



Scripture Press

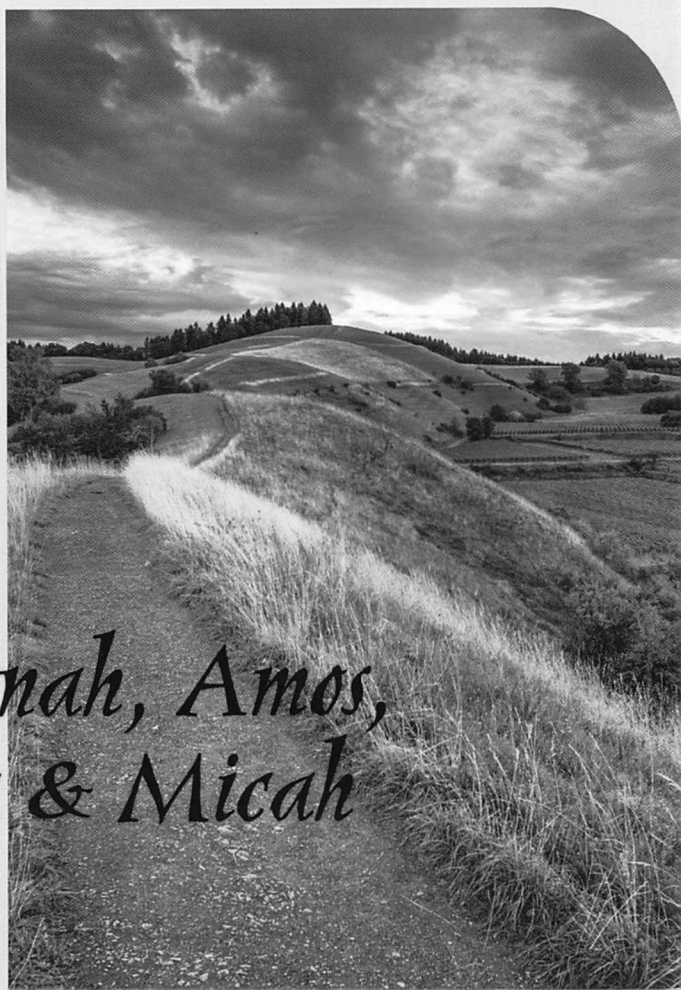
Disciples' *Bible Study Series*



ADULT **STUDENT BOOK**

STUDIES IN

*Joel, Jonah, Amos,
Hosea & Micah*



POWER FOR LIVING

Here's a full-color, weekly, take-home publication that's an exciting tool for personal growth and evangelism. With life-related stories of faith, ***Power for Living*** connects God's truth to real life.

DISCIPLES' BIBLE STUDY SERIES

YEAR	SEPTEMBER QUARTER	DECEMBER QUARTER	MARCH QUARTER	JUNE QUARTER
2016-17	Acts	Genesis	1, 2 Thessalonians; Jude	Joel; Jonah; Amos; Hosea; Micah
2017-18	Luke	Exodus	1 Corinthians	Leviticus; Numbers; Deuteronomy
2018-19	Hebrews	Joshua	2 Corinthians	Isaiah
2019-20	Matthew	Judges; Ruth	1, 2 Timothy; Titus; Philemon	Jeremiah; Lamentations
2020-21	Romans	1, 2 Samuel	1, 2 Peter	Nah; Zeph.; Hab.; Obad.; Hag.; Zech.; Mal.
2021-22	John	1, 2 Kings; 1, 2 Chronicles	James; 1, 2, 3 John	Proverbs
2022-23	Philippians; Colossians	Ezra; Nehemiah; Esther	Revelation	Ezekiel; Daniel
2023-24	Mark	Psalms	Galatians; Ephesians	Job; Ecclesiastes; Song of Solomon

Early Minor Prophets

Lessons

1. The Predicament and the Proper Response (Joel 1:1—2:17) —	9
2. The Lord's Promises to His People (Joel 2:18—3:21) —	17
3. Jonah Disobeys His First Commission (Jonah 1—2) —	25
4. Jonah Obeys His Second Commission (Jonah 3—4) —	33
5. The Lion of Zion Roars (Amos 1:1—5:17) —	41
6. The Lord's Judgment of His Own (Amos 5:18—6:14) —	49
7. Prophecies of Judgment and Restoration (Amos 7—9) —	57
8. Unfaithful Wife, Faithful Husband (Hosea 1—3) —	65
9. Accusation, Evidence, and Sentence (Hosea 4—10) —	73
10. God's Love and Forgiveness (Hosea 11—14) —	81
11. Judgment for Those Who Deserve It (Micah 1—2) —	89
12. Good News for the Faithful (Micah 3—5) —	97
13. Reversal of Fortune (Micah 6—7) —	105

Features

Introduction to the Book of Genesis —	4
How to Use the Study Book —	6
Time Lines—Lives of the Patriarchs —	113
Map—The World of the Patriarchs —	114
Genealogy—The Patriarchs' Family Tree (and Art Credits) —	115

Early Minor Prophets

The dozen prophetic books at the end of the Old Testament have been grouped together since at least two hundred years before Christ. In combination, they are sometimes called the Book of the Twelve. They are also called the Minor Prophets, not because they are minor in importance but because they are minor in size. The Major Prophets, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, are much bigger books. This quarter we'll look at five of the Minor Prophets: Joel, Jonah, Amos, Hosea, and Micah. Many Bible

scholars believe these five were written in roughly the same period of history. The other seven, probably written in a later period, will be featured in another quarter of this Bible study series.

Four of this quarter's books reveal God's mind on social, spiritual, and political issues. The fifth—Jonah—portrays a prophet's personal struggle with God's call upon him. All five contain messages that we can use as we seek to live for Christ in today's world.



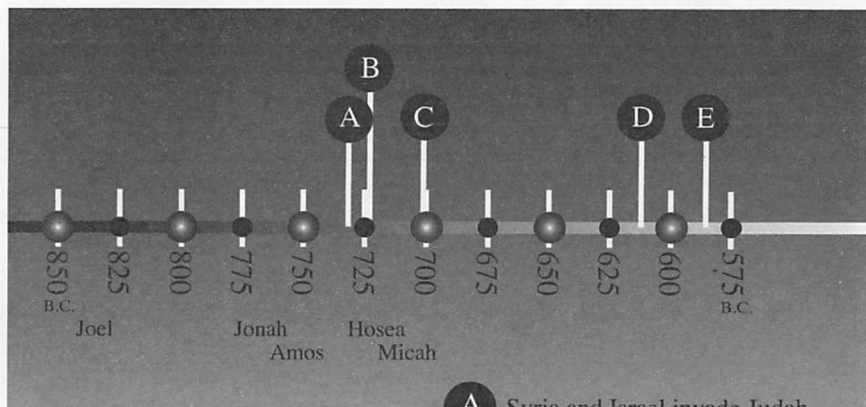
Historical Background

The prophets Joel, Jonah, Amos, Hosea, and Micah conducted their ministries in a period that ranged from approximately 835 B.C. until about 700 B.C. During that period the covenant people were divided into two nations: the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Some of the prophets witnessed the downfall of Israel; others watched the stage being set for the similar downfall of Judah. International developments provide a background to many of the prophets' messages.

The *decline of Syria*. Syria was the kingdom that lay immediately to the northeast of Israel. In the early years of the divided kingdom period, the

Syrians often posed a threat. But as the Assyrians grew in power, the Israelites and Syrians sometimes combined forces to defend against the Assyrians.

Around 732 B.C. the Israelites and Syrians invaded Judah, hoping to force the southern kingdom to join their coalition. This proved a mistake, however, when Judah's king appealed to Assyria for help. The Assyrians destroyed Syria's capital, Damascus, thereby putting an end to the kingdom of Syria. By paying tribute, the Israelites postponed the same fate for themselves, but they lost some of their territory in the north to the invading Assyrian forces.



A Syria and Israel invade Judah.

B Israel falls to Assyria.

C Assyria invades Judah.

D Assyria falls to Babylonia.

E Judah falls to Babylonia.

The rise of Assyria. The Assyrian Empire was centered along the Tigris River in northern Mesopotamia, hundreds of miles northeast of Israel. Assyria had two periods of dominance in the Near East. The first period began when Shalmaneser III ruled the empire in the mid-ninth century B.C. Then after a few decades of comparative weakness, when Tiglath-Pileser III ascended to the throne around 745 B.C., Assyria again took the lead role in the drama of Near Eastern history. Tiglath-Pileser made the Assyrian army a ruthless fighting machine feared near and far.

In their second period of dominance, the Assyrians made several marches into the area around Israel, conquering several small nations. About 725 B.C. the Assyrians entered Israel and quickly captured all the important cities except the capital, Samaria. After a two-year siege, Samaria also fell. The Assyrians

killed thousands of Israelites and deported thousands more to Mesopotamia.

About twenty years later it looked as though the story might be repeated in Judah. The Assyrians under Sennacherib captured Judah's smaller cities and laid siege to Jerusalem. However, one night God sent death among the ranks of the Assyrians, causing Sennacherib to withdraw his remaining forces.

