and interceded in prayer (entreated God). God always hears the prayer that comes from a humble heart, even from the likes of Manasseh. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Psalm 51:17).

God heard Manasseh’s supplication and “brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom.” That Manasseh was saved and fully converted is evidenced by the statement, “Then Manasseh knew that the Lord he was God” (2 Chron. 33:13). Repentance brought about a change of heart and attitude toward God, His house and His people. Brought back to Jerusalem, Manasseh was a changed man. During the final few years of his reign, he attempted to make amends for his years of wickedness. His corrupt counselors likely thought Manasseh’s mind was affected. He repaired the city walls and extended them to cover the expanding city. He enclosed the water supply at the Gihon spring. The wall around the old city of David on the hill of Ophel was fortified, and captains were set on all the walled cities of Judah.

The greatest proof of Manasseh’s conversion was that he took the idol of Asherah out of the Temple. He also removed all the altars in the Temple courts that were used to worship the stars. The altars that had been erected to false gods were destroyed. In his zeal Manasseh encouraged the people to return to the true worship of Jehovah. The altar of the Temple was repaired and sacrifices were offered up to God. Manasseh found salvation and peace with God.

**DOING THE RIGHT THING**

**THE WRONG WAY**  
2 Kings 21:17; 2 Chronicles 33:12-16

Manasseh failed to remove the high places he had put back in place after the death of his father, Hezekiah. The people continued to offer sacrifices at the high places. Even though their sacrifices were made unto the Lord, what they were doing was wrong. This had not been ordained by God. There was only one place that the Lord had appointed where He was to be worshiped with sacrifices. That place was upon the altar in the house of God, also called the Temple (1 Kings 8:64; 2 Chron. 7:7). The liturgy may come with ceremony and song, but if it is not according to God’s Word, it is wrong. The high places were there because the people wanted to be like their pagan neighbors. The irreligious services had become pagan ritual and provided both time and place
to return to idolatry. It appears there were those who opposed the changes brought about by Manasseh's conversion.

Manasseh teaches us that it is impossible to undo the past. Sins of our youth may haunt us into our old age. Sin always has its consequences, and we will reap more than we sow. The sins of Manasseh's youth brought the judgment of God, which was to be the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem. The judgment was deferred for almost one hundred years, but it came to pass just as the prophets foretold. How many, possibly like Manasseh, have wished they had turned to the Lord as a young person? Putting off accepting the Lord as Savior or putting off your service to Him is dangerous indeed. The book of 2 Kings does not give the account of Manasseh's captivity and conversion. The book of Kings was written prior to and during the exile from a prophet's point of view. The book of Chronicles was written after the exile from a priest's point of view. In Kings the rulers of Israel are spoken of but in Chronicles the rulers of Judah are emphasized. The Temple at Jerusalem and true worship of the Lord played a prominent role.

Kings and Chronicles gives an account of prophets and seers preaching to Manasseh (2 Kings 21:9-11; 2 Chron. 33:18). Kings does not give an account of Manasseh's captivity and conversion. We do not have an inspired passage in either Kings or Chronicles that records the prophet's messages or Manasseh's penitent prayer. The last book of the Apocrypha entitled "The Prayer of Manasseh" records a prayer that acknowledges a multitude of sins and pleads for God's mercy.

A FATHER'S INFLUENCE 2 Kings 21:18-26; 2 Chronicles 33:20-25

The Scriptures indicate that Manasseh received an honorable burial befitting a king. He was not placed in the usual sepulcher of the kings. His father Hezekiah was given the chiefest, or an elevated place in the sepulchre of the kings (2 Chron. 32:33) Manasseh was buried in the palace garden, called the garden of Uzza. It is not certain whether Uzza was a caretaker, owner or whether the garden was named in his honor. Manasseh's twenty-two year old son, Amon, was placed on the throne of Judah. Manasseh's evil influence was branded upon his son. The name Amon is the same as the Egyptian sun god. A name given while Manasseh was still steeped in idolatrous worship. Amon's mother was Meshullemeth, which means friend. Other than this she is unknown. The two-year reign of Amon gets little attention in Kings and Chronicles. It seems as though the writer of Chronicles, who was concerned with the worship of Jehovah, had no desire to give this ungodly king much notice.

Amon did not choose to continue the spiritual reforms begun near the end of his father's reign. He chose rather to follow the evil ways with which he had been raised. It is difficult to erase one's early upbringing. Children need to be introduced to Jesus and the Word as early as possible. Delay will only bring
heartache. Fathers are to nurture and admonish their children in the things of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). Amon's young years were scared with superstition and idolatry. He apparently outdid his father in the practice of evil. He “trespassed more and more” (2 Chron. 33:23). He was not influenced by Manasseh's reforms. He did not humble himself and turn to the Lord, but rebelled against all that was holy. He forsook Jehovah the God of his fathers. Manasseh, like many other fathers, had to bear the burden of knowing his son was trained in the ways of idolatry and the world but not in the ways of the Lord. The images which Manasseh destroyed were erected once again. Amon sacrificed unto all the carved or graven images and served them.

Amon's reign was brought to an abrupt end when his own servants executed him in the palace. These were not household servants. These were the palace officials and advisors. We are not told what it was that set them against the young king. The evil leaders of Judah would likely have been pleased with the return to idolatry. However, there may have been a remnant that desired to rid the throne and the people of Judah of such evil. Whatever the case may have been, they did not have the support of at least a segment of the citizens of Jerusalem. They did not condone the assassination of the king. They took those responsible and put them to death. If their goal was a change in dynasty, they had failed.

Amon was placed in a tomb alongside Manasseh in the garden of Uzza. His body had found a resting place, but his soul was eternally lost because he did not humble himself before the Lord. The people of Judah brought the rightful heir to the throne, Josiah a young boy of eight.

**THE FOOLISHNESS OF IDOLATRY**

God’s Laws of spirituality, morality and justice never change. It is still wrong to worship other gods. It is as abominable in the eyes of God for this generation to promote abortion as it was for Manasseh to sacrifice his son.

What has gone wrong? Isn't the old time religion good enough anymore? (Jer. 6:16). Have we lost our love for lost souls? (Rev. 2:4). What kind of dirty dishes are we allowing to pile up? Dirty dish number one: Are we guilty of sin? (1 John 1:7-10). Dirty dish number two: Have we forsaken worship by letting other things or people come between the Lord and us (Heb. 10:25). Dirty dish number three: Have we sacrificed our children? What example have we set? Do they know the Lord? Dirty dish number four: Have we desecrated the house of God by continuing to keep those on the rolls, who by their life-style and nonattendance need to be turned over to the Lord?
Because of the setting of the lesson, moving from the reign of wickedness to one that followed after the Lord, we need to be careful not to imply that Josiah was a faultless man. Like all men he was a sinner and had his failings. The people of Judah had been through a dark period and was in a position to appreciate the light of God’s Word more fully. Those who are old enough may recall the great revival meetings of the 1940’s and 50’s. The meetings brought a ray of hope to a country that had been hit by a depression and a world war. Looking at the fifty-four years before him, Josiah and his generation could appreciate the things of God more fully.

Those who have helped in the Bible distribution program at the Olympic games have reported witnessing a real hunger for the Word. They have found this especially true among the athletes and guests coming from countries once under communism. The prophet Amos warned of a time of famine, “not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD” (Amos 8:11). Although Bibles and churches are plentiful in America (and other countries as well), the lack of concern found among many Christians has created a need for discovering the book.

**WOMAN BATHED?** 2 Kings 21:24-26; 22:1, 2; 2 Chronicles 33:25; 34:1, 2

Josiah, whose name means, “may Jehovah give,” was the son and successor of Amon, king of Judah, making him the sixteenth king of the Southern Kingdom. He was six years old when his grandfather, Manasseh died and only eight years old when his father Amon died and he became king. His reign lasted for thirty-one years (641-610 BC). Fulfilled prophecy is witnessed in the life and ministry of Josiah, Three hundred and fifty years earlier, Jeroboam, king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, was sacrificed on an altar he had erected at Beth-el. Jeroboam had erected the golden calves at Dan and Beth-el (2 Kings 10:29). The Lord designated Jerusalem, the Temple and its altar as the place of sacrifice. It was sacrilege to offer sacrifice to a golden calf anywhere but to do so at Beth-el (house of God) was a slap in the face of God. While Jeroboam was burning incense at Beth-el, a man of God out of Judah came and cried against him and the false altar: “O altar, altar, thus saith the LORD;
Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee" (1 Kings 13:2).

For three hundred and fifty years no king of Judah named his son Josiah, and no one attempted to fulfill the prophecy. God works out His prophecies on His timetable. Proof of God’s work is seen in the fact that it was wicked king Amon, who likely knew nothing of the prophecy, who named his son Josiah.

Josiah did not follow in the footsteps of his father and grandfather. He, like his great grandfather, Hezekiah, followed the example of the man after God’s own heart, their pious forefather David. In his young years Josiah likely received proper moral and religious training from his mother, Jedidah, which means “beloved.” Jedidah was the daughter of Adaiah, whose name means “Jehovah has adorned himself.” The family was from the village of Boscath which was in the lowlands of Judah just east of present-day Gaza. When he ascended the throne, he came under the tutelage of godly men who were devoted to the Lord and His Word. They were instrumental in turning his young heart to seek after God. This was also the case with the young king Jehoash (2 Kings 12:1, 2). The spiritual character of Josiah was of the highest order. He serves as an example for young people and leaders today. Three remarkable things that are said about his life are found in 2 Chronicles 34:2, 3. (1) “He did that which was right in the sight of the LORD.” (2) “He walked in all the way of David his father.” (3) “He turned not aside to the right hand or to the left.” This last statement is based upon the Law given to Moses and the people of Israel (Deut. 17:11, 20).

One who is privileged to live, be loved by others and have the opportunity to
serve, sins if he does not do so (James 4:17). Josiah was a man who desired to make a difference and contribute to the well-being of the nation of Judah. The two kings that preceded Josiah were unusual men. Manasseh for most of his life was totally lacking in morals, and this was also the case in Amon's short life and reign. Josiah was entirely different from these two who had reigned over Judah before him. He stands as one who set a worthy example for both young and old to follow. His reign was a ray of sunshine in a time of great darkness. His reign was Judah's last great revival and days of rejoicing before the dark clouds of Babylonian captivity fell across the land. Like Josiah, we must strive to live a life totally settled in the Word of God. The true value of life depends on its relationship with God and His Son, Jesus Christ (1 John 1:1-7).

WHY THE BOOK WAS LOST

The simple answer to the above statement is this, God and His Word were forgotten. Why would a nation, chosen of God, given and entrusted with the oracles of God, forsake the very document that made it different from all other nations? (Rom. 3:1, 2). Manasseh and Amon forsook the book and led the people of Judah to sin. These ungodly leaders substituted idols, superstitious rites and lascivious worship for the book that had been given them by God. Without the book, righteousness disappeared not only from the king's court, but throughout the entire kingdom of Judah. God was not replaced, for this is an impossibility. But, God was misplaced in the palace, and the people followed their leaders. The cultic rituals introduced to the people of Judah came by way of their pagan neighbors. Baal or Baalim were the gods of the land. The worship of Baal, introduced to the people of Israel and Judah by Moab and Phoenicia, almost displaced the worship of Jehovah in Israel. Astarte (also called Ashtartoth or Ashtoreth) was the fertility goddess from Babylon and Canaan. Molech, the god of the Ammonites, was worshiped with grisly rites that included the sacrifice of children. Tammuz was the fertility god of Mesopotamia and Syria. The fourth month of the Jewish calendar (June-July) was named for this idol. The Hebrew word translated idols is eliyyl and means...
“good for nothing, vain, of no value.” This is a most fitting description of all false gods; they are useless. Without the book righteousness soon disappeared from Israel and Judah. The very year prayer, Bible reading and the Ten Commandments were removed from the public school system the problems began to mount in America. America’s morality is still reeling today from this open rebellion against God’s Word. We need to discover the book once again.

This was not the result of slum-like conditions or the lack of proper education. Materially it was a time of prosperity. What a sad commentary on God’s chosen; that during times of affluence the things of God are put aside and forgotten. The riches of the book were looked upon as nothing. Judah did not consider what they were giving up. Material wealth has often proved to be a curse. The love of money has caused many lives and souls to be pierced with many sorrows. Those serving faithfully, but for the grace of God, may turn aside because of their love for the things of this world. Moses left a good example in making the proper choice. He esteemed “the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward” (Heb. 11:26).

Americans have more material wealth and things today than ever before in history. However, the American dream will quickly become a nightmare without the book and Jesus Christ. The story of the rich man and his barns serves as a good example of one who seemingly had everything the world could offer but he forgot the Lord and lost everything including his soul (Luke 12:15-20).

HOW THE BOOK WAS FOUND

The book was found by a leader and people who were willing to return to the Lord. Josiah chose a good example to follow from among the kings of Judah. He “did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the way of David his father” (2 Kings 22:2). He did not seek advice from the wicked counselors or false prophets that advised his father and grandfather. He was only sixteen years of age when he “began to seek after the God of David his father” (2 Chron. 34:3). He did not sit idly by and wait for change to come to him. Josiah initiated the changes.

With the book lost, respect for God’s Word was near non-existent in Judah. For Josiah and Judah to fully return to the Lord, there had to be a return to, and respect for, God’s book. When they found and read the book, Josiah made a pledge to keep its commandments and statutes and perform the words of the written covenant. He did what he could to restore the true worship of Jehovah and obedience to His law. This was all brought about by adherence to the book. May God grant that we ever hold forth the book in its truth and in its entirety in the pulpits of the Lord’s local New Testament churches today. The past few decades have witnessed many new translations of the Bible. Some of these new translations were done by honest and scholarly men who have done a commendable job and service for the Bible student. There is a claim by some
translators that the book is obsolete and in need of revision. The book is not obsolete, but it is absolute in every word. The Word of God is sacred and should be treated as such. Jesus addressed the distinguishing characteristics of the church in Philadelphia and said, thou “hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name” (Rev. 3:8). There is no other book like the Bible. It alone presents the total truth concerning man’s origin and destiny. Man has tried to destroy it, but it remains the best selling book ever published. Man’s attempts to revise it have only caused its truths to stand the test of their abuse. God’s book shall not fail nor pass away (Isa. 40:8).

When the people of Judah made up their minds and hearts to return to the Lord and honor His book, they realized they could not continue in the wicked ways of Manasseh and Amon. In the twelfth year of his reign, Josiah began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of all the high places, groves and images that were in the land (2 Kings 23:19; 2 Chron. 34:3). No stone was left unturned in the effort to rid Judah of the wickedness of idolatry. Evil was carried on under the name of religion, and this made it more difficult for Josiah to cleanse the land and the people. Josiah had the strange altars polluted (2 Kings 23:16), and the false priests slain (verse 20). This may seem like drastic measures, but such was needed to awaken the perpetual backsliding Judeans (Jer. 8:5). The spiritual climate for much of Israel was still the same during the days of the early church (Acts 7:51), and it is still among us today. Josiah’s desire, for himself and the nation, was to serve the same God David had served so faithfully. Josiah is an example of one who sought to purify the land.

**Purged:** is to cleanse or purify so as to make clean, clear and bright. The action here involved removing impurities that would cloud the otherwise clearness and brightness of a thing. This purging may involve physical or moral cleansing. It does require a determined action to cleanse that which is unclean. King Josiah of Judah removed those things considered a mark on the brightness of his community. Word Study #2891.

### Manna

**Divisions of Levite Workers (2 Chronicles 34:13):**

Many years prior to the reign of King Josiah of Judah, King David set the order of the service of the Temple, even before it was constructed, as one of the last acts of his reign prior to his death. At that time, there were 38,000 of the tribe of Levi thirty-years-old and up. With worship finding a permanent place in Jerusalem, the role of the Levites changed from their previous service with respect to the Tabernacle in the wilderness. Later, when King Josiah of Judah purged the land of the idolatrous worship of idols, the restructuring for Temple worship was initiated, this time with the employing of Levites twenty-years-old and up. With their number significantly increased, as well as the amount of laborers for Judah’s worship increased, the organizational structure of the Levites needed designated leaders such as scribes, officers (overseers) and porters (gatekeepers) for efficient operation. They were responsible for the discharging of duties with the priority given the musicians, those entrusted with the most important aspect of the Temple function—the corporate worship.
Amend: Amend means “to add strength to or fortify a thing such as a structure.” The desired result is to increase strength and dependability. The word suggests a need exists for additional strength to be added to the original. A weakness exists at least in the eyes of a beholder so that he makes a judgment that the structure needs additional strengthening. He then takes action to add to the structure such that would strengthen it. Word Study #2388.

for everyone who is serious about their service to the Lord. He stands out as one to be admired and imitated by our young men. Paul told the Corinthian church, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). The “follower” Paul mentioned is an “imitator.” Who are we imitating? The church at Antioch, Syria, so imitated Christ, that they “were called Christians first in Antioch” (Acts 11:26). We need to keep in mind that there are those who are imitating us. The kind of example we set is very important. For some people you may be the only Christian, pastor, deacon, or Baptist they know. Therefore, they judge all the rest by what they see in you. May God grant that we live a life worth imitating, one that will bring people to the Lord, His work and true worship.

WHERE THE BOOK WAS LOST AND FOUND

The book was in God’s house, the Temple, raised in God’s name in Jerusalem. What a place to lose the book! Has the book been lost in America today? The book has been lost in a number of lives, homes and churches today. It has been perverted or totally ignored to meet personal definitions and lifestyles. How can “God bless America” unless its citizens and churches return to the book? Even though copies of the book may be found in churches and homes, it does not mean it has not been forsaken? The apostle Peter warned concerning those who “are unlearned and unstable wrest [pervert]” these and other Scriptures to their own destruction (2 Peter 3:16). The Bible is not to be read and studied on a pick and choose basis. The Word of God cannot and will not be changed to fit an ungodly or unscriptural life-style or teaching. It is not the Word that needs to change; it is the hearts and lives of men that need changing. It has been stated by liberals of the day; “There are no absolutes. Truth is relative and each must find his own truth.” This is the doctrine of Satan. The book is not obsolete. It is as relevant for our time as it was when it was first written. The book needs to be engrafted in its entirety into our hearts and minds. It is to flow with the life source, Jesus Christ (Psalm 119:160; John 17:17; James 1:21).

Without the book, Judah reverted to the actions of its forefathers during the time of the Judges when, “every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6). Yet, Josiah, with the book, was able to offset the evil influence of his father and grandfather. What a marvelous testimony to the grace of God. According to Jewish tradition, Manasseh killed Isaiah having him
sawn in two with a wooden saw (Heb. 11:37). Micah, the younger contemporary of Isaiah, had died. Habakkuk did not have access to the courts of Manasseh or Amon, and Jeremiah was not called until Josiah’s thirteenth year (Jer. 1:2; 25:3). However, this young boy king, who heard the message of Zephaniah (which began the same year of Josiah’s coronation), and studied of the book, did not yield to evil. He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord. Like his father, David, he “served his own generation” (Acts 13:36).

WHEN THE BOOK WAS READ

Josiah sent Shaphan, a scribe, to look after some business in the Temple. While there, he was given a book found by Hilkiah, the high priest. Upon receiving the book, Shaphan began to read the book and soon discovered just how far Judah had strayed from the Law and the things of God. The book of the Law was then read before a king of Judah perhaps for the first time in over fifty years. The events that followed turned the kingdom around. Josiah ordered his servants, Shaphan the scribe and Hilkiah the high priest to inquire of the Lord on behalf of Judah. He realized they were not living up to the standards of the book.

Hearing the words of the book, Josiah became convicted, “for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us” (2 Kings 22:13). The same problem is with us today.

Huldah, the prophetess, who lived in Jerusalem at the time, was consulted also and she revealed God’s message to them. This is the only place in Scripture that Huldah is mentioned. Her dealings with the leaders of Judah and her direct and truthful answer to their inquiry is proof that she was truly a great woman of God. Huldah’s message was not one of flattering lips with words only to please its hearers. Her words were not good news for Judah. The Lord revealed through her that because Judah had for-
saken God and burned incense to false gods, He had been provoked to anger. The wrath that had been kindled against the people of Judah and Jerusalem would not be quenched.

There was one bright point in Huldah’s message. The messengers were to tell Josiah, because of his penitent heart and humbleness before God, he would not witness the judgment God had in store for Judah. God’s blessings await all those who, like Josiah, will turn with all their hearts to serve Him. This life is filled with trials and tests; however, we have the Lord’s promise that as He overcame the world, we too can overcome (John 16:33; 1 John 2:13, 14; 4:4; 5:4)


What about the book today? Much of the world has lost sight of the book (the Bible) as the authoritative inspired Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). This is due, in part, to the belief or unbelief of the world’s religious leaders. More people today have the book in more translations than at any other time in history. It must be more than just an ornament to set on the coffee table. Lip service has become the norm, because the words of the book have not been hidden in the heart (Psalm 119:11). Have we considered what was given up when God’s people stood idly by and watched as the Ten Commandments were removed from school walls and legislation was passed forbidding the reading of the Bible in public schools? There are those who want to pull the book out of circulation. Without the book as a guide, morality, righteousness and one’s sense of responsibility began to wane quickly. When the Bible was lost in the public school system, delinquency began to rise, while the grade point average began to decline. Like the people of Israel and Judah, we have reached the days of spiritual famine for the want of hearing the book (Amos 8:11). Sound doctrine is no longer endured. Men and churches are turning from the truth of the book in great numbers. To tickle their itching ears they prefer to listen to fables instead of the book (2 Tim. 4:3, 4). There are those among us today, like the false prophets of Israel and Judah, who are spiritually unlearned, unstable and wrest the Scriptures (2 Peter 3:16). Such wrenching and perversion of the book will bring about their destruction. The warning God gave the people of Israel (Deut. 4:2), and the warning Jesus gave the churches (Rev. 22:18, 19), still holds true today. Like the Israelites, we are obligated and privileged to live by the book.

We have a great responsibility to preach the book as it was once and for all-time delivered to the saints (Jude 3). It is to be handled like the sharp sword it is (Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12). The need today is to read it, speak it and live it without fear (Phil. 1:14). One cannot put a price tag on the truth of the book. Those who faithfully labor in the book are truly worthy of double honor (1 Tim. 5:17).
The book was found in the very place it had been lost, the house of God. Returning to the Lord, His book and His worship will bring one full circle back to His house. Josiah led Judah to return to the house of God in Jerusalem. Here God had placed His name and promised His presence (Ex. 25:22; 30:6; 1 Kings 9:3). God’s house today is the New Testament churches (Mark 13:34; 1 Tim. 3:15). This is the place He has promised to be with His people today (Matt. 28:20; Eph. 3:21). We are not to forsake worshiping together in the assembly (Heb. 10:25). The New Testament church was established by the Lord Jesus Christ during His personal ministry (Matt. 16:18). Before He ascended back to Heaven He finished all the work the Father had sent Him here to complete (John 17:4). This not only included the work of redemption but the setting in order of The New Testament church. Jesus left the one hundred twenty at Jerusalem, whom He called “his house” (Mark 13:34), which is His church (1 Tim. 3:15); whom He called His “little flock” (Luke 12:32), which is His church (Acts 20:28). Every essential element of the church was put in place before Jesus ascended back to the Father. Jesus was and remains the Head and Chief Cornerstone (Mark 12:10; Eph. 2:19-22). Jesus was and is its Lord and Master (Matt. 23:8-10; John 13:14). There was an ordained ministry placed in the church by Jesus (Mark 3:13, 14; Luke 6:13-16; 1 Cor. 12:28). The church and its ordained ministers had power and authority given to them by Jesus (Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 9:1; 10:19). This church preached the gospel of Jesus (Matt. 11:5); sinners were saved (Luke 7:50); baptism was administered (John 3:22; 4:2); and the Lord’s Supper was observed (Matt. 26:26-28). This church, house and flock of God will continue because we have His promise that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18). Unlike the Temple in Jerusalem its ministry and presence shall not cease.
Josiah revealed the reason behind Judah’s problems and ours today. “Go ye, enquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us” (2 Kings 22:13). The chosen nation had not listened to or obeyed the book. They, like many today, put the book aside. We are living in a generation that has forgotten God because they have forsaken His Word, the Bible.

The actions of King Josiah serve as an example of how to bring a sinful nation and its people back to the Lord. As we look around the world today, it quickly becomes evident that few people are serving the Lord in spirit and in truth (John 4:20-24). Many today worship a god that has been created by the evil imagination of man. Therefore, their so-called god is false (Jer. 9:13, 14; 13:10).

A COVENANT BEFORE THE LORD 2 Kings 23:1-3; 2 Chronicles 34:29-32

Making God’s Word known was a challenge for Josiah. The king gathered all the spiritual leaders of Judah to the house of the Lord. The meeting included the elders of Judah, the citizens of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets. No one was left out of this important meeting that would become the turning point in Josiah’s reign and the history of Judah. Jeremiah would have been among the prophets (Jer. 1:1, 2). The prophet Zephaniah would also have been present (Zeph. 1:1). It is important to note that Josiah read “all the words of the book” (2 Kings 23:2). Nothing of God’s message was left out. The apostle Paul told the elders at Ephesus that he had not shunned to declare unto them “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). We are responsible to preach, teach and follow the book in its entirety.

The apostle Paul’s admonition was for us to study, heed and apply the Word. It is important that God-called leaders know the Word and how to apply it (2 Tim. 2:15). We are instructed to preach the Word. This should never be taken lightly. Preaching the Word is a serious matter. Paul charged Timothy to “preach the word; be instant in season, out of season” (2 Tim. 4:2). The challenge was to be ready when it was opportune and to be of the same vigilance
when it was inopportune. We are to take heed concerning what we hear and apply it properly (1 Tim. 4:16).

Applying the Word led Josiah and Judah to make a covenant with the Lord (2 Kings 23:3). The words made a covenant are from the Hebrew words karath heriyth, which mean to “cut a covenant.” It was made by passing between the pieces of a slaughtered animal as part of the ritual. Animals were cut in half and the parts laid opposite each other upon their respective altars. It portrayed the self-destruction of the one making the covenant. The fate of the animal would befall him if he broke the covenant oath. Note that the covenant outlined exactly what the people were to do.

The people of Judah were to “walk after the LORD” (verse 3). Their manner of life was to match what the Lord commanded. Our lives should be no less (Phil. 1:27). They were to “keep His commandments, and his testimonies, and and his statues” (2 Kings 23:3). No part of God’s Word is to be left out of our lives. James instructed his readers to be doers and hearers of the Word (James 1:21, 22). Paul thanked God that the Thessalonians received the Word as the truth of God and allowed it to

The King’s Public Covenant (2 Chronicles 34:31): After the book of the Law was read to King Josiah, he assembled the elders of Judah and Benjamin in the Temple, stood in his official place and indicated his determination to personally abide by the covenant of the Lord and urged the elders to command all the people to reaffirm and recommit themselves to the covenant of God with the people of Israel. Since the people of Judah had long ago forsaken the covenant and followed after idols with much of that sin due to the disobedient leadership of a number of their kings, Josiah abandoned his sinful past, recommitted himself to the Law of the Lord. He was determined to lead the people to honor the covenant of their fathers with the Lord. Josiah’s courage of conviction was important since the prediction of the prophetess Huldah indicated that the nation was not going to overcome its past and would suffer captivity at the hands of the Babylonians.

The Purpose and Value of Covenants (2 Chronicles 34:32): Depending on the usage and context, covenants (agreements, alliances, treaties and so forth) refer to the mutual agreements between two or more parties. In the case of Jehovah’s relationship with His people, He often entered into various covenants, both conditional and unconditional. Conditional covenants required the fulfillment of agreed upon provisions on the part of both parties. In the case of the Sinaitic Covenant, the Lord promised to bless and prosper the people of Israel if they faithfully followed Him and His commands. On the other hand, unconditional covenants, such as the Abrahamic Covenant, were those in which the recipients of the covenant were graciously provided the benefits of it on the basis of the character of God. The value of the unconditional covenants show the fruit of the faithfulness, trustworthiness and immutability of Almighty God. However, in the case of the conditional covenants, the demands were so immense that the people were to glean the fact that the flesh couldn’t fulfill God’s requirements, and, in the case of the Sinaitic Covenant, pointed the people to One who would fulfill it—their Messiah, Jesus Christ.
work in their lives (1 Thess. 2:13). The people “stood to the covenant” (2 Kings 23:3), which means the people of Judah took a stand for the Lord and the book. Our covenant with Christ is upon better promises (Heb. 8:6). It is better because it is cut through and by the blood of Christ. (Heb. 12:24). What the New Covenant believers have in Christ is everlasting (Heb. 13:20).

**A TIME OF CLEANSING IN GOD’S HOUSE 2 Kings 23:4-7**

Hearing and applying the Word leads to a changed life. There first must be a cleansing of the heart before there can be cleansing of the life. The psalmist prayed for the Lord to wash him thoroughly from his iniquity (Psalm 51:2). Heeding the Word will have a cleansing effect on our lives (Psalm 119:9). Josiah commanded or laid the charge for, the leaders to do their job. The high priest, Hilkiah, the priests of the second order, or the common priests and the keepers of the door who were Levites responsible for watching the Temple, were to set the standard as the cleansed of the Lord (Num. 8:5, 6, 21). There are at least thirteen steps in the cleansing of the Temple, the land and people mentioned.

Step one, Josiah had all the idols in the Temple removed and burned (2 Kings 23:4). The false gods mentioned are Baal (lord of the Phoenicians) and Asherah (goddess of fortune and consort of Baal), and the Astral (worshipers of the sun, moon and stars). They were burned in accordance with the Law (Deut. 7:25).

Step two, Josiah put down from the Hebrew word shabath; which means “he exterminated, removed, or put an end to” the false priests (2 Kings 23:5). The apostle John instructed the earlier believers to put the teachings they heard to the test and examine it because of the many false prophets in the world (1 John 4:1). Paul’s admonition to the Roman brethren was to “mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Rom. 16:17). The word *mark* is from the Greek word *skopeo*, meaning to “take aim, keep an eye on, or to scope him in.” It is important for us to know those who teach and lead us (1 Thess. 5:12).

Step three, Josiah took the image of Asherah, burned and crushed it and scattered the ashes over the graves of its worshipers (2 Kings 23:6). This was to show the people that the idol had no more life than its dead followers. The idol was useless in life and in death.

Step four, Josiah broke down the houses of prostitution, both male and female (verse 7). Male and female prostitution was practiced inside the Temple compound. In seeking fertility for crops, the people falsely worshiped Baal and Asherah by having relations with the godless priest and priestess. God did not honor such then and still does not today (Lev. 20:13; Deut. 23:17, 18). It may be difficult for good Christian people to picture such taking place on the grounds of God’s House. Several religious denominations have witnessed their clergy being charged with sex crimes. Such actions bring a black mark upon
all churches and their leaders. We should earnestly pray that God would deliver us from such evil.