The Assyrian Empire finally fell to the Babylonians around 612 B.C.

The threat of Babylon. The Babylonian Empire did not seriously endanger the Israelite peoples during the lifetimes of the five prophets we study this quarter. However, when some of the prophets predict-

ed the downfall of Jerusalem, they were looking ahead to that city's capture by the Babylonians. That

event, which marked the temporary end of Judah, took place about 586 B.C.

Joel

Joel 1:1 tells us all that we know for sure about the prophet Joel's personal life: he was the son of a man named Pethuel. The prophet's obvious familiarity with Judah and Jerusalem, along with his concern for righteousness in temple worship, suggests that he lived part of or all his life in Jerusalem.

Old Testament scholars do not agree on the question of when Joel delivered his prophecies. Estimates have ranged from the ninth to the second century B.C. One group of scholars puts the book's date at about 835 B.C., and that is the opin-

ion this Bible study series follows in placing Joel first this quarter.

Fortunately, our ignorance about the date of the book does not stand in the way of our understanding its message.

The central theme of Joel is the impending day of the Lord. It appears that a devastating plague of locusts sparked Joel's warning that a day of the Lord was coming with disaster for the unfaithful. Joel called on all to repent and promised that God's blessings would come to the faithful after judgment on the day of the Lord.

Jonah

The son of a man named Amittai (Jonah 1:1), Jonah came from Gath Hepher (II Kings 14:25), a town belonging to Israel during Jonah's lifetime. According to II Kings, Jonah's prophetic career coincided with the reign of the Israelite king Jeroboam II (about 793–753 B.C.). We can't date the events in the Book of Jonah more precisely than that.

Unlike all the other Minor Prophets, the Book of Jonah is not a collection of prophecies. Instead, it is a story about a period in the prophet's life. We don't know whether Jonah was the author of the book or whether someone else wrote the book about him.

The Book of Jonah falls into two distinct parts. The first part shows us Jonah's attempt to escape God's call to preach in the Assyrian city of Nineveh. The second part portrays Jonah's reluctant obedience to that command.

Although Assyria's power was temporarily on the wane in Jonah's day, Assyria had cruelly oppressed Israel and other neighboring states. This helps us understand Jonah's reluctance to go to Nineveh. Jonah's nationalism and his righteous indignation made it difficult for him to accept God's willingness to show mercy to Assyrians.

Amos

Amos once said, "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. But the Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel'" (Amos 7:14, 15). Amos was a resident of Tekoa, a village ten miles south of Jerusalem. He usually lived in Judah but prophesied in Israel.

The prophecies in the Book of Amos date from "two years before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam son of Jehoash was king of Israel" (1:1). We don't know when that particular earthquake took place. But Uzziah reigned from about 792 to 740 B.C. and Jeroboam II reigned from about 793 to 753 B.C. It is probable that the

prophecies in this book were delivered around 760 B.C.

Amos warned the Israelites of judgment coming for their sins, which included social injustice, religious hypocrisy, and idolatry. During a period of relative peace and prosperity, some Israelites had accumulated wealth and had begun to exploit the poor. Proper forms of worship had become mixed with pagan religious practices borrowed from Israel's neighbors. Even when Israelites worshiped in the proper way, many went through the rituals without any real faith in their hearts and then treated others badly.

The truth of Amos's warning was borne out a generation later, when Israel was swallowed up by Assyria.

Hosea

Hosea the son of Beeri came from the northern kingdom of Israel. His messages were primarily directed at Israel, but in some cases they encompassed Judah as well.

The heading for the Book of Hosea (Hos. 1:1) loosely dates the prophet's ministry by the reigns of one king of Israel and four kings of Judah. This suggests that Hosea may have compiled the book in Judah after Israel's fall to the Assyrians. Hosea's ministry probably extended from about 760 to 715 B.C.

Hosea was God's instrument to warn the Israelites of the hardships He would use to punish them unless they repented and reformed. As his

tory shows, this punishment eventually came from the Assyrians, whose shadow hung over the nation in its final, chaotic years.

More than most prophetic books, the Book of Hosea is a mixed bag. Threat and promise, doom and hope, judgment and salvation alternate rapidly with one another in Hosea. Yet the dominant theme is unfaithfulness.

That theme comes out early in the book in the living parable of Hosea's marriage to the adulterous Gomer. Just as Gomer was maritally unfaithful to Hosea, so Israel was spiritually unfaithful to God. Just as Hosea separated from Gomer, so

God would separate Himself from Israel. And just as Hosea reconciled himself to Gomer, so God would

eventually reconcile Himself to His people.



Micah

We know little about the prophet Micah, apart from his hometown and his time period (Mic. 1:1; compare Jer. 26:18). Micah hailed from Moresheth Gath, a town that lay about twenty miles southwest of Jerusalem. Some scholars, however, theorize that he spent much of his adult life in the capital. His career lasted during the reigns of three kings of Judah—that is, from about 750 B.C. at the earliest to about 686 B.C. at the latest.

On God's behalf Micah condemned such sins as idolatry, false

prophecy, and oppression of the poor. He predicted judgment from God, including the downfall of Samaria and Jerusalem. But he also predicted eventual restoration and the birth of the Messiah.

The essence of Micah's message is expressed in Micah 6:8: "What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

Surely Joel, Jonah, Amos, and Hosea would all respond with a hearty "Amen!"

How to Use the Study Book

The study book is meant to be used with a Bible opened beside it. Before studying one of the lettered sections within a lesson, read the corresponding Bible passage. Then refer back and forth between your Bible and the study book until you

get the meaning of the passage. Also think about your personal answer to each of the "Ask Yourself" questions. Finally, come to class prepared to discuss the Bible passage and raise any questions that have occurred to you.

1

The Predicament and the Proper Response

Joel 1:1–2:17

a Calls to the People (1:1-12)

**What the locust swarm has left
the great locusts have eaten;
What the great locusts have left
the young locusts have eaten;
what the young locusts have left
other locusts have eaten.**

—Joel 1:4

The Book of Joel opens like many other prophetic books in the Old Testament—with a brief heading that names the author and claims divine authority for the prophecies contained within (vs. 1). Whether Joel's prophecies were at first given orally and only later reduced to a written form, or whether they were delivered in writing from the start, is not known.

The prophet Joel interpreted for the people of Judah the supernatural meaning of a natural disaster that had befallen them. A plague of locusts had destroyed their crops—a serious setback for a society based on agriculture. Joel wanted the people to take this disaster as a sign from God that they ought to repent

of their sins and submit themselves to Him anew.

Some scholars think the locust plague Joel described was symbolic of an enemy invasion that threatened the nation of Judah. Most, however, think the locust plague was real. Parts of the book have more than one possible meaning.

Verses 2 through 12 are made up of four stanzas of poetry. The first stanza (vss. 2-4) is a general appeal to the people of Judah. The other stanzas appeal to different groups within Judah: drunkards (vss. 5-7), the people of Jerusalem (vss. 8-10), and farmers (vss. 11, 12).

In the first stanza (vss. 2-4), Joel addressed himself both to the elders (leaders) of the nation and to the rest of the people. The destruction recently caused in Judah by locusts was so bad that Joel challenged the people to recall its like in living memory or in history. Furthermore, he urged them to pass on the story so that future generations might hear about it.

Describing the damage, Joel used four of the nine Hebrew words for "locust" (vs. 4). Some commentators suggest that these words refer to the locusts at different stages in their

development. Others think Joel used more than one word for "locust" to represent the great extent of the damage caused by the locusts.

In the second stanza (vss. 5-7), Joel addressed drunkards. Those people would now have trouble indulging their vice, since the locusts had destroyed the season's grape crop,

The Locust

The insect that caused the damage Joel talked about was probably the migratory locust (also known as the desert locust). Under the right conditions, billions of migratory locusts may swarm, covering tens or even hundreds of square miles. Such swarms may be blown by the wind from the deserts where they have hatched into northern Africa, southwest Asia, or southern Europe. As they come in, they blot out the sun and fill the air with a sound like the crackling of fire. When they leave, trees and crops are often completely stripped.

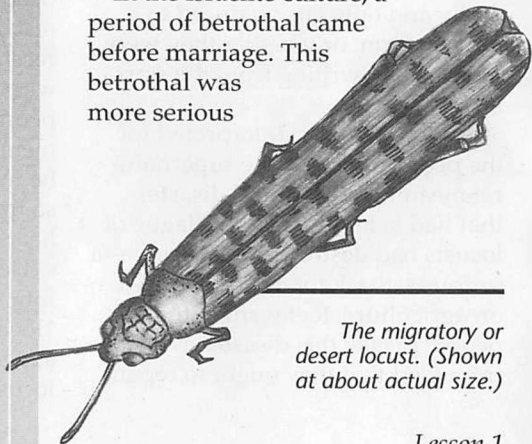
For thousands of years locust plagues have been periodic problems in the land of the Bible. According to Scripture, more than one locust plague was an instrument of judgment (Exod. 10:1-20; Deut. 28:42; II Chron. 7:13; Amos 4:9).

from which wine would have been made. Comparing the locusts to an army and to lions, Joel said they had ruined both vineyards and orchards.