**A TIME OF CLEANSING IN JUDAH**

Step five, Josiah brought the backslidden priests to Jerusalem (2 Kings 23:8, 9). All of the shrines scattered throughout Judah were destroyed. The priests who had participated in the worship at the high places were restored but disqualified from leading Temple worship. Levites of the seed of Aaron who were found with a “blemish,” from the Hebrew word *mum*, meaning “a physical defect or a moral stain” were not to take part in the offerings or go inside the holy place and thus profane the Lord’s sanctuaries (Lev. 21:21-23). Those called into the ministry are to carefully guard the sanctity of the office (Titus 1:7-9). Peter’s charge was this, “As he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:15, 16). Pastors, deacons and all Christian leaders must strive to have a good report, not only among the brethren and those they serve, but also among those on the outside of the church who do not know Christ as their Savior (1 Tim. 3:7). John’s third epistle called to mind an example for us all. “Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is true” (3 John 12).

Step six, Josiah “defiled” the place of human sacrifices (2 Kings 23:10). The valley of Hinnom runs southward from the Jaffa gate on the west side of Jerusalem, then it turns eastward running south of the city until it joins with the Kidron Valley. It was part of the boundary between Judah and Benjamin. It became a dumping ground and a place for burning trash. Topheth was an area in the valley of Hinnom where human sacrifices were made to the pagan idol of Molech. It is first mentioned by Isaiah as a place of burning prepared by the Lord for the king of Assyria (Isa. 30:33). Jeremiah wrote that its name would be changed to “the valley of slaughter” because of the number who would be killed there (Jer. 7:32, 33). Molech was the false god of the Ammonites. The image was heated and the bodies of children who had been killed were laid in his arms. The Hebrew word transliterated into Greek becomes *geenna*; the word was used ten times by Jesus in His description of hell. The practice of child sacrifice was condemned by the Law (Lev. 18:21; Deut. 18:10).

Step seven, Josiah “took away,” exterminated or destroyed, the horses and chariots used in worship of the heavenly bodies (2 Kings 23:11). The kings of Israel and Judah were not to multiply horses (Deut. 17:15, 16). The Lord wanted the people to trust in Him and not worldly implements of warfare. They were not to be fainthearted, fear or tremble. “For the LORD your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to save you” (Deut. 20:4).

Step eight, Josiah pulled down and broke in pieces the altars on the roof chamber dedicated to the host of heaven and those in the courts of the Temple and pounded them to dust (2 Kings 23:12). The kings brought pagan wor-
ship into the home and the people followed after them. The Lord was ready to cut such men and stretch out His hand in judgment upon those who looked into the heavens but never saw past the stars (Zeph. 1:3-5). There were those in Judah who practiced their pagan rituals in the dark, but this did not hide the evil from the all-seeing and the all-knowing Jehovah.

Step nine, Josiah destroyed a number of the false altars built by Solomon that still remained after three centuries. Josiah defiled these sites by making them burial grounds (2 Kings 23:13, 14). Solomon’s seven-hundred pagan wives and three hundred concubines turned his heart from God and he built high places for their false gods (1 Kings 11:3-5). The three idols and their worship mentioned here took a heavy spiritual toll on the people of Judah and Israel. Ashtoreth was a fertility goddess of the Canaanites worshiped with lewd rites. Chemosh was the false god of the Moabites. King Mesha offered his son as a burnt-offering to Chemosh when he was defeated in battle (2 Kings 3:4-27). Milcom is another name for Molech, which was worshiped with gruesome orgies that included child sacrifice.

A TIME OF CLEANSING IN ISRAEL 2 Kings 23:15-20

Step ten, Josiah fulfilled the prophesy of 1 Kings 13:1-13 by destroying Jeroboam’s worship site at Beth-el (2 Kings 23:15). Josiah honored the grave of the man of God from Judah who had delivered the prophecy in the days of Jeroboam (verse 16). He also honored the grave of the prophet from Samaria (verse 17). Like Josiah, we need to take care when we speak out against evil and wrong that we do not destroy the memory and work of godly people.

Step eleven, Josiah went into the towns of Samaria like he did at Beth-el. All of the houses and high places that were dedicated to pagan idols and ritual he “took away.” The Hebrew word sur means “to pluck up, bring to an end and remove.” Josiah’s goal was to eliminate all traces of pagan worship.

Step twelve, Josiah “slew” or slaughtered like a sacrifice the false priests who had served at the various altars of the pagan idols and burned their bones. Upon completing this task he returned to Jerusalem (verse 20).

A GREAT REVIVAL SERVICE 2 Kings 23:21-25; 2 Chronicles 35:1-19

Step thirteen, Josiah commanded all the people to keep the passover. There had not been such a service dedicated to the Lord (verses 21-23). The passover was to be held exactly as written in the book. It was to be as thus saith the Lord. This was the first time such a passover was ever held in Judah and Israel. Proper preparations were made to make the nation and its people ready to serve the Lord according to the book. Are we ready to serve the Lord today according to the book?

The animals for sacrifice were slain and offered at the appointed time. “Moreover Josiah kept a passover unto the Lord in Jerusalem: and they killed
the passover on the fourteenth day of the first month” (2 Chron. 35:1). This was in accord with the Lord’s command to Moses while the people of Israel were still in Egypt (Ex. 12:1-6). The priests were appointed to take their ordained place. “And he set the priests in their charges” (2 Chron. 35:2). King Josiah asked seven things of the Levites: (1) Serve the Lord and His people. “Serve now the LORD your God, and his people Israel” (verse 3). (2) Put the ark in the Temple. “And said unto the Levites that taught all Israel, which were holy unto the LORD, Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel did build; it shall not be a burden upon your shoulders” (verse 3). (3) To set their courses and duties as appointed by David. “And prepare yourselves by the houses of your fathers, after your courses, according to the writing of David king of Israel, and according to the writing of Solomon his son. And stand in the holy place according to the divisions of the families of the Levites” (verses 4, 5). (4) Slaughter the passover sacrifice. “So kill the passover” (verse 6). (5) Sanctify themselves to serve before the Lord. “And sanctify yourselves” (verse 6). (6) Prepare the people to serve the Lord. “And prepare your brethren” (verse 6). (7) Follow the book. “That they may do according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses” (verse 6).

Josiah’s contribution to the passover offerings was the act of a generous leader (verse 7). This is an example for pastors and church leaders to follow. People will follow what they see their leaders doing. If we are going to preach giving, then we must be givers. The generosity of the king soon caught on and

Moving the Holy Ark to the Temple (2 Chronicles 35:3): During the wicked reigns of Kings Manasseh and Amon of Judah, the faithful Levites had the Ark of the Covenant removed from the Temple to provide insurance from the potential of pillaging from their pagan neighbors and the idolatrous desecration from the internal idolatry which was fostered by the unfaithful kings. As a result of Josiah’s personal repentance, command for the people to recommit to the covenant found in the book of the Law and significant observance of the Passover, he then commanded the Levites to recover the ark, restore it to its rightful place in the Temple, and, therefore, properly serve the Lord. After the completion of Solomon’s Temple, the Levites ceased in their transporting of the ark, as in the Tabernacle in the wilderness. However, they had resumed the task when the nation had spiritually drifted from wholly following the precepts of the Lord. Josiah insisted they completely and thoroughly return to the proper form of worship and Temple service.

Gave Willingly: the idea is to offer willingly and voluntarily. The person gives of himself or of his substance without compulsion. It is an act of free will, a voluntary giving with no requirement of reward. It may be an act of mercy or meeting a need of another or a show of love and appreciation for something or someone. The princesses gave willingly to the restoration and celebration of the Temple practices. Word Studies #5068 and #5071.
spread among others. The king’s princes and the three chief priests also gave generously (verse 8). Six chief Levites are named who gave to the other Levites (verse 9).

The offerings were presented to God. The priests and Levites took their appointed places. “So the service was prepared, and the priests stood in their place, and the Levites in their courses, according to the king’s commandment” (verse 10). The animals were killed, skinned, the blood sprinkled, flayed and divided quickly to the families. Note they took care of the people first and then supplied for themselves (verses 11-14). The singers and porters took their places and were served by the Levites. No one was left out of the service. “And the singers the sons of Asaph were in their place, according to the commandment of David, and Asaph, and Heman, and Jeduthun the king’s seer; and the porters waited at every gate; they might not depart from their service; for their brethren the Levites prepared for them” (verse 15).

The service was a success because it honored God and the book. There was no other like it in the history of Israel or Judah. “So all the service of the LORD was prepared the same day, to keep the passover, and to offer burnt-offerings upon the altar of the LORD, according to the commandment of king Josiah. And the children of Israel that were present kept the passover at that time, and the feast of unleavened bread seven days. And there was no passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; neither did all the kings of Israel and Judah keep such a passover as Josiah kept, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel that were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (verses 16-19).

This great service did not happen overnight. In the eighth year of his reign, at sixteen years old, Josiah began to seek the God of...
David his father. The teen years are a critical time of decision in every young person's life. The most important of all decisions is to answer the question, "What shall I do with Jesus?" It was in the twelfth year of his reign, having read the book, that he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images (2 Chron. 34:3). It was now six years later and he was twenty-six years of age. "In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah was this passover kept" (2 Chron. 35:19). Recovery from the evils of his forefathers was not an easy task, but it was surely worth all the effort he and others put forth to restore the true worship of Jehovah in Jerusalem, Judah and parts of Israel.

**LAMENTING A GODLY KING** 2 Kings 23:25-30; 2 Chronicles 35:20-27

Of all the kings of Judah, only Hezekiah and Josiah are recognized for their "goodness" (2 Chron. 32:32; 35:26). Of Hezekiah it was said, "He trusted in the LORD God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him" (2 Kings 18:5). Hezekiah's faith in God had no equal. On the other hand Josiah demonstrated a life and reign that held fast to the Law of God; therefore, he was eulogized with much the same words. "And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him" (2 Kings 23:25). Josiah, as a young man, turned to the Lord with all his heart. However, by this time in Judah's national history, even the great reforms and revival of Josiah did not prevent the divine judgment appointed upon the sinful generations who were needful of God's chastening hand. The writers of Kings and Chronicles both wrote concerning the idolatrous worship that the people must bring to an end and the true worship of Jehovah that needed to be restored and preserved. Reviewing their past seventy years and what they had come from to where they were on the great passover day, makes Josiah's reforms monumental. However, with the untimely death of Josiah the great reforms appear to have been only outward for the majority of the people and not of the heart. The prophet Jeremiah showed little faith in the reform's power to save the nation against such obstinate and perpetual backsliders. Jeremiah was told there was a conspiracy among the men of Judah and Jerusalem to turn back to the iniquities of their fathers and worship idols. They were ready to break the covenant they made with Josiah. As a result the Lord was ready to bring evil upon them. Jeremiah was told, "Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up a cry or prayer for them: for I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble" (Jer. 11:14). It is no wonder why Jeremiah is called the weeping prophet.

As devoted as he was, Josiah did have a failing. Josiah's godly rule was concluded after thirty-one years of faithful service to the Lord and the nation of
Judah. At the still young age of thirty-nine he was killed in a senseless battle against the Egyptians led by Pharaoh Necho at Megiddo. It appears that Pharaoh Necho was traveling north through Judah to give his support to the Assyrians in their fight against Babylon. With the fall of Nineveh to the Babylonians in 612 BC, the fleeing Assyrian army and people set up a government at Haran. This city is located in northern Mesopotamia, on the Balikh River, a branch of the Euphrates. Abram came here with his father, Terah, and family (Gen. 11:31). Haran stood at the intersection of the trade routes from Damascus, Carchemish and Nineveh. Historians note that in the Battle of Haran in 601 BC, the Assyrians were crushed by the Babylonians due in part because the help they expected from Egypt did not come.

Josiah confronted Necho at Megiddo with a small army. Necho attempted to persuade the young king that he meant him no harm and his battle was elsewhere. Josiah disguised himself and pushed the battle forward. He was mortally wounded in the first onset of battle. His driver placed him in the second chariot, which was lighter and faster and headed toward Jerusalem. Josiah died enroute. Jeremiah led in the lamenting for Josiah (2 Chron 35:25; Lam. 4:20). The weeping prophet could see that the end was in sight. At no other time in the history of the Jews was there such a number of writing prophets. The Lord was giving Judah one last chance to repent and return to Him. Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Nahum and Habakkuk all wrote during this time.

**THE WORD OF GOD APPLIED**

When the book was found and its contents made known, honest men and women returned to the Lord. There are seminars and books presenting all sorts of programs and ideas on how to build a church and have a fulfilled life. The real answer for success is surrender to Jesus Christ and His Word. We need a great revival today based on Bible preaching. Until this is done, God will not bless and people will not be aware of the signs of the times. The fact is, we are rapidly approaching the end of this age and the coming of Christ.
The theme of Zephaniah’s message is the “day of the Lord (Jehovah).” It is mentioned three times in chapter one in verses seven and fourteen. The focal point of his message is the impending judgment of the Lord upon the people of Judah and the pagan nations around them. There were those in Judah who felt that Zephaniah was an alarmist but the prophet stood by his message. The day of the Lord’s wrath was at hand and those who did not believe the message of the prophets would be judged.

THE PROPHET ZEPHANIAH

The name Zephaniah means, “the Lord hides or he whom the Lord hides.” He was born during the reign of Manasseh when many in Judah sacrificed their sons on the fires of Molech (2 Kings 21:16). This makes the name Zephaniah very fitting for these times. Zephaniah 1:1 lists four generations of this prophet. This was uncommon in the Old Testament. The possible reason for tracing his lineage was to prove he was a Jew. His father’s name was “Cushi,” which means a descendant of Cush or an Ethiopian. His father was likely a foreigner who had embraced the God of Abraham and thus a Jew by faith. This was true of several Ethiopian immigrants to Israel; they were simply foreigners who were Jews. One of Gedaliah’s daughters married an Ethiopian. The Law in Deuteronomy 23:7, 8 permitted the children of such marriages to be accepted into the Jewish congregation after three generations were established. Since Hezekiah was the last and fourth name mentioned, Zephaniah would have been a man of prominence. The genealogy established Zephaniah as the great-great-grandson of King Hezekiah. This would have provided him access to the royal court and placed added weight to his message.

At the time of Zephaniah’s ministry, the Northern Kingdom of Israel had been in captivity eighty years. During that time Judah had sharply declined spiritually and morally. They committed the same evils and worse than those for which God had judged the people of Israel. How far do we think we can go before God judges us today? The nation of Judah was living in the aftermath of the evil and idolatrous years of Manasseh and Amon. Amon was so wicked that his own servants conspired together and killed him in his own house. The people of Judah killed the servants and crowned Josiah as king (2 Chron. 33:21-25).

Zephaniah’s message was delivered after the death of Amon during the early years of Josiah’s reign. This would place the time of Zephaniah’s min-
istry between the years of 641-626 BC. He was a contemporary of Habakkuk. These two prophets led the way for Jeremiah and linked his ministry with that of Isaiah. Zephaniah and youthful king Josiah faced a city, Jerusalem, and a country, Judah, which were in great turmoil. The Temple, after fifty plus years of neglect, was in bad need of repair. The moral and spiritual climate in Judah was at an all time low. However, Zephaniah, because of his intimate acquaintance as a prince in Judah, was familiar with court life and delivered a strong message to them concerning their sins, God’s judgment and love. His message and ministry had a positive influence on the young king Josiah, who at the age of 16, led the people of Judah in revival. (See lessons 2 and 3.) The people of Judah were offered gracious spiritual guidance and help during this period of history. Their sin of rejecting God’s message is a dark chapter in the history of the Jewish people. Idolatry had become a frightful thing during the reign of Manasseh. Because of Judah’s lapsing into degeneracy, Zephaniah raised his voice against all the idolatrous practices that had become prevalent throughout Jerusalem and Judah. No prophet was more scathing in his denunciation of idolatry. Zephaniah presented two pictures: one was of the dark gloom and judgment that was to come upon the unrepentant, the other was of the bright glory and blessings that were to belong to the remnant when the Messiah came into their midst. The love of God is clearly witnessed in Zephaniah’s message. Zephaniah’s ministry and Josiah’s courageous reforms were the last gleam of hope before God put the light out. Zephaniah’s main theme through his message, like that of Joel, is “the day of the LORD.” He made reference to the “day” twenty times in thirteen verses. Note how Zephaniah affirms the sovereignty of God in chastisement and in love.

Josiah, at the age of twenty, began six years of spiritual awakening and reform (2 Chronicles 34; 35). These were completed in 622 BC. The sins which Zephaniah condemned were dealt with and lamented.

THE WICKED UTTERLY CONSUMED

God disciplined because of His love for the people of Israel and Judah. Throughout the Old Testament this truth is taught. “For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth” (Prov. 3:12). The word *correcteth* is from the Hebrew word *yakach*, which means, “to reprove, to be right; to justify, to convince or to reason together.” In the usage of this word, both the subject (the Lord) and the object (the ones He loves) participate in the action. This usage conveys capability, possibility and obligation. It reveals only a part of the overall picture that is not yet completed. Perhaps the most well-known usage of this word is found in Isaiah 1:18, where it is translated *reason together*. The apostle Paul wrote, “Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth” (Heb. 12:6). Such chastening was an act of discipline that was done to train up a child, educating them so they may learn by the teaching hand of the Father. Other New Testament passages clearly show this interpretation. Paul wrote, “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching (training, educating, chastening) us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lust, we should live
soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Titus 2:11, 12). These verses and others show the purpose and goal behind the chastening of the Lord.

By chastening unbelievers, God expresses His love toward the obedient by enforcing His laws and statutes. The judgment of the Lord is always right and just (Psalm 98:8, 9). Whether it is directed toward His children or the unbelieving, the Lord is patient and long-suffering. It is His desire to comfort and bring men to repentance. His long-suffering demonstrates His love, mercy and forgiveness. (Num. 14:18; Rom. 15:5; 2 Peter 3:9).

Guilty of sin and idolatry, the nations were to be totally destroyed by the Lord (Zeph. 1:2). The Hebrew word here is *suph*, which means “they will be snatched away, terminated and come to an end.” The first attack of Nebuchadnezzar was less than forty years away. But, Zephaniah, like several other Old Testament prophets, spanned across the years to the end times, the Tribulation, Armageddon and the millennial reign of Christ. The final judgment of the nations will be centered around Jerusalem. At the appointed time the wrath of God will come like a rage upon all the nations. The sword of the Lord will strike hard and fast. It will be known as the day of the Lord’s vengeance (Isa. 34:1-8). When the unbelieving nations of the world came up against Jerusalem, the Lord Himself will lead the battle against them. “Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle” (Zech. 14:3). The nations will be brought to the Lord’s assigned place for their judgment. There He will separate the sheep from the goats and His sentence will be final (Joel 3:2; Matt. 25:32).

### THE LORD’S HAND UPON JUDAH

*Zephaniah 1:4-6*

The problem that faced Judah and Jerusalem was materializing in the world once again. True worship was misplaced in Judah by the false worship of Baal and Ashtoreth. The people had degraded from worshiping the Creator to the worship of creation. Paul spoke of God’s judgment upon those who would so degrade the glory of God. It is not that they do not know about God, but that they choose to be unthankful and foolish by worshiping beasts and creatures instead of giving God the glory due Him. The apostle Paul warned the Romans about such irreverence for the one true God. (Rom. 1:21-25). The time had come in Judah for Baalim and all the priests to be eradicated. The word *Chemarims* only appears once in the Old Testament text in the plural. The Hebrew word *kemarim* is used in 2 Kings 23:5 where it is translated *idolatrous priests*. In Hosea 10:5 it is *priests*. The word is Aramaic in origin and is used in the Old Testament in a bad way. The verbal form of the word means...
“to be black.” The Chemarims were clothed in black as they performed before their idolatrous gods. True priests of the Lord who were of the Levitical order wore white robes when they performed their official duties in the Tabernacle and the Temple. According to the Mishna (traditional Jewish Rabbi interpretation of the ordinances) a Levite who had become disqualified for service was to remove his holy garment of white and put on black garments and depart from the Temple compound.

The Chemarims were hermit-like idolatrous priests who attempted a double allegiance (Zeph. 1:4, 5). They swore by the stars, or Malcham (the god of the Ammonites), and then attempted to serve before the Lord. Double standards will never work in the Lord’s service (Matt. 6:24). For many the same choice is before them and they need to make up both their minds and hearts to follow the Lord. Elijah challenged the double minded of Israel as he stood before the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel with these words: “How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him” (1 Kings 18:21). The reference to Baal worship in Zephaniah 1:4, 2 Kings 23:5 and to their vestments in 2 Kings 10:22, speaks of the black robed Chemarim of Baal as well as the disqualified priests of Jehovah. They will be cut off together and no longer be allowed to serve before the Lord. Near the end of his life, Joshua challenged his generation and all those that were to follow to, “Choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:15). After the death of good king Josiah, the inevitable happened in Judah. The people quickly followed a wicked king back into idolatry. The Lord included these backsliders in His day of judgment. “And them that are turned back from the LORD; and those that have not sought the LORD, nor enquired for him” (Zeph. 1:6).
THE LORD’S SACRIFICE

Sinners will stand in silence holding their peace because unconfessed sin will have no rebuttal when the Lord prepares His sacrifice (Zeph. 1:7). All those who oppose the true worship of Jehovah will be silenced and resistance will cease. In this verse the prophet is preaching the need for the nation to repent and return to the Lord. This same message needs to be echoed to every nation of the world today. The saints of God stand in awe of His marvelous works (Psalm 33:8). This day of the Lord and His judgment is closer than most realize or care to admit. The Bible declares the day of the Lord and the end of all things “is at hand” (1 Peter 4:7). John was told in the closing of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, “Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand” (Rev. 22:10).

The guilty enemies are the Lord’s sacrifice. The word sacrifice in verse 7 is from the Hebrew word zebach, which means “slaughter.” The guests have been invited to witness and participate in the slaughter of the ungodly who betrayed the worship of the Lord. Sin and judgment effects every walk of life. The “princes,” “king’s children,” and those “clothed with strange apparel” in Judah were not exempt from the sacrifice (Zeph. 1:8). Let no one think that they are exempt from the chastening hand of God. There will be no laxity due to one’s position in life. On the contrary, Jesus taught that men will be punished in accordance with what they have done with the blessings they have been afforded in life (Luke 12:47-49). The word strange or foreign apparel were those devoted to idolatry. These verses refer to God’s chosen people, the Jews. They were to be identifiable by their manners and dress. “Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue: and it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring: that ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God” (Num. 15:38-40). God’s children should be easily identified as Christians and not looked upon as worldly. Paul admonished women to dress modestly (in good and orderly taste), with shamefacedness (with bashfulness toward men and with modesty and reverence toward God), because
such becometh (is appropriate, godly, and worthy of) women professing godli-
ness (1 Tim. 2:9, 10). This same standard applies to Christian men as well.

“Those that leap on (Hebrew al meaning over or beyond) the threshold” may
have reference to the Philistine priests and worshiper of Dagon. They would
superstitiously jump over this area of their temple entrance because this is
where Dagon fell before the Ark of the Lord (1 Sam. 5:4, 5). More likely it is a
reference to plundering servants of the rich. The Lord’s sacrifice would include
those who had become robbers (those leaping on the threshold), seekers of
unjust gain (filled with violence), and involved in fraud and treachery (Zeph.
1:9). The judgment of God encompassed the entire city. Lamenting
was heard from all quarters. Both
buyer and seller were invited to
the day of reckoning. (Zeph. 1:10,
11). The fish gate represented
their place of business and the
public market. This was also the
main entrance gate on the north
side of Jerusalem. Today it is
called the Damascus Gate. The
area in front of this gate is still
used for market today. This gate,
because of the lay of the land
around Jerusalem, would be the
first to suffer attack. The howling
from the second was the heart of
the city and its homes. The hills
point to the surrounding suburbs.
The merchants are the owners and
business men. All they that bear
silver (the buyers) are cut off. Ever notice how products have a different value
and warranty depending on whether one is the buyer or the seller? Christians
are to be honest as both buyer and
seller. Solomon apparently had deal-
ings with some hard barters and gave
us warning. “It is naught, it is
naught, saith the buyer: but when he
is gone his way, then he boasteth
(Prov. 20:14) As Christians we are to
“provide things honest in the sight of
all men” (Rom. 12:17).

There are always those who are
indifferent, these, too, were included.
Jerusalem was to be searched with
candles. The Lord has set the time
and place. No one will be exempt and
no one or anything shall be hidden

---

**Manna**

God Searching Jerusalem with Candles (Zephaniah 1:12): Referring to the most
minute searches of the dwellings and hid-
ing places of those of the people of Judah
who had despised the Lord and followed
after foreign gods, the prophet indicated
they would ultimately face the judgment
of God through the divine empowering of
their enemy, the Chaldeans. The “candles”
were actually clay oil lamps which were
commonly used at that time for night light-
ing and for close searching purposes.
Those who despised the name of Jehovah,
who knows and sees all, endured the plun-
der of their enemies, foretold by the Lord
through the prophets and which proved
that the hidden things would not, after all,
be hidden from the all-seeing Jehovah.

---

**Lees:** the basic meaning is that of “keep-
ing, guarding or protecting.” The word
refers to a place of protection, as a
place behind a hedge protected from
the wind. It is the side of a structure
that may offer protection from wind or
other offensive forces. Such a side place
is out of the main stream of activity, a
place of protection, rest and ease. It may
mean a position of a body as resting on
the side. It is like a soldier that has left
the battle and taken shelter beside a
structure or has laid on his side in such
a manner as to protect himself. Word
Studies #8104 and #8105.
(Rom. 2:16). Those who are comfortable with life, “settled on their lees,” will be most uncomfortable when exposed to the consuming fire of God’s wrath. For the thoughtless who think “It won’t happen to me!” “It’ll never happen here!” “Why worry now? I’ve heard this before!” will be unpleasantly surprised (Zeph. 1:12).

You can make a difference; the choice is yours. The Lord will do evil upon the unrepentant. Evil refers to adversity, affliction, calamity, distress, harm, misery, and trouble. The goods of Jerusalem were to be booty and the land made desolate (verse 13).

**THE GREAT DAY OF THE LORD**

Zephaniah 1:14-18

The words, the day of the Lord, are used twenty-three times in the King James Bible. Eighteen of the references are in the Old Testament with five in the New Testament. The “day of the Lord” does not refer to a twenty-four hour day. It is a prophetic term used to describe the final days of this present age. It is a day the Bible also refers to as “the time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7), and the “great tribulation” (Matt. 24:21). The prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Zephaniah and Malachi wrote about the day of the Lord. The apostle Peter mentioned it during his sermon on the day of Pentecost and then again in his first epistle. Paul also wrote about it to the Corinthians and the Thessalonians. It is spoken of as being near or close at hand. It is said to be a day when the proud are brought low (Isa. 2:12); a day of destruction (Isa. 13:6); a terrible day (Joel 2:31); a day of darkness (Amos 5:18); a dreadful day (Malachi 4:5) and it will come as a thief (2 Peter 3:10).

The day of the Lord and His judgment will not be an easy time for the unrepentant sinner. The Lord’s judgment upon the people of Judah was written in light of the last days. The judgments of the Old Testament stand as reminders to us of the day of the Lord. Repeated this way, it stresses the nearness of the day of the Lord. The majority of people live their lives with little thought about tomorrow and less thought about just how close they are to God’s Judgment on Judah
Zephaniah 1:1—2:3

the day of judgment. The bitterness of that day will see the powerful warrior on his knees and tears welling up in his eyes (Zeph. 1:14). We must guard against becoming contented and skeptical concerning the coming of the Lord and His judgment. There have been scoffers around for millenniums. However, in the last days they will increase in number and intensity. Their cry has not changed much over the years. They have the misnomer that nothing ever changes. Men are born, they die and life continues on the same. The foolishness of men will be brought to an abrupt end. The world and the universe as we know it today will be dissolved in the day of judgment. Hence, we have God’s promise of “new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Peter 3:3, 4, 13).

Zephaniah 1:15, 16 paints a dark picture of the day of the Lord. He spoke of it as a day of “wrath.” The Hebrew word ebrah is used to speak of an outburst of passion, anger or rage. True, the Lord is long-suffering and merciful (Psalm 86:15). He was long-suffering to Noah’s generation by sending the sign of Methuselah who lived nine hundred sixty-nine years and then there was the one hundred twenty years Noah spent in preparing the ark before God sent the flood (1 Peter 3:20). He was long-suffering to the nation of Israel crying out; “How shall I give thee up” (Hosea 11:8). He has been long-suffering to this present generation: “Not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Zephaniah also referred to the day of the Lord as a day of “trouble and distress.” The word trouble is from the Hebrew word tsarah, which was used to speak of a female rival, an adversary. It is also used to speak of adversity, affliction, anguish and tribulation. The word distress from the Hebrew word Messiah is closely related and refers to someone in a narrow strait with nowhere to turn. It is a day of “wasteness and desolation.” Both of these words have to do with devastation and ruin. It is a day of “darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness.” Isaiah spoke of this day when the sun refused to shine (Isa. 13:10). It is a “day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers.” The trumpet is the Hebrew shophar. It was made from a ram’s horn without a mouthpiece. It was used chiefly as a signal instrument in religious worship. It was also used in battle, as with Gideon (Judges 7:16-22). It is associated with Jehovah blowing it to frighten His enemies and the gathering of Israel (Zech. 9:14, 15). Angels sound the trumpets during the tribulation to signal the opening of the seventh seal (Rev. 8:7, 8, 10, 12; 9:1, 13; 11:15). The trumpets break the silence and publicly proclaim God’s war upon fallen man. There will be no uncertain sounds like those spoken of by Paul to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 14:8). Jehovah will direct the action in “the day of the Lord.”

SEEK YE THE LORD

Zephaniah never used the Hebrew verb sub which means “to turn, or repent” in his plea for the people of Judah to change their hearts and lives. However, it is clear that he has a strong desire for them to humble themselves before the Lord. Only when this is done may they “be hid in the day of L ORD’s anger” (Zeph. 2:3).
First the prophet issued a summons. “Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together” (verse 1). Gather is the word for harvest and also for an assembly. The day of reaping and gathering was at hand. They would be assembled like so many stalks of grain brought before the threshing floor. Zephaniah was not tactful or gentle in his message. He referred to Judah as “O nation” (verse 1). The Hebrew word here is goy. This was always used in reference to a foreign nation; hence Gentiles or heathens. It was a sad commentary on the spiritual condition in Judah. They became like their sister in the north; they totally turned from God to idols (Ezek. 23:31-33). Since they acted like Samaria (Israel), they would be met with the same judgment. They were called “O nation not desired” (Zeph. 2:1). They had no longing for the Lord; therefore, His desire for them was also gone.

The reason Zephaniah called them to assemble is given in verse 2. At the time of his message there was still time to return to the Lord, “before the decree bring forth the day” (Zeph. 2:2). The day of wrath would come with great speed. It would be like the chaff that is blown in the wind. Three times in verse 2 the word before is used stressing the urgent need for repentance or they must fact the Lord’s anger and wrath.

Zephaniah’s advice to the people of Judah is still good advice for sinful men today. “Seek ye the LORD” (verse 3).” This must be done with the whole heart, body and soul. They were challenged to seek three things. (1) Seek the Lord. This is where it must start with Jesus first and foremost. (2) Seek righteousness. This has to do with what is spiritually, morally and legally right. This is lacking among the nations of the world today. (3) Seek meekness, which is modesty and humility.

**GOD’S JUDGMENT ON JUDAH**

Zephaniah’s message was a cry for action. Right action that the Lord would honor. This was Judah’s only hope. When the Lord announces judgment, He also proclaims a way of escape. The day of repentance is a glorious opportunity to return to the Lord’s favor. They were encouraged to pursue after righteousness. If they sought the Lord, they may be hidden or preserved in the day of His wrath. The door for repentance and salvation was opened wide by Zephaniah, but it was up to the hearer to heed and enter.
The Lord declared Himself in judgment. The nations around Jerusalem had been derelict toward Jehovah and in the treatment of the Jews. They would now stand before the one whom they rejected as the true God. The “Law of the Harvest,” “whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Gal. 6:7), is clearly set forth in this lesson. Zephaniah wrote about a nation in each direction from Jerusalem. God’s people in Old Testament times were surrounded by enemies. Twenty-six hundred years later Israel is still surrounded by enemies who reject the Lord God and His Word. Many are descendants of those about whom Zephaniah wrote.

GOD’S JUDGMENT UPON PHILISTIA

Zephaniah 2:4-7

Zephaniah looked to the west and south of Jerusalem to the Philistine area called Gaza, which means “the strong place.” The mention of Gaza in this passage is a reference to all of Philistia. The verses also name Ashkelon, Ashdod and Ekron which were three chief cities of the Philistines. The city of Gath was not mentioned because Uzziah, king of Judah, had already broken down that city (2 Chron. 26:6).

The Philistines had been a thorn in the side of the people of Israel from the time they first entered the land of promise (Num. 33:55). Their transgressions involved the treatment of Israelite captives. All of the captivity had been sold into slavery to the Edomites. For this Gaza would be forsaken, Ashkelon a desolation, Ashdod driven out and Ekron rooted out. The Scriptures and history record how this sentence was carried out.

Gaza was the oldest and most important of the five principal cities of the Philistines. It is located forty miles south of Tel-Aviv/Joppa along the Mediterranean coast. It is the last city of importance on the Mediterranean seacoast as one travels south toward Egypt. Gaza was controlled by Egypt, Assyria and then Alexander the Great, who invaded the area in 332 BC and killed all the men and sold the women and children into slavery.

Ashkelon is one of the oldest known cities in the world. It was the only Philistine city with a harbor. A base relief at Karnak records how Ramses II captured Ashkelon during the thirteenth century. The Romans built several structures in this city. There was a temple to the goddess Derketo who was in the form of a fish. This was the birthplace of Herod the Great. The Moslem
leader, Saladin, took Ashkelon from the Crusaders in AD 1187 and it was completely destroyed in AD 1270.

Ashdod, which means “fortress,” was the seat of Dagon-worship (1 Sam. 5:1, 2). It was a fortified city of the Hyksos empire. They ruled Egypt, Syria and Palestine from 1700—1550 BC. King Uzziah took the city (2 Chron. 26:6, 7). It was then captured by Sargon the King of Assyria in 700 BC (Isa. 20:1). Nehemiah became alarmed at those of the returning remnant who intermarried with its inhabitants (Neh. 13:23, 24). The ancient ruins are three miles south of the city bearing the name today, which is being developed into a seaport of Israel.

Ekron, which means, “naturalization,” was the northernmost of the five cities of the Philistines. It served as the seat of the false god Baal-zebub (lord of flies). It is located about fifteen miles southeast of Tel-Aviv and Joppa. It was to this city the Philistines brought the captured ark of the Covenant. After witnessing the judgment hand of the Almighty God, the citizens of Ekron placed the ark on a cart and sent it toward Israel. When David killed the Philistine giant, Goliath, Saul and the people of Israel pursued their armies back to Ekron. According to Assyrian records, Sennacherib took Ekron, put to death its leaders and carried the people into captivity in 714 BC.

The phrase nation of the Cherethite is an ancient name for Cretans or Philistines in general. The words mean “executioners” or “life guardsman.” Much of this prophecy has been fulfilled. The fullness of it will be completed with the return of Christ.

The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) claimed a great part of this territory in 1995-96. Even with the death of Arafat, it is still the hope of the PLO leaders to proclaim an Arab State in this area and the West Bank, which is an area between the hills east of Jerusalem and the Jordan River. Numerous terrorist attacks have been launched from here that have killed thousands of innocent Jewish citizens. Many of the Hamas leaders are still pushing for a Jihad (holy war) that would push Israel into the sea. The Prime Minister of Israel, Ehud Olmert, recently agreed to remove all Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip and turn them over to the PLO. Rest assured that the PLO is under the watchful eye of the living God who will yet defend His chosen people as He has done in the past.

GOD’S JUDGMENT UPON MOAB Zephaniah 2:8-11

Moab was the son of Lot by incest with his oldest daughter (Gen. 19:30-34). The land of Moab was an area about thirty-five miles long and twenty-five miles wide on the east side of the Dead Sea. Its boundary to the north was the Arnon River and on the south the Brook Zared. Much of the area is about three thousand feet above sea level. This makes it some forty-three hundred feet above the level of the Dead Sea. Within its boundaries are two mountains mentioned in Scripture, Nebo and Pisgah (Num. 21:20; Deut. 34:1).

During the people of Israel’s march to the land of Canaan (Deut. 2:8, 9), the Lord instructed them not to distress Moab. When Balak, king of Moab, witnessed the strength of Israel against the Amorites, he sought the help of Bal-
aam to curse the Israelites (Num. 22:1-6). In the days of the Judges of Israel the Moabites sided with the Ammonites and the Amalekites against Israel (Judges 3:12-15). Moab thought to make war against Judah and Jehoshaphat, but their plans were spoiled by Jehovah's intervention (2 Kings 3:10-27; 2 Chron. 20:1-25). During this battle, Mesha, king of Moab, offered his eldest son as a sacrifice to their god, Chemosh (2 Kings 3:26, 27). This was not the only false god of the Moabites. It is clear from the account given in Numbers 25 that they worshiped their Baalim like the pagan nations around them. Little is known of their history from the mention of their origin in Genesis 19 until the Exodus of Israel from Egypt. When Israel or Judah was weakened, Hazael and Benhadad, kings of Syria, joined with the Moabites to raid Judah and Israel (2 Kings 13:20-22).

For their transgressions, God foretold that fire would be sent to devour their palace, Moab would die with tumult and shouting, and his judges would be cut off and his princes slain. The Moabites faded into obscurity as they were first subdued by Shalmanezer, then Sargon of Assyria. The following century they were taken captive by the Chaldeans, their final days of being overrun came from the Nabataeans who were descendants of Ishmael through Nebaioth (1 Chron. 1:29). They mingled with the Edomites. Josephus wrote of the land of the Nabatene that stretched from the Red Sea to the Euphrates (Josephus, Ant, XIII, xv, 1, 2). Alexander the Great built his infamous stronghold in ancient Moab at Machaerus. This fortress was on a mountain that overlooked the Dead Sea. Years later, during the earthly ministry of Christ, Machaerus became the place of John the Baptist's imprisonment and death (Mark 6:21-28; Josephus, Ant, XVIII, v, 2).

GOD'S JUDGMENT UPON AMMON

Ammonites was the name given to the descendants of Ben-ammi, the son of Lot by incest with his youngest daughter (Gen. 19:35-38). The present-day capital of Jordan, Amman, is located on the ancient site of Rabbath which was the capital of the Ammonite empire. It is only twenty-five miles east of the Jordan River and forty-five miles northeast of Jerusalem. It is at an altitude of three thousand feet. Like the city of Rome, Rabbath sets on seven hills.

The Lord instructed Israel not to distress the children of Ammon as they marched to the Promised Land (Deut. 2:19). Israel was actually a blessing in disguise to the Ammonites. When Gad, Reuben and half of the tribe of Manasseh decided to settle on the east of Jordan, they rid the area of the Amorites who had previously settled there (Num. 21:21-24).

Ammon refused the people of Israel any help and instead secured the aide of Balaam to curse them. However, this backfired and the curse was brought upon the Ammonites (Deut. 23:3, 4). Ammon's treatment of the people of Judah and Israel was both shameful and brutal. They were ready to subdue the men of Jabesh-gilead by putting out their right eyes. Saul and three hundred thirty thousand of Israel and Judah came to their rescue by defeating Nahash and the Ammonites (1 Sam. 11:1-11). When King David took the city
of Rabbath he left it in the possession of the king and made the Ammonites a vassal kingdom to Israel (2 Sam. 12:27-31). They joined with Moab against King Jehoshaphat of Judah (2 Chron. 20:1). As Israel began to sing praises to the Lord, the Lord set ambushments against Ammon and Moab and they were defeated (verses 21, 22).

Ptolemy II of Egypt took the city of Rabbath and rebuilt it then changed the name to Philadelphia to honor himself (265-263 BC). The Seleucids claimed Ammon in 218 BC. Their last battle of any consequence was against the Maccabees. Herod the Great took the city in 30 BC and engaged in a huge building program. He surrounded the city with walls and built a temple to Hercules. During this time Amman was a part of the Decapolis (Mark 7:31). With the Arab conquest in the seventeenth century the city declined to just a small village. When Abdullah made Amman-Rabbath the capital of the new country of Jordan, the city and area began to flourish once again. Solomon married an Ammonite woman, whose son became king of Israel. He, through foolish counselors and judgment, split the nation and was left to govern the tribes of Judah and Benjamin (1 Kings 14:21). In the years that followed, the false gods of the Ammonites and Moabites found their way into the lives and worship of the people of Israel and Judah.

Zephaniah compared Moab and Ammon’s fate to that of Sodom and Gomorrah. They would be overtaken with weeds and salt pits and be a continuous desolation. The comparison to Sodom and Gomorrah is most fitting. This was the dwelling place of their parents until the Lord brought the judgment of fire and brimstone (Gen. 19:24, 25). The history and events surrounding Sodom and Gomorrah were likely well-known among the children of Moab and Ammon.

Revilings: is to decry or speak abusively to another or about another. These words depreciate the value of another so as to declare that person worthless. One may use contemptuous language about another; thus, reproaching another with a harmful purpose. These actually are vain words as to their substance but may harm just the same. Word Study #1421.

Moab as Sodom and Ammon as Gomorrah (Zephaniah 2:9): The comparison of the nations of Moab and Ammon to the ancient evil cities of Sodom and Gomorrah is interesting in light of the origins of these two nations. After Abraham’s nephew Lot fled the cities with his family, his wife died and was turned to salt for disobeying the Lord’s command not to look back at His destruction of those cities. Afterward, Lot’s daughters caused their father to become intoxicated, and they each committed incest with the result being that they both bore children from those illicit activities. The illegitimate sons they bore were named Moab and Ben-ammi. The Moabites and Ammonites utilized every possible opportunity to show hostility to the people of Israel and Judah. The comparison, brought to the time just prior to the captivity, indicates that the judgment of God upon the Moabites and Ammonites would be like His judgment had been upon those infamous cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Their lands were turned into the habitation of a barren desert where nothing of value would grow, and the barren desert would become virtually uninhabitable.
The metaphor is changed from the land to the people. The Ammonites and Moabites would become the spoil of the Lord’s people. There is much dispute in the Middle East today. Jordan, until the Six-Day War in 1967, controlled the old city of Jerusalem and the west bank of the Jordan. This area is often in the news as PLO and Hamas extremists seek to rid the area of the Jews. All of this will soon cease with the return of Jesus Christ.

GOD’S JUDGMENT UPON ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia is first mentioned in Scripture as the land bordered by the river Gihon. Gihon was the second river named among the four flowing out of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:10-14). Ethiopia is a translation of the Hebrew word kush. Cush (Kush) was the son of Ham and grandson of Noah. His name means black. Ethiopia is just south of the first waterfall on the Nile River. The Ethiopian empire ruled Egypt from 720-664 BC. This was during the twenty-fifth dynasty of the Egyptian Pharaohs. In the Old Testament several passages speak of Ethiopia with respect. There are at least three men named “Cushi” in the Old Testament (2 Sam. 18:21; Jer. 36:14; Zeph. 1:1). Moses was married to an Ethiopian named Zipporah (Num. 12:1) Jeremiah’s helper, Ebed-melech was an Ethiopian (Jer. 38:7-13). On the other hand, its people are spoken of as being careless (Ezek. 30:9). Note that here again their judgment is tied with that of Egypt. They are included among the warlike nations that will invade Israel in the last days (Ezek. 38:1-9). But the day is coming when Ethiopia will stretch out its hand to the Lord (Psalm 68:31).

He pronounced judgment upon Ethiopia and the nations about them. Egypt from the word mitsrayim, means “double straits” and refers to Upper and Lower Egypt. When these two civilizations united in 3100 BC the world had its first united nation in history. They placed the first of thirty pharaohs on the throne. For nearly two millennia they were a brilliant civilization. During the reign of Thutmose III, (the eighteenth dynasty 1567-1320 BC), Egypt enlarged its borders north to the Euphrates River and further south down the Nile. Pathros means, “region of the south.” It was a part of Egypt. It is likely that Zephaniah was using the deprecating term Cush in reference to Egypt. Zephaniah placed Cush and Assyria side by side in verse 13 which would indicate he was speaking of the greater power to the south under the name Ethiopia or Cush.

A fulfillment of this prophecy was witnessed with the invasion of the Chaldeans and their defeat of Egypt. The wealth and fate of this area of northeast Africa was bound up with that of Egypt. The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel foretold how the day of the Lord would fall upon Ethiopia and its allies. The Libyans were named as a people who upheld Egypt; therefore they would share the same judgment. Libya is the ancient Greek name for northern Africa west of Egypt. The Hebrew name is Put (Ezek. 30:5). It was the

**Word Study #7329.**

**Famish:** is “to make something lean, barren or thin.” It is to cause one to waste away in real substance. It is an action taken toward another, so as to deplete its effect. When the fat of a thing is removed, the truth of it shows. God would remove the fat of the false gods and cause them to be seen as poor substitutes for the real.
country of the Lubim, who were descendants of Ham (Gen. 10:13). The name _Put_ means “flight.” Jeremiah tells us they were skillful in using the shield (Jer. 46:9). Put has been used to signify a part of Egypt.

Over the years Jews were dispersed over the land of Ethiopia. The Lord promised to “recover the remnant of his people” from this area (Isa. 11:11). “Operation Moses” brought several thousand Jews from Ethiopia in 1985. There was an average of three hundred immigrants a week until 1991. In March of 1991 Prime Minister Shamir was given $2.5 billion to assist with immigration. According to the Jerusalem Post May 4, 1991, the _aliya_ (going up) of Ethiopian Jewry hit record numbers. About three thousand Ethiopian Jews have arrived since the start of the year, and another twelve hundred are expected this month. There are some fifteen thousand Jews in Addis Ababa, who are mainly refugees from outlying areas that await permission to emigrate. There are another twenty thousand who converted to Christianity under pressure but retained their Jewish identity and now wish to make _aliya._

**GOD’S JUDGMENT UPON ASSYRIA**

Zephaniah’s woes climax with Assyria. They were the strongest politically and most ruthless warriors of their day. Zephaniah in few words finely honed foretold how the Lord would destroy Assyria and leave Nineveh a desolation as dry as the desert.

The Assyrian empire ruled the Middle East and its surrounding areas from about 1100 to 612 BC. They had already passed the peak of their success when Zephaniah wrote concerning their utter destruction. The Hebrew verb forms used in verse 13 by Zephaniah seem to express his own personal desire for the judgment to come quickly. Zephaniah likely witnessed and was acquainted with Assyrian atrocities. The English language does not express the force of the Hebrew verbs. Note how Zephaniah’s focus becomes more narrow with each utterance. (1) _Stretch_ meaning “to spread out, bend away or turn aside against the north.” (2) _Destroy_ meaning “to vanish, cause to perish Assyria.” (3) _Make Nineveh a desolation,_ meaning “an astonishment or waste,” and _dry,_ meaning “parched or drought,” _like a wilderness_ meaning “a desert place.” At the time of Zephaniah’s writing Nineveh was still a great trade and cultural center. This was a city of over a million souls. The city lim-
its extended over a sixty mile area in the form of a trapezium. The inner city was surrounded by walls reaching one hundred feet in height with several towers that have been estimated to reach a height of two hundred feet. The Tigris River formed a moat along the west wall of the city. The River Khosr ran through the heart of the city alongside the palace. The city was thought to be impregnable by its kings and citizens. But the Lord had spoken. Its homes would be deserted by man and no one would cross their thresholds. About one hundred ten years earlier Assyria overran the people of Israel and took them captive. They held the hammer of domination over the people of Judah for nearly half a century, now it was God’s turn to deal with Assyria.

Where once a proud people lived, all the beasts of the nations would find places to lodge. The desolation would be so great that entrance to the buildings would be impossible. The picture Zephaniah presents is that of total destruction. The Assyrians and Nineveh once sang and rejoiced. But they were careless. They were careless in their acceptance of Jehovah as the one true and living God. They were careless in the treatment of God’s chosen people the Jews. They were careless in their boasting. I am, and there is none beside me. For this callous arrogance Assyria and Nineveh would be brought down. This was also a false claim of prideful Babylon (Isa. 47:8). The early church at Laodicea boasted that they were rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing. The Lord’s answer to such pride and boasting is never good. “Knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:17). Such a statement can only be truthfully said by the Lord. “There is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else” (Isa. 45:21, 22).

GOD’S JUDGMENT UPON JERUSALEM  

Zephaniah used three strong words to describe the sinful conditions that existed in Jerusalem. These words clearly pictured the reason the city faced God’s judgment. The Lord, finished with the surrounding nations and their judgment, turned toward His beloved city and said, “Woe to her” (verse 1). The
word *woe* (also translated * alas, ah* and *ho*) is an interjection that is generally used to express lamentation. It is found fifty times in the prophets. Forty of these are warnings of God’s impending judgment. God’s judgment was coming upon Jerusalem because its citizens made the city filthy. The Hebrew word *mara* speaks of a rebel, or literally one who beats the air. This has to do with mistreatment with a whip. They were God’s chosen people who had abused their unique relationship with Him. Their regard for the Law of God was that of a stiff-necked people tuned to serve false gods.

Jerusalem had become polluted. They had defiled and desecrated the holy things of God, His Law, His Temple, His priest and thus the people themselves. The Hebrew word *gaal* means “to stain, to make impure, to be polluted by blood.” It was used to speak of those who were polluted and could not serve in the priesthood. Jerusalem was guilty of such action against God (Neh. 7:64; 13:29). The Lord’s garments were stained with the blood of the heathen nations (Isa. 63:3), now Jerusalem itself was stained with its ungodly actions. They defiled the Lord’s altar which is the same as defiling Him (Malachi 1:7-12).

Jerusalem had also become an oppressing city. The Hebrew word *yanah* has to do with rage, violence and maltreatment. The indictment against Jerusalem concerned their biased judicial treatment of the poor and needy. The Law forbade the oppression of fellow Jews (Lev. 25:14), foreigners journeying through the country (Lev. 19:33), and of slaves (Deut. 23:15, 16). Oppression of the poor had become a part of everyday life in Jerusalem.

The indictment against Jerusalem also included four concise charges. “She obeyed not the voice” (Zeph. 3:2). Israel had been privileged to hear the voice of God out of the fire (Deut. 4:33). Yet, they did not listen or obey His voice (Num. 14:22). Because of their deaf ears they would face all the curses pronounced by God (Deut. 28:15-45). God had also spoken numerous times through His prophets, but the majority of the people chose to ignore their messages and persecuted the messengers even unto death (Matt. 23:37).

“She received not correction” (Zeph. 3:2). The chastening of the Lord had little effect upon the people of Israel, Samaria, Judea and Jerusalem. They witnessed His discipline on a number of occasions but failed to learn their lesson. The Lord sent war, pestilence, drought and famine but all of these failed to bring them to their knees in repentance toward God (Jer. 5:3; 7:28).

“She trusted not in the LORD” (verse 2). This was their greatest and most fatal mistake. In times of wars and famines they turned to Assyria and Egypt, or some other ungodly nation, rather than depend on the Lord. Their unbelief became the foundation on which they attempted to build their city and their lives. Such a foundation was doomed to failure. Their solution to its needs

---

**Light:** the meaning comes from the boiling of water in a pot. It refers to the bubbling of the boiling. The bubbles rise from the liquid with heat and intensity causing great expectation. However, when the bubble pops, it produces nothing but the evidence of its vanity. It was light with no substance as compared to heaviness, and its activity was vain, producing nothing of value. Word Study #6348.
could not be found in Egypt or any other foreign land. Their problem was indeed a spiritual one. They needed to return to Jehovah and serve Him.

“She drew not near to her God” (verse 2). True worship had been forsaken for a pantheon of false idols. Although the morning and evening oblations were still being observed, they became a mockery (Ezek. 8:16-18). They became void of true worship. One cannot have it both ways. The choice must be made whom we will serve (Joshua 24:15; 1 Kings 18:21).

The indictment against Jerusalem included both its political and spiritual leaders. Those in places of leadership are responsible to God. They must give an account (Heb. 13:17). They need to remember that they were ordained of God (Rom. 13:1). The princes of Judah were like roaring lions seeking someone else to devour. The judges were pictured as wolves that had picked their prey clean. This sounds a lot like politics as usual in much of the world. Turning from the political leaders, Zephaniah addressed the prophets who were “light and treacherous” (Zeph. 3:4). The Hebrew word pachaz means “to bubble up and become frothy and thus be wanton or unimportant.” They were no longer taken seriously by the people. The word translated treacherous (bogedoth) is only used here. It is a plural and therefore speaks of multiple treacheries. It deals with deceit and infidelity. They claimed to speak in the name of Jehovah, even though the Lord had not spoken. Two indictments were levied against the priests. They “polluted the sanctuary” and did “violence to the law” (verse 4). The things they were ordained for and set aside to uphold they had forsaken. Every deacon and pastor should take careful note at this point. If called of God and ordained by a New Testament church, we must be true to the calling and work set before us (1 Peter 1:15).

The fact that the Lord was in the midst of Jerusalem made its judgment more certain. He hoped His judgment upon the nations would serve as a warning, but Jerusalem did not heed the warnings. If only the people would repent and return to Him, He would not cut them off.

Zephaniah 2:4—3:7

A lesson for all those who read Zephaniah is this: if God would so humble the prideful and idolatrous nations around Jerusalem, would He not also bring judgment upon the people of Judah for their sins? This same truth applies today. Peter taught, “For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first began at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” (1 Peter 4:17, 18).
God’s Blessings and Restoration  
Zephaniah 3:8-20

In chapter 1 Zephaniah’s message was centered around the Lord’s passionate anger and judgment upon the people of Judah. God disciplines because of love: His discipline is for teaching, correcting and moral and spiritual growth. The unrepentant will be consumed by the Lord. We should all be aware that what we sow is what we will reap. The day of the Lord is near. There is no rebuttal offered for sin. The day of judgment is closer than we think. It is the guilty who will suffer the greatest loss. Sin and its judgment affects every walk of life. You can make a difference. The choice is yours. The Lord will bring evil upon the unrepentant and blessing upon the believer.

In chapter 2 Zephaniah’s message was to the nations about Israel. The Lord’s judgment upon these nations should have served as a warning to Judah and Jerusalem. However instead they continued in their sins. The history of Israel serves as an example for the New Testament church to be faithful to the Lord and not lust after evil as the people of Israel did.

Note that God will not ultimately cast His people aside (Psalm 94:14). However, He does chastise them for their transgressions. The Lord will not cast out, eject or expel those who come to Him in faith (John 6:37). The Lord has great things in store for His faithful children. The people of Israel and Judah are examples of these truths. Although they sinned and God chastised them, Israel is once again a nation today and greater things are in store at the coming of Christ.

GOD’S JUDGMENT ON THE NATIONS  
Zephaniah 3:8

Every nation and each citizen, including Israel and America, will be held accountable to God for their sins. “Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy” (Zeph. 3:8). Paul, in his message from Mars Hill, in Athens declared that God has already “appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness” (Acts 17:31). The judgment will take place at the appearing of Jesus Christ, “who shall judge the quick and
Zephaniah 3:8-20

The dead” (2 Tim. 4:1). There are several appointments made by God that all mankind will keep. There is an appointed time to be born and a time to die (Eccl. 3:1, 2). Our appointment with death also includes an appointment with judgment (Heb. 9:27).

The judge will be the Lord Jesus Christ. The Saviour of the Cross will be the King and Judge on the throne. The Father has “committed all judgment unto the Son” (John 5:22). Jesus Christ has been granted Heaven’s “authority to execute judgment” (verse 27).

The judgment of the nations will take place in the Valley of Jehoshaphat. The name Jehoshaphat means “Jehovah has judged.” The prophet Joel wrote concerning this day of judgment. In the valley of Jehoshaphat the Lord will plead, or judge, the nations there concerning His chosen people, Israel (Joel 3:2, 12). Joel also referred to this area as “the valley of decision”, meaning “the valley of sharp judgment.” Truly the judgment will be sharp upon those who have cursed the things and the people of God (verse 14). Since the fourth century, the Kidron Valley has been referred to as the “Valley of Jehoshaphat.” Both sides of the valley today are crowded with graves: Jewish graves are on the east slope with Moslem graves on the west slope along the ancient wall of Jerusalem.

The basis of this judgment will be the treatment of the Lord’s brethren the Jews. The result will be the separation of the sheep nations from the goat nations. The present day anti-Semitism that is prevalent in many nations will be judged harshly by the Lord. Every nation that has offended will suffer great loss. The Lord will send His angels to gather everything that is offensive, “and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire” (Matt. 13:41, 42). Those nations which have cursed the people of Israel and the church will themselves be cursed. When they attempt to defend their actions, the Lord will remind them of their past (Matt. 25:41-46).

GOD’S RESTORATION OF THE NATIONS

Zephaniah 3:9, 10

The nations and peoples of the earth converted. “For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the L ORD, to serve him with one consent” (Zeph. 3:9). They will learn righteousness through judgment. After the day of judgment the Lord will “turn to the people.” The word turn is from the Hebrew word haphak, which means “to turn about, to convert, to transform.” The nations will all have a pure language with which
to call upon the Lord. This is literally a clean lip. It will be a language that fully respects Jehovah as the living God. The word consent is from the Hebrew word shekem, which is the neck area between the shoulders. It is the place where burdens and responsibility are borne. Today the majority do not want to take responsibility for their actions so this will be a welcome change. There will be proper accountability when the Lord returns. The attitude it’s no one’s business but mine will be gone. In that day all the earth will look to and come to Jerusalem to worship Christ who will be seated on the throne of David (Zeph. 2:11). So important will this be that those who “will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain” (Zech. 14:17).

There will be nations who will help in bringing the scattered people of Israel home. We have witnessed the partial fulfillment of this since the end of WWII. They are today being brought back from the continent of Africa. “From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, even the daughter of my dispersed, shall bring mine offering” (Zeph. 3:10). God continues to stir the nations concerning Israel. Nations are assisting in bringing Jews from the four corners of the earth. The prophet Isaiah foresaw a day when the Lord would set His banner among the Gentiles. As a result they shall carry the sons and daughters of Israel in their arms and upon their shoulders. The leaders of these Gentile nations will build up and support the newborn nation as a mother nurses a child. The promise is this: “For they shall not be ashamed that wait for me” (Isa. 49:23).

Despite what some may teach, the Lord’s Word is faithful. He has not and will not cut off Israel forever (Lam. 3:31). This is because of God’s irreversible and irrevocable covenant with Abraham. Israel was chosen by God’s grace through Abraham forever. The apostle Paul was clear to the Romans, “Hath God cast away His people? God forbid.” Paul referred to Israel as the “people

---

**Manna**

A Pure Language (Zephaniah 3:9): Prior to the scattering of the people at the Tower of Babel (Gen: 11:9), the world was unified by the existence of a single language. However, they were a people who were rebellious and sinfully independent. As a result, the Lord caused their language to be divided, and the ability to communicate ceased. The result was the immediate cessation of the building of the tower and the separation of people and nations through the confusion and diversity of languages. Eventually, during the rule of the Messiah in His kingdom, the Lord will provide the people a pure unifying language, one that will be without contamination through the use of swearing by and praying to false gods. All praise will be singularly directed to the King of kings and Lord of lords.

**Suppliants:** means “to be rich, multiply or abundant.” The idea of the word comes from the burning of incense in worship to God. The degree of devotion in worship may be determined by the thickness of the cloud of incense. Those who caused a thick cloud were shown to be more devoted. The suppliants are those devoted worshipers. Word Studies #6279 and #6282.
which He foreknew” and “a remnant according to the election of grace” (Rom. 11:1-7). Abraham was called while still in Ur to follow the Lord, and he and his descendants would become a great nation. God will bless those who stand by Israel and He will curse those who do not (Gen. 12:1-3). This promise is still very much in force today. God chose the people of Israel because of His love for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He will keep the oath sworn to them (Deut. 7:7, 8; Psalm 105:7-10).

Believers are saved and secured as a result of God’s irreversible and irrevocable covenant with His Son, Jesus Christ. Believers are saved by God’s grace (unmerited love) through Jesus Christ by the sanctification of the Spirit and their belief of the truth (2 Thess. 2:13). By faith New Testament believers, both Jew and Gentile, become heirs to the promise through the Seed, Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16, 29).

THE REDEMPTION OF ISRAEL

Restored and converted Israel will know no shame. “In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against me: for then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain” (Zeph. 3:11). As foretold the Jews, as a people, have been killed by countless enemies (Lev. 26:17). It is they who have been made a joke and mocked by many people and nations (Deut. 28:37). It is they who have been scattered to the countries of the world (Ezek. 22:15). It is this same people and nation who will no longer be ashamed because the Lord will graciously pardon all their transgressions (Micah 7:18).

Pride will be removed and a humbled and cleansed people will serve the Lord. The people of Israel will be brought back into agreement with the Word and once again walk with God. “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORd require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Micah 6:8).

A nation with faith in the Lord is pictured without shame. When Israel understands that salvation is by grace through faith and not by the Law, it will bring a humble spirit. The faithful in Israel will be a spiritual instead of a material people. “I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor
people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD” (Zeph. 3:12). With their transgression put away, they will find their refuge in the Lord (Isa. 25:4). Israel will finally enjoy the blessings God intended for His chosen. Undisturbed and unchallenged by pagan enemies and neighbors, they will flourish in the Promised Land. “In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, shall ye call every man his neighbour under the vine and under the fig tree” (Zech. 3:10). The people of Israel will then be in a spiritual position to fulfill their calling as priests of a holy nation. “And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel” (Ex. 19:6). Israel in that day will stand as a true light and witness for the Lord (Isa. 42:6; 43:10-12; 49:6).

THE REJOICING OF ISRAEL

Iniquities forgiven, hearts humbled and the Lord in the midst is cause for singing, shouting, and rejoicing. “The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth” (Zeph. 3:13). Why such jubilation? God has taken away their bent to sin. This is speaking of repeated and willful sins. Since the Lord’s people “shall not do iniquity,” it appears the redeemed will take on the character of their Messiah, Jesus Christ. At the return of Jesus Christ the saints will be transformed for their corruptible bodies will be changed to incorruptible and the mortal will put on immortality (1 Cor. 15:53, 54). The Lord “shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Phil. 3:21). These redeemed ones will not speak lies. Their conversation will not be laced with lying. They will speak truth. They shall abide in the Lord’s tabernacle, dwelling in His holy hill, walking upright, working right, and speaking the truth (Psalm 15:1, 2). To underline his point Zephaniah added, “Neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth” (Zeph. 3:13). This truly is taking on the nature of Christ who left us “an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth” (1 Peter 2:21, 22).