Although Joel did not name the people he addressed in his third stanza (vss. 8-10), some scholars think he spoke to the people of Jerusalem. These scholars point out that in the Bible, Jerusalem is frequently portrayed as a woman (vs. 8; compare Isa. 51:17, 18). Furthermore, this stanza mentions worship at the temple, which of course was in Jerusalem.

Temple worship required such agricultural products as grain, wine, and oil. The locusts had destroyed these products, so the daily rituals at the temple might have to halt, if indeed that had not already happened. Not surprisingly, the temple's priests grieved over this situation (Joel 1:9b)—perhaps both because of their religious feelings and because their income was threatened. But Joel called the people of Jerusalem to grieve as well (vs. 8).

In the Israelite culture, a period of betrothal came before marriage. This betrothal was more serious



The migratory or desert locust. (Shown at about actual size.)

than our engagement. The betrothed were called husband and wife; however, they did not have sexual relations until marriage. That's the background for Joel's call to "mourn like a virgin in sackcloth grieving for the husband of her youth." The interruption of temple worship was a terrible calamity for the people of Jerusalem.

In his fourth stanza (vss. 11, 12), Joel addressed the nation's farmers. These people, obviously, suffered because the locusts had ruined any hope they had for harvesting their crops. Tragically, it appears from verse 12 (as well as other parts of the book) that the locust destruction was compounded by a drought. The farmers were in a tough spot for certain.

Joel saw a parallel between what had happened to the crops and the plague's effect upon the hearts of the people. The same Hebrew term is used in verse 12 to refer to the drying up of the vines, the trees, and "the joy of mankind."

Locust plagues are not a problem for most of us today. Yet all of us know what it's like to have disaster suddenly invade our lives. At such times we may as well admit that our joy has taken a blow. But as we continue to study the Book of Joel, we'll learn that God can use disasters in our lives to help rebuild our relationship with Him.

Ask Yourself . . . Could any of my present circumstances be God's way of getting my attention?



Priestly and Public Repentance (1:13-20)

**Declare a holy fast;
call a sacred assembly.**

Summon the elders

**and all who live in the land
to the house of the LORD your God,
and cry out to the LORD.**

—Joel 1:14

In Joel's view the locust plague was no ordinary disaster, and it called for no ordinary response from the people. He thought the whole nation should join in appealing to God for mercy.

It was only proper for the religious leaders to take the lead in turning the nation back to God. So Joel called on the priests to show the traditional signs of mourning over the destruction God had seen fit to allow (vs. 13). This meant wearing sackcloth and wailing loudly. It was unusual for a person to wear sackcloth overnight, but Joel considered that measure appropriate in this case. After all, the locust plague had interrupted the supply of goods needed for temple worship. Not to have the means of making the appointed sacrifices for sin—what a terrible thought to a religious Israelite!

The Old Testament sacrificial system is no longer needed because faith in Christ is the means for the forgiveness of sins. And yet Chris-

SACKCLOTH

Sackcloth is a dark-colored fabric made from goat's or camel's hair. It is cheap, durable, and scratchy. People in the ancient Near East often used it for their everyday clothing, both outer garments and undergarments. However, they also wore it sometimes for symbolic reasons, such as to express grief, humility, repentance, or need. Twice Joel referred to the symbolic wearing of sackcloth (Joel 1:8, 13).

tians today ought to be just as concerned about regular worship as Joel was. Once in a while something comes up that keeps us away from church unavoidably; God understands. But skipping church deliberately—that's another matter. We should strive for regular attendance at worship services.

Ask Yourself . . . How faithful am I in attending worship services?

The Israelites had a calendar of regular religious holidays. For significant occasions, however, they sometimes held a special, onetime religious service. The people would drop their work and gather at the huge platform in Jerusalem where the temple was located.

Joel believed that the locusts' destruction rated such a special assembly, and he urged the priests to set it up (vs. 14). Their personal signs of mourning were not enough; they should bring in all the people to fast and pray. The situation involved everybody.

As if to show the people of Judah what to say at the proposed assembly, Joel offered both a lament, which is a poetic expression of unhappiness (vss. 15-18), and a prayer (vss. 19, 20).

The destruction by the locust plague evidently made Joel think that the day of the Lord was coming soon with destruction for the ungodly (vs. 15). Whether Joel meant a provisional day of the Lord (that is, a time of divine judgment) or the ultimate day of the Lord scheduled for the end times is not clear. But it is clear that if the people of Judah continued in their sins, they would be earning God's wrath.

In his lament Joel returned to a description of the effects caused by the locust plague (vss. 16-18). The plague meant that food was unavailable, either for eating or for sacrificing. The whole system of agriculture was in disarray because of the lost crops. The livestock were suffering from a lack of fodder and forage.

Faced with widespread tribulation, what better could one do than

seek the Lord? Joel brought before God the drought that evidently coincided with the locust plague (vss. 19, 20). The land looked like a fire had burnt it. Only God could bring relief in a situation so desperate.

Ask Yourself . . . Do hardships in my life generally make me turn to God, or do they more often cause me to turn away from Him?

The Day of the LORD

The day of the Lord is a common theme in Old Testament prophecy. The prophets described this day as a time when God will act decisively in history, bringing judgment on His foes. Some of the prophets went no further than to say that this judgment is for wicked Gentiles. But others, including Joel, indicated that God's judgment will take in Israelites who oppose Him.

The New Testament teaches that while the day of the Lord will be terrible for those who refuse to believe in Jesus Christ, it will be wonderful for those who have given their lives to Him.

C Day of the Lord (2:1-11)

**Blow the trumpet in Zion;
sound the alarm on my holy hill.
Let all who live in the land
tremble,
for the day of the LORD is coming.**
—Joel 2:1a

Earlier, Joel had warned about the coming day of the Lord (1:15). In this section he described in much greater detail this day of the Lord (2:1-11). In this day of the Lord a great army would advance against Jerusalem.

The interpretation of this section of Joel is not easy. Was Joel describing a plague of locusts in terms of an army? Or was he describing an army in terms of a locust plague?

Bible scholars have suggested that Joel may have been talking about

- (1) the past plague of locusts;
- (2) a future plague of locusts;
- (3) a future military invasion by enemies, perhaps the Assyrians;
- (4) the ultimate day of the Lord, which will occur in the end times; or
- (5) some combination of the above.

Verses 1-11 fall into four stanzas. The first stanza (vss. 1, 2) announces the day of the Lord in which an army would appear. The other three stanzas (vss. 3-5, 6-9, and 10, 11) describe the army's approach and what that approach would involve.

In Joel's day watchmen on city walls used a ram's or bull's horn to warn of coming danger, such as the

appearance of a hostile army on the horizon. Joel declared in the first stanza (vss. 1, 2) that it was time for an alarm to be sounded in "Zion" (Jerusalem) to announce that a day of the Lord was coming. That alarm would strike fear in many hearts.

Joel imagined the day of the Lord as a dark day. Perhaps he was remembering how the locust swarm had darkened the sky. Here, however, the darkness symbolizes tribulation and judgment.

As the people of Jerusalem would look at the army massing against them, the troops would appear to spread out over the land like the dawn spreads across the eastern sky. This army would be big.

In the second stanza (vss. 3-5) the army is described as being surrounded by fire. Judah was like the Garden of Eden, but the army would make it like a desert. The advancing army would destroy everything in its path.

The third stanza (vss. 6-9) describes the fear that the army would inspire in the people of Jerusalem. With perfect military precision, the invading army would run right over the defenders and enter the city.

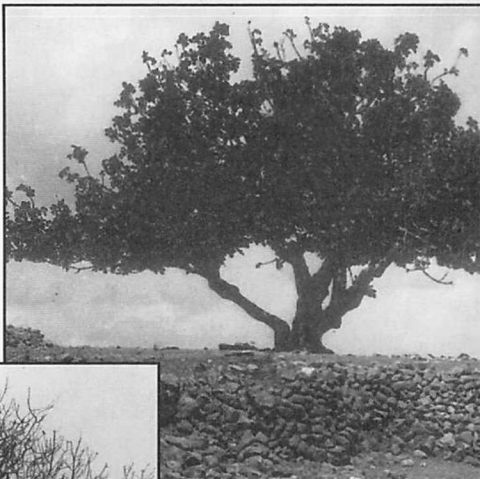
Symbolically, the fourth stanza (vss. 10, 11) describes the army as disturbing the heavens and the earth. Such imagery is common in the Bible's apocalyptic [uh-

POCK-uh-LIP-tick] passages, which describe events of the end times.

This stanza also reveals who would be commander in chief of the army: the Lord. In other words, God willed the destruction that the army would cause. It would be His means of judgment.

Joel concluded this section with a probing question about the dreadful day of the Lord: "Who can endure it?" (vs. 11). The answer is this: Anybody who trusts in God's way of deliverance can endure the future day of the Lord.

Ask Yourself . . . Am I trusting in anything other than Christ to preserve me?



The same fig tree before and after the locust plague that infested Palestine in 1915.