The latter part of the verse thirteen paints a picture of a beautiful pastoral scene of the shepherd and his sheep. “For they shall feed and lie down, and
none shall make them afraid” (Zeph. 3:13). This echoes the song of the psalmist David when he sang: “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures” (Psalm 23:2). Ezekiel spoke of a time when God would shepherd His flock after the time of exile. He will search and seek out His scattered sheep, and He will deliver them out of all the lands where they have been scattered. They will be fed in the land of Israel. The pastures will be green and fertile. The wounded and broken will be healed and strengthened (Ezek. 34:11-19). Safely within the Great Shepherd’s fold, pasture and care, the people of Israel will no longer be afraid. “But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it” (Micah 4:4).

Zephaniah used three revered titles for the chosen of the Lord. “Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem” (Zeph. 3:14). They are the “daughter of Zion.” The New Jerusalem or New Zion will boast a citizenship of redeemed Jews and Gentiles. Unlike present day Jerusalem it will not just be a speck on a map. It will be the capital of Christ’s Kingdom (Isa. 35:10). They are called “Israel” (God prevails, or God will rule). This is the name the Lord gave to Jacob and the nation He loved. The faithful remnant of Israel and redeemed Gentiles will make up the Israel of God as the true seed of Abraham and Christ (Gal. 3:28, 29; 6:16). They are called the “daughter of Jerusalem.”

In that glorious day the people of Israel are promised they will do four things. “Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem” (Zeph. 3:14). They will “sing.” This is from the Hebrew word ranan which means “to be so overcome with joy so the heart bursts forth with singing.” They are the ringing songs of victory (Psalm 126:1, 2). They will “shout.” This is the Hebrew word rua which means “to root, to raise a loud cry.” It, too, is a shout of triumph. Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem during His earthly ministry was a foretaste of what is yet to come (Zech. 9:9; Matt. 21:1-11). They will “be glad.” This is the Hebrew word sameach which means “to fill with glee, to be joyful or merry.” When the salvation of Israel comes, “Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad” (Psalm 14:7). They will “rejoice” This is the Hebrew word alaz which means “to jump for joy.” Note that all four of these are done with the whole heart (Jer. 24:7).

THE RULER OF ISRAEL

“The LORD hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the LORD, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more” (Zeph. 3:15). There are several reasons why Zephaniah encouraged the redeemed to triumphantly jump up and down with joy. First of all the Lord took away all judgments. Sins forgiven and forgotten, the newly arrived citizens no longer stand condemned. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1). The King has come without sin unto salvation (Heb. 9:28).
There is reason for such joy because the King has triumphed over the enemy and cast him out. The last enemy will once and for all be destroyed. “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (1 Cor. 15:26). Satan, the deceiver and adversary, will be “cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Rev. 20:10). Death and hell were defeated by the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He became a partaker of flesh and blood; “that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:14, 15).

The greatest reason for such rejoicing is the King, the Lord Jesus, will be in the midst. The Lord’s Temple will be in their midst forever (Ezek. 37:28). The promise from Heaven is this, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God” (Rev. 21:3).

We rejoice because the King of Israel will remove all fear. “In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack” (Zeph. 3:16). The future holds no fear for those who are the Lord’s. God is going to do a marvelous work for the redeemed. “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Rev. 21:4). Fear will no longer overwhelm and hinder the believer. It will torment us no more because “perfect love casteth out fear” (1 John 4:18).

We rejoice because of the King’s matchless love. “The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing” (Zeph. 3:17). He will save and our salvation will be made complete. We have been saved from the penalty of sin (Rom. 6:23), we are being saved from the power of sin (1 Cor. 1:18; Gal. 2:19, 20), and we will be saved from the presence of sin. Salvation in the future tense is the “redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:23), as the result of the redemp-
tion and regeneration of our spirit (John 3:3-5). From beginning to end it is God’s plan. He will carry it through to its consummation (Phil. 1:6; 2:13). Rejoice, joy and singing are words of physical demonstration of a triumphant child of God. Here the Lord Himself leaps, dances, and shouts in the midst of His people. There’ll be shouting on the hills of glory. Jesus endured the cross “for the joy that was set before Him” (Heb. 12:2). He will rest in His love. A love so great that mere words cannot express its fullness nor its meaning. It is not enough to say, “God loves us.” The Bible states, “God is love” (1 John 4:8). There is no longer a reason to rebuke or judge. Thus He breaks forth with singing. His love will silence the judgment halls.

THE REGATHERING OF ISRAEL

Zephaniah concluded his prophecy with a personal message from Jehovah. There is comfort in knowing the Lord will gather His children. “I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden” (Zeph. 3:18). The sorrow of captivity faced the people of Judah. The day of Jacob’s trouble still awaits (Jer. 30:7). The Lord will gather those who have mourned the loss of the Temple and the beloved city of Jerusalem. Today they come by the thousands to stand at the “Wailing Wall” and cry over what once was and the hope of what shall be. There were those in Zephaniah’s day that did not lament but mocked the prophet’s message (Jer. 44:16, 17). There were those who mocked Jesus and the apostles (Matt. 13:55-57). The number of scoffers will continue to increase the closer we come to the return of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:3).

Unless one is familiar with the history of the Jews, it is difficult to understand their love for the land of Israel and especially the city of Jerusalem. The years of exile and deportation have placed a stigma alongside the name Jew. They are still despised by many. The survival of the nation of Israel is proving their antagonists to be wrong about Jewish capabilities. The destruction of Jerusalem both shamed and stunned them to the point they found it difficult to sing in the days of their dispersion (Ezek. 33:21; Psalm 137:1-5).

The days of affliction will be a thing of the past. “Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee: and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame” (Zeph. 3:19). The word afflic is from the Hebrew word anah, which means “to browbeat, to look down on, to put down.” The nations and peoples who have been guilty of doing this to Israel, the Lord will “undo.” They will be dealt with by God. The promise is that the Lord will save her that “halteth.” This is the Hebrew word tsela. This speaks of those who are limping or stumbling. This word was first used concerning Jacob when he wrestled with the Lord. The Lord touched the hollows of Jacob’s thigh and put it out of joint, “and he halted (tsela) upon his thigh” (Gen. 32:24-32). All the sons of Israel, who like Jacob after many years away, are now limping home. They will be gathered home and become a great nation (Micah 4:7). The nation of Israel, though one of the smallest nations in land mass and population, has
gained “fame” meaning “a reputation.” It has gained a reputation for survival when most thought it would not. It has gained a reputation for its superb agriculture skills in making the desert blossom and turning swamps into productive farm land. It has gained a reputation of having one of the best trained military forces in the world. It has gained a reputation in the electronic—computer industry which competes with California’s Silicon Valley. It has gained a reputation in the field of medical research. Making the people of Israel a praise among those who held them in shame involves either the conversion or overthrow of the enemy. Those who have touched Israel have touched the heart of God (Isa. 41:11,12; 54:17).

As surely as the remnant returned from Babylon, the Jews are returning back to Israel today. “At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the LORD” (Zeph. 3:20). In 536 BC the first of the remnant returned from Babylon under the leadership of Zerubbabel. This prophecy includes the physical return to the Promised Land. “At that time” and “in the time” are lights of hope for the exiles of Israel. In the fulfillment of this prophecy Zephaniah took the reputation and praise of Israel to “all the peoples of the earth.” Here messianic Israel is in view. The salvation of Israel will be more than just a renewing of the land. True freedom from captivity will be truly known in the New Zion. “Before your eyes” was not speaking of Zephaniah’s generation. They would perish before deliverance came from Babylon almost one hundred years later. With the coming of Christ, the rapture and the resurrection, the eyes of God’s chosen will witness full the redemption of the people of Israel.

GOD’S BLESSINGS AND RESTORATION

Zephaniah began with the judgment of nations and Israel and ends with a restored and redeemed people who will be a blessing to all the earth. All affliction will be taken away for those who heed Zephaniah’s message to “seek ye the LORD” (Zeph. 2:3).

Zephaniah proclaimed judgment upon the whole earth. He also looked ahead to the conversion of unbelieving nations. Therefore, the salvation spoken of is not restricted to Israel but is offered to all those who will believe. Through the gospel of Jesus Christ all mankind can be saved by grace through faith. Christ is not only for the Jews, but for men and women of every nation who will trust Him.
True believers know God is sovereign. He is in control of the entire universe. Truly, would we want it any other way? It is frightening to think of a world without God in control. He is aware of all that happens. The news media often portrays a world out of control. It must have looked that way to Habakkuk. However, when he asked, he found the Lord had a higher purpose in allowing certain things to happen. We need to remember that the Lord knows and declares the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10). We must believe that God’s great eternal purpose for Israel, us and the world will prevail.

HABAKKUK AND HIS TIMES

The first verse of Habakkuk’s message emphasized three things of importance to the book and its contents. The first is the word burden. The Hebrew word massa was used to set the theme for the following message. It had been used by the prophets to foretell the judgment of an idolatrous nation near to Judah or Israel; however, Habakkuk’s message dealt with the coming judgment upon Judah. The second is the word prophet. This tells Habakkuk’s listeners and readers the message is from God. The third and final word seer ties closely with the word prophet. It was also used to let the hearers and readers know this was not mere guesswork on the part of Habakkuk, the message came by the inspiration of God (2 Peter 1:21).

The title of the book bears the author’s name, Habakkuk. Little is known about the life of this prophet. His name means “the embracer.” Some Rabbinical writers claim that Habakkuk was from the tribe of Levi. Referring to the closing words, “To the chief singer on my stringed instruments,” it is possible that Habakkuk was one of the Temple musicians (Hab. 3:19). Some writers
connect his name ("the embracer") with Elisha's statement to the Shunammite woman. "And he [Elisha] said, About this season, according to the time of life, thou shalt embrace a son. And she said, Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid" (2 Kings 4:16). The primary root word for embrace and Habakkuk is the same. Their claim is that Habakkuk was the son of the Shunammite woman. Another thought that may be helpful in establishing Habakkuk's identity is to compare the commission of Isaiah to, "Go, set a watchman, let him declare what he seeth" (Isa. 21:6), with Habakkuk's own statement concerning his ministry where he said, "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved" (Hab. 2:1).

What we do know definitely about Habakkuk is that he was God's prophet who was set to see the downfall of Babylon. The writer referred to himself as: "Habakkuk the Prophet" (Hab. 1:1). Haggai is the only other writer so identified in the opening verse of his prophecy (Haggai 1:1).

The dating of Habakkuk is established by the characteristics of the book itself. (Note the timeline chart concerning the following names and dates.) The ministry of Zephaniah (641-626 BC) had just concluded. Habakkuk followed closely behind the ministry of Nahum (651-621 BC), who dealt with the kingdom of Assyria and the downfall of its capital, Nineveh. Nahum’s prophecy was fulfilled in 612 BC. Habakkuk's message dealt with the Chaldeans whom God sent to take Judah into captivity for seventy years. He looked at the end of this era and foresaw the Babylonian downfall, but it came after Judah’s refinement and repulsion of idolatry.

The core of his prophecy was most likely delivered after the death of the good king Josiah (641-610 BC). The nation of Judah rapidly returned to evil under the wicked kings that followed Josiah, namely Jehoahaz (609 BC), Jehoiakim (609-598 BC), Jehoiachin (598-597 BC) and Zedekiah (597-586 BC). This would make Habakkuk an early contemporary with the weeping prophet, Jeremiah, whose ministry spanned the final days of Judah and into the early years of the captivity (635-587 BC).

From the time of the Chaldean's first invasion and the early stages of the captivity in 605 BC, Habakkuk's assurance and message of Babylon's overthrow was fulfilled within seventy years (536 BC). This was the exact time frame that was foretold by the prophet, Jeremiah (Jer. 25:11). This seventy year period was noted and confirmed by the prophets Daniel (Dan. 9:2) and Zechariah (Zech. 7:5).

Habakkuk presented the Lord as the answer to the problems of men and kingdoms. The book presents an excellent lesson for God’s people today. It teaches how Habakkuk left the problem of evil, and the nations who perpetrate it upon God’s chosen, with the Lord. The battle fought and won by the Lord, Habakkuk closed with a prayer of thanksgiving and praise to the Lord.

HABAKKUK ASKED, “HOW LONG?” Habakkuk 1:2-4

Habakkuk cried out to God because he was deeply concerned over the violence and wickedness in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem. “O L ORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and
thou wilt not save!” (Hab. 1:2). This question stemmed from what he witnessed all about him. He cried out for an answer; yet, it seemed to him as though God ignored the situation and his prayer. How long would God ignore him? Why would He not intervene on behalf of Judah? In all of Judah’s history these were perhaps the darkest days it had ever experienced. The reign of Jehoiakim was an abomination to the Lord, and the majority of the people followed his ungodly example. The entire nation of Judah was guilty of wickedness (2 Chron. 36:8). So evil was his life and reign that God told Jeremiah not to lament for him (Jer. 22:18, 19).

Habakkuk asked God, “Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance?” (Hab. 1:3). The word grievance is from the Hebrew word amal, which speaks of toil that is a wearing effort; mischief, misery, perverseness, wearisomeness and wickedness. Habakkuk wondered why he must continue to see such violence and trouble with seemingly no one to deliver the victims. “For spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention” (Hab. 1:3). The word spoiling is from the Hebrew word shod, which is used to speak of a number of atrocities such as ravaging, desolation, destruction, oppression, robbery and ruin. The Hebrew word chamas, translated violence is also translated as wrong, cruelty, false, injustice and unrighteousness in the King James Version. The word strife from the Hebrew rib, and the word contention from madon are both used to speak of a contest of discord or dispute in a case of law. As a result of the number who pressed unjust law suits and violence, “Therefore, the law is slackened, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth” (verse 4). The innocent were found guilty and the guilty were found innocent. This was due, in part, due to the unjust judges who were guilty of taking bribes (Micah 3:11).

Violence and wickedness are not new. They have run wild ever since sin entered the human race and Cain killed his brother Abel. Why does God permit evil? is an age-old question. There are those who claim that God is the effective cause of all that exists, and, therefore, the author of sin and evil. This is a wrong assumption that finds no merit in the Bible. “God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man” (James 1:13). Sin and evil were not a part of the original creation. Adam and Eve were created in a state of innocence. Lucifer, an anointed cherub of Heaven’s realm, was also perfect in the day of his creation until iniquity was found in him. He was lifted up with pride
and rebelled against all that was holy (Isa. 14:11-15; Ezek. 28:12-15). These characteristics revealed themselves in Adam when he willingly disobeyed God’s command and thus sin entered into the world (Gen. 2:16, 17; Rom. 5:12). For reasons which our finite minds may not fully understand, God permitted evil to befall the human race. However, in His infinite wisdom and love He can and does overrule evil for His good and the good of those who love Him. The words of Joseph to his defiant brothers, “But as for you, ye thought it evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive” (Gen. 50:20), show God’s intervention. God is sovereign; therefore, He can bring to naught the counsel of the ungodly (Psalm 33:10). This was the lesson Habakkuk had to learn and is the one we need to understand today.

It is alarmingly sad how closely this pictures the scene around us today. “The law is slacked” (Hab. 1:4), meaning it was sluggish, feeble, faint and had ceased to be applied justly for the good of the people. Habakkuk felt powerless. He knew that only God could intervene and save the nation.

“I WILL WORK A WORK” Habakkuk 1:5-6

Habakkuk cried out for an answer and the Lord heard his cry. He was no longer silent. “Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you” (Hab. 1:5). The apostle Paul in the synagogue at Antioch gave this same warning to the Jews there who scorned the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 13:14, 41). The Lord’s does not give an immediate answer to Habakkuk’s “why.” Neither does the Lord give any details as to why He had not answered sooner. There is no censuring of Habakkuk for his grievance. The Lord did not challenge the truthfulness of Habakkuk’s concerns. The Lord was fully aware of the evils taking place in Judah and Jerusalem.

The word behold is generally used in the Scriptures to present something out of the ordinary and unexpected. God is always at work. He does not sleep or slumber, meaning He does not even get drowsy (Psalm 121:3-5). Prayer is not a means by which we can force the Lord to do things our way. Prayer is both a privilege and a necessity. Without it believers would be cut off from the throne of grace. Prayer is an entreaty or a petition to God for self, or for others by way of intercession. It is an act of worship that bears the soul before God. Prayer is man seeking a favorable relationship with God.

Rest assured that God is not an unconcerned observer of world affairs. If you are concerned about the rampage of sin, remember that God who is holy is far more concerned than we. A review of history and how the Lord dealt with the heathens and sinners of past generations should put Habakkuk’s and our hearts at ease. In the book of Judges God used different nations on various occasions to bring the people of Israel and Judah under His chastening hand. In every case in point God’s will was triumphant.

Jehovah outlined His plans as He introduced the enemy that He would use to conquer Judah. The great Assyrian empire lay between the Tigris and Zab rivers. The capital, first at Assur, and later at Nineveh, was a marvel of the ancient world. Ahaz and Israel paid tribute to Tiglath-pileser (2 Kings 16:7-
10. Shalmaneser made Hoshea, king of Israel, his servant and captured Samaria (2 Kings 17:3; 18:9). Sennacherib foolishly challenged Hezekiah and Jehovah and lost his army and his life (2 Kings 18:13; 19:16; 36, 37). The Assyrians never recovered from this defeat by the angel of Lord. The Chaldeans were on the rise. Hezekiah made a serious blunder when he greeted the emissaries sent by Merodach-baladon. What may have appeared as gesture of goodwill by long-lost kin turned out to be a spying of the land, its fortresses and its treasures. Hezekiah gave them the grand tour of Jerusalem and his house, which included all the treasures and armaments of his domain. This set in motion the prophecies concerning the downfall and captivity of Judah (Isa. 39:1-8).

A BITTER AND HASTY NATION

The Chaldeans were a Semitic people. Their family tree found its roots in the family of Abraham. Their lineage can be traced back to Chesed, Abraham’s nephew by Nahor his brother (Gen. 22:20-22). However, all signs of friendship and family ties had ceased. The Chaldeans followed no code of equity but their own.

The Lord called them “that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwelling places that are not their’s” (Hab. 1:6). This pictured the cruelty of their fast-moving armies as they conquered city after city. Nineveh was taken in 612 BC by the Chaldean’s King Nabopolassar (625-604 BC). The remnant of the Assyrian forces fled to Haran in the northwest of Mesopotamia, modern day Turkey. The Assyrians made an attempt to ally with Egypt but failed. They were defeated in 610 BC. This ended any Assyrian threat.

Pharaoh Necho king of Egypt came to fight the Chaldeans at Charchemish. The good king Josiah rallied the army of Judah and fought against the Egyptians. Necho sent ambassadors to Josiah to tell him; “I come not against thee this day” (2 Chron. 35:21). Necho accused Josiah of meddling with God’s plan. Josiah disguised himself as an ordinary soldier. The writer of Chronicles recorded that Josiah “hearkened not unto the words of Necho from the mouth of God” (verse 22). Josiah was mortally wounded and was buried in Jerusalem.

Pharaoh proceeded to face the Chaldeans at Charchemish, a city on the west bank of the Euphrates River inside Turkey on the border with Syria. The Battle of Charchemish (605 BC) is where King Nebuchadnezzar began to gain
prominence. The Egyptians were so soundly defeated in the battle that Scripture record, “The king of Egypt came not again any more out of his land: for the king of Babylon had taken from the river of Egypt unto the river Euphrates all that pertained to the king of Egypt” (2 Kings 24:7). This ended all threats to the rise of the Neo-Babylon empire. They positioned themselves toward Judah and Jerusalem, showed themselves to be cruel and oppressive in their character and speedy in their attacks and conquests.

Habakkuk and Judah learned that God is a keeper of His Word. The nation from the far end of the earth, swift as the eagle, and of fierce countenance was to be brought upon Judah as the Lord had forewarned (Deut. 28:49-52). The people of Judah and Israel had failed to keep the Lord's Sabbaths. They forsook God as their King and chose to be like other nations (1 Sam. 8:4-7). From the time they anointed Saul in 1095 BC to the first assault upon Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 605 BC was 490 years. There should have been seventy sabbatical years in which the land rested. There should have been ten celebrations of the Year of Jubilee. If the people of Israel or Judah ever honored these years, it is not recorded. Therefore, the Lord claimed His Sabbaths.

During the reign of Nabopolassar and his son Nebuchadnezzar, the Chaldeans on three occasions (once each during the reign of Judah's last three kings; Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah) laid siege to Jerusalem. The first deportation to Babylon came in 605 BC. It was during the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim. This was when Daniel and many of Jerusalem's finest, young men were taken to Babylon (Dan. 1:1, 2). Eight years later in 597 BC Jehoiachin, who reigned three months, was taken with his mother, servants, princes, and officers to Babylon with all the treasures of the king's house and the Temple. He is also called Jeconiah and Coniah. He was wicked. The Lord said, “Write ye this man childless, . . . for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah” (Jer. 22:24-30; 24:1). In 586 BC the city was taken by the swift eagle from Babylon. The invading army burned the homes and buildings and even the foundations were destroyed. King Zedekiah was captured near Jericho as he

Deride: the basic meaning is “to laugh.” However, the word further explains the activity to be that of scornful laughing. It is to make spoil of another or to mock another. Although it is a playful activity, it harms and hurts the object of the joking. In the text, the princes of Judah became an object of scornful laughter to the forces that came against them. Word Study #7832.
attempted to flee. He was brought before Nebuchadnezzar. They killed his sons, put out his eyes and carried him in fetters to Babylon. That bitter and hasty nation struck hard against Judah and Jerusalem.

MINE HOLY ONE

Habakkuk should not have thought that he was the only one in the universe who was concerned with the problem of sin and wickedness in the world. God is not a disinterested party in the affairs of this world. He is far more concerned about sin and its results than any of us. Everything is under His watchful eyes. “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Prov. 15:3). Every creature from king to pauper, from the president to the lowest taxpayer is manifest in His sight (Heb. 4:13).

Habakkuk was replete with questions. But his faith in God was reaffirmed by a question that did not demand an answer. “Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die” (Hab. 1:12). Because He is everlasting and holy, God must keep His promises to Israel. His promise of vengeance upon the wicked would not be forgotten. The people of Judah and Israel would not die and in God’s time, the Chaldeans would be judged.

Habakkuk accepted God’s charge concerning the people of Judah, their sin demanded judgment. He knew the people of Judah deserved what God had planned for them at the hands of the Chaldeans. “O LORD, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction” (verse 12). The word LORD (Yehovah—Yahweh) is repeated as a reminder of the covenant relationship between Him and the people of Judah. It is also an affirmation of the truth, “For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed” (Malachi 3:6). The Lord is immutable. The word mighty is from a Hebrew word used to speak of a place of refuge and security from one’s enemies. David used the word this way in several of his psalms (Psalm 18:2, 31, 46). God was, is and forever shall be, the place of refuge for His people. However, sin and rebellion made the people of Judah vulnerable to the judgment of God and thus, His instrument, the Chaldeans. The word correction is from a Hebrew verb that is also translated prove and convince.

These verses show that Habakkuk was perplexed by God’s answer. It appeared to Habakkuk that the Lord tolerated what He was against. God told Habakkuk that Jerusalem, His beloved city, would be punished for its sin. But why are you going to use a nation that is less holy than Jerusalem to carry this out? Habakkuk seemingly answered his own question, for he knew that God was holy. This does not mean that God is not aware of the evil but to the contrary. Once aware of its presence He cannot, and will not, condone, or in any way excuse, it. “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue.

Deal Treacherously: is to deceitfully cover, to act covertly, or to act hypocritically. There seems to be a purpose associated with this action and that being to deceive, to spoil, or oppress another for personal gain. These were perfidious or quick to break a vow if it brought them profit. Their lies were covered in their vain words of promise. Word Study #898.
when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?” (Hab. 1:13). This was done in full sight of the Lord, and Habakkuk thought it was with His support. The psalmist struggled with this same dilemma as he viewed the prosperity of the wicked. “Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches” (Psalm 73:12). Why would the Lord keep silent and continue to hold His tongue while a wicked person destroyed one more righteous than he? Because of the Law and the prophets God had given to the people of Israel and Judah and their failure to follow them, it could not be said that they were more righteous than the Chaldeans.

Judah, without proper leadership, was like a fish easily caught in a net. “And makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them?” (Hab. 1:14). Nebuchadnezzar’s army quickly spread the net over the people of Judah and Jerusalem and easily led them away captive with hooks (Ezek. 29:4; Amos 4:2). So great was the take of fish (captives), the Chaldeans burned incense and made sacrifice to their many false gods. “They take up all of them with the angle, they catch them in their net, and gather them in their drag: therefore they rejoice and are glad. Therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag; because by them their portion is fat, and their meat plenteous” (Hab. 1:15, 16). The Chaldeans credited their military might, not the hand of God, for their victory.

They attempted to somehow sanctify their brutality. They quickly emptied their nets from one catch to run and pursue yet another. “Shall they therefore empty their net, and not spare continually to slay the nations?” (verse 17). Entire nations were caught in their nets and hauled to the slaughter or servitude.

**STANDING WATCH**

Habakkuk was perplexed and deeply distressed by the message God gave him. His grievance over Judah’s sins was not to be ignored by a righteous and holy God. Hearing that God would send the idolatrous Chaldeans as His rod of correction, he was in a quandary both spiritually and mentally. Habakkuk came to understand that God would use the Chaldeans to prove or convince the people of Judah of their sins and their need to obey God’s Law.

Habakkuk’s faith in God set him as a watchman ready and eager to see the marvelous work of God. “I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved” (Hab. 2:1). Habakkuk was confident the Lord would deal with the problem at hand. This was an inward setting and preparation of his
heart that had grown faint to fully trust the Lord. Habakkuk joined Isaiah (Isa. 21:8), Jeremiah (Jer. 6:17) and Ezekiel (Ezek. 3:17) as a watchman over God’s chosen people. Like a watchman on the ramparts it takes his post to view and declare what will happen to Jerusalem and Judah (Isa. 21:6). The watchman’s tower was found in two places in biblical times. They were placed at an elevated point on the city walls. From here the watchman could see out over the surrounding terrain and warn of the approaching enemy. Towers were also placed on hills in the frontier areas. These served to alert the cities and villages in time for them to prepare to defend themselves (Ezek. 3:17; 33:7).

The rebellion of Judah and Jerusalem against the Law of God lifted His protecting hand. Soon the glory of His presence would withdraw from the city (Ezek. 10:15-19). Therefore, the watchmen were being set in vain (Psalm 127:1).

Habakkuk was now ready to hear and see what the Lord would say and do. The statement, “What I shall answer when I am reproved” (Hab. 2:1) does not indicate that God issued any complaint against Habakkuk and his inquiries. Habakkuk knew God would answer his prayer and he had prepared his heart to receive the answer.

THE WONDERING PROPHET Habakkuk 1:1—2:1

What goes through your mind and heart when you watch the world news? The reports on terrorism and war deaths is often staggering. In the world today evil is called good and good, evil!

Are we bothered, like Habakkuk, when it appears the wicked are prospering while the righteous are made to suffer? The psalmist sang, “For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked” (Psalm 73:3). As he watched them he began to feel, “Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency” (verse 13). The more he thought about it the more painful it became. However, that all changed when he went to the house of the Lord. “I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction” (verses 17, 18).

He came to realize his thoughts were foolish and ignorant (verse 22). His conclusion should also be ours. “It is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works” (verse 28).
In this lesson we picture Habakkuk as he climbed to the top of a high hill to see an unobstructed view from a watchtower. There he eagerly awaited God’s message for the people of Judah and Jerusalem. The message Habakkuk received is also a message for our times. What was revealed to him about Judah, Jerusalem and the fast approaching Chaldeans is pictorial of situations we see in our own nation and cities today. The answer to Judah’s problem was faith. This is still the answer for our problems today. God’s way is for His children to live by faith. The Lord needs pastors and leaders today who, like Habakkuk and other prophets, will faithfully stand their watch.

**THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH**

Habakkuk determined that he was ready to receive the Lord’s answer to his perplexing question. “I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved” (Hab. 2:1). What Habakkuk did, we also need to do. It is important to one’s spiritual life and well-being to be prepared to receive the Word of the Lord.

When we come into God’s house, our hearts and minds need to be ready to hear the Word. Our mental and spiritual state should stand alert, ready to hear and ready to act upon what the Lord is saying through the lesson and message from His Word. Without proper preparation of heart and mind through prayer and mediation, little may be realized from the services.

Habakkuk was not disappointed and neither shall we be. God answered him and gave him specific instructions concerning the message. “And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it” (verse 2). With a note of joy and excitement Habakkuk wrote, “And the LORD answered me.” The Omniscient God and Creator of man does not have to discuss or argue His decisions with us. But since He is love (1 John 4:16) and plenteous in mercy (Psalm 86:5), the Lord hears and answers the prayers of those who humbly seek Him (2 Chron. 7:14). God’s answer was for Habakkuk to write and make it “plain.” This same verb, ba’ar, was used by Moses when he instructed the elders to write plainly (Deut. 27:8). The message of both were to be preserved and made easy to read. Isaiah was
He May Run that Readeth It (Habakkuk 2:2): The prophet was instructed by the Lord to provide very special treatment of the prophetic message he was to receive. The message was so important that it was to be considered necessary to place it on tablets, probably ones made of wood which were covered with wax and engraved by an iron pen, a practice which provided a means of communicating important messages, including national government affairs and announcements. The tablet was to be hung in a public place, and the message was to be so clearly legible that the reader would understand it even if he were running past it. As a result, the impact of the message would be so strong that the passerby would then run to herald it to everyone along his route of travel.

told to write his message on a scroll (Isa. 30:8) while Jeremiah was to write in a book (Jer. 30:2).

The need for the message to be spread quickly across Jerusalem and Judah was vital to their well-being. The meaning of the statement “that he may run that readeth it” (Hab. 2:2) is important to the spreading of the message. It was not written with such large letters that one running or passing by would be able to read it quickly. The word read-eth is from the Hebrew word qara and means to “call out, to cry out, to proclaim.” The subject expressed in the Hebrew text and the Greek Septuagint is the one proclaiming or heralding will run or rush with the message. Runners or posts were used during Bible times to spread the message (Esther 3:15; Zech. 2:4, 5).

The immediate fulfillment of the vision was that God would punish the Babylonians for the wickedness. “For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry” (Hab. 2:3). This part of the message contains four important points. (1) It declares the vision is “for an appointed time.” God already had the date and time set for His retribution against Babylon. (2) There is the assurance that the message is true. Literally “the appointed time” toward the end will hasten with excitement and panting. The messianic hope will not be delayed. Christ will return like a runner crossing the finish line. The “last days” (Heb. 1:1, 2) or the last time is as surely on God’s calendar as was the destruction of Babylon. It is clearly stated that it will come, “and not lie.” An important truth to remember is that God “cannot lie” (Titus 1:2), because it is impossible for Him to do so (Heb. 6:18). (3) There is the challenge, “though it tarry, wait for it.” The scoffers Peter spoke of mocked what the Word had to say about the last days (2 Peter 3:3, 4). We should never be discouraged by the mockers. The Septuagint has the verse this way, “Though he should tarry, wait for Him.” The hope of the people of Israel and the world is the second coming of Christ. (4) We are given the assurance that “He will surely come, He will not tarry.” The latter part of this verse was quoted from the Septuagint by Paul. “For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry” (Heb. 10:37). This shows that the ultimate fulfillment of the vision will be realized at the second coming of
Christ. From the human viewpoint the fulfillment may seem long in coming. From God’s point of view it is never in doubt nor is it delayed.

The answer to Habakkuk’s bewildered state is given in the Lord’s answer. “Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith” (Hab. 2:4). The first part of the verse shows us that pride is the road to destruction. The latter part of the verse is the answer for the way of life. God is pleased when we place our faith in Him. The last clause of this verse is quoted three times by the apostle Paul. A different part of the verse is given emphasis each time. In Romans 1:17 Paul stressed “the just” shall live by faith. The word therein refers to the act of faith, the acceptance of the gospel message of salvation (verse 16). Who can live by faith? Only those who are “just” or righteous. Paul faced a large group of people who believed they were justified by doing the best they could to keep the Law. But no man is justified by works or by keeping the Law (Rom. 3:27, 28). In Galatians 3:11 Paul stressed the just “shall live” by faith. Those who failed to keep the Law were under the condemnation of its curse. No one can live by the Law, but the just “shall live” by faith. In Hebrews 10:38 the emphasis is on the last two words “by faith.” It is by faith that we find the power to live for God and trust His Word.

Habakkuk came to realize that his faith in the Lord put a clear distinction between the wicked Chaldeans and the godly remnant. The prideful Chaldeans were headed for destruction, but the just remnant, who lived by faith, were promised God’s safe keeping. If we want to please God, we must exercise faith in Him. We cannot be saved apart from faith (Eph. 2:8, 9). The watchword for the believers of Habakkuk’s day, “The just shall live by his faith” (Hab. 2:4) is still viable for God’s children today.
WOE TO THE THIEF

The message was directed to the proud and unbelieving. “Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people” (Hab. 2:5). The Lord always resists the proud (James 4:6). Pride and a haughty spirit will result in self-destruction (Prov. 16:18). The haughtiness and overconfidence of the Chaldeans came from their addiction to wine. The imbibing of alcoholic beverages caused them to continue their transgressions against both God and man. The word *transgresseth* is from the Hebrew word *bagad*’, which is also translated *treacherously, transgressors, deceitfully and unfaithful*. The thought is of one who acts covertly or under cover to pillage by deceit and treachery. Wine and strong drink are in themselves treacherous. They deceive those who partake of them. “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise” (Prov. 20:1). The word *mocker* is from the Hebrew word *luwts* which was used to speak of someone who speaks in an arrogant manner. Wine and strong drink both speak of fermented intoxicating drink. Solomon labeled them as raging or that which causes a great commotion.

Urged on by their false pride and sense of invincibleness the Chaldeans would not stay in Babylon. Their relentless ambition was to gather in the other nations and dwell in the homes of others. It was God’s providence that would soon make the Chaldeans a homeless people. He continued to enlarge his desire or soul. Whatever a man craves or loves, his soul will soon be theirs too (Matt. 6:21). The lustful appetite of the flesh if not checked by God’s grace will soon engulf the whole being and when it is finished, death is the result (James 1:15). Their carvings are compared to hell that is continuously enlarged and yet never satiated.

Nebuchadnezzar gathered people, nations and languages to worship his golden image (Dan. 3:4, 5). The plundered nations sang and rejoiced over the fall of Babylon in mockery. “Shall not all these take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say, Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his! how long? and to him that ladeth himself with thick clay!” (Hab. 2:6). The taunting song began with “Woe.” How long will his thievery be allowed to continue? His “thick clay,” from the Hebrew word *abtiyt*, was pawned goods or heavy debts. The stolen goods will not be enjoyed by the thief for he will swiftly be taken away. “Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite thee, and awake that shall vex thee, and thou shalt

---

**Taunting:** is the distortion of the mouth while attempting to articulate difficult sounds that gives basis for the meaning. It means “to twist or distort the mouth, therefore, to speak with a twisted or abnormal mouth.” From this basic meaning comes the application here of taunting, also meaning to mock, deride or scorn. A taunting proverb would be one given for the purpose of condemning. Word Studies #3887 and #4426.
be for booties unto them?” (verse 7). The remnant of those who had been spoiled would become the spoilers of Babylon. “Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee; because of men’s blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell there-in” (verse 8).

WOE TO THE COVETOUS 

Habakkuk 2:9-11

The second woe was upon their covetousness. “Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil!” (Hab. 2:9). The words coveteth an evil covetousness is a craving so exceedingly evil that it proves to be fatal to him, his house and the whole nation. Though he believed he was untouchable like the eagles nest high on a cliff he would be brought low. The Chaldeans believed Babylon was an indestructible city. What was said of Edom (Obad. 4), would also be true of Babylon and the Chaldeans. Time and history have proven the Word of God and His prophets to be true.

This same message still applies to the covetous who desires to move up higher over the backs and sorrows of others. The tenth commandment God delivered unto Moses on Mount Sinai says, “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s” (Ex. 20:17). The Hebrew word chamad, translated covet speaks of one who lusts after something so strongly that their desire becomes evil. It is an inordinate, selfish desire at the expense of others.

The covetous oppressor develops tunnel vision seeing only those things on which his greed is focused. He does not look to the side or behind to see the destruction of life left in his wake. It is because of this sinful characteristic that he has sinned against his own soul. “Thou hast consulted shame to thy house by cutting off many people, and hast sinned against thy soul” (Hab. 2:10). Thus he has brought about his own ruin. The word consulted is from the Hebrew word ya’ats, and means “that he has resolved and determined the shame that will befall on his house.” The point is—we cannot blame Adam, Dad, Mom, society or the neighborhood for our sins and misgivings. We are responsible for our actions and the consequences that follow.

So great would be the retribution of the Lord against them that even the stone and timber would cry aloud of their sins. “For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it” (verse 11). It may seem strange to us that inanimate objects would cry out because of the iniquities that had been done within them. On the day of Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem, a group of Pharisees asked Jesus to rebuke His disciples because they were rejoicing and shouting, “Blessed be the King.” This was something the Pharisees did not want to hear. However, Jesus, “answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones
would immediately cry out” (Luke 19:40). The fallen dynasties and monuments of sinful men and nations cry out in testimony against them and to the power of Jehovah.

WOE TO THE VIOLENT

Habakkuk 2:12-14

The third woe was upon their extreme cruelty. “Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and stablisheth a city by iniquity!” (Hab. 2:12). Their cities were built upon the backs of slaves and their blood. Nebuchadnezzar beautified the city of Babylon at the expense of the blood and lives of those he had conquered and taken back to work as slaves. Excavations done in and around ancient Babylon by a number of archeologists have uncovered the splendor that was once Babylon. The remains of the Ishtar Gate and the processional streets lined with decorated facades of enameled tile brick. Nebuchadnezzar’s wife, Amytis, a Median princess, missed her mountain home with its beautiful greenery and gardens. She had the hanging gardens built, which the Greeks named one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar’s father, was the last viceroy appointed by the Assyrians. Nabopolassar was a Chaldean and made an alliance with the Medes and Scythians and conquered Nineveh. The Assyrian empire was divided between them. A treaty was sealed by the marriage of Nebuchadnezzar to Amytis. The destruction of Nineveh and Calah was so great that they were never again inhabited. Their very sites were forgotten until modern times. In 607 BC Nebuchadnezzar joined Nabopolassar to battle the remnants of the Assyrian empire, and their ally Egypt, at Carchemish. This resulted in Nebuchadnezzar’s seizure of all of Syria and Israel. When he learned of his father’s death, Nebuchadnezzar quickly returned to Babylon with his bodyguards and secured the throne. He continued the war effort commenced by his father until Judah and Jerusalem were destroyed and the Temple treasures were carried away to Babylon. Judah’s kings and princes were either killed, blinded, or taken away captive.

Every nation and every cause that has been built with the policy of kill and enslave have themselves been smitten. Those who continue to do so today will face God’s judgment. Nations that build their cities and monuments with no regard for the labor force will come tumbling down. “Behold, is it not of the LORD of hosts that the people shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity?” (verse 13). The purpose of the proud and violent Chaldeans would not succeed. Such cold-

---

**Vanity:** the word vanity denotes an emptiness. The contents of a vessel has been poured out. There is no value in it, and its adornment is poverty and worthlessness. Those who journey to its rim find nothing of value and only dissatisfaction. Much like the “bag with holes” of Haggai 1:6, the people labored and received nothing but emptiness as a reward. Word Studies #7324 and #7385.
blooded and hard-hearted leaders, whether it be Nebuchadnezzar and his dynasty or the brutal dictators of this day, will all stand before the King of kings. The Lord decreed judgment upon Babylon (Jer. 51:58).

Satan and his puppet kingdoms of darkness will once and for all time be defeated in their attempts to control the souls and minds of men around the world. The kingdom of light with the King of kings and Lord of lords, Jesus Christ, on its throne will cover the earth. “For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14). Habakkuk took on the same message found in Isaiah 11:9. The destruction of Babylon and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem would echo around the world. Habakkuk’s and Isaiah’s prophecies not only spoke of the Babylon of their day, but they opened a window into God’s eschatological time table. Satan’s hordes and the Mystery Babylon spoken of in the book of Revelation shall not prevail against the people of Israel, the saints or the New Testament church (Rev. 14:8; 20:10). The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ shall be triumphant over all the earth (Isa. 2:1-4).

WOE TO THE DRUNKARD

When the Chaldeans conquered a nation, they literally turned it upside down and shook it loose from all of its treasures. They made off with anything and everything of any value. The Chaldeans were shameless in all forms of wickedness. “Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that puttest thy bottle to him, and maketh him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness!” (Hab. 2:15). They were guilty of making their neighboring countries drunken with the same unquenchable thirst for battle and conquest. Once they were intoxicated, Babylon exposed them to great loss and shame. Pharaoh-hophra, king of Egypt, used this shameful debauchery on Jehoiachin and Zedekiah. When they were intoxicated, their lying neighbor coaxed them to rebel against Babylon. As a result Nebuchadnezzar’s army stripped them from the throne, took artisans among the people captive, gutted the city and looted the Temple.
The phrase, “that thou mayest look on their nakedness” (verse 15) is used to point out how helpless the victim had become. The person or persons responsible for this helpless state, for their own pleasure, take advantage of and humiliate the drunken ones. The Hebrew word *ma’or* is only used here to refer to the indecent exposure of the naked human body, especially under the influence of wine or strong drink to make light of or wrongfully take advantage of another person. The Lord pronounced stern judgment upon those who tarried long at the wine and drink ( Isa. 5:11, 22). Nothing good has ever come from the abuse of alcoholic beverages.

The drunkard always has a higher opinion of himself than a sober mind would allow. “To look upon nakedness” is also used in the Scriptures to speak of someone committing sexual immorality (Lev. 20:17). It is likely that such was the ungodly intentions of the invading Chaldeans. Noah was drunk the night Ham entered his tent and “saw the nakedness of his father” (Gen. 9:21-25). The word *saw* sheds some light on Ham’s sin. It speaks of a continuous action. The context of the Hebrew word *ra’ah* as it is used here means “to inspect, to stare, to experience.” Whatever took place within Noah’s tent involved more than an unavoidable glance. Lot’s daughters gave him wine so that each in turn could lie with him during his drunkenness. He was so intoxicated that he did not even realize that they had shamed him and themselves in such a manner (Gen. 19:32-38). Their offspring, the Ammonites and the Moabites, became a perpetual thorn in the side of the people of Israel and Judah.

“Thou art filled with shame for glory: drink thou also, and let thy foreskin be uncovered: the cup of the LORD’s right hand shall be turned unto thee, and shameful spewing shall be on thy glory” (Hab. 2:16). The king and his army will be exposed for who and what they are. Their uncircumcised condition shows their rebellion against the laws of God. The final statement of this verse pictures the king of Babylon drunk, naked and lying in his own vomit. The handwriting was on the wall. That night Belshazzar was killed and Darius the Median took over the kingdom.

In their drunken state Babylon’s hunger for power and conquest spared neither man, beast nor plant. “For the violence of Lebanon shall cover thee, and the spoil of beasts, which made them afraid, because of men’s blood, and
for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein” (Hab. 2:17). Lebanon’s beautiful cedars were used in the construction of Solomon’s Temple. Nebuchadnezzar had his army set fire to the house of the Lord, destroy the walls of Jerusalem and only a small remnant of the people were spared and carried to Babylon (2 Kings 25:11-21). Babylon, so fond of drink, would drink from the cup of God’s wrath.

WOE TO THE IDOLATOR

The sins of Babylon can be traced to its idolatry. Those who make their own gods also make their own standard of morality. Idolatry was what led them to commit the evils recorded by Habakkuk and other prophets. “What profiteth the graven image that the maker thereof hath graven it; the molten image, and a teacher of lies, that the maker of his work trusteth therein, to make dumb idols?” (Hab. 2:18). Habakkuk’s label of the graven images is most accurate. There is no profit or value in a carved image or one that is the result of metal fusion. A teacher of lies is from the Hebrew word yarah and speaks of one who points the finger and shoots out or pours out deception and falsehood. “Dumb idols” is a fitting title for those worthless objects of worship. The word idol in Hebrew is eliyel, which means “good for nothing, vanity, of no value.”

The psalmist reminds us that graven images cannot speak, see, hear, smell, handle or walk (Psalm 115: 4-8). Dumb and worthless is a good description. The apostle Paul agreed with this analogy in his letter to the Corinthians concerning the eating of meat offered to idols. He wrote, “We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one” (1 Cor. 8:4).

Idolatry is not dead today. There are still countless millions around the world who bow to lifeless, graven images. “Woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall teach! Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it” (Hab. 2:19). Bowing before statues made in the likeness of Old or New Testament saints is an abomination in the eyes of the living God. Such practice today is just as wrong as the false worship of wood and stone overlaid with gold and silver in biblical times. The Lord’s command could not be any clearer. “Thou shalt have no other gods before me”

Expensive but Breathless (Habakkuk 2:19): The final “woe” expressed toward the Chaldeans was uttered because of their greatest sin of all, idolatry. To show the utter worthlessness of idols, no matter what they were made of or how costly the materials that were used to make them, the prophet made inquiry of their value. They were of no use. It was senseless to seek help of a dumb idol which was lifeless. They would have had to come to life to help; they could not. By comparison, the Chaldeans had gone after lifeless pagan gods in lieu of fearing the living, all-seeing, ruling God of the heavens, as well as the earth. Even though the idol may have been overlaid with gold or silver, which showed earthly splendor, there was no life within it.
(Ex. 20:3). Putting them inside a church building does not change what they are—"dumb idols." “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5).

THE WATCHING PROPHET

Habakkuk 2:2-20

How different it is for those who trust in the living God, the Lord Jehovah. “But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him” (Hab. 2:20). This is a sharp contrast to the lifeless idols. Our God is not hidden in stone, silver or gold. He reigns from His holy temple in Heaven. He speaks (Isa. 40:5), He sees good and evil (Prov. 15:3), He hears and answers prayer (2 Chron. 7:14), He smells the sweet savour of Christ’s sacrifice (Eph. 5:2), He touches and can be touched (Luke 24:39; Heb. 4:15), and He walks (Gen. 3:8). What God has promised through His prophets, He will perform to the jot and tittle (Matt. 5:18). Therefore, the answer to Habakkuk’s question is simply that we serve the living God, the one true God. Let every knee bow and submit to the Almighty God.
Habakkuk finally understood the words of warning and promises given by the Lord. His prophetic message closed with prayer and praise. The prophet came to understand that prayer and praising the Lord, regardless of how stressful the times, were always appropriate. Circumstances had not changed, but God changed Habakkuk’s heart and attitude. This is the result of counting one’s blessings instead of one’s trials.

HABAKKUK’S PRAYER OF PRAISE

Habakkuk finally understood the words of warning and promises given by the Lord. His prophetic message closed with prayer and praise. The prophet came to understand that prayer and praising the Lord, regardless of how stressful the times, were always appropriate. Circumstances had not changed, but God changed Habakkuk’s heart and attitude. This is the result of counting one’s blessings instead of one’s trials.

HABAKKUK’S PRAYER OF PRAISE

Habakkuk 3:1

Habakkuk finally understood the words of warning and promises given by the Lord. His prophetic message closed with prayer and praise. The prophet came to understand that prayer and praising the Lord, regardless of how stressful the times, were always appropriate. Circumstances had not changed, but God changed Habakkuk’s heart and attitude. This is the result of counting one’s blessings instead of one’s trials.

HABAKKUK’S PRAYER OF PRAISE

Habakkuk 3:1

Habakkuk finally understood the words of warning and promises given by the Lord. His prophetic message closed with prayer and praise. The prophet came to understand that prayer and praising the Lord, regardless of how stressful the times, were always appropriate. Circumstances had not changed, but God changed Habakkuk’s heart and attitude. This is the result of counting one’s blessings instead of one’s trials.

HABAKKUK’S PRAYER OF PRAISE

Habakkuk 3:1

Habakkuk finally understood the words of warning and promises given by the Lord. His prophetic message closed with prayer and praise. The prophet came to understand that prayer and praising the Lord, regardless of how stressful the times, were always appropriate. Circumstances had not changed, but God changed Habakkuk’s heart and attitude. This is the result of counting one’s blessings instead of one’s trials.

HABAKKUK’S PRAYER OF PRAISE

Habakkuk 3:1

Habakkuk finally understood the words of warning and promises given by the Lord. His prophetic message closed with prayer and praise. The prophet came to understand that prayer and praising the Lord, regardless of how stressful the times, were always appropriate. Circumstances had not changed, but God changed Habakkuk’s heart and attitude. This is the result of counting one’s blessings instead of one’s trials.

HABAKKUK’S PRAYER OF PRAISE

Habakkuk 3:1

Habakkuk finally understood the words of warning and promises given by the Lord. His prophetic message closed with prayer and praise. The prophet came to understand that prayer and praising the Lord, regardless of how stressful the times, were always appropriate. Circumstances had not changed, but God changed Habakkuk’s heart and attitude. This is the result of counting one’s blessings instead of one’s trials.
Another word in the title is *Shigionoth* which comes from the Hebrew word *shagah*, meaning to “wander.” It is a wanderer’s song that is an improvised ode to be sung with much feeling. Habakkuk’s prayer outlines God’s plan for His people. This is part of God’s eternal plan, and it concerns all of His children, not just the people of Judah and Israel.

**HABAKKUK WORSHIPPED GOD’S MERCY**

The Lord’s speech of impending judgment struck awe in the heart of Habakkuk. Judah was to fall and Jerusalem was to be destroyed. “O LORd, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid” (Hab. 3:2). The revelation that was given to Habakkuk led him to the only One who could give him the answers he needed and ease his mind and heart. Habakkuk prayed, “O LORd, revive thy work” (verse 2). How great and marvelous are His mighty works. The psalmist David often sang of the Lord’s works (Psalm 143:5). Does the work of the Lord need to be revived among us today? Is there ever a time when revival is not appropriate? The psalmist made this request a part of his prayer and song (Psalm 85:6). Habakkuk asked for a revival “in the midst of the years” (Hab. 3:2). He was asking God to act before the time appointed for judgment came upon Judah and Jerusalem. The words *in the midst* are from the Hebrew word *qereb*, which refers to the nearest part or point. It shows that Habakkuk was aware that something needed to be done now, at the nearest time of the year, before it was too late.

There is a need for churches to be revived by the truth of God’s Word. A great deal of heresy is being presented today under the guise of those calling themselves Christians or evangelicals. The Word of God stands alone as truth and New Testament churches are the guardians of it. Man’s wresting of the Scripture continues to lead countless numbers astray. The Lord’s prayer in the upper room the night He was betrayed asked the Father to, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17). There is a need for revival in preaching the gospel to the lost. The gospel is still the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth (Rom. 1:16). As in the days of Habakkuk, there needs to be a revival of godly and moral standards. The apostle Paul told the young preacher Titus that the grace of God not only brings salvation, but it teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to look for the appearing of Jesus Christ (Titus 2:12, 13).

Habakkuk also prayed for the Lord to give him knowledge. “In the midst of the years make known” (Hab. 3:2). Literally this could read: At this present time Thou will make known. The request was asking the Lord to make known His plan for the future of His people. Like many others, Habakkuk was concerned about his inability to fully understand God’s revelation. The apostle Peter when writing about the salvation of our souls noted that, “the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you” (1 Peter 1:10). The apostle Paul prayed that God would give us greater wisdom and understanding of Jesus Christ. His request was that because the eyes of our heart have been enlightened; may we know the
greater and wondrous things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, His glory, His inheritance in the saints and the exceeding greatness of His power, which was proven by His resurrection from the grave (Eph. 1:15-23).

Habakkuk prayed that God would “in wrath remember mercy” (Hab. 3:2). The word wrath is from the Hebrew word rogez, which means to “have rage, turmoil, agitation or disturbance.” The nation of Judah was facing a time when the very foundations of their faith would be shaken. Jerusalem would literally be turned upside down. When the Lord stretched His plummet over Jerusalem, He wiped Jerusalem as a dish and turned it upside down (2 Kings 21:13). In such trying times salvation and deliverance can only come by God’s mercy (Psalm 25:6). The request was simple but most important. Lord remember which is from the Hebrew word zakar meaning to “call to mind, keep in mind, make mention of mercy.” The plea was, “Lord don’t forget us.” The word mercy is the Hebrew word racham, which speaks of “a deep and tender love full of compassion of the highest order.” This Hebrew word is also used to speak of a mother cherishing the fetus in her womb. This is how dearly the Lord loves the seed of Abraham which are the children of Israel. Through the prophet Ezekiel, the Lord reminded the exiles of Judah and Jerusalem that no one else pitied them. Only the Lord had compassion on them. From the day of their birth He washed them, clothed them, multiplied them, covered them and swore by a covenant “thou becamest mine” (Ezek. 16:5-8). The Lord’s mercy toward us is no less compassionate. The apostle John wrote of the self-sacrificing love of God. “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

Do we listen to and heed the Lord’s message the book of Habakkuk has for us? We, like the people of Judah and Jerusalem, have sinned (Rom 3:23; 5:12). Therefore, we, like the people of Judah and Jerusalem, need to repent and believe the Word of God. First and foremost, if the message of the new birth and regeneration is not heeded, then the message of judgment will surely follow (John 3:18, 36). Individually as saints we are told to confess our sins. Do not allow Satan to deceive you into believing this does not mean you. When we confess, the blood of Jesus Christ keeps on cleansing us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:7-10). A day of judgment and reckoning has been set when every child of God will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. At that time
every one of us shall give an account of himself to God, whether it be good or bad (Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10). Are we struck with the same reverent fear as Habakkuk when we look about us today and see what is approaching?

HABAKKUK WORSHIPPED GOD'S GLORY AND POWER

Habakkuk was privileged to see a theophany, a visible appearance of the Lord in human form, in a vision. In the revelation Habakkuk envisioned that “God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah” (Hab. 3:3). This came in fulfillment to God’s promise (Hab. 2:3). Habakkuk was struck with awe. Yet, he proceeded with his message concerning the Lord’s coming in glory and the effects it would have upon Judah. Viewing the theophany, Habakkuk’s prophetic eye and heart could see the Lord in a glorious form coming toward Jerusalem.

Habakkuk used an ancient title for God. The Hebrew word Eloah is used forty-one times in the book of Job and fifteen times by other Old Testament writers. Eloah was clearly used for Israel’s God, the true God. Nehemiah used it when quoting the revelation given to Moses (Ex. 34:6, 7; Neh. 9:17). It is a compound word that combines the two Hebrew words El and Ah. They are a form of “I shall be.” This is also found in the name of the Lord given to Moses (Ex. 3:14). Note that Habakkuk’s message concerned the sins and fall of Jerusalem and the first place Eloah is used the same subject in under consideration (Deut. 32:15-17).

Habakkuk did not place himself back in time. The context shows a future sense. As the Lord came and delivered the people of Israel from Egypt and showed wonders in the wilderness, in like manner, He comes once again to deliver and show wonders. The word Teman means “south” or “southward” in Hebrew and is so translated twenty-one times in the Old Testament. The name Teman was given to a son of Eliphaz and a grandson of Esau (Gen. 36:11). Teman is associated with the mount of Esau (Obad. 9). It was the southernmost city of the Edomite empire. It is used here in Scripture to represent all of Idumea. The word Paran means “place of caverns.” It is the wilderness of the Sinai between the land of Midian and Egypt. It was through these places that God led Israel to the land of promise (Num. 12:16; 13:3; 21:4). On the first journey God was leading Israel to possess the land of promise. However, now God was coming to take them out of land because they had forsaken Him and the land by not honoring the Lord’s Sabbaths (Ezek. 20:21).

The title Holy One is from the Hebrew word qadosh, which is used to designate that which is in fact inherently sacred and holy. God is holy and calls upon His people to be holy (Lev. 11:44; 1 Peter 1:15, 16). The words The Holy One of Israel are used thirty times in the Old Testament. They serve to remind the people of Israel and us of God’s moral perfection and the fact that we are sinners. “For Israel hath not been forsaken, nor Judah of his God, of the Lord of hosts; though their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel” (Jer. 51:5).
The word *Selah* is used three times in this chapter (Hab. 3:3, 9, 13). It means “a pause.” It is a technical musical term used to show emphasis. Habakkuk desired the singers and musicians at this point of the song to pause as they thought about exalting the message of the second coming. The theophany revealed to Habakkuk the infinite glory of God. The heavens and the earth are filled with His glory. The greatest display of His glory will be manifested at the return of Jesus Christ. Such was the song of the seraphim (Isa. 6:3), and the angelic chorus sang to the shepherds (Luke 2:8-14). Isaiah’s vision of the coming Lord revealed a kingdom of peace and prosperity. His glorious coming will have an influence upon mankind unlike anything in history. The whole earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord (Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14).

“And his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power” (Hab. 3:4). The word *light* is from the Hebrew word *or*, which speaks of the illumination of the sun as at daybreak’s brightest hour. Habakkuk exalted the greatness and glory of God’s intervention. The word *horns* from the Hebrew word *qeren* is used to refer to “a horn of strength” or to “rays of light.” The later is the reference used in this passage. When Moses was in the presence of God’s glorious light, “the skin of his face shone” (Ex. 34:29-35). The Hebrew word here is *qaran* which is akin to *qeren* and means “to shoot out horns” or “to send out rays.” Shortly before his death Moses reminded the people of Israel: “The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth [Hebrew *yapha*, “sent out beams”] from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them” (Deut. 33:2). These glorious illuminations serve as a blinding shield hiding the power of the Almighty invisible God.

Habakkuk’s theophany of the Lord is a reminder of the plagues that He sent to befoul the Egyptians. “Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet” (Hab. 3:5). Habakkuk saw the Lord bringing judgment and destruction with Him. This would be a comfort in view of the Chaldean threat. This reveals an Almighty God who is capable of defeating all who stand against Him (Joshua 23:9; Rev. 6:17). The words *burning coal* are from the Hebrew word *resheph*. It is translated *arrows* (Psalm 76:3); *burning heat* (Deut. 32:24); and *hot thunderbolts* (Psalm 78:48).
The Lord took His stand. “He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting” (Hab. 3:6). “He stood” is a statement declaring that He remained and endured. It is used as a metaphor of victory. During His coming, God stopped and “measured” (Hebrew mud; used only in Habakkuk) meaning “to shake” in the sense of a shakedown or shake up. His measurement shook and rocked the earth. God’s standard of measure, His plumbline, is according to His Word. It is always one hundred percent accurate and righteous (Isa 28:17; Amos 7:8). The nations witnessed God’s measurement of Judah and now they knew He would turn toward them. This was reason to tremble (Deut. 2:25; Jer. 10:10).

“He beheld” (Heb. 3:6) is a reminder of the all-seeing eye of God. Twice David told us that God was looking down upon man and his psalms are repetitive in their message (Psalm 14:1-3; 53:1-3). Both passages begin with the fool saying in his heart, “There is no God.” With such a corrupt heart matters can only get worse. The final lines sound much like the apostle Paul’s message to the Romans (Rom. 3:10-12).

Such a corrupt world and its ungodly nations will be “driven asunder.” The Hebrew word nathar means “to be violently agitated, terrified, to undo.” This is what the Lord did to Egypt when He brought the people of Israel out (Ex. 15:15, 16). As they came to the land of promise this passage of Scripture began to unfold before their eyes. When they turned northward Edom was terrified and did not want the people of Israel to pass through their land (Num. 20:21; Deut. 2:4). The children of Moab were so frightened they became distressed (Num. 22:3). Rahab of Jericho told the spies of the terror-struck people (Joshua 2:9, 10). The Canaanites became so scared they fainted away (Joshua 5:1). The nations of the world will tremble like never before with the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the day of the Lord’s wrath the whole earth shall tremble (Jer. 10:10). The apostle John saw the great day of God’s wrath and asked: “Who shall be able to stand?” (Rev. 6:17).

So great will be the trembling that mountains and hills shall be turned to dust and bow before His presence (Isa. 64:1, 2). All powers great and small shall give way to the Lord. Mountains are used in the Scriptures as symbolic of strength and stability, but the Omnipotent God is far more powerful (Psalm...
This is a prophetic reminder that governments and nations, great or small, will bow before the power of the Lord for they will be His (Isa. 40:15-17; Rev. 11:15).

The closing statement, “His ways are everlasting” (Heb. 3:6) shows the contrast between the mountains and the eternal purpose of God. God, in the past, drove asunder Egypt, the Canaanites, Syria, Assyria, and the fall of Babylon was certain. In more recent times we have witnessed the rise and fall of Imperial Japan, Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Communist Asia. All nations will bow to the everlasting plan of God.

As a final reminder of God’s sovereignty and power, Habakkuk was reminded of the days of Othniel and Gideon, judges of Israel. “I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction: and the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble” (Hab. 3:7). Cushan-rishathaim was the first foreign invader against Israel during the time of the judges (Judges 3:8-11). The spiritual problems during the time of the judges had a striking similarity to those Habakkuk and the people of Judah faced. The Midianites invaded Israel during the time Gideon was a judge. God’s hand and power were seen in the unusual victory won with pitchers, torches and trumpets. The Midianites were so frightened that they turned on each other (Judges 6; 7).

HABAKKUK WORSHIPPED GOD FOR HIS WORKS

In the verses of this section we witness the actions that foretell the Lord’s coming in victorious power. Rivers and the sea are under the control of the Lord at His coming. “Was the LORD displeased against the rivers? was thine anger against the rivers? was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thine horses and thy chariots of salvation?” (Hab. 3:8). Why did the Lord part the Red Sea? Why did He stop the Jordan River? Why did the river of Kishon sweep the enemy away? This was done to make way for His “chariots of salvation.” The Lord is mighty in battle. His chariots easily defeated Pharaoh’s chariots driven by ungodly men (Ex. 15:3, 4). The Lord’s chariots of salvation are driven by His angel band (Psalm 68:17). David saw the Lord as the conqueror. Without limitations of time and joined by His angelic chariots, He victoriously marched from Sinai to the Holy Place to issue salvation. This angelic host will accompany the Lord at His return and carry the saints away to glory (Matt. 24:30, 31).