Authentic National Repentance (2:12-17)

**Rend your heart
and not your garments.
Return to the LORD your God,
for he is gracious and compas-
sionate,
slow to anger and abounding in
love,
and he relents from sending
calamity.**

—Joel 2:13

Those who listened with a sensitive spirit to Joel's prophecy of a coming day of the Lord would have wondered if they could somehow escape judgment. So Joel told the people what they ought to do if they wanted to receive God's mercy. They should truly repent (vss. 12-14) and they should gather for a service of supplication to God (vss. 15-17).

This section of the book begins with a direct appeal from the Lord for the people to repent wholeheartedly (vs. 12). It was their sins that had earned God's wrath. Thus repenting of those sins was their only way out of judgment. And they should show their repentance with the traditional signs of fasting, weeping, and mourning.

While God looks for proof of repentance, He is not fooled by signs exhibited apart from a real change of heart. So Joel warned that repentance must be genuine. The tearing of clothes was another traditional sign of repentance, but Joel said,

"Rend your heart and not your garments" (vs. 13).

The tearing of garments has gone out of fashion, but hypocritical repentance is a continual favorite of sinful people. We like our pet sins, we don't like being humiliated; consequently, it's tempting for us to say we're sorry for our sins while all along we have no intention of changing our behavior. That's why we need to know that God sees through our pretenses and still demands true repentance when people break His moral laws.

Ask Yourself . . . Lately, have I pretended to repent while in fact not being willing to turn from my sins?

Joel went on to remind the people of God's mercy, patience, love, and willingness to withhold punishment. Because of these characteristics, God might respond to genuine repentance on the part of the people by preventing judgment. In that case, God might show His intention by leaving behind a "blessing"

(vs. 14): He might renew the supplies of agricultural products to the temple so that grain and drink offerings could again be offered.

The next stanza (vss. 15-17) returns to the idea that the people of Judah ought to hold a special assembly (see 1:14).

Previously, Joel had called for a trumpet to be blown in Jerusalem as a call to arms (2:1). Here he called for a trumpet to be blown again (vs. 15), but this time as a call to worship. The people were to gather for

a special assembly of fasting and prayer.

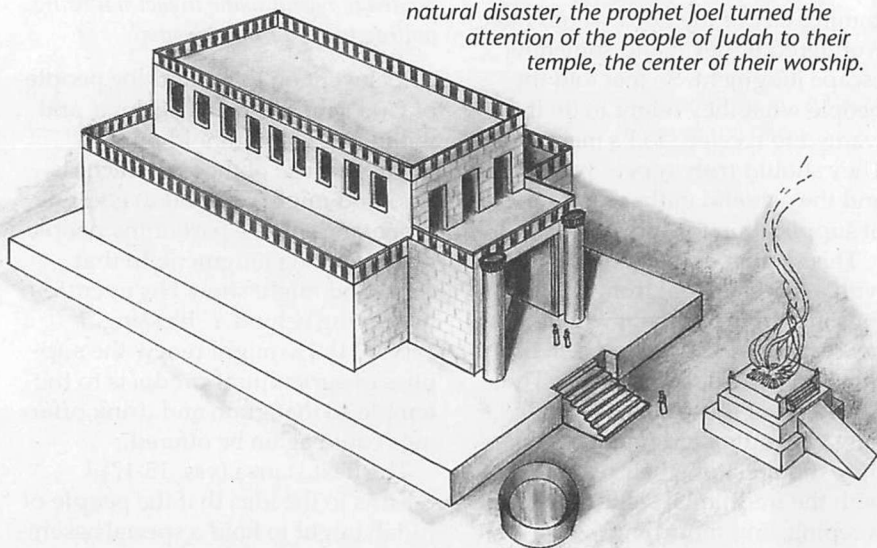
No one ought to miss the assembly. Everyone in Judah from the oldest to the youngest ought to attend. Even newlyweds should interrupt their honeymoon to join the solemn assembly.

The worship at this assembly would be led by the priests. They were to take up a position between the porch of the temple and the altar—presumably a customary spot

for priests when ministering. There they were to weep for the nation's sins.

Joel even told the priests what they ought to pray. The priests should ask God for deliverance—not because the people deserved such consideration, but for the sake of God's own glory. If God let the threatened punishment against Judah go through, then other peoples would no doubt look down on His people and doubt His power.

This is an artist's representation of Solomon's temple, which existed from about 960 to 586 B.C. In the face of a natural disaster, the prophet Joel turned the attention of the people of Judah to their temple, the center of their worship.



2

The Lord's Promises to His People

Joel 2:18—3:21

a Promises of Restoration (2:18-27)

I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten—
the great locust and the young locust,
the other locusts and the locust swarm—
my great army that I sent among you.

—Joel 2:25

In the first half of his book, Joel described a locust plague as well as a coming judgment against Judah that might be prevented through repentance. At the beginning of the book's second half, Joel described what would happen if the people did in fact repent (vss. 18-27). Then he went on to describe blessings reserved for the messianic era (vss. 28-32). He also described the handing out of punishment to the wicked and blessings to the righteous in the end times (chap. 3).

The first stanza of poetry in this week's passages starts off with a promise from Joel: "Then the LORD

will be jealous for his land and take pity on his people" (2:18). The "then" means "once the people have returned to the Lord in their hearts and have assembled to ask for deliverance" (see vss. 12-17). At that time, God would act on His love for His people and show them compassion.

After the people spoke to God in prayer, He spoke to them. His reply appears in verses 19 and 20.

God made promises to the Judahites. First, He would restore in abundance the agricultural products that the locusts had destroyed (vs. 19a; compare 1:10). Second, He would no longer subject them to humiliation before their neighbors (2:19b; compare vs. 17). Third, God would drive "the northern army" (vs. 20a) into desert areas, the "eastern sea" (Dead Sea), and the "western sea" (Mediterranean Sea)—places where the stench from the soldiers' rotting carcasses would rise.

When it comes to the "northern army," some scholars think Joel was talking about a literal army. These scholars point out that while locusts usually entered Judah from the south or east, armies usually entered from the north. However, other scholars believe that Joel was using

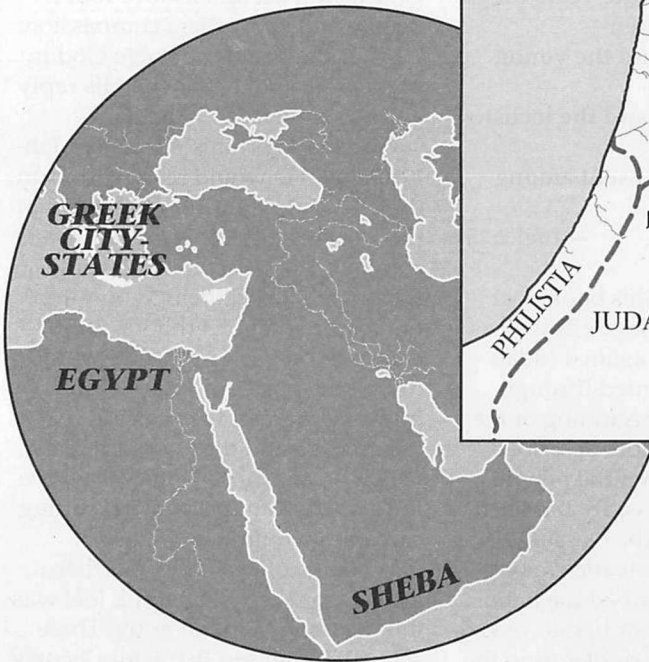
military imagery to describe locusts.

The second stanza, made up of verses 20b through 24 (or in some translations, vss. 21-24), addresses the land and the animals of Judah, as well as the people of Jerusalem. All three (land, animals, people) had been endangered by the locust plague, and all three would benefit from God's reversal of the situation. Thus Joel told all three that joy and not fear would be their appropriate attitude when God fulfilled His promises to repentant Judah.

The land had been devastated by locusts and by drought. But God

when there was no drought, Judah had two rainy seasons—spring and fall. God would restore the regular pattern of rainfall.

In the third stanza of this section (vss. 25-27), we again hear the Lord speaking. He promised to repay the people of Judah for all they had



lost in the locust plague. Instead of famine, plenty. Instead of laments, praise. Instead

would restore the land, upon which both animals and people depended, by sending rains. In normal years,

of shame, glory.

Probably the greatest thing to come out of this reversal of fortune

would be the people's renewed confidence in God. Because of all God would do for them, they would have new evidence that their God is the one true God and that He cares for His people.

Ask Yourself . . . Is there "locust damage" in my life that I need God to repair?

This section of Joel can remind us that God has great blessings in store for those who repent of their sins and turn to Him. From that perspective, it's astonishing how some people stubbornly refuse to turn to God. If only they would humble themselves before Him, He would gladly give them good things (spiritual, if not material). And the best blessing of all would be their new relationship with Him.

b Promises of the Spirit and Wonders and Salvation (2:28-32)

And afterward,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your old men will dream dreams,
your young men will see visions.
—Joel 2:28

In the preceding verses God spoke to the people of Judah, telling them how He would bless them. In these

verses, God continues to speak of blessings. And yet from the one passage to the other, the perspective has changed in a big way.