The Lord is coming to save His people. This will require a battle of great magnitude. “Thy bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even thy word. Selah Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers” (Hab. 3:9). The sheath was removed and the bow and its arrows made ready. The Lord’s weapon store is inexhaustible and undefeatable. The Lord kept His word to the tribes of Israel (Deut. 32:40-43). Habakkuk did not live to see the remnant delivered from Babylon. About ninety years passed, but remember God is faithful who promised. The Medes and Persians took Babylon in one night (Dan. 5:30, 31). In the first year of his reign, Cyrus freed the people of Israel and allowed them to go home (2 Chron. 36:22, 23).
When the Lord threatens, all nature trembles and obeys. They can in no way match the awesome power of God’s arsenal. “The mountains saw thee, and they trembled: the overflowing of the water passed by: the deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high. The sun and moon stood still in their habitation: at the light of thine arrows they went, and at the shining of thy glittering spear” (Hab. 3:10, 11). The sun stood still in the valley of Ajalon by God’s power. Joshua used this time to completely defeat the five kings who had allied against Israel (Joshua 10:12-14). The Lord also turned the sun back ten degrees, or forty minutes, as a sign to Hezekiah that he would be healed (2 Kings 20:9-11). In like manner the so-called super powers of this world are no match for Almighty God. The nations of the world have rebelled against God time and again. Yet, try as they may, they cannot defeat the Almighty. God will deliver His people from among the heathens. “Thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the heathen in anger. Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed; thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck. Selah. Thou didst strike through with his staves the head of his villages: they came out as a whirlwind to scatter me: their rejoicing was as to devour the poor secretly. Thou didst walk through the sea with thine horses, through the heap of great waters.” (Hab. 3:12-15).

HABAKKUK WORSHIPED GOD BECAUSE OF HIS SALVATION

The theophany revealed in this chapter caused the prophet to tremble. “When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops” (Hab. 3:16). His message near completion, Habakkuk’s thoughts went back to the subject introduced in verse 2, God’s works and mercy. His protest had been silenced and he was left in awe before God. The experience left a mark on his physical being; his stomach quivered with fear; his speech vibrated, he felt as though he were decaying or wasting away. Daniel’s vision of the ancient of days left him troubled and paled to the point that he fainted and was sick
for several days (Dan. 7:28; 8:27). Habakkuk prayed for “rest” in the day of judgment. Those who put their faith in Jesus need not fear the wrath of God (1 Thess. 5:9, 10). The early church faced many trials and those who troubled it. Paul spoke of a day of rest and judgment (2 Thess. 1:6-10).

Habakkuk viewed the ravages of war. With crops and flocks gone where are we to turn? “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls” (Hab. 3:17). Look at any war-torn land today. The devastation of homes and a ready food supply is troublesome. Many can still remember the gas and food rationing during World War II here in America to help the war effort.

What followed Habakkuk’s awakening is one of the great passages of joy and comfort for God’s children found in the Scriptures. “Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (verse 18). Habakkuk was ready to accept and face God’s plan of judgment. He understood that God’s justice would be triumphant. It was too late to call for revival and repentance. The people of Judah had rebelled one day too long. It was time to get ready to face the day of the Lord. First used by Isaiah, we’re told it will be a day of destruction (Isa. 2:12). Jeremiah told how it would be a day of vengeance (Jer. 46:10). Ezekiel proclaimed it a day of battle (Ezek. 13:5). Joel said it would be dark and terrible (Joel 2:1, 11, 31). Habakkuk, and all believers, can find reason to rejoice.

**Manna**

**Faith in Spite of Circumstances (Habakkuk 3:17):** One of the ways that the people of Israel measured their faithfulness to the Lord was in the prosperity of their agriculture. Old Testament history reveals that its prosperity was dependent on the nation’s obedience to the covenant and on the Lord’s blessings as a consequence. Its abundance was forfeited by disobedience and disloyalty to the covenant, which incurred the Lord’s chastisement through natural and military disasters. In this particular vision of Israel’s devastated economy, the prophet Habakkuk acknowledged the apostasy of the nation and the subsequent and inevitable judgment it would receive. However, in spite of the devastation, Habakkuk never wavered in his loyalty to God nor in his personal faith, since he clearly understood that the nation was receiving the just due for its disobedience.

**Manna**

**Rejoicing and Being Joyful in God (Habakkuk 3:18):** The full expression of Habakkuk’s faith in the Lord is reached in this verse. His confidence of faith and subsequent cause for rejoicing is timeless. The psalmist showed the same confidence and assurance of hope, as did the other prophets, as well as the apostle Paul in the New Testament. Their confidence rested in the promises of God in His revealed Word. Habakkuk’s understanding of the covenant that promised the invasion of the Chaldeans and the devastation which accompanied it included the assurance of restoration to God’s favor and striving with the people again. It was that anticipation which caused the prophet to have a settled joy in the Lord and enabled him to endure the affliction which would precede it.
Joel, in the midst of telling about the day of the Lord told the people of Israel to rejoice (Joel 2:21). From his prison cell in Rome, Paul encouraged believers to, “Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice” (Phil. 4:4). Real and lasting joy is found “in the God of my salvation.” The people of Israel sang this song when they crossed the Red Sea (Ex. 15:1, 2). David sang this song when God delivered him from Saul (2 Sam. 22:1-3).

The vision of victory gave Habakkuk renewed strength. “The LORD God is my strength” (Hab. 3:19). This is a reminder that “the just shall live by his faith” (Hab. 2:4). All that we need to sustain us comes from the Lord (Psalm 121:2). Habakkuk’s revived spirit established his walk and lifted him to new heights of glory with the Lord. “And he will make my feet like hinds’ feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places” (Hab. 3:19). Paul encouraged the Ephesians by reminding them of their blessings in heavenly places (Eph. 1:3). Those who wait on the Lord are promised great blessings (Isa. 40:31).

THE WORSHIPING PROPHET

This odic prayer was written to be sung by the Temple singers as they were accompanied by the Temple musicians. “To the chief singer on my stringed instruments” (Hab. 3:19). Songs that praise the Lord are an important part of worship (Eph. 5:19, 20).

The faithful remnant’s salvation will be brought about through the work of God’s anointed, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. He fought the battle of temptation and won over sin (Heb. 4:15). He fought the battle of death and hell and won (Rev. 1:18). He fought the battle between law and grace and won (Col. 2:14). His victory is victory for every believer (1 Cor. 15:57; 1 John 5:4). The time to prepare to meet the Lord is today. God’s plea to the people of Israel is the plea to mankind today. “Prepare to meet thy God” (Amos 4:12).
Second Chronicles 35:25, “And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah: and all the singing men and the singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations to this day, and made them an ordinance in Israel: and, behold, they are written in the lamentations.”

The Hebrew Bible entitles the book of Lamentations, “HOW.” This came about from the custom of naming a book after its opening words. The word HOW is used in Lamentations 1:1, 2:1 and 4:1 to introduce a deep cry of lament. The word HOW is from the Hebrew word eykah (aw-kaw). It is an adverbial interjection or exclamation of lamentation. It is used as the first word of a funeral song. In the Talmud (a collection of writings of Jewish law) it is called “dirges.”

In the Greek Bible (Septuagint) these words are found as part of the opening text. And it came to pass after Israel was taken captive, and Jerusalem made desolate, that Jeremias sat weeping, and lamented with this lamentation over Jerusalem, and said. And then follows verse 1.

In the Greek, Latin and English Bibles, Lamentations follows the book of Jeremiah because of the long-held tradition that the book of Lamentations was written by Jeremiah. The words of 2 Chronicles 35:25, the introduction in the Greek Bible, the grief of Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, and his poetic style of writing all lend some evidence to his authorship. The writer of the book of Lamentations would have been an eyewitness to the downfall of Judah, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the people being led away as enslaved captives.

The book is divided into five lamentations, which from their content would be dated after the fall and capture of Jerusalem in 586 BC. The first lamentation is over Jerusalem seen as a widow weeping in the night (Lam. 1:1). The second lamentation concerns the warrior Lord (Lam. 2:1). The third lamentation concerns the man of affliction (Lam. 3:1). The fourth lamentation is for the sanctuary (Lam. 4:1). The fifth lamentation is in the form of a prayer (Lam. 5:1).

The first four chapters of Lamentations are a Hebrew alphabet composition. The alphabet and numbers were used in the Old Testament to help with the memorization of passages. Chapters 1 and 2 each have twenty-two verses and each verse has three lines. The first word in the first line of each verse begins sequentially with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Verse 1 begins with ה aleph and continues to verse 22 and the letter ꝕ tau. Chapter 3 has sixty-six verses. Verses 1-3 begins with the first letter aleph and the 4-6 with beth and it goes sequentially through the Hebrew alphabet to verses 64-66 which begins with the last letter tau. Chapter 4 has twenty-two verses of two lines each. Each verse follows the same order of the alphabet as chapters 1 and 2.
Chapter 5 also has twenty-two verses and twenty-two lines, but the alphabet form is not used.

Lamentations is one of the five scrolls, or megilloth, of the Hebrew Old Testament called the writings. The megiloth consists of Song of Songs, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Esther and Lamentations. These scrolls, or books, are read in public services once a year. Lamentations is read on the anniversary of the destruction of the Temple; Song of Songs at Passover, Ruth at Pentecost, Ecclesiastes at the Feast of Tabernacles and Esther at Purim. Regardless of its placement, when in the various Bible translations, the book of Lamentations has never been questioned as to its place in the sacred Scriptures.

The fall of Jerusalem is one of the most important events in the history of Israel and Judah. There are a number of writings concerning this period of Judah's history. We have the historical records of 2 Kings 23:31—25:30 and 2 Chronicles 36. Zephaniah saw the “day of the Lord” and called for repentance. Habakkuk warned about the ruthless Chaldeans. Jeremiah was an eye witness to the events around Jerusalem. Ezekiel wrote from Babylon, but viewed events and scenes in Jerusalem being transported in spirit. Lamentations is the broken heart of an eyewitness to the brutality of the Babylonian army and the utter destruction of Jerusalem, especially the Temple. A beaten and captive people looking and hoping for a ray of light as they cry out to God.

Like the book of Habakkuk, Lamentations deals with the question of why a righteous God would allow wicked Babylon to conquer Judah, destroy Jerusalem and plunder the Temple? The Temple housed the sacred place, the Holy of Holies, where Jehovah promised to meet with the high priest between the cherubim on the Day of Atonement. It had stood for over four hundred years. With the resounding defeat of Sennacherib's 180,000 strong army, Judah adopted a false premise that was promoted by false prophets. “Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, are these” (Jer. 7:4). Their cry carried the false hope of we are God's people, living in God's city, and we are the keepers of God's house; therefore, we are safe. They falsely believed that, before they could be taken captive, the enemy must defeat the One who dwelt between the cherubim. Jeremiah's message was simply, you are mistaken. It was a striking alarm that went unheeded by the majority of Judah including the king, judges and priests. How mournfully these same souls cried when the Chaldeans entered the city and carried the treasures of the Temple back to Babylon along with thousands of captives.

This period of Judah's history centered around a time of rebellion against God, a time of suffering as captives in Babylon, a time of repentance and seeking the Lord. The book of Lamentations stands like a full-length mirror, not only for the people of Israel, but for all nations and peoples to look into and see how they stand before the Lord. Like Israel's wilderness journey these events were to serve as an example and for our admonition, “to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted” (1 Cor. 10:6).
The book of Lamentations is a graphic picture of the destructive results of a life of persistent sin in any individual or nation. Sin usually begins small, seemingly innocent or what many feel is insignificant. Yet, any variation from God’s Word will bring judgment. Sin, like a cancerous canker, takes hold and continues to grow. As it grows, it moves one further and further away from God (Isa. 59:1, 2). Lust gives birth to sin and then sin delivers death (Rom. 6:23; James 1:15). Every child of God needs to read the book of Lamentations carefully and let its message take hold of his heart. By doing so he will avoid the dreadful consequences that follow when one rebels against the Lord.

**LONELY CITY**

In this chapter the poet watched the city from the viewpoint of the third person using the words she and her. To the faithful Jew, no place on earth is as sacred as Jerusalem. This is reflected in many of the Psalms. This is especially true of the Temple Mount area. God led David to choose the Jebusite fortress as the place to build the capital of the nation of Israel. Here the Lord chose to place His name. Following God’s plans, David secured the materials and workers, and under Solomon’s directions Jerusalem was graced with the magnificent Temple. It was here, in the Temple between the cherubim, that God promised to meet with His people and receive their worship and praise. The majority of Jews today fail to recognize that Jesus, who walked on the streets of ancient Jerusalem and within the gates of Herod’s Temple, is the Christ. Today, as in ancient times, no matter where they may have been scattered, Jews look toward Jerusalem and the Temple Mount with great lamentations and in the hope of the coming Messiah. The beauty of Jerusalem is not found in its location or its architecture although they are pleasing to the eyes. The real beauty and grace are found in God’s presence.

Grief and sorrow befell the poet as he thought of the city’s glorious past but stood and viewed its gloomy present. The picture is of a recently bereaved widow. “How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! how is she become as a widow! she that was...
great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary!” (Lam. 1:1). The city, once full of people, was empty, alone and desolate. The city was once great, a princess, but now a slave! What a contrast to the joy and gladness that once filled the city (Ezek. 26:13)

Jerusalem still had One that loved it ( Isa. 43:1-4; Jer. 31:3). God loved Jerusalem when no one else cared ( Ezek. 16:1-14). However, she went after other lovers who were attractive to the flesh. “She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks: among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her: all her friends have dealt treacherously with her, they are become her enemies” (Lam. 1:2). Hence, all of Jerusalem’s lovers proved to be false and not one was left to comfort it. They came to despise Jerusalem ( Jer. 4:30). Sin appeals to the flesh. It promises much but produces nothing but heartache. Sin and disobedience to God will bring one to total desolation. The apostle Peter spoke of false teachers who are void of the spirit, their message is arrogant, and though they speak of liberty, they themselves are servants of corruption (2 Peter 2:17-21).

“The way of transgressors is hard” (Prov. 13:15). This was never more true than in the case of Jerusalem and Judah. Sin was the reason for their fall. These once proud and prosperous people became homeless exiles. Since they were intent upon embracing idolatry, God gave them over to their vile affections and moved them in with their false lovers. Here they would dwell until they were sickened of the idolatrous practices. This serves as a warning for God’s children. “Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction, and because of great servitude: she dwelleth among the heathen, she findeth no rest: all her persecutors overtook her between the straits” (Lam. 1:3). The Lord’s churches must not yield to false doctrine. It is better to be accused of being too strict and narrow-minded than it is to corrupt the truth of sound doctrine and biblical practice.

LAMENT OF ZION  Lamentations 1:4-8

All that was once beautiful and all that was once sacred vanished before their eyes. The poet looked across Zion’s hill and sang a most solemn dirge. No longer was there a faithful gathering of worshipers; the appointed feast was not attended. “The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn feasts: all her gates are desolate: her priests sigh, her virgins are afflicted, and she is in bitterness” (Lam. 1:4). Zion was widowed politically and spiritually. The “ways,” or roads, to Zion once heavily traveled mourned for the feet of worshipers. The gates which were once a gathering place were in ruins. The Lord started a fire at the gates of the city which spread and burned up its palaces ( Jer. 17:27). Zion was to represent the religious and spiritual life of the people. The priests, appointed by God, were to be the leaders of Temple worship. However, they were mourning because the Temple was destroyed and they could no longer serve. This was hypocritical for a number of the priests. When they were privileged to serve, they did not honor their calling and God’s Word (Micah 3:11). The “virgins” were grieving. Virgins is the Hebrew word bethulah, which means “to be separate.” These young maidens, who had not yet been with a man, were given a special place in the singing and worship dur-
ing religious feasts (Jer. 31:13; Psalm 149:3). Their singing and dancing was
turned to deep grief. A number of them would likely never marry, for most of
the young men have either been killed or carried away captive. Those among
the captives in Babylon continued to weep and found no reason to sing in
Babylon (Psalm 137:1-4). Jeremiah stated that Zion “is in bitterness” (Lam.
1:4) from the Hebrew word *marar*. It is used in the sense of being provoked or
enraged. Such deep emotional feelings came too late. They should have been
enraged when their ungodly kings led the nation astray after the great
revival led by Josiah. They should have been enraged when the self-pro-
claimed prophets continued to deliver false messages. They should have been
enraged when the priests offered the blemished lambs for sacrifices to God
(Malachi 1:8). Such sacrifices were not acceptable to the Lord (Deut. 15:21).
How much sin is too much? How much heretical doctrine is too much? How
many violations of God’s Word will it take to get Christian people motivated
to take a biblical stand for the Lord?

The situation in Zion was reverse to what it should have been. “Her adver-
saries are the chief, her enemies prosper; for the LORD hath afflicted her for
the multitude of her transgressions: her children are gone into captivity
before the enemy” (Lam. 1:5). Zion’s youth, the hope of the nation, were all
taken away in shame (Dan. 1—4). The princes were like frightened deer try-
ing to flee before the hunters. “And from the daughter of Zion all her beauty
is departed: her princes are become like harts that find no pasture, and they
are gone without strength before the pursuer” (Lam. 1:6). In their day of mis-
ery, they remembered the good old
days. This added to their distress and
miserable for those days were gone. Her
false lovers joined with the enemy to
laugh at her downfall. “Jerusalem re-
membered in the days of her affliction
and of her miseries all her pleasant
things that she had in the days of old,
when her people fell into the hand of
the enemy, and none did help her: the
adversaries saw her, and did mock at
her sabbaths” (verse 7). The word Sab-
baths is from the Hebrew word *mish-
bath*. It is only used by Habakkuk. The
basic meaning is, “to sever, put an end to, or annihilation.” It indicated the
total destruction of Jerusalem. Nehemiah on his night ride, one-hundred forty
years later, still found the city in ruins (Neh. 2:11-15).

Why such destruction and grief? “Jerusalem hath grievously sinned; there-
fore she is removed: all that honoured her despise her, because they have seen
her nakedness: yea, she sigheth, and turneth backward” (Lam. 1:8). Jerusalem
was persistent and unrelenting in her rebellion against God. She sinned a sin.
The statement has to do with the crime and its penalty. The punishment, sev-
ent years in exile, was befitting of the crime. Israel rejected the Lord as their
king and anointed Saul. The year was 1095 BC. It was exactly four hundred

---

**Miseries:** is to wander, rove or tramp
about in a nomadic fashion. It carries a
possible negative connotation, as if the
wandering is due to a negative reason
within itself or from an outside force.
The word suggests a lack of proper
attachment. These were the days of
Judah being unattached to its home-
land, its God and its national prosperi-
ty, having been spoiled by the Babylon-
ian forces. It was the days of its mis-
eries. Word Studies #4788 and #7300.
ninety years later that the first captives were taken to Babylon in 605 BC. During those years the people of Israel and Judah forsook the sabbatical years. The Lord was reclaiming His Sabbaths (Jer. 25:4-11; 2 Chron. 36:21).

**IS IT NOTHING TO YOU?**

The people of Jerusalem and Judah, chosen of God to walk with Him, were now like the street walkers. Stripped naked, the people cried out for the Lord to look upon their affliction. Everything the people once held precious was taken by the enemy (Jer. 52:17-23). “Her filthiness is in her skirts; she remembereth not her last end; therefore she came down wonderfully: she had no comforter. O LORD, behold my affliction: for the enemy hath magnified himself” (Lam. 1:9). When given the opportunity, Jerusalem gave little or no thought to its destiny. It came down “wonderfully” is from the Hebrew word pele, which is used in reference to a miracle or wonder of God acting either in judgment or redemption. “The adversary hath spread out his hand upon all her pleasant things: for she hath seen that the heathen entered into her sanctuary, whom thou didst command that they should not enter into thy congregation” (verse 10). What was the people of Judah’s greatest loss? The enemy took their pleasant things. The writer of Chronicles tells us that Nebuchadnezzar had Jehoiachin removed as king and brought to Babylon, “with the goodly vessels of the house of the Lord” (2 Chron. 36:10). The vessels of the Temple were dedicated to the service and worship of the Lord. They were not intended to be the treasures of pagan kings. The widow is pictured as destitute and having to part with her treasures just to sustain life “All her people sigh, they seek bread; they have given their pleasant things for meat to relieve the soul: see, O LORD, and consider; for I am become vile” (Lam. 1:11). The siege of Jerusalem lasted for eighteen months. During that time the food supply was exhausted. Jeremiah was in prison and could have died from hunger: “for there is no more bread in the city” (Jer. 38:9). The enemies of God are still looking to spread their hand over the pleasant things and treasures of His Word, His people and His churches. We must take heed to continue in the doctrine (1 Tim. 4:16), establish churches in the faith (Acts 16:5), so we will be grounded and settled, unmoved from the hope of the gospel (Col. 1:23).
In the following verses the point of view is changed from that of a spectator to one of familiarity. Jeremiah and Zion seek a rebuttal from those staring at him and the city. “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger” (Lam. 1:12). Jeremiah spoke in the name of Jerusalem. He spoke as if the city were an individual. It is as though the widow is clinging to each passerby. “Look at me.” “Aren’t you concerned?” “Don’t you care about my condition?” What had befallen Jerusalem could not be disregarded. She reached out to clutch a passerby, not wanting him to leave. The anguish Jerusalem suffered over her lost opportunities to repent and return to the Lord is meant to be seen as a warning to all who passed by, and by all who read this today. No city under Heaven suffered the things like those done to Jerusalem (Dan. 9:2). It would serve the Lord’s churches well if its members, on a regular basis, would take a close look around and take stock of what they see. Is it nothing to you that many who call themselves Baptists, also call themselves Protestants, deny the faith, deny church history and embrace universalism and the heresies that accompany such teachings?

THE YOKE OF TRANSGRESSION

Lamentations 1:13-15

The physical emotions are addressed with blunt honesty. The fierce anger of Jehovah was inflicted upon Jerusalem. Jeremiah used the following to show Jerusalem’s predicament. The fires that destroyed the gates and homes of the city had likely burned a number of the residents. Jerusalem was ill and feverish and the sickness had subdued the entire body. The burning it suffered went deeper than the skin. The fire was in its bones. “From above hath he sent fire into my bones, and it prevaleth against them” (Lam. 1:13). Without strength she was easily snared in the trapper’s net. “He hath spread a net for my feet, he hath turned me back” (verse 13). Jerusalem was entangled in God’s judgment net and could not escape. This was a picture of God’s net spread over Zedekiah for his wickedness. Zedekiah reigned for eleven years. “And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD” (2 Kings 24:9). The anger of the Lord was against him and Jerusalem (2 Kings 24:18-20). Ezekiel was God’s sign to the captives in Babylon. He was told to move his things to another place in the day so all could see him do it. He was to dig through the wall and go out. He was to cover his face as though going blind. The sign pointed to the king of Jerusalem, who would follow Ezekiel’s example. “My net also
will I spread upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare: and I will bring him to Babylon to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there" (Ezek. 12:13). When Zedekiah saw the Chaldean army around Jerusalem, he packed his bags and fled the city by night. He went out through the gate between the walls. The Chaldeans hunted him down and captured him near Jericho. He was brought before Nebuchadnezzar who ordered his sons and the nobles of Judah killed. He then blinded Zedekiah and carried him in chains to Babylon (Jer. 39:1-8).

Sin’s oppressive yoke was difficult to bear. “The yoke of my transgressions is bound by his hand: they are wreathed, and come up upon my neck” (Lam. 1:14). The misery persistent sin brings is represented as a heavy yoke. Thus we speak of the burden of sin. The transgressions (from the Hebrew word pesha, which speaks of their endless rebellions and revolts) were now like a wreath entwined around the neck. The yoke was fastened or held firmly by God’s hand. He was twisting Jerusalem’s neck into submission to His judgment. The city’s surrender was sure to happen. “He hath made my strength to fall, the Lord hath delivered me into their hands, from whom I am not able to rise up” (verse 14).

How sad that Jerusalem’s real enemy had become the Lord, not Babylon. “The Lord hath trodden under foot all my mighty men in the midst of me” (verse 15). Jeremiah’s grief grew deeper as he continued to put himself in place of Jerusalem. The acknowledgement is “The Lord hath” done this. The words trodden under foot are from the Hebrew word salah, meaning “the Lord had rejected Jerusalem because she had been weighed in the balance and found to be of no value.” The rebellion and idolatry made Jerusalem worthless. Therefore, its defenders were treated with scoffing and contempt. The “mighty men” were raised up like lightweights. “He hath called an assembly against me to crush my young men” (verse 15). The Lord summoned the irresistible and weighty assembly of the Chaldeans, and their allies, to “crush,” break down into pieces, the choice men of Jerusalem. The Lord placed Jerusalem in His winepress and the life of its finest and youngest were squeezed out. “The Lord hath trodden the virgin, the daughter of Judah, as in a winepress” (verse 15).

THERE IS NONE TO COMFORT

In its sorrow Jerusalem could not find a single comforter. Its misery and weeping touched no one. Jeremiah’s reaction to this tragic scene was mixed with sorrow. He wept and was lonely. He found no comforter and was bereaved because of the children’s desolate condition. “For these things I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water, because the comforter that should relieve my soul is far from me: my children are desolate, because the enemy
prevailed” (verse 16). “For these things” is a heartbreaking reminder of the shameful downfall of Judah and Jerusalem. Echoing “mine eye, mine eye” pictures the widow flowing with tears, for the husband who truly loved her has gone (Ezek. 10:4,18, 19). We are reminded of the sorrow Jesus felt as He stood and viewed Jerusalem during His earthly ministry. “And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it” (Luke 19:41). A sad scene today is a visit to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. Here one will find large stones that once made up part of the foundation and east retaining wall of the Temple Mount. Those on the lower tiers date back to Solomon’s time. At this wall Jewish men and boys, women and girls gather to pray and weep for Jerusalem lost and a Temple destroyed. Many weep and pray for the coming of the Messiah, but do not realize or believe their Messiah did come and die for them and the sins of the world. Gordon’s Calvary and the Garden Tomb are less than one thousand yards north. The skull hill at Gordon’s Calvary is part of the ancient Mount Moriah. This is the Mount where Abraham offered Isaac (Gen. 22:2); where David purchased the threshing floor and Solomon built the Temple (2 Chron. 3:1).

Jerusalem reached out but it appeared as a woman set apart during her days of impurity. “Zion spreadeth forth her hands, and there is none to comfort her: the LORD hath commanded concerning Jacob, that his adversaries should be round about him: Jerusalem is as a menstruous woman among them” (Lam. 1:17). Spreading forth the hands is a form of supplication and prayer (Ex. 9:29-33). Entreat as she may, no one, not even the Lord, came to offer her any comfort. The Lord’s chastening hand was upon her. The nations round about her, of which Moab, Ammon, and Edom were kinfolk, had all become her enemy. Jerusalem was looked upon as an abomination, both to God and man. She was to go untouched like a menstruous woman. The word menstruous is from the Hebrew word niddah, which literally means “rejection.” During this time women were separated from their husbands and from the Temple (Lam. 1:8; Lev. 15:19-30). Under the Law, a husband had the authority to give an unfaithful wife a bill of divorcement (Deut. 24:1-4). Because of the spiritual adultery committed by Jerusalem, there was a fear this would happen. Isaiah spoke of a separation brought about because of Jerusalem’s sin (Isa. 59:1-4). Yet, no certificate of divorce had been given (Isa. 50:1, 2). Hosea’s message was to the
people of Israel and Samaria. There the Lord declared “she is not my wife, neither am I her husband” (Hosea 2:2). Thus, as with the menstruous wife, there would to be a time of cleansing. God had not sold Jerusalem to the creditors. God is not impoverished. Their own sins sold them into the seventy years of captivity. This was the appointed time of its cleansing.

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF JEHOVAH  Lamentations 1:18-22

A sure sign of repentance was witnessed when Jerusalem acknowledged the righteousness of Jehovah, and in the same breath condemned herself. “The LORD is righteous; for I have rebelled against his commandment: hear, I pray you, all people, and behold my sorrow: my virgins and my young men are gone into captivity” (Lam. 1:18). Jerusalem invited “all people,” a reference to the pagan nations. If the Lord would so judge His chosen people and the city that He had chosen to carry His name, just how would they fare under His mighty chastening hand? God began His judgment with His chosen people in Israel and Judah and then He turned and dealt with the Assyrians and Babylonians. The Judgment Seat of Christ will begin with the house of the Lord, “and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” (1 Peter 4:17, 18). Without faith in Jesus Christ and the assurance of salvation, it will be a terrifying experience to be overwhelmed by the hands of the Almighty God (Heb. 10:31).

Jerusalem found no sympathy when it cried out to its lovers. “I called for my lovers, but they deceived me” (Lam. 1:19). Jerusalem embraced its false gods who had eyes but could not see its need. They had ears but could not hear cries. They had hands but could not reach out to help and save. Jerusalem learned the hard way, “They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them” (Psalm 115:8). Worshipers of a blind, deaf and mute god are in a pit with no way out but to look up to the true and living God (Luke 6:39; 1 Thess. 1:9). The priests and elders, who blindly led Jerusalem, blindly groped about the city seeking daily bread and dying in the process. “My priests and mine elders gave up the ghost in the city, while they sought their meat to relieve their souls” (Lam. 1:19). This is a foretaste and a strong warning for all those who will face the time of Jacob’s trouble (Jer. 30:7).

Jerusalem was inflamed with sorrow, its whole being mind, body and soul were passionately stricken by the hand of God. She cried out to the Lord between her cramps and nausea. “Behold, O LORD; for I am in distress: my bowels are troubled; mine heart is turned within me; for I have grievously rebelled: abroad the sword bereaveth, at home there is as death” (Lam. 1:20).
The sword was without and pestilence and famine were within (Deut. 32:25; Ezek. 7:15). *The sword bereaveth* is from the Hebrew word *shakol*, which means “to miscarry, to suffer abortion.” Weak from months of war, lack of water and food, the women were bereaved of children. They were either barren or suffered miscarriages.

The enemies rejoiced over fallen Jerusalem. “They have heard that I sigh: there is none to comfort me: all mine enemies have heard of my trouble; they are glad that thou hast done it: thou wilt bring the day that thou hast called, and they shall be like unto me” (Lam. 1:21). Edom joined with the enemy and showed no pity upon his brother (Amos 1:11). Jerusalem was assured that those who had oppressed it would also be judged (Psalm 137:8). Jerusalem pled for the Lord to remember its evil crimes and judge it accordingly. “Let all their wickedness come before thee; and do unto them, as thou hast done unto me for all my transgressions: for my sighs are many, and my heart is faint” (Lam. 1:22). God promised to remember His covenant with Israel. He also promised to remember Babylon in His day of wrath (Rev. 16:19).

**Manna**

When *There Is None To Comfort* (Lamentations 1:21): When it was painfully obvious that there was absolutely no one to provide consolation to the devastated people of God, the prophet abandoned his pleas for mercy and urged the Lord to swiftly continue His judgment upon the surrounding nations since they had boasted in their conquest and plunder and rejoiced that the Lord had allowed the devastation of His own people. Believing that the Lord would fulfill His Word completely, the prophet took great consolation in the fact that He would bring the oppressing nations to their own justice. Even though the lamenting prophet came to the conclusion that God’s mercy would not at that time be available to His people, he took a little consolation in the fact that the surrounding nations were likewise subject to God’s judgment for their sins.

**DESOLATION OF JERUSALEM**

In the final verses of this chapter the widowed Jerusalem cried out to all that passed by to learn from its mistakes. The lesson of sin and righteousness must be taught and learned. In its sorrow, it acknowledged, “The **LORD** is righteous; for I have rebelled against His commandment” (Lam. 1:18). Jerusalem knew the reason for its dilemma, but its heart was turned too late to stay the judgment. The poet prayed that God would deal accordingly with those who mocked and scoffed at its misfortunes. Every person and each nation today needs to heed the message presented in this most tragic of funerals.

The wisest decision one can make is to “flee fornication” (1 Cor. 6:18), “abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 Thess. 5:22), and “stand fast in the faith” (1 Cor. 16:13).
This chapter is Jeremiah’s second lament. The focal point is God’s anger, which is mentioned five times. Jerusalem was placed under the spotlight of scrutiny. The walls were in ruins, timbers were blackened from the fires, the Temple was robbed and destroyed, and the citizens, who had not been killed in battle, stood barren and mute in silent witness to the Lord’s fierce judgment upon sin.

It was not the might of the Chaldean army that weighed so heavily upon Judah and Jerusalem. It was the hand of the Almighty God. Jeremiah preached to the people of Jerusalem about the love of God, His provisions and His protections, but they would not listen. The Lord repeatedly called upon them to repent and mend their ways but all He got in return was a deaf ear. Those who cried out that God was not being fair were quickly silenced. It was Israel that was not balanced. God’s judgments are always balanced (Ezek. 33:17-20).

THE FORGOTTEN FOOTSTOOL

“How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger” (Lam. 2:1). Here the one God loved, “the daughter” from the Hebrew word bath. It is a term of relationship. Literally and figuratively it was used in the Old Testament to speak of “the apple of the eye.” David prayed for the Lord to “keep me as the apple of the eye” (Psalm 17:8). Apple is the Hebrew word ’iyshon and is the pupil or center of the eyeball. It is considered a vital part of life, being the light or candle of life (Prov. 20:20; 24:20). It is protected by being surrounded by the bones of the fore-
head and face. The eyebrows channel sweat and water around the eye. The eyelids automatically close when anything comes near. The tear ducts routinely keep the right amount of moisture over the cornea to wash and cleanse it from dust. It is a symbol of that which is precious and protected. This is how the Lord loved the people of Israel (Deut. 32:9, 10). This is why the heathen attackers of Jerusalem, Judah and Israel have been, and will continue to be in the future, judged and handled severely by the Lord. To touch Zion is to touch the “apple of his eye” (Zech. 2:8). Nations of the world today need to learn this lesson if they desire God’s blessings. It is both our responsibility and privilege to “pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee” (Psalm 122:6). How precious and protected are the saints of God? They are “kept,” meaning they are guarded and watched by a garrison under the power of God (1 Peter 1:5). So precious are they that they are redeemed by the precious blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ (verses 18-21). They are so protected and precious that we have the promise that the “wicked one toucheth him not” (1 John 5:18).

In the day of Israel’s birth the Lord had pity and compassion upon them. He covered them with His own skirt to hide their nakedness (Ezek. 16:4-10). When they came out of Egypt He covered them with a cloud to lead them by day and pillar of fire to direct the way at night (Ex. 13:21, 22). When the Tabernacle was completed He covered it with the cloud of His glory (Ex. 40:33-35); and so it was with the Temple (1 Kings 8:6-11). Now His beloved daughter is “covered” but not with glory. The Hebrew word ub means to be dense or dark. It is used as a figure of God’s anger toward Jerusalem and Judah. This cloud was cast down or thrown out of Heaven to the earth. It was filled with anger and judgment to destroy the beauty or the ornament of glory in Israel. This was a reference to the Temple that housed the glory of God (Isa. 64:11). The “footstool” is a reference the “Ark of the Covenant” (1 Chron. 28:2; Psalm 99:5; 132:7, 8). David spoke of the ark as representing the Lord’s strength. Now that strength was taken away. Israel had worshiped the ark more than the God it symbolized. In like manner we are not to worship the cross, but the Christ of the cross.

No part of Judah or Jerusalem escaped God’s judgment. “The Lord hath swallowed up all the habitations of Jacob, and hath not pitied: he hath thrown down in his wrath the strong holds of the daughter of Judah; he hath brought them down to the ground: he hath polluted the kingdom and the princes thereof” (Lam. 2:2). The Lord’s judgment ate and swallowed Judah and Jerusalem in one huge bite like a mighty earthquake that opened up the earth and destroyed all in sight. Trampled down by the pagan armies, the whole kingdom was wounded and desecrated. What was once holy ground was now profane. The Lord reached the point that He was heated or burning with His nostrils and face flaring in rage. “He hath cut off in his fierce anger all the horn of Israel: he hath drawn back his right hand from before the enemy, and he burned against Jacob like a flaming fire, which devoureth round about” (Lam. 2:3). The “horn,” an emblem of power, was hewn down like a tree. The people of Judah’s power lay in the presence of the Lord. When He withdrew His hand of protection they became easy prey. His mighty hand, that so often had
reached out and seized the enemy and formed a protect barrier around His chosen, was now the weapon of their destruction. “He hath bent his bow like an enemy: he stood with his right hand as an adversary, and slew all that were pleasant to the eye in the tabernacle of the daughter of Zion: he poured out his fury like fire” (verse 4). How sad was the heart of the Lord as He shot His arrows and killed those who were most dear and pleasing to Him. Their maker and protector became their worst enemy. “The Lord was as an enemy: he hath swallowed up Israel, he hath swallowed up all her palaces: he hath destroyed his strong holds, and hath increased in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation” (verse 5). The Lord wounded them as He would an enemy (Jer. 30:14).

THE SPURNED ALTAR

The people of Judah did not believe the words of the prophets. They falsely believed that God would not destroy His city and the rituals He had established. “And he hath violently taken away his tabernacle, as if it were of a garden: he hath destroyed his places of the assembly: the LORD hath caused the solemn feasts and sabbaths to be forgotten in Zion, and hath despised in the indignation of his anger the king and the priest” (Lam. 2:6). The Temple was taken down and removed as though it were a garden shed. The Temple Mount to this day still shows the scars and ruins brought upon Jerusalem. With God’s house and presence gone, Jerusalem was left desolate. The people of Israel and Judah recovered somewhat after seventy years of captivity in Babylon. They recovered from the shame and pollution of Antiochus IV (Epiphanies) under the leadership of Judas Maccabees. However, their rejection of Jesus as the Christ brought judgment, which was carried out by the Romans under Titus. Jerusalem is weeping till this day (Matt. 23:37, 38).

The daily offering had to meet the qualifications set down by the Lord. They were to be of the first year and without spot or blemish (Ex. 29:37-42). Jerusalem polluted the Lord’s Sabbaths and the daily sacrifices that the sweet savour was turned to a foul-smelling stench. “Thou hast despised mine holy things, and hast profaned my sabbaths” (Ezek. 22:8). Therefore, the Lord spurned His altar. “The Lord hath cast off his altar, he hath abhorred his sanctuary, he hath given up into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces; they have made a noise in the house of the LORD, as in the day of a solemn feast” (Lam. 2:7). The shouts of victory that rang out from the Temple compound were in sharp contrast to the silver trumpets and songs of worship and praise that once filled the sanctuary. Only with the coming of the Messiah and the people of Israel’s salvation will true joy return and the weeping cease (Isa. 65:17-19).
The Lord purposed to bring Jerusalem to its knees. To show that He was just in His actions He measured it with His line. “The LORD hath purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion: he hath stretched out a line, he hath not withdrawn his hand from destroying: therefore he made the rampart and the wall to lament; they languished together” (Lam. 2:8). The Lord stretched His line over Samaria and Israel and they did not stand plumb with the Law (Amos 7:7, 8). The same measure He used for Samaria was stretched across Jerusalem. As a result Jerusalem was turned upside down (2 Kings 21:13). This shows the preciseness with which the Lord dismantled Jerusalem was so complete that the destruction; the walls, the streets, the Temple and the gates of the city were gone. “Her gates are sunk into the ground; he hath destroyed and broken her bars: her king and her princes are among the Gentiles: the law is no more; her prophets also find no vision from the LORD” (Lam. 2:9). The language here reminds us of the fall of Jericho; the city was swallowed up by the earth.

First one plane and then another hit the World Trade Center towers in New York. America and much of the world stood in shock as they crumbled to the ground. Then word came that another plane had hit the Pentagon and a fourth crashed in a field. The date 9/11 will long be remembered. We wondered, how many more? What else will happen? Thus, the elders of Jerusalem mused in that day. There were no words to express their grief. “The elders of the daughter of Zion sit upon the ground, and keep silence: they have cast up dust upon their heads; they have girded them-

Manna

God Has Stretched Out a Line (Lamentations 2:8): To provide exact dimensions for erecting structures, builders would often use a measuring line. Its use provided a way in which the walls of a structure would be level and plumb. Measuring lines are still used today in modern building construction. In this context, however, the destruction of Jerusalem by the determination of God to exact judgment upon the city and the Temple was to be accomplished with the same kind of precision as had been used previously in their construction and finish work. Jehovah carried out His judgment on Jerusalem with the rigidity of intricate precision and completion of His punishment upon His sinful people.

Manna

Prophets with No Vision from God (Lamentations 2:9): With the destruction of Jerusalem and the loss of their unique identity as a nation, the Hebrew people lost all means of connection with Jehovah. That included their theocratic relationship with the Lord through the Law of Moses and the continued revelation of God to them through the witness of the prophets. By implication, the priestly and prophetic offices were still in existence but each were spiritually anemic to perform their duties. In the case of the prophets, the Spirit of God ceased to give revelation, and, without prophetic vision, there was no witness that God’s presence was with them. Prophecy was the consistent witness to God’s people and also the Gentile nations that Jehovah’s presence was among His covenant people. The lack of a prophetic vision provided a striking reality of God’s abandonment of Israel and Judah for that season.
selves with sackcloth: the virgins of Jerusalem hang down their heads to the ground” (verse 10). The young virgins, who would generally be concerned with their appearance, sat in mourning garb and their joyful songs were muted.

THE DISTRESSED BODY

Jeremiah could no longer control his emotions. He had suffered long with Jerusalem, its elders, priests and king. His was a deep, heartfelt sorrow for the city and people he knew God loved. “Mine eyes do fail with tears, my bowels are troubled, my liver is poured upon the earth, for the destruction of the daughter of my people” (Lam 2:11). He looked upon Jerusalem as “my people.” Pastors may often refer to my church or my people. There is a closeness and love there that the world does not understand. So deep was the prophet’s lamenting that his internal organs were in turmoil. He became sick and could not control himself. His liver or bile was vomited on the ground. It is often difficult for pastors to find the stomach needed to preach against the sins in today’s churches. Many fine pastors have suffered heart attacks or other serious maladies as they labored and worried over the flock of God. Love can endure many things and come through them just fine. However, Jeremiah was the injured party in love, and he watched the one he loved waste away and be destroyed when it should not have happened.

The cry for the want of food was repeated again and again. “They say to their mothers, Where is corn and wine? when they swooned as the wounded in the streets of the city, when their soul was poured out into their mothers’ bosom” (verse 12). The children were hungry and thirsty and the mothers had nothing to give them. The famine was just as deadly as the swords of Babylon. The prophet wrenched with emotions when he saw the innocent children faint from their weakness. The children were abandoned in the streets of Jerusalem like fatally wounded soldiers. When they instinctively turned to their mothers’ breasts and found no milk, they breathed their last breath on their mothers’ bosom. No wonder the prophet wept and cried out, “see if there any sorrow like unto my sorrow” (Lam. 1:12). When such sorrow comes upon us, no amount of human comfort can bring the peace and succor we need. When word of the destruction reached Babylon, Daniel said it was because they had sinned against God. The judgment of God confirmed His word. They were told what would happen if they did not repent. “For under the whole heaven hath not been done as hath been done upon Jerusalem” (Dan. 9:12). Jeremiah could not recall any disaster that would compare to what had happened to the people of Judah and Jerusalem. Only the sea compared to the size and depth like a giant tsunami destroying everything in its path. “What thing shall I take to witness for thee? what thing shall I liken to thee, O daughter of Jerusalem? what shall I equal to thee, that I may comfort thee, O virgin daughter of Zion? for thy breach is great like the

Swoon: comes from meaning “to shroud or clothe over something.” The word portrays a person becoming emotionally overwhelmed to the point of fainting. The natural strength of the person has become shrouded and covered so that he manifests weakness, like a child that is famished with hunger. Word Study #5848.
sea: who can heal thee?” (Lam. 2:13). Their time of healing had passed. God had been long-suffering and merciful for hundreds of years. The time had come for the guilty to be charged. No one was found to plead their case or apply the healing medicine (Num. 14:18; Jer. 30:13).

THE FOOLISH PROPHETS
Lamentations 2:14-17

The Lord described foolish or senseless prophets as those, “that follow their own spirit, and have seen nothing!” (Ezek. 13:3). They had worked against Jeremiah with their false messages of peace when there was no peace (Jer. 6:14). Like the true prophets of the Lord, they began their message with, “The LORD hath said” (Jer. 23:17). “Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee: and they have not discovered thine iniquity, to turn away thy captivity; but have seen for thee false burdens and causes of banishment” (Lam. 2:14). They failed to warn of the impending dangers of continuing in their sin. By not uncovering the depravity of the idolatrous priests and false worshipers, they put their stamp of approval on it. They made no attempt to bring the people back into a right relationship with the Lord. This would have been difficult for them to do, however, since they were preachers for hire. The topic of their message went to the highest bidder (Micah 3:11). Their false message gave no hope of deliverance or the prevention of the Chaldeans from conquering the nation and leading them into captivity. Their false messages actually added to the reasons for Jerusalem’s seduction or cause of banishment. Their messages were lies, and they were not sent by the Lord (Jer. 27:11, 15).

There are false prophets among us today. They preach a social gospel that is filled with lies. Every major doctrine of the New Testament church at some point has been denied or watered down to where it is ineffective. Many present a do-good-works plan of salvation that will never bring about the redemption of one soul (Eph. 2:8, 9). They approach the ministry simply as another profession instead of a calling from God. Paul clearly stated it was “Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry” (1 Tim. 1:12). It is the Holy Spirit that places men as overseers of the church. Every God-called minister is obligated by that call to

Manna

Facts About the Destruction of Jerusalem by Josephus and So Forth: The Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, reported the destruction of Jerusalem in graphic detail in his work Antiquities of the Jews, Book 10, Sections 145-154. In addition to the verification of the statements made by the prophet Jeremiah in the book of Lamentations, Josephus chronicled the further devastation as he reported the particular captivity of the high priest, Seraiah, the next ranking priest, Zephaniah, and several ruling elders and attendants, who were all taken captive from Jerusalem and sent to Riblah, a city in Assyria. There, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon commanded that they be beheaded and personally took charge of leading the captives to Babylon. In the process, he commanded that the son of Seraiah, Jozadak, be bound and taken captive, along with deposed King Zedekiah of Judah. Later he took the vessels of the Temple and dedicated them to the pagan gods which he worshiped, making further mockery of the God of his captives.
preach the truth. Sin must be uncovered (Rom. 3:23; 5:12), and he wages of sin presented clearly (Rom. 6:23). The message of hope and salvation is only through the shed blood of Christ who died for all and would have all men to be saved. To ward off the attack of Satan, death and hell, the victory can only be claimed by repentance and faith in the truth that Jesus is the Christ and that God raised Him from the dead (Rom. 10:9-13).

Verse 15 reminds us of the foolish ones around the cross of Christ (Matt. 27:39). “All that pass by clap their hands at thee; they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying, Is this the city that men call The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole earth?” (Lam. 2:15). What a sad day when the enemies of God had reason to rejoice over the downfall of His people and His beloved city. They applauded the downfall as an act of ridicule and contempt. To hiss is an expression of scorn. The Hebrew word sharaq means to “shriek or shrill either in horror, derision or joy.” All three may be applied to the passerby of Jerusalem. First, they were shocked at what they saw but delighted that it had happened. They all chimed in together,—Babylonians, Assyrians, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites and all the Canaanites and rejoiced to see Jerusalem destroyed. This is the day for which they had waited. “All thine enemies have opened their mouth against thee: they hiss and gnash the teeth: they say, We have swallowed her up: certainly this is the day that we looked for; we have found, we have seen it” (verse 16). There are nations and people today who are waiting and hoping for the destruction of modern day Israel and Jerusalem. Several Muslim extremist groups have vowed to push Israel into the sea. Recently, the leader of Iran said he did not believe the Holocaust ever happened. He boasted that he would annihilate Israel. There are millions in the world today who mock the things of God—His Word, His church and His people. We must try the spirits (1 John 4:1) and not play into the hand of the enemy.

The enemies of Jerusalem rejoiced as though it was their doing. However, God beat them to the strike upon the city. “The LORD hath done that which he had devised; he hath fulfilled his word that he had commanded in the days of old: he hath thrown down, and hath not pitied: and he hath caused thine enemy to rejoice over thee, he hath set up the horn of thine adversaries” (Lam. 2:17). What happened was in God’s plan. God forewarned and told them of the curses that would fall upon them if they did not heed His Word (Deut. 28:15-68).

THE CRY IN THE NIGHT Lamentations 2:18, 19

A foreman at Boeing Aircraft told his crew, “When all else fails, read the blueprints.” This is sound advice. Jerusalem needed to go back to the blueprint of God’s Word and follow His directions. “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:14). In the same message to Solomon and the people of Israel the Lord promised that He would be attentive “unto the prayer that is made in this place” (2 Chron. 7:15). Jerusalem’s only choice left was prayer. What calamity had to fall before they would fall on their knees before
God. “Their heart cried unto the Lord, O wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears run down like a river day and night: give thyself no rest; let not the apple of thine eye cease” (Lam. 2:18). Jeremiah urged the people to join him in prayer that God would see the overflowing of tears and not allow His beloved to perish. Isaiah used a similar state, “Howl, O gate; cry, O city” (Isa. 14:31). It is not the wall or the gate as such, but the inhabitants of the city. It is heart wrenching to visit the “Western Wall” of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Thousands gather there weekly to pray and weep for Jerusalem. Thus, the wall is also called “The Wailing Wall.”

Throughout the night at the beginning of each watch, Jeremiah entreated the watchmen on the walls of the city to, “Arise, cry out in the night: in the beginning of the watches pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord: lift up thy hands toward him for the life of thy young children, that faint for hunger in the top of every street” (Lam. 2:19). The word cry from the Hebrew ranan means “to shout aloud” (generally for joy), but here it is the noise of lamentation. The Jews divided the night into three equal watches of four hours each. First watch was from sunset until ten. The middle watch was from ten until two (Judges 7:19). The third watch was from two until sunrise. This was also called the morning watch (Ex. 14:24). If they would weep for themselves, what about their children who were dying from hunger?

The word hand or hands is used over sixteen hundred times in the Bible. When placed under the thigh it meant to take a solemn oath (Gen. 24:2-9; 47:29). When placed on the head, it meant a blessing (Gen 48:14). Would they lift up their hands as a sign of surrender and supplication to the Lord to save the youth of the city? It was a customary posture of prayer to spread the hands toward the heavens (Ex. 9:33; 1 Kings 8:22; 1 Tim. 2:8). However, it is the posture of the heart and mind and not the body that will touch the heart of the Lord (Psalm 51:17).

THE CHILDREN CONSUMED

The bloodbath wrought by the Chaldeans did not regard sex or age. Men, women and children were led like lambs to the slaughter. The weeping prophet completed this part of his lamentation with an example of the type of prayer Jerusalem needed to pray. “Behold, O LORD, and consider to whom thou hast done this. Shall the women eat their fruit, and children of a span long? shall the priest and the prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord?” (Lam. 2:20). The first plea was for the Lord to “consider” or take a close a look at who it was that He had allowed to cause such a thing to happen. It was His people, His city and His Temple that were being ruthlessly destroyed and forced into captivity. The cry is that of a child to their father. “Father, will you destroy your own children?” This is a necessary example of what is called tough love. Like the psalmist and Christ on Calvary they cried out, “My
God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1; Matt. 27:46). They knew they were the reason. They were the chosen offspring of the holy God who will not behold evil nor look on iniquity (Hab. 1:13). Their sins made them the guilty party not Jehovah (Isa. 59:2; Jer. 5:25).

Two disparaging questions were asked. Would the mothers of Jerusalem have to resort to cannibalism? These were helpless babies a “span long” or small enough to carry in their arms. The distress of the long siege had a devastating and horrendous effect upon Jerusalem. They had been solemnly warned by the Lord, “If ye will not for all this hearken unto me, but walk contrary unto me; then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins. And ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall ye eat” (Lev. 26:27-29). The warning was repeated twice more as a reminder (Deut. 28:53-57; Jer. 19:9). Such was a siege upon Samaria by Ben-hadad king of Syria. The famine grew to the point that their was no food in the city. Two mothers agreed to eat their infant sons. They boiled one and ate him. But the mother with a full belly and a live son, hid him. There was no sign of grief by the now childless mother. She rather appealed to an ungodly king to have the mother surrender her son to be eaten. The king put on sackcloth, but he blamed the prophet Elisha and not the sins of the people (2 Kings 6:24-31).

The second question concerned the killing of the priests and prophets. Was the Lord going to allow this to happen in His holy place? The problem they failed to realize was the holiness had long since been polluted by the priests and prophets. They were lying prophets and priests for hire. They had not honored the Lord, and He would not honor them in death.

The future work of the Lord’s churches is in the hands our young people; they are the greatest resource God has given us. Jerusalem killed her children and her future. “The young and the old lie on the ground in the streets: my virgins and my young men are fallen by the sword; thou hast slain them in the day of thine anger; thou hast killed, and not pitied” (Lam. 2:21). What Jerusalem did was no worse than what happens in the abortion on demand clinics.

An important question for us to ask is, “Are we giving our children an opportunity to live according to the Word of God; or are we leaving them to the enemy?” “Thou hast called as in a solemn day my terrors round about, so that in the day of the LORD’S anger none escaped nor remained: those that I have swaddled and brought up hath mine enemy consumed” (verse 22). The enemy had no mercy upon the little ones of Jerusalem (Psalm 137:7-9). The enemy was summoned by the Lord as though it was a feast day.

**GOD’S JUST JUDGMENT**

The suffering and judgment that fell upon the people of Judah and Jerusalem serve to remind all nations and peoples, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31). The only plea for Zion was to turn back to God. Why do we wait until we are in desperation before we pray? The wrath of God may be turned to mercy and peace. It is preventable by the prayer of repentance and faith. What Jerusalem needed is what cities need today—an old fashion revival to return them to the Lord.
God’s Faithful Mercy
Lamentations 3:1-66

God is not an unconcerned spectator when it comes to chastening those He loves ( Isa. 43:1-4; Jer. 31:1-3; Ezek. 16:1-14). Jeremiah spoke for the Lord (Jer. 1:7; 22:1; 34:2). His emotions were expressed. Because of sin, Jerusalem had to be judged. It pained the Lord to do so (Ezek. 33:11; Hosea 11:8).

In chapter three Jeremiah assumed a corporate personality, and he represented Judah and Jerusalem. He spoke from his own experience and unveiled the emotions of a heart filled with distress for his people and beloved city. In chapter three the theme of the song changed and acknowledged that God’s judgment was deserved and just. However, Jeremiah sang of a glorious hope. He wanted Judah to understand that God’s justice was tempered with mercy. The Lord’s rod of correction is never wielded by an insensitive hand and heart.

REMEMBERING AFFLICTION Lamentations 3:1-18

Jeremiah was not only an eyewitness but a participant in the affliction. He was afflicted by the people, priests, and false prophets (Jer. 26:8-11). His own family plotted his murder (Jer. 11:19; 12:6), and he was lowered into a miry dungeon under King Zedekiah’s orders (Jer. 38:1-6). In this he is a type of Christ being rejected by His own (John 1:11). His lamentation involved his whole being, body, soul and spirit. How sadly he moaned under the sceptre of wrath. “I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath” (Lam. 3:1). Jeremiah used several metaphors and similes to clearly picture his affliction. He compared his agony to sitting alone in obscurity. “He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light” (verse 2). It was as though all prosperity had been removed from his life. The hand of the Lord, which was once his protector, inflicted new strokes of affliction daily. “Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand against me all the day” (verse 3). What misery to feel that the hand of the Lord is afflicting you. Jeremiah’s ministry had spanned about forty years at the time he wrote his lamentations. The burdens of his ministry took their toll on him spiritually and physically. “My flesh and my skin hath he made old; he hath broken my bones” (verse 4). His strength slowly wasted away, and he was in intense pain from the physical abuse he suffered. He felt the pains like that of besieged Jerusalem. “He hath builded against me, and compassed me with gall and travail” (verse 5). The word gall
is from the Hebrew rosh, which is the word for poisonous venom. He felt this was all around him. Thus, he had postured himself as a dead person placed sitting in a sepulchre. "He hath set me in dark places, as they that be dead of old" (verse 6). Jeremiah and Jerusalem were delivered to the grave (Psalm 88:5, 6).

He was a prisoner, shackled, with no way of escape. "He hath hedged me about, that I cannot get out: he hath made my chain heavy" (Lam. 3:7). There is no greater distress for God’s children than the feeling of being closed out by God (Psalm 38:21, 22). "Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer" (Lam. 3:8). The antitype here is Christ as He hung on the cross (Psalm 22:2). The people of Judah had not listened to the Lord (Jer. 22:21; 29:19); therefore, He would not hear their cries until they repented (Jer. 7:16; 11:14).

Jeremiah tried faithfully for forty years to prepare the people of Judah for its self-inflicted destruction. Their chosen path made the death of the people of Jerusalem and Judah inevitable. He was like a traveler on a crooked unmapped route. "He hath enclosed my ways with hewn stone, he hath made my paths crooked" (Lam. 3:9). The fall came with a shock, like an untamed animal stalking its prey. "He was unto me as a bear lying in wait, and as a lion in secret places. He hath turned aside my ways, and pulled me in pieces: he hath made me desolate" (verses 10, 11). The nation, its cities and peoples, were ripped apart by the savage beasts from Babylon. The wages of sin show no mercy. The results are shame and destruction for all who choose its broad path (Prov. 14:12; Jer. 4:18-20; Matt. 7:13). When the hunter came, it was not to save him from the bear and lion, but he was the target. "He hath bent his bow, and set me as a mark for the arrow. He hath caused the arrows of his quiver to enter into my reins" (Lam. 3:12, 13). The word reins is from the Hebrew word for kidneys, kilyah, as an essential organ. The people of Judah made sport of Jeremiah’s message. Herein lies the depth to which the arrows pierced. "I was a derision to all my people; and their song all the day" (verse 14). "All my people” reminds us of Christ as He came and His own rejected Him (Matt. 23:37;
John 1:11). Jude and Peter both gave warnings concerning those who malign the Word of God (2 Peter 3:3, 4, 16; Jude 4).

Finally, Jeremiah compared his affliction to food that is inedible and indigestible. “He hath filled me with bitterness, he hath made me drunken with wormwood. He hath also broken my teeth with gravel stones, he hath covered me with ashes” (Lam. 3:15, 16). He was satiated with “wormwood” which was regarded as poisonous and, therefore, accursed. Bitterness had been washed down with greater bitterness. It is difficult to read these verses without cringing in pain. During the siege bread was in short supply. Any grain that could be scraped together was used. The gravel refers to the small grit in the dough that was mixed and baked in the ashes (Prov. 20:17). Sin and judgment were not a laughing matter. So vile was the scene before Jeremiah that he forgot what prosperity meant. He felt his strength and hope in the Lord was gone. “And thou hast removed my soul far off from peace: I forgat prosperity. And I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the LORD” (Lam. 3:17, 18).

REMEMBERING THE LORD’S MERCIES Lamentations 3:19-26

Jeremiah’s remembrance of his afflictions helped to drain the sorrows and hurts within his heart. Sharing his sorrows made it possible for him to move ahead and seek forgiveness, hope and salvation. He changed his attitude from that of doom and gloom to a more positive message. In humbleness he was ready to seek the Lord. “Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me” (verses 19, 20). In the midst of his bitterness, Jeremiah began to pray. He would not allow himself to continue wallowing in or become stuck in the mire. His remembrance brought him humbled before the Lord and he found a ray of hope. “This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope” (verse 21).

The key to appreciating the message of Lamentations is found in the Lord’s mercies. If not for the Lord’s mercies, there would not have remained a faithful remnant in Judah. “It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not” (verse 22). The Lord’s tender love for the people of Judah and Jerusalem had roots back to the covenants made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The people of Israel and Judah occupied the “land of promise” (Heb. 11:9). God’s compassion would not fail because He would not fail in His covenant relationship with His chosen people. He will keep His oath to the fathers (Jer. 11:5). The judgment was less than what was deserved,
because “His mercy endureth for ever.” This statement is repeated forty-one times in the Old Testament. In his remembrance Jeremiah recalled the days of Jerusalem’s joy and the Lord’s promise and cried out, “Praise the LORD of hosts: for the LORD is good; for his mercy endureth for ever: and of them that shall bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the LORD. For I will cause to return the captivity of the land, as at the first, saith the LORD” (Jer. 33:11). If not for the Lord’s mercies, where would we be (Psalm 124:1-8)? Satan would have devoured us long ago (1 Peter 5:8). Only by the sure mercies of God, we have been, are being at the present and shall be in the future delivered by God’s dear Son (2 Cor. 1:10; Col. 1:13, 14). The Lord’s compassions do not fail. Being mindful of this truth gave the weeping prophet the courage and strength to continue for the Lord. We, like Jeremiah, must never forget the message of this verse.

Every dawning of a new day proclaims the mercies of the Lord. “They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness” (Lam. 3:23). His mercies are “fresh” or new each day. They do not become out-of-date. The word faithfulness is from the Hebrew word ‘emunah, which literally means “firmness.” It is used to speak of one who is steadfast and one who possesses moral fidelity. David sang that it reached the clouds (Psalm 36:5). Ethan the Ezrahite desired to make it known to all generations (Psalm 89:1-8). We can start each day afresh knowing He will not forsake us. God’s children today are troubled, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed. The death
and resurrection of Jesus Christ declare the believer’s victory over sin, death, hell and the grave (1 Cor. 15:55-57; 2 Cor. 4:8-10).

Jeremiah, being of the tribe of Levi and a descendant of Abiathar, knew of Aaron’s and Levi’s special inheritance. “The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him” (Lam. 3:24). The word portion is from the Hebrew word cheleg, which is one’s allotment or share. Unto Aaron the Lord said, “I am thy part (cheleg) and thine inheritance among the children of Israel” (Num. 18:20). The “portion” of Jacob was unlike any other inheritance ever given. Its “former,” that is its molder and maker, was the “rod” or symbol of authority underwriting it. “The LORD of hosts is his name” (Jer. 10:16). The “rod” or “sceptre” is that which Jehovah uses to rule over Israel, Judah and Jerusalem. The apostle Paul preached that saints have obtained an inheritance. It is sealed, or stamped by the Holy Spirit, giving the believer a guarantee or assurance of the purchased acquisition (Eph. 1:11-14). Our inheritance under the New Covenant is eternal (Heb. 9:15). It is special in that it is “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:4).