That change is signaled by the words "and afterward" (vs. 28). The preceding verses spoke about blessings for people in Joel's day. But the blessings in these verses are for people in another time—the messianic era.

The New Testament quotes this passage, or parts of it, in several places (examples: Mark 13:24, 25; Acts 2:17-21; Rom. 10:13). The New Testament teaches that the Spirit is poured out on those who believe in Christ (compare Joel 2:28, 29). It teaches also that the second coming of Christ will be attended by signs on earth and in the heavens (compare vss. 30, 31). Lastly, it teaches that all who call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved (compare vs. 32).

Of course, the people of Judah in Joel's day could have no idea how the promises of blessing in verses 28 through 32 would be fulfilled. Yet hearing that a time was coming when God would do great and wonderful things must have been encouraging to them.

The first part of God's promises for the coming era was the pouring out of the Spirit (vss. 28, 29). In Joel's day, the Holy Spirit came upon some people. In the coming era, however, God's Spirit would be given to all God's people, regardless of gender, age, or social position.

Ask Yourself . . . Since God gives His Spirit to all types of people, am I able to look beyond differences to see other believers as my spiritual brothers and sisters?

In addition to pouring out the Spirit on all His people, God would show wonders in the heavens and on the earth in the coming age (vss. 30, 31).

The wonders on the earth would include "blood and fire and billows of smoke" (vs. 30). Perhaps this refers to a climactic battle in the end times.

The wonders in the heavens include the darkening of the sun and the reddening of the moon (vs. 31; see Rev. 6:12). Possibly this refers to the way those heavenly bodies appear when seen through a cloud of smoke or dust. If so, then this

may be another indication that the destruction of war will take place "before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Joel 2:31).

The day of the Lord will not be dreadful for all; some will find a source of security in that day. Those who worship the Lord will have a safe haven "in Jerusalem" (vs. 32). By God's grace they will survive the hardship.

In a broader sense as well, all who call on the name of the Lord are saved. Not only will believers be saved from judgment at the day of the Lord, but also believers in every generation are saved from God's wrath—the consequence of their sin. By acknowledging Jesus as Lord and trusting in Him, sinners can find His loving salvation.



The Holy Spirit In the Old Testament Era

While the Old Testament mentions the Spirit of God frequently, it tells little about people possessing the Spirit. The Old Testament does, however, reveal that those who experienced the Spirit in that era included rulers such as elders (Num. 11:25), judges (Judg. 3:10), and kings (I Sam. 16:13). Prophets also experienced the Spirit (Ezek. 2:2). In at least one case, a craftsman experienced God's Spirit (Exod. 31:3). The Holy Spirit was sometimes withdrawn from people (I Sam. 16:14).

Taking all the evidence into consideration, the impression conveyed is that the Spirit mainly came upon selected individuals for specific jobs in the Old Testament era. However, Old Testament prophets entertained a lively hope that a time was coming when God's Spirit would be given out more broadly (Isa. 32:15; 59:21; Joel 2:28, 29). That hope was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (John 14:16; Acts 2:14-21).

C Judgment in the Valley (3:1-16)

**I will gather all nations
and bring them down to the
Valley of Jehoshaphat.
There I will enter into judgment
against them
concerning my inheritance, my
people Israel,
for they scattered my people
among the nations
and divided up my land.
—Joel 3:2**

In contrast to those who will be saved on the day of the Lord, Joel mentioned others who will be judged. Verses 1 through 16 present a scene in which God gathers the people who have opposed His people, and punishes them. In describing this scene, Joel was (for the most part) looking forward to a far distant time—a time that still lies in the future.

The first stanza (vss. 1-3) in this section contains God's intention to gather the Gentile nations in a valley. There He will act as a judge against them. The Gentiles' crimes will be scattering God's people, dividing up the promised land, and treating the people as objects. This is how successful invaders, such as the Assyrians and the Babylonians, typically behaved in the ancient world.

In the NIV, verses 4 through 8 of chapter 3 make up the only prose section of the Book of Joel (except

for the book's heading). These verses temporarily leave the topic of God's judgment on the unbelieving nations in the end times. Yet these verses fit where they are because they are concerned with foreigners committing crimes against Judahites and with God's judgment on those foreigners.

In these verses God addressed the people living in coastal areas—the Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon and the territory of Philistia. God accused these people of having looted the Jerusalem temple and having sold Judahites as slaves to the Greeks. Scripture attests that such crimes did go on at various times in history (Judg. 13:1; I Sam. 5:1; II Chron. 21:16, 17; Ezek. 25:15; 27:13; 28:20-24; Amos 1:6).

God was not only prosecutor but also judge. He sentenced the offenders to an appropriate punishment: they who had sold Judahites to a faraway place (Greece) would themselves be sold by Judahites to a faraway place (Sabea, or Sheba, in southern Arabia). Historical reports show that the people of Sidon were sold into slavery by Antiochus III about 345 B.C., while the citizens of Tyre and Gaza were enslaved by Alexander the Great about 332 B.C. Jews might easily have been among the slave buyers on those two occasions.

With verse 9 the poetry resumes, and so apparently does the subject of God's end-time judgment on the nations.

The stanza comprised of verses 9 through 11 constitutes a call to arms.

Ordinarily, God would make such a call to His own people. But in this case, ironically, He will make the call to His enemies. They are to face Him in battle, even though they do not stand a chance against Him.

God's call to arms will take in all His enemies. He will muster not only the professional fighting men (vs. 9), but also farmers and weaklings (vs. 10). Everyone is to assemble in the valley of judgment (vs. 11).

The last line of verse 11 is another kind of call—this time for God to muster His heavenly warriors, the angels, to join Him for the upcoming battle.

Verses 12 and 13, the next stanza, tell us what will happen once God's enemies are assembled. God will sit in judgment against them and He will cut them down like grain, trample them like grapes. This will

be just treatment for all their wrongdoings.

In this section's final stanza, we hear more about the judgment in the valley. In verse 14, we find out that the number of people involved is great and that the judgment is drawing near. In verses 15 and 16a, we hear that on that day there will be signs—namely, darkness, noise, and shaking—on earth and in the heavens. Finally, in verse 16b, we have an assurance that God's people will not be included in the punishment to come.

In our day, even many people who do not have saving faith believe that God and heaven exist. Fewer believe in a coming judgment. These people evidently think (or hope) that after death, their sins will just be overlooked. Yet Joel and the other biblical writers remind us of a time when all people will be gathered in one place for judgment. The only way for us or for anyone to escape future judgment at the hands of God is to trust in Christ.

A view of modern Jerusalem, with the Kidron Valley in the foreground. Traditionally, the "Valley of Jehoshaphat" (Joel 3:2) and "valley of decision" (vs. 14) are identified with the portion of the Kidron Valley between the temple mount and the Mount of Olives.

Ask Yourself . . . Is there someone I know who needs to hear the Gospel message?



The Valley of JEHOSHAPHAT

The location of the Valley of Jehoshaphat is not known for certain. Since the name *Jehoshaphat* means "the Lord judges," an appropriate paraphrase of the "Valley of Jehoshaphat" (Joel 3:2) may be, simply, the "valley where God will conduct judgment." However, it's possible that the Valley of Jehoshaphat is a real place that was named after the Judahite King Jehoshaphat, who reigned from about 873 to 848 B.C.

On the assumption that Joel had a specific valley in mind when he spoke of the Valley of Jehoshaphat, several identifications of the site have been suggested. The traditional identification is the Kidron Valley, which lies east of Jerusalem. Another possible identification is the Hinnom Valley, which lies south of Jerusalem. Another possibility is the valley spoken of as created by the splitting of the Mount of Olives in the end times (Zech. 14:4).

d Final Promises (3:17-21)

In that day the mountains will drip
new wine
and the hills will flow with milk;
all the ravines of Judah will run
with water.

—Joel 3:18

Joel's prophecy ends with a crescendo of promises from God. These promises, emphasizing the blessing in store for God's people, echo many things said in earlier parts of the book.

In the end times, when God has executed His judgment on the unbelieving nations, the people will know that God dwells among them. He will make them holy and protect them (vs. 17; compare 2:27).

The plague of locusts had ruined the crops and a drought had dried up the land, but in the end times, Judah will become a lush, well-watered country (3:18). Poetically, Joel described the land as running with not only water but also wine and milk.

The source of all this blessing is the Lord, from whose house (temple) a fountain will flow. This fountain will water a "valley of acacias." Perhaps Joel had in mind the southern part of the Kidron Valley, where even today acacia trees grow. Since acacias are known for growing in dry places, this detail shows that a previously dry place will become well watered.



ZION

The original meaning of the word Zion is thought to have been "fortress." It was the name of the citadel at Jebus, captured by David and renamed the City of David (II Sam. 5:7). When the temple was built north of the City of David, the temple mount was considered part of Zion, too (Ps. 9:11). Eventually Zion was considered an alternate name for the whole of Jerusalem (Mic. 3:12). Sometimes Zion was used to designate God's people (Zech. 2:7).

In the New Testament the term Zion occurs mostly in Old Testament quotations and is used in all the senses described above. But for Christians, Mount Zion is also "the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God" (Heb. 12:22).