Jeremiah wrote an awe-inspiring statement that should be committed to our memory. What joy it will bring in times of distress. “The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him” (Lam. 3:25). The word good from the Hebrew tobe is used to describe good in the widest sense of its meaning. This word is used to speak of that which is pleasant, agreeable, excellent, valuable, best or precious. The Lord is all of these things and more, to those who “wait,” look for or hope in Him. This is the soul that resorts to the Lord with special care. Hope makes faith come alive. There can be no assurance without hope. Placing his hope in the Lord calmed Jeremiah’s fears and anxieties. “It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD” (verse 26).

**REMEMBERING JUDGMENTS PURPOSE**  
**Lamentations 3:27-36**

Early habits, good or bad, are difficult to change. This is the reason godly discipline is needed. Youthful discipline will have a positive effect upon those who receive it. The wise man Solomon admonished parents to “train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6). The words train up are chanak in the Hebrew. It is best understood as “to initiate.” The thought is to “start” early and “dedicate” the child to the proper way of life. Youth is the time of one’s life when it is easier to adjust to situations. It is also the time when correction and instruction are best received. “It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth” (Lam. 3:27). Jeremiah pictures the posture of hope as being under a yoke. A “yoke” was placed upon an animal so it could pull and bear the load. When the people of Israel were young, the Lord broke the yoke of bondage from Egypt (Lev. 26:13).
led them (Ex. 13:18), fed them (Ex. 16:32), and clothed them for forty years (Deut. 29:5). Above all this He gave them His Law. They had every advantage (Rom. 3:1, 2). However, judgment for Jerusalem’s iniquities included a yoke of iron (Deut. 28:48). Useful men are developed under the patient yoke of their youth. The yoke of the Lord’s teaching is best shouldered in our youth (Prov. 8:17; Eccl. 12:1).

Jeremiah reminded himself and us who it is that places the yoke on us. “He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him” (Lam. 3:28). Unlike Ephraim, who wavered and wandered to and fro even when goaded, Jeremiah became willing to let the Lord do the turning (Jer. 31:18). Silently, like a well-trained ox, the prophet bowed to the master’s will. Taking the yoke of the Lord with a quiet and meek spirit will bring rest to the soul (Matt. 11:29, 30). An important part of taking the Lord’s yoke is the “learning of” or “understanding of” Him. The proper yoke will keep us and hold us tight in the ways of the things we have “learned” (2 Tim. 3:14, 15). The word silence comes from the Hebrew word damam which may be used to describe one that is “astonished” or “awestruck.” The yoke humbled Jeremiah before the Lord. “He putteth his mouth in the dust” (Lam. 3:29). Ezra, upon hearing the Levites had not separated themselves from the abominations of the Canaanites, rent his clothes, plucked his beard, and, before those who feared the Lord, he fell on his knees with his hands outspread to the Lord. He was so humbled that he was ashamed to lift up his face (Ezra 9:1-6). Why would
they put themselves in such a posture? “If so be there may be hope” (Lam. 3:29). Remembering the Lord’s mercies was not a question of whether the Lord would be faithful to forgive. The word hope in this verse is the Hebrew word tiqvah, which is literally a cord, or an attachment. This is the word used of Rahab’s cord placed in her window (Joshua 2:18-21). This gave her and her family an attachment to Jehovah’s saving power. Even though exile was before Jerusalem, there was the cord or attachment to the Lord’s mercy and faithfulness that gave Jeremiah and the people of Jerusalem a hope of a positive future (Jer. 29:10-13).

Patience and meekness are contrary to the sinful nature of man. When one is hit, human nature says strike back. Jesus’ admonition to turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:39), is strange advice to the world’s way of thinking. The one who is surrendered to the Lord can find the grace to meekly wait. “He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled full with reproach” (Lam. 3:30). This verse may be understood as an imperative. Let him give his cheek to the smiter. Once again we hear the messianic message, for He suffered and endured patiently the wicked hands of His abusers (Isa. 50:6). Jesus was battered with fist and rod, scourged and spit upon (Matt. 27:26, 30; Mark 14:65). A slap is a great insult. The long beard was considered a mark of honor. To have it cut or pulled out was to be shamed (2 Sam.10:1-5). The picture is of one that has been disgraced and exposed by stripping him of his dignity (Jer. 48:37, 38).

When the Lord’s chastisements have borne their fruit, His compassion withdraws His heavy hand. This truth lifted Jeremiah from the pit of despair. “For the Lord will not cast off for ever” (Lam. 3:31). Jesus promised those who come to Him will not be cast out (John 6:37). He has promised never to orphan His children or leave them abandoned (John 14:8, Heb. 13:5). The chastening hand of the Lord always includes His mercies and love. It is not his purpose to browbeat His children. “But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men” (Lam. 3:32, 33). The Lord never approves of needless cruelty. The mistreatment of prisoners of war, obtaining an unjust sentence in the name of God and the misrepresentation of justice in general are forbidden. “To crush under his feet all the prisoners of the earth, to turn aside the right of a man before the face of the most
High, to subvert a man in his cause, the Lord approveth not” (verses 34-36). The Lord will punish those responsible for such unlawful violence.

**REMEMBERING THE MOST HIGH**

The judgment of the Lord is with all wisdom; therefore, it is just. It should be looked upon as being redemptive instead of disciplinary. Man has no right to protest when he received the just reward for his sins. Nothing is done without God’s say-so. Only He can speak and it is done. He does not force anyone to choose the path of sin with it wages of death. “Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not? Out of the mouth of the most High proceedeth not evil and good? Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord” (Lam. 3:37-40). It is the height of foolishness for man to fret against the Lord (Prov. 19:3).

Jeremiah continued to encourage the people of Jerusalem to look at their lives, what they had done, what it had wrought and return to the Lord. The sufferings of life present an excellent time for self-examination (2 Cor. 13:5). An honest evaluation will turn the heart toward the Lord. “Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD. Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens” (Lam. 3:40, 41). The last line may be literally read, “Let us lift up our hearts unto our hands.” First the heart lifts the hands, then with the heart in the hands they are lifted up in prayer. Sin had cut off the mercies of the Lord. There is no other God that pardons iniquity or passes over our rebellion like the Lord (Micah 7:18). The problem is not with God. The problem is our unrepentant hearts. “We have trespassed and have rebelled: thou hast not pardoned” (Lam. 3:42). The Lord was not ready to pardon simply because the people of Jerusalem and Judah were not ready to repent and return to Him. The people cried but not in confession and repentance. It was more of a case of we are sorry we got caught. Hypocrisy will never be honored by the Lord. “Thou hast covered with anger, and persecuted us: thou hast slain, thou hast not pitied. Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through” (verses 43, 44).

God allowed the people of Judah and Jerusalem to be scoffed at by the Babylonians and all their ancient enemies. They were treated as garbage which is to be tossed away. “Thou hast made us as the offscouring and refuse in the midst of the people. All our enemies have opened their mouths against us” (verses 45, 46). Under a different scenario the apostles were met with sim-
ilar abuses from the world, often their own people, yet they rejoiced in the Lord (Acts 5:41; 1 Cor. 4:13). How you deal with persecution depends on where your heart is (1 Peter 2:20; 3:14; 4:16).

**REMEMBERING TEARS**

These verses present the personification of Jeremiah’s sorrow. He also presents three others that the misfortunes have deeply touched—the enemies, Judah and the Lord. His weeping was stirred by the humiliation suffered in the loss of Jerusalem and the Temple, the concern for Judah’s suffering, and by the remorse and repentance that was needed toward the Lord. Such weeping and regret will be the lot of every person who rebels against God. The message of Jeremiah is still relevant today. There must be a heartfelt sorrow and repentance for sin and a genuine turning to the Lord for salvation.

Unconfessed sin, an unrepentant heart and no shadow of turning to the Lord resulted in massive ruin and panic. “Fear and a snare is come upon us, desolation and destruction” (Lam. 3:47). Fear should be understood as “being struck with terror.” They were like frightened animals scurrying to and fro in all directions in a feeble attempt to escape the hunter’s snare. The “snare” is used as a picture of devastation. The people of Judah and Jerusalem were trapped in the pit of “desolation.” The people and the city had been shattered, or fractured, into pieces as though the potter had tossed out a broken vessel (Jer. 18:3-7).

It is evident how Jeremiah received the title of “The Weeping Prophet.” The tears flowed down the lines of his face like rivulets. “Mine eye runneth down with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people. Mine eye trickleth down, and ceaseth not, without any intermission “ (Lam. 3:48, 49). The Hebrew word for rivers, peleg, is the divided streams or tributaries, like those of a delta. Such unceasing agony and tears are devastating to one’s emotions and can be detrimental to one’s health.

Jeremiah’s tears that flowed unceasingly like a river had not been in vain for God takes notice of the tears His people shed (Psalm 56:8). Such contrition, mingled with tears and prayer, is not without hope. Jeremiah continued until he knew the Lord had taken notice. “Till the LORD look down, and behold from heaven” (Lam. 3:50). The Hebrew word shaqaph (look) implies a leaning out or bending forward for a closer and better view of what was happening. He wanted the God of Heaven to take careful note of the situation. These were tears of sorrow and sincerity. The tears of his eyes had a severe effect on his soul. Jeremiah was hurting so that it was unhealthy. “Mine eye affecteth mine heart because of all the daughters of my city” (verse 51). Cutting into the heart of the weeping prophet was his sorrow for the women of the city, especially the young maidens, who were disgracefully defiled. His undeserved treatment, which he likened to an innocent bird, was vicious. “Mine enemies chased me sore, like a bird, without cause” (verse 52).
REMEMBERING PRAYER

Jeremiah recalled his experience while in the dungeon (Jer. 37; 38). Lowered down into the mire of the cistern dungeon, they enclosed him with a stone. “They have cut off my life in the dungeon, and cast a stone upon me” (Lam. 3:53). While bogged down in the miry clay, water poured in on him and he thought he would die. “Waters flowed over mine head; then I said, I am cut off” (verse 54). In despair for his life he cried out to the Lord, who heard his cry. “I called upon thy name, O LORD, out of the low dungeon. Thou hast heard my voice: hide not thine ear at my breathing, at my cry” (verses 55, 56). Jeremiah was delivered from the pit through the intercession of Ebed-melech (Jer. 38:7-11). The Lord answered Jeremiah’s prayer with comforting words. “Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not” (Lam. 3:57).

Jeremiah knew the Lord as his advocate and redeemer. “O Lord, thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul; thou hast redeemed my life” (verse 58). The Hebrew word ga‘al speaks of the one who acts as kinsman redeemer. This involved both paying the ransom and avenging the blood. He pleaded with the Lord to vindicate his mistreatment. “O LORD, thou hast seen my wrong: judge thou my cause” (verse 59). Jeremiah’s prayer quickly passed from the deliverance to a plea for a curse upon his enemies. The Lord was fully aware of how His prophet had been treated. “Thou hast seen all their vengeance and all their imaginations against me. Thou hast heard their reproach, O LORD, and all their imaginations against me; the lips of those that rose up against me, and their device against me all the day. Behold their sitting down, and their rising up; I am their musick” (verses 60-63). Jeremiah asked the Lord to render unto them what they deserve. “Render unto them a recompense, O LORD, according to the work of their hands. Give them sorrow of heart, thy curse unto them. Persecute and destroy them in anger from under the heavens of the LORD” (verses 64-66).

GOD’S FAITHFUL MERCY

In the depth of despair, Jeremiah submitted himself to the Lord’s keeping. His was not a plea or desire for vengeance but a cry for justice. The Lord’s rod is never directed with a cold, indifferent heart.

How quickly and beautifully our song will change when we too know the Lord as Jeremiah knew Him (Titus 2:11-14; 1 John 2:1, 2).
Lesson 13

For Sunday, November 25, 2007

Prayer of Lamentation
Lamentations 4:1—5:22

The sorrow expressed in the heartrending lamentation of chapter four is of a profound spiritual nature. Jeremiah turned from the sorrows caused by physical sufferings. These were certainly bad enough. However, the real tragedy was in the fact that God’s chosen people rebelled against Him and no longer stood as a testimony and witness for Him. Israel was chosen by God to be His peculiar treasure. As a nation they were to be His witnesses to the rest of the world. Through them the nations were to see the grace and power of the true and living God. The people of Israel had utterly failed to do so. Therefore, they were led away captive and their beloved city, Jerusalem, and the Temple were left in ruins.

The final chapter of Lamentations is a prayer. Jeremiah went into detail regarding Judah’s sufferings; yet, in the midst of tribulation, there remained hope in the mercy and goodness of God. The certainty of God’s judgment upon the sins of Judah was affirmed. Jeremiah was just as equally certain of God’s mercies and His promise to deliver and restore Judah and Israel to greater glory.

HUMILIATION

Lamentations 4:1-16

What a sad day when the shining Temple of God was made dim. “How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed! the stones of the sanctuary are poured out in the top of every street” (Lam. 4:1). It had been a magnificent building. However, its magnificence was shattered when the glory of God departed, and its stones lay scattered in the streets of Jerusalem. One only has to view the scene at the Wailing Wall today to be reminded of the pain in the hearts of Jewish people from Jeremiah’s time to today. Jesus warned the churches in Asia concerning their sins and the need to repent. History tells the sad story of these and other congregations that departed from the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). May God’s mercies and compassions keep the living stones (1 Peter 2:5) of His spiritual house (Mark 14:38; 1 Tim. 3:15) fitly framed together upon the foundation and cornerstone, Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:19-22). The second desolation in Jerusalem was not that of buildings but the precious youth. These young souls are a treasured asset of any nation. They
were worth their weight in gold, but in Jerusalem they lay in the streets like shattered pottery. “The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!” (Lam. 4:2).

Jeremiah’s experience with the Babylonian attackers, the starving children, the mother’s cannibalism, the pampered and whimpering rich and the false prophets and priests makes his grief in this chapter very passionate. The siege of Jerusalem was long and difficult. The hunger pangs made nursing mothers indifferent to their babies. “Even the sea monsters draw out the breast, they give suck to their young ones: the daughter of my people is become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness. The tongue of the sucking child cleaveth to the roof of his mouth for thirst: the young children ask bread, and no man breaketh it unto them” (verses 3, 4). The mammals of the sea took better care of their young than the cruel (from the Hebrew word ‘akzar meaning “fierce” or “deadly”) mothers, who like the ostrich gave little or no care for her young. The rich who had once lived on delicacies were like derelicts as they searched through garbage piles. “They that did feed delicately are desolate in the streets: they that were brought up in scarlet embrace dunghills” (verse 5).

Jeremiah looked upon Jerusalem’s fate and judgment as being worse than that which fell upon Sodom. “For the punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the punishment of the sin of Sodom, that was overthrown as in a moment, and no hands stayed on her” (verse 6). Sodom was taken in a day with a stroke of God’s wrath. Jerusalem suffered for years under the onslaught of the Chaldeans.

The Nazirites, or separated ones, are first pictured as they should have been, dedicated, pure and healthy, but the scene now pictured them as skin and bones. Their once bright and clean faces were dark and dirty. “Her Nazarites were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk, they were more ruddy in body than rubies, their polishing was of sapphire: their visage is blacker than a coal; they are not known in the streets: their skin cleaveth to their bones; it is withered, it is become like a stick. They that be slain with the sword are better than they that be slain with hunger: for these pine away, stricken through for want of the fruits of the field” (verses 7-9). They were God’s polished jewels but became black like coal. It would have been better for them to have been killed by a Babylonian sword than to languish in the famine and pestilence.

The dilemma of the babies in Jerusalem was a shameful atrocity. “The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children: they were their meat in the destruction of the daughter of my people” (verse 10). The horrific misery of famine led the starving mothers to boil and eat their own children. Josephus describes the act as it took place in the siege under Titus. The words
pitiful women today is used of something disgraceful or unfortunate. The Hebrew words used here are *nashim rachmanyothi* which means “women of compassion.” It describes the depth of feeling a mother’s love can reach. What a sharp contrast between the inborn love of these mothers and their cannibalistic actions.

The decisive reason for Jerusalem’s destruction was the fiery wrath of the Lord. After the overwhelming destruction of Sennacherib’s army, the false prophets easily persuaded the populace that God would protect and not allow His holy city to be destroyed. Jeremiah and Ezekiel both disputed this false viewpoint. What happened to Jerusalem was a marvel among her enemies. “The Lord hath accomplished his fury; he hath poured out his fierce anger, and hath kindled a fire in Zion, and it hath devourd the foundations thereof. The kings of the earth, and all the inhabitants of the world, would not have believed that the adversary and the enemy should have entered into the gates of Jerusalem” (verses 11, 12). The prophets and priests led the people into spiritual darkness, shedding the blood of the righteous and committed scandalous murders (Jer. 26:7-24). Now they staggered in the streets as blind men. They were reaping what they had sown. “For the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests, that have shed the blood of the just in the midst of her, they have wandered as blind men in the streets, they have polluted themselves with blood, so that men could not touch their garments” (Lam. 4:13, 14). These once highly regarded citizens had become so vile that they were looked upon as untouchable lepers. The shouts were cries of warning against these murderers. “They cried unto them, Depart ye; it is unclean; depart, depart, touch not: when they fled away and wandered, they said among the heathen, They shall no more sojourn there” (verse 15). All respect was lost for the elders and priests. These that should have been examples had brought contempt for their office. “The anger of the Lord hath divided them; he will no more regard them: they respected not the persons of the priests, they favoured not the elders” (verse 16).
VAIN HELP

Lamentations 4:17-20

How feeble are the efforts to redeem oneself! With all that happened they foolishly continued to look to their strange lovers. The people of Judah stared at the horizon until their eyes were sore and longed for help from Egypt that never came. Egypt was powerless in the face of the Almighty God. “As for us, our eyes as yet failed for our vain help: in our watching we have watched for a nation that could not save us” (verse 17). Judah was like the mother of Sisera who, unaware that Jael had nailed him to her tent floor, looked out a window and cried for his chariot to return home. Hence, she, along with the people of Judah and all who look to the arm of the flesh, wait for the dead who will never come. The psalmist said it best when he wrote, “Our soul waiteth for the LORD: he is our help and our shield” (Psalm 33:20).

The Babylonian army was everywhere so that the Judeans felt unsafe on the city streets. The days of the people of Judah and Jerusalem were numbered. “They hunt our steps, that we cannot go in our streets: our end is near, our days are fulfilled; for our end is come. Our persecutors are swifter than the eagles of the heaven: they pursued us upon the mountains, they laid wait for us in the wilderness” (Lam. 4:18, 19).

King Zedekiah would provide no protection for them. Unlike Hezekiah and Josiah, he did not seek the Lord. He was too busy attempting to save himself. He fled Jerusalem by night only to be hunted down like a wild animal and taken captive near Jericho. He was made to witness the killing of his sons, after which he was blinded, put in chains and carried to Babylon. “The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the LORD, was taken in their pits, of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen” (verse 20). The historical account is given in Jeremiah 52:7-11.

NATIONS TAKE WARNING

Lamentations 4:21-22

The nations of the world today who scorn the nation of Israel, scoff at the Lord’s New Testament church and ridicule His Word need to look closely and heed the warning placed upon Edom. The subversion of Edom against his brother was the classic behavior of Esau and his descendants. Since the day Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of pottage (Gen. 25:30-34), he had it in for Jacob and the Israelites. Edom had taken its vengeance and revenge out on his brother as he was being slaughtered by the Chaldeans (Ezek. 25:12). They came up from the south and shed innocent blood (Joel 3:19). He pursued the people of Judah with the sword and showed him no mercy (Amos 1:11).

As the captives sat by the rivers of Babylon, they sang together and asked the Lord to remember the evils of Edom (Psalm 137:7). The judgment was set. Because of the gloating and boasting, Edom would be the reward for all those who dealt treacherously with God’s chosen people. “Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom, that dwellest in the land of Uz; the cup also shall pass through unto thee: thou shalt be drunken, and shalt make thyself naked. The
punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion; he will no more carry thee away into captivity: he will visit thine iniquity, O daughter of Edom; he will discover thy sins” (Lam. 4:21, 22). The book of Obadiah gives the vision of the Lord’s revenge upon Edom. The ancient cities of Edom lie in ruin to this day because of their rebellion against Israel and Judah.

Edom also became subject to Babylon. The Persians turned Edom into a province called Idumea which is the Greek form of Edom. When the Romans conquered Palestine, the Idumeans (Edomites) were included. Herod Antipater, an Idumean was made procurator of Judah. He was the father of Herod the Great. With the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD the Idumeans vanished from history.

**ZION ON ITS KNEES**

The first verse of this final elegy denotes that it is a prayer. The picture is presented of a nation on its knees in distress. “Remember, O LORD, what is come upon us: consider, and behold our reproach” (Lam. 5:1). They were crying out for God to remember. After forty years of ministry to a “perpetual backsliding” nation (Jer. 8:5), Jeremiah had not relented his message or given way to the sins of the people of Judah and Jerusalem. The supplication was for God to consider, restore and renew.

The remnant left in Judah were deprived of their inheritance. Their inheritance was in the hands of the enemy. “Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens. We are orphans and fatherless, our mothers are as widows” (Lam. 5:2, 3). Orphaned, fatherless and widowed they were exiles in their own land. This is a quandary that the Lord’s New Testament churches need not fear. Jesus promised He would not leave us “comfortless” (John 14:18). This is from the Greek word orphanous meaning to be orphaned or fatherless. The believer’s Father is everlasting (Isa. 63:16). The church will never be a widow for her groom is alive for evermore (Rev. 1:18).

They were forced to buy their own food and water from the Babylonians who seized all the goods of the land. “We have drunken our water for money; our wood is sold unto us” (Lam. 5:4). The inflation, caused by war and captivity, took its toll upon the price of one’s basic daily needs. The cost of these goods made it necessary for them to work constantly just to survive. “Our necks are under persecution: we labour, and have no rest” (verse 5). From the days of Adam, and incorporated within the Law of Moses, one may find God’s provisions for rest (Gen. 2:2, 3; Ex. 31:15-17). God did not mean for work to be a burden. He planned for a balance between work and a time of refreshment for the body both physically and spiritually and for the good of the land (Lev. 25:1-12). One day in seven and one year in seven was to be dedicated to the Lord. But against the preaching of Jeremiah, the people of Judah made the Sabbaths just one more day and one more year. Now they and their children would pay the price. May God grant that believers heed the warnings taught
here. Have we made the Lord’s day like any other? Those who spend hundreds at a Sunday sporting event choke at the idea of faithfulness in tithes and offerings on the Lord’s day (Malachi 3:8; 2 Cor. 9:6, 7; Heb. 7:5-9).

Some in Judah tried to escape by giving their hand to the Egyptians and Assyrians. “We have given the hand to the Egyptians, and to the Assyrians, to be satisfied with bread” (Lam. 5:6). How sad that after all they had been through they would still turn to their old archrivals. These had shown themselves to be false lovers. Why is it so difficult to admit our guilt? They put the blame on their fathers; they were guilty. “Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities” (Lam. 5:7). Why, when the Lord was so nearby, would they flee again to these beggarly elements? God’s children need to understand and live by the words of the apostle Peter. “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). Knowing who and what Egypt and Assyria were and had done in the past how degrading to the compassions and mercies of God for them to seek rest among such ungodly neighbors. Why, once redeemed by the blood of Christ, would anyone desire to return to bondage (Gal. 4:9)? Why return to that which cannot satisfy? When the living well and its freely offered water is so nearby, why does anyone choose to die (Isa. 55:1, 2; Ezek. 18:31)? God desired to love the people of Israel like one would a wife (Isa. 54:5-8). After all it had been through, how could it give its hand to another? The church is presently espoused to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2). Jesus loves it and gave Himself for it (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25-28). How could it ever possibly think of not being faithful to Him (Rev. 2:10)? The bondage of sin is harsh and it grows worse for those who have tasted the heavenly gifts and then returned to the wallow in its mire (Luke 11:24-26; Heb. 10:26-31).

Jeremiah grieved over the occupation of the Chaldeans. He described the ruthless rulers as slaves. “Servants have ruled over us; there is none that doth deliver us out of their hand” (Lam. 5:8). The basic needs of life became difficult to get. They could not go into the fields and harvest or feed their flocks. The lack of food caused them to be ill with fever. Hunger had dried up the pores of their skin. “We gat our bread with the peril of our lives because of the sword of the wilder-

---

**Borne:** in a physical sense, is to bear up a weight or to carry a weight upon oneself, like a man would carry a load upon his shoulders. It may also refer to the bearing of an emotional, moral or political burden. In this sense, a responsibility is laid upon a person. It may be a responsibility for previous actions or for future actions. In the text, it was their iniquities or sinful ways that had been laid to the children of the previous generation. Word Study #5445.

---

**Ravished:** is “to respond or give attention to another,” and that often may be done in a negative manner. It is also to oppress another with labor, to labor upon or toward another, or to exercise oneself toward another. This text reveals a physical application in that men exercised themselves toward women. The context speaks of a forced attention or rape. Word Studies #6030 and 6031.
ness. Our skin was black like an oven because of the terrible famine” (verses 9, 10). If this were not enough, the women were no longer safe as the enemy had their way with them. “They ravished the women in Zion, and the maids in the cities of Judah” (verse 11). This shocking evil was prophesied by Moses and Jeremiah (Deut. 28:30-32; Jer. 6:12).

The princes of Judah were hung by the Chaldeans. “Princes are hanged up by their hand.” (Lam. 5:12). This type of cruelty was invented by the Chaldeans. Like the bodies of Saul and his sons that were hung on the wall of Bethshan (1 Sam. 31:8-10), the Chaldeans suspended them from hooks in the wall by their hands till they died through torture and exhaustion. There they were left to be devoured by the fowls of the air (Gen. 40:19).

**ZION’S SIN AND CONTRITION**

Lamentations 5:12-18

Both the old and the children were subjected to abuse. “The faces of elders were not honoured. They took the young men to grind, and the children fell under the wood” (Lam. 5:12, 13). These were elderly officials and boys under military age. They were no longer found in their normal surroundings and doing their normal duties. Justice was no longer administered; Jerusalem was under military law. “The elders have ceased from the gate, the young men from their musick” (verse 14). With justice and music gone, the rejoicing stopped and their times of festivity turned to lamentations. “The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning” (verse 15).

The day of accountability had arrived. Finally, it was witnessed in prayer. Once again Jeremiah became the voice of the people. “The crown is fallen from our head: woe unto us, that we have sinned!” (verse 16). The “crown” speaks of the dignity of Judah’s royalty and the nation. At feasts they crowned themselves with garlands of flowers, but such festivity was now at an end. Self-respect was no longer possible under such repulsive conditions. The chief ornament and dignity is lost; the independence of the nation, and all that gave them rank and honor. The crown had been thrown down and greatly tarnished. Judah sinned (missed the mark), and like the cancer

**Manna**

The Crown Is Fallen from Our Head (Lamentations 5:16): The image of the fallen crown is a figurative expression to show the previous position of honor the Hebrew nation held with God in the midst of their Gentile adversaries. During its favored status, they grew proud of themselves rather than boast in their God. By virtue of their forsaking of the exclusive worship and service toward Jehovah and turning to the pagan gods of the nations, they lost their prominent standing with the Lord, and they were dethroned. They went from being the highly favored nation of God, enjoying the blessings of their unique covenant relationship with Him, to being forsaken and taken captive by their ravaging enemy. Additionally, their separate and unique identity as a nation was lost as they were blended into the fabric and life of their captors.
that sin is, it continued to gnaw away until all was desolate. The destruction of Jerusalem was so complete that it was prowled about by foxes (jackals). As they thought over their condition, they became sicker and faint. Their outlook was dim for the wages of sin offered no hope. “For this our heart is faint; for these things our eyes are dim. Because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it” (verses 17, 18). God had offered mercy and pardon but they refused (Jer. 18:11, 12). Without the Lord Jesus Christ there is no hope (Eph. 2:12).

**THE TURNING POINT**

**Manna**

God Is Still on His Throne (Lamentations 5:19): Even though the palace of the king of Judah on Mount Zion was destroyed and lay in ruins, and the jackals took habitation of the mountain, such was an indication and admission that the kingdom of Judah had come to an end. However, the prophet Jeremiah was personally reminded and desired to provide hope to the displaced people of God, that Mount Zion was more appropriately representative of the eternal throne of God, thus anticipating the kingdom of God which would endure forever. Even in the midst of their turmoil and devastation, the Hebrews could rejoice that their God continued to reign in all the earth from His enduring eternal throne.

Judah’s only hope, and the only hope for all men, is that Satan does not have the last word. The last word concerning sin is always Jesus. Jeremiah’s prayer was the voice of hope. His attention was no longer upon their sins and woes. He directed the people of Judah and us to the eternal God. Although the throne of Judah failed, the throne of God shall endure forever (Psalm 9:7). “Thou, O LORD, remainest for ever; thy throne from generation to generation” (Lam. 5:19). The earthly sanctuary, the Temple, is in ruins, but the heavenly throne is above the heavens.

Jeremiah lamented the longevity of the absence of God’s presence and mercy. “Wherefore dost thou forget us for ever, and forsake us so long time?” (verse 20). It is contradictory to the covenants and promises of God that Judah and Jerusalem will be forgotten and forsaken by the Lord. What is wrong here is not with God’s mercy. It is Judah’s sin! The Lord found fault with them and they were judged. Yet, in His love for them He would make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. The new covenant would bring about the conversion of the Jews. “I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their
We Shall Be Turned: is to return “to the former state, to turn back, restore or to retreat.” It denotes a returning to the point of departure. When found in distress, the answer to the problem is often to return to the place where one possessed safety and peace. Prayerfully, the prophet begged for God’s help for them to return to that place from where they have strayed. Word Study #7725

Hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: and they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb. 8:10-12).

Jeremiah stopped with the woes and turned his attention to the Lord. His final plea was for the people of Judah to turn their hearts to God and renew their spirits in Him. “Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old” (Lam. 5:21). In days of old they had a land, a nation, a Law and a Temple where they could worship the Lord. The real missing element from the days of old was God’s favor. Unless we allow the Lord to turn our hearts and lives around, there will be no turning (Jer. 31:18). Unless the Lord renews a right spirit, there will be no renewal or restoration to His favor (Psalm 51:10). Only His mercy can save us from complete ruin. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

PRAYER OF LAMENTATION

Every person needs to stop here and review what Jeremiah had been through and how his heart was broken. Every sinner in need of salvation and every cold and indifferent child of God must pause here and be reminded, unless the Lord renews there will be no renewal, unless the Lord turns us, there will be no turning. Jeremiah’s last thought literally reads, Unless thou hast utterly rejected us, unless thou art very wroth against us (Lam. 5:22). This is stated as an impossibility. Praise the Lord, “His anger endureth but a moment; in his favour is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Psalm 30:5). Forty years of tearful ministry were put into these words. Jeremiah knew that the best tribute to the sovereignty of God was a nation on its knees in repentance. Surely the Lord looked down upon His weeping prophet with the words, “Well done thou good and faithful prophet.”
Bibliography


Lochyer, Herbert. *All the Kings and Queens of the Bible.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961.