Yet while Judah becomes well watered, the other nations will become like empty deserts (vs. 19). These nations are represented by Edom and Egypt, who did violence and shed blood in Judah. Both of these countries were neighbors, and frequently enemies, of Judah.

Unlike those countries, which will become emptied of people, "Judah will be inhabited forever and Jerusalem through all generations" (vs. 20). No longer will invaders carry the people off as captives or sell them as slaves.

The opening part of verse 21 in the NIV reads "Their bloodguilt, which I have not pardoned, I will pardon." If this translation is correct, it refers to forgiveness of the Judahites' sin. However, other translations suggest that the original words mean God will avenge the blood of the Judahites that had been spilled.

While Joel's original readers would not live to see all the prophecies in Joel 3 come true, they nevertheless could take comfort because "The Lord dwells in Zion!" Whatever their troubles and failings may have been, by trusting in the Lord, they could know that they would be all right in the end.

Similarly, we may have to wait a long time before Christ returns to usher in an era of justice and security for His people. But if He dwells in our hearts, we can be at peace as we wait for that day.

Ask Yourself . . . Does the Lord dwell in my heart?

3

Jonah Disobeys His First Commission

Jonah 1—2

a Jonah Takes to the Sea (1:1-10)

The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me."

But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish.
—Jonah 1:1-3a

The Book of Jonah opens by introducing its chief character: Jonah the son of Amittai. According to II Kings 14:25, Jonah lived in the northern kingdom of Israel and prophesied there during the reign of Jeroboam II (about 793–753 B.C.). This book, however, is concerned with an unusual job that God had for Jonah outside Israel. God commissioned the prophet this way: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me" (Jonah 1:2).

Some of the terms in the commission deserve special attention. First, "great city" probably means "important city" or "leading city." Nineveh

was in fact sometimes a capital of the mighty Assyrian Empire. Second, "preach against" in effect means "warn." Later, the prophet's warning to the Ninevites would take this form: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned" (3:4). Third, in the Bible the word translated "wickedness" (1:2) usually occurs in contexts that deal with abuse, exploitation, and immorality. Probably, therefore, those things were going on in Nineveh.

As far as we know from the Bible, Jonah was the only true prophet who disobeyed a direct commission from God to prophesy. Jonah "ran away from the LORD" (vs. 3).

Why did he do that? We can make a good guess.

When Jonah heard that God wanted him to warn Nineveh, he realized this implied that God might show mercy to the Assyrians. This thought horrified Jonah (see 4:1, 2). After all, Assyria was Israel's enemy. Although Assyria was currently in a period of decline, it was still a threat. Jonah remembered all the harm that Assyria had done to Israel and Israel's neighbors in the past. Jonah did not want to preach in Nineveh because he did not want

the Assyrians to repent and be forgiven.

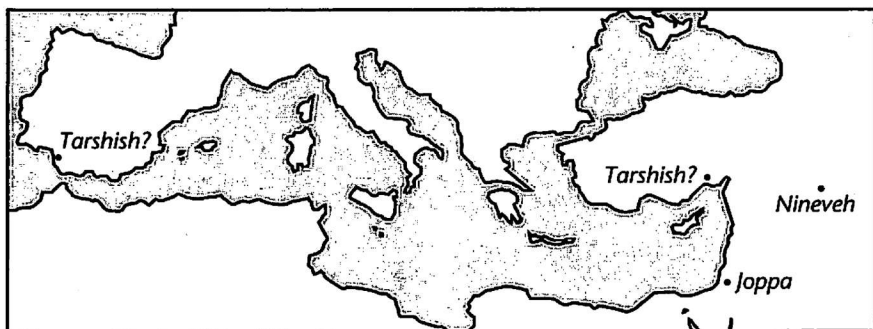
Ask Yourself . . . Is there anybody in my life whom I would rather see suffer God's wrath than receive God's mercy? How can I achieve a more Christlike attitude?

Three times the Book of Jonah tells us that Jonah tried to run away from the Lord (twice in 1:3, once in vs. 10). Despite this emphasis, Jonah probably did not really think he could get away from God. After all, Scriptures existing in his time taught that God is present everywhere (example: Ps. 139). Later, Jonah showed himself familiar with this concept (Jonah 1:9). So probably Jonah was trying to get away from the command God had given him. He must have thought, *Let somebody else have the dirty job of preaching to the Assyrians!*

Since Nineveh lay to the east, Jonah fled to the west. His plan

was to go to Tarshish, the location of which is not known for certain. Scholars have identified it with the cities of Tarsus (now in southern Turkey) and Tartessus (now in southwest Spain), among other places. But whatever the true location, Jonah meant to get far away from Israel by crossing the Mediterranean Sea. He took passage on a ship at the port of Joppa (today's Jaffa, Israel).

Few of us will take to the sea to escape from God. Yet there are many other ways we may try to run away from Him and His demands on our lives. We may become absorbed in our work or our leisure activities. We may turn to artificial stimulants and depressants. We may even use the bustle and noise of church activities to drown out the still, small voice of God. But all such attempts are as futile as Jonah's flight would turn out to be. God is always waiting for us to do His will, and it would be better for us to submit to Him sooner rather than later.



When the prophet Jonah ran away from the Lord, he "headed for Tarshish" (Jonah 1:3). Tarshish is frequently mentioned in Scripture, yet Bible scholars are not sure where it was located.

Ask Yourself . . . In what ways, if at all, do I try to run away from God?

As land faded into the distance, Jonah found a place to lie down in the vessel. Shortly, he "fell into a deep sleep" (vs. 5). Perhaps Jonah thought that he had accomplished his purpose, that he had evaded God. But as a matter of fact, God was just getting ready to capture Jonah's attention.

The Lord sent a "great wind" and a "violent storm" (vs. 4). So rough were the seas that the ship was in danger of breaking up. To lighten the ship, the crew was willing to sacrifice the cargo that would have made their voyage profitable. Though they were experienced sailors, they were terrified at the possibility of shipwreck the storm presented.

We don't know the nationality of the ship's crew, but they were obviously polytheists (worshippers of many gods). While the Israelite religion proclaimed only one God, other religions had a variety of personal, family, and national gods. So Jonah's sailing companions began appealing to their gods for salvation from the storm (vs. 5). Having wakened Jonah, the captain urged him to do the same with his God (vs. 6). The captain must have figured that the more deities called on, the greater the likelihood that one of them would come through.

But praying didn't work; the storm got worse. The sailors would have to try another approach to save their skins.

In the ancient world, natural disasters were commonly assumed to mean that God was displeased with someone. The sailors in Jonah's ship made the same assumption (vs. 7), and in this case, they were right. They turned to divination (the attempt to learn truths or see into the future) to find out who the guilty party was. They cast lots, which probably worked something like playing dice.

The way the lots fell, they indicated that Jonah was the cause of the storm. At this, the sailors fell to interrogating the Israelite prophet about what he knew and who he was (vs. 8).

Jonah responded by saying that he was a Hebrew and that he worshiped "the Lord [that is, *Yahweh*], the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land" (vs. 9). This shows that Jonah held the belief that *Yahweh* was not one god among many, like the false gods worshiped by the sailors. Instead, *Yahweh* is the one true God of all the world.

Hearing this, the sailors were frightened (vs. 10). In disbelief, they cried, "What have you done?" Jonah had already told them that he was running away from the God he worshiped. It terrified them, therefore, to think that Jonah had the gall to disobey a God as powerful as the one he had described.

The polytheistic sailors recognized more clearly than Jonah himself the folly of Jonah's rebellion against God.

b Jonah Is Thrown Overboard (1:11-17)

They took Jonah and threw him overboard, and the raging sea grew calm. . . . But the LORD provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights.

—Jonah 1:15, 17

Now the truth was known: Jonah was the cause of the storm that threatened the ship he was in. But the storm was getting still worse; something had to be done, and quickly.

Not sure what course to take, the sailors asked Jonah for advice. It appears by the way they phrased their question, however, that they may have had in mind the same action Jonah recommended. They asked, "What should we do to you?"

This Phoenician trading vessel was carved on a stone coffin in the Phoenician city of Tyre about the second or first century B.C. Since the Phoenicians were recognized as the greatest sailors in the Mediterranean area for many centuries, the ship Jonah sailed in may have been one of theirs.

SHIPS of Tarshish

The Bible does not tell us what kind of ship Jonah boarded in Joppa. It may, however, have been one of the "ships of Tarshish" that are frequently mentioned in the Old Testament (example: Ps. 48:7). The name of these ships does not mean that they were all built in Tarshish, any more than all "China clippers" were built in China. Some scholars have suggested that the word Tarshish comes from a term used in the ancient mining industry. If so, the term "ships of Tarshish" may originally have meant "ore ships." Reports indicate that the ships of Tarshish were large merchant vessels capable of transporting heavy cargoes.



(vs. 11). He replied, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea" (vs. 12).

At this point, Jonah probably shared with the sailors the belief that God is a vengeful being who would be satisfied only with the death of the man who had dared defy Him. They all thought God had cooked up the storm to kill Jonah, and that if He didn't destroy Jonah on His own, He would destroy the whole ship to get at him. Thus Jonah had to sacrifice himself for the preservation of the rest.

While the wish to save his traveling companions probably played a large part in Jonah's offering to be thrown overboard, he may have had other motivations as well. Perhaps he felt that justice would be served only if he died. Perhaps he was depressed and looked forward to a quick end. Perhaps he would rather die than obey God and preach to the Ninevites.

The sailors were at first unwilling to do as Jonah had suggested. They didn't want to make a mistake. If Jonah drowned and he was innocent, then God might do worse to them than He was already doing by tossing them about in a storm.

So the sailors kept Jonah's plan in the back of their mind for the time being and took less drastic action. Evidently the ship had not gotten far from land, because the sailors tried to row it to shore (vs. 13). The ship would have been equipped with oars and sails, but of course the sails could not be used in the gales of a storm.

The sailors pulled on the oars till

their energy was spent, but to no avail. The waves were getting wilder. There was no hope of reaching land by rowing, or at least not until the weather moderated.

Finally, the crew decided to go back to their earlier option: they had to throw Jonah overboard. But before doing so, they prayed that God would not kill them if they drowned an innocent man. They had no choice in the matter, they said, because God had sent the storm (vs. 14). The sailors were still frightened of Jonah's God.

Over the side went the prophet, and disappeared beneath the waves (vs. 15).

The sailors need not have been afraid; they had done the appropriate thing. After Jonah went overboard, the sea grew calm, the storm was over. Now the sailors "feared" the Lord in the sense that they were awed by His power (vs. 16). Their own gods were incapable of doing anything, yet they had seen Jonah's God raise up a storm and calm it down.

The crew "offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows to him." Possibly this happened later, once the ship had landed and the men had made their way to an Israelite town, if not to the Jerusalem temple itself.

But what of Jonah? It turns out that the sailors had not seen the only miracle performed by the Lord that day. In addition to calming the storm, God "provided a great fish to swallow Jonah" (vs. 17). With no fanfare, the book's writer records the

extraordinary occurrence of Jonah's lodging inside a large sea creature (we don't know what kind) for three days and nights.

The fish saved Jonah from drowning. Contrary to what the sailors thought, God's intention had never been to destroy Jonah. He wanted to preserve Jonah and to teach Jonah obedience. That's why Jonah had to go overboard, and that's why for three days Jonah had a fish's belly for his home.

When Christians sin, God does not want to destroy us. He may permit hard times to enter our lives, but He hopes that we will respond to hardships by looking to Him. He hopes that we will recognize our sins and repent of them. Then He will surely show us mercies—in this life and in the life to come.

Ask Yourself . . . What times can I recall when God's mercy was very apparent in my life?



Jonah's Prayer (2:1-10)

**When my life was ebbing away,
I remembered you, LORD,
and my prayer rose to you,
to your holy temple.**

—Jonah 2:7

When Jonah was flung into the raging sea and sank beneath the surface, he passed through a spiri-

tual crisis. He had been trying to run away from the Lord, but now he realized that his only hope for deliverance lay in turning back to the Lord.

In the large fish that swallowed Jonah, he felt proper gratitude to God (vs. 1). His prayer, in poetic form, is contained in verses 2 through 9.

Students of the Bible have often noticed that expressions in Jonah's prayer resemble expressions in the Psalms (for example, compare Jonah 2:2 and Ps. 18:6). This suggests that Jonah was familiar with psalms used in worship in his day. It was natural for him to construct his own prayer in the terms he was used to. This in no way suggests that his prayer was less than heartfelt.

Ask Yourself . . . Do I know God's Word well enough to draw on it as a source of comfort when I am in trouble?

Verses 2 through 7 look back at that brief period of time when Jonah was plunging deeper and deeper into the waters of the Mediterranean Sea. Verse 2 is an introductory summary for these verses. Essentially, what happened was that when Jonah was in the water ("my distress," "the depths of the grave"), he called to God for help and God answered that prayer.

Verses 3 through 7 contain vivid descriptions of what it was like physically for Jonah to be in the water. By God's will, Jonah found himself in "the very heart of the seas" (vs. 3) with the "currents"

swirling about him and the "waves and breakers" sweeping over him. He was threatened by "engulfing waters" (vs. 5), surrounded by "the deep," and entangled with "sea-weed." He sank toward the sea bottom, or "roots of the mountains" (vs. 6), and felt barred in by "the earth." His life was "ebbing away" (vs. 7).

These verses also describe what it was like spiritually for Jonah as he sank in the water. He recognized that he was far from the presence of God in Israel, and yet he had hope that he would one day return to the beloved Jerusalem temple (vs. 4). His thoughts turned to God and he prayed to God (vs. 7). So God saved

him from death (vs. 6).

When we are swamped with troubles of our own making, we do well to remember Jonah's spiritual turnaround while under water. If there is rebellion within us, it is not too late to turn to the Lord. And because the Lord is all-powerful, salvation in some unexpected form may come even at the last minute.

Ask Yourself . . . Have I ever had a spiritual experience similar to the one Jonah described in his prayer?

Verses 8 and 9 complete Jonah's prayer with a recommitment to the Lord. First, Jonah set himself apart

S

H

E

O

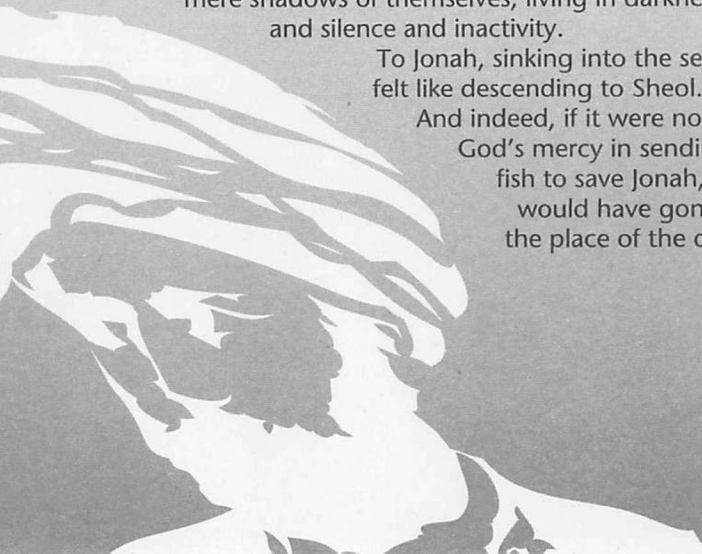
L

In his prayer from inside the fish, Jonah said, "From the depths of the grave I called for help" (Jonah 2:2). Here "grave" translates the Hebrew word Sheol. This word referred to the place of the dead.

The Israelites (as well as other ancient peoples) evidently believed that the dead occupy a gloomy underworld place: Sheol. They believed that in Sheol the dead are mere shadows of themselves, living in darkness and silence and inactivity.

To Jonah, sinking into the sea felt like descending to Sheol.

And indeed, if it were not for God's mercy in sending a fish to save Jonah, he would have gone to the place of the dead.



from idol worshipers, who forfeited God's grace (vs. 8). He worshiped the true God and had been saved by this God. Therefore, he vowed to offer sacrifices and sing a song of thanksgiving to God (vs. 9).

The last line of Jonah's prayer proclaims, "Salvation comes from the LORD." Jonah gladly accepted that truth as it applied to him. Salvation had come to him from the Lord when he had been rescued from a drowning death. But would Jonah

accept the truth when it was applied to the Ninevites? That's what we'll find out in next week's lesson.

Ask Yourself . . . Do experiences of God's grace in my life generally make me more caring about other people?

At the end of three days, the fish, at God's command, cast Jonah out onto dry land (vs. 10). We can only imagine the prophet's feelings of relief, amazement, and thankfulness.

4

Jonah Obeys His Second Commission

Jonah 3—4

a Jonah Goes to Nineveh (3:1-5)

The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."

Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh.

—Jonah 3:1-3a

God graciously gave Jonah a second chance. After the prophet's escape from the belly of a fish, God commanded him a second time to go to Nineveh and preach. This time Jonah obeyed, but as we'll see, his heart was not really in it.

The wording of Jonah's second commission is virtually identical with that of the first. God said, "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you" (3:2; compare 1:2). The last part of that command could also be translated "the message I gave you" or "the message I will give you" (3:2). But whichever translation is best, the emphasis is on the divine origin of the message Jonah would proclaim.

The second time around, Jonah

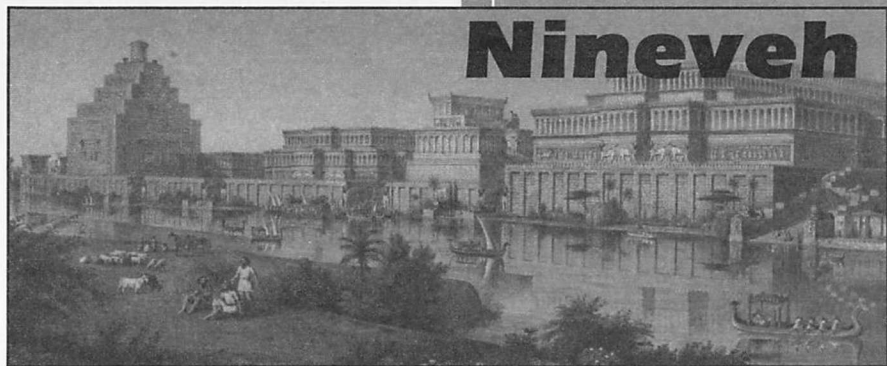
reacted differently to God's command. The first time, Jonah had reacted by boarding a ship and heading in the opposite direction from Nineveh. But this time, "Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh" (vs. 3).

God still likes to give His wayward people a second chance. If we repent after going astray, we will find that He is yet calling out to us. Let us obey Him with a willing heart and with gratitude for His patient love.

Ask Yourself . . . How has God given me a second chance to do what pleases Him?

The Book of Jonah says nothing about Jonah's journey to Nineveh, which probably occupied two months or more. Jonah would have taken ancient trade routes along the Fertile Crescent that arched northward from Israel and then eastward and southward into Mesopotamia, following rivers much of the way. The book focuses not on the journey but on what happened once Jonah got to Nineveh.

Verse 3 comments on Jonah's destination this way: "Nineveh was



An artist's representation of what ancient Nineveh might have looked like.

a very important city." The Hebrew original can also be translated "Nineveh was a city important to God." The phrase could indicate God's interest in its inhabitants. Or it may simply point to Nineveh's prominence in the ancient world.

Verse 3 comments that "a visit [to Nineveh] required three days." This probably does not mean that the city was so big it would take Jonah three days to walk through it. Archaeological surveys reveal that in the eighth century B.C. Nineveh was only three miles across at its widest point.

One explanation for the biblical comment suggests that the surrounding territory was included as a part of Nineveh. In that case, three days might have been required to walk from the frontier of Nineveh's territory to the center of the city itself.

Another explanation is that protocol, not size, is in view. According to this explanation, a foreigner with a message for the city was regulated by city officials. Such a person could

According to Genesis 10:11, the city of Nineveh was founded by the hunter Nimrod. Excavations have uncovered evidence of human habitation at the site, which lies near the city of Mosul, Iraq, dating (some say) from 4500 B.C. During periods when Assyria was dominant in the Near East, the city was enlarged and enriched. Many Assyrian emperors made it their capital.

At the time of Jonah's visit (mid-eighth century B.C.), Nineveh held "more than a hundred and twenty thousand people" (Jonah 4:11). That figure agrees with archaeologists' estimate for the city's population.

In fulfillment of the prophecies of Nahum and Zephaniah (Zeph. 2:13-15), Nineveh was utterly destroyed by the Babylonians about 612 B.C.

speak publicly, but had to leave the city by the end of the third day.

As far as the meaning of the book goes, the main significance of the words "a visit required three days" is revealed by what comes in verses 4 and 5. Not even three days were needed for Jonah's message to have an effect: in just a single day the Ninevites were persuaded.

We may not know all that Jonah told the Ninevites, but we have the core of his message: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned" (vs. 4). This was the message God had said He would give to Jonah (see vs. 2).

Jonah's message to the Ninevites may seem ambiguous. Was the overturning inevitable, or did the forty days comprise a waiting period in which the Ninevites might avert the overturning? The word translated "overturned" (vs. 4) had a number of different meanings. It could refer to an overthrow, a judgment, a turning upside down, a reversal, a change, a deposing of royalty, or a change of heart. Which was it in this case?

No matter what Jonah's warning specifically meant, his hearers took it quite seriously. "The Ninevites believed God" (vs. 5). It's debatable whether this statement refers to saving faith or simply to the Ninevites' recognition that God was angry with them. Nevertheless, a religious fervor crossing all class boundaries led the Ninevites to adopt traditional signs of repentance: fasting and wearing sackcloth.

b The King Issues a Decree (3:6-10)

When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh.

—Jonah 3:6

When the Book of Jonah says that the Ninevites "from the greatest to the least" put on sackcloth (vs. 5), it really means from the greatest. Even the king got caught up in the wave of repentance sweeping through his city (or at least he found it politically advisable to lead a bandwagon that had already started to roll). We don't know if this king was ruler of the city only or ruler of the whole Assyrian Empire.

The king traded his robes of state for an uncomfortable garment of sackcloth and left his impressive throne for a humble seat in the dust. He set an example for his people.

Along with his nobles, the king issued a decree for the people of Nineveh. Presumably, this decree was read aloud in public places or was posted where the literate could read it.

The decree proclaimed a total fast (no food, no water) for people and for domestic animals. Since no person can go more than a few days without water, the king evidently wanted a short but severe fast.

Furthermore, the decree required

the people and the animals to wear sackcloth. Perhaps the king wanted the rich ornamentation on harnesses and bridles exchanged for sackcloth coverings.

To us, the inclusion of animals in the king's decree may seem bizarre. But such measures, though rare, were not unheard of in the ancient world. The historians Herodotus and Plutarch recorded that at a later date Persian mourning rites included animals.

The Ninevite king's decree called for more than the trappings

of repentance. In addition to fasting and wearing sackcloth, the people of Nineveh were to "call urgently on God" (vs. 8).

Their prayer was to be both public and earnest. Also, they were to "give up their evil ways and their violence." The term translated "evil ways" refers generally to

immoral behavior. The term translated "violence" speaks of social injustice.

Earlier, God had said that the city's wickedness had come up before Him (1:2), and now something was being done about that wickedness.

The reason the king gave for his decree was the possibility that God might yet "relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish" (3:9; compare 1:6). Clearly, the king hoped that the overturning Jonah had proclaimed (3:4) was conditional, not inevitable. Maybe with repentance and reformation on the part of the Ninevites, God's mercy might yet save the city.

The king's decree was evidently obeyed in the city, and God took notice. The Lord was particularly pleased to see that the Ninevites had "turned from their evil ways" (vs. 10). Therefore, the king's hope was well placed. God did indeed have compassion on the Ninevites. He shelved His plan to bring destruction on the city in the near future. At the end of the forty days, no judgment would take place.

The word for "repentance" used in the Book of Jonah literally means "to turn." Repentance implies that we have been moving in the wrong direction. When we turn back to God, we do so with mind, heart, and body.

Ask Yourself . . . Is there any way in which I need to follow the Ninevites' example and turn back to God?



This drawing, based on an Assyrian relief sculpture, reflects the fact that Assyrians favored elaborate and costly clothing.

Yet when Jonah preached in Nineveh, even the king replaced his royal robes with sackcloth (Jonah 3:6).



Prepared for **REPENTANCE**

The repentance of the Ninevites is remarkable by any standard. Yet it is easier to understand if we take into account factors that may have affected the Ninevites' frame of mind in the mid-eighth century B.C.—the probable time when Jonah appeared in their midst.

Political threats to Assyria's stability may have made the Ninevites uneasy about their future. Riots and rebellions cropped up around the Assyrian Empire between 772 and 758 B.C. The kingdom of Urartu took land and major cities away from the Assyrians between 760 and 750 B.C.

Natural events also occurred that would certainly have been viewed as signs of God's displeasure. A violent earthquake shook the region sometime between 772 and 755 B.C. Famine left many hungry in the years 765 to 759 B.C. A total eclipse of the sun occurred on June 15, 763 B.C.

Prepared by this combination of disasters and evil omens, the people of Nineveh could easily have been quick to believe a foreign prophet warning that God would overturn their city in 40 days.

C Jonah Becomes Angry (4:1-4)

Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. . . .

But the LORD replied, "Have you any right to be angry?"

—Jonah 4:1, 4

The Ninevites' repentance affected Jonah much differently than it affected God—it displeased Jonah greatly. God had compassion on the repentant Ninevites; He turned from His anger (3:9) when He saw them turn from their evil ways (vs. 10). But Jonah's anger was just getting started (4:1). Jonah still hated the Ninevites and still did not want them to receive divine mercy.

In chapter 4, we read about the interaction between the Lord and His prophet after the completion of Jonah's preaching tour in Nineveh.

In prayer, Jonah poured out his thoughts and feelings to the Lord. He started off by saying, in effect, "I told You so!" (see vs. 2). From the first, when God had commissioned him to go to Nineveh, Jonah had feared that the Ninevites would repent and God would spare them. That's why Jonah had made his failed attempt to go to Tarshish. He wanted nothing to do with God's showing mercy to Israel's enemy.

Jonah had known in advance what might happen in Nineveh, because he knew God's character. God is "a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant-

ing in love, a God who relents from sending calamity." In this description Jonah echoed earlier scriptural portrayals of God's forgiving nature (Exod. 34:6, 7; Num. 14:18; Neh. 9:17; Ps. 86:15; 103:8; 145:8, 9; Joel 2:13; Nah. 1:3). Jonah was pleased about God's showing forgiveness to Israel. But to Israel's enemy? No!

Jonah was so upset over the sparing of Nineveh that he asked God to take away his life. Months earlier, when he had been sinking beneath the surface of the Mediterranean Sea, he had called out to God to save his life (2:2). But now his prayer was just the opposite: he wanted death.

Hebrews 12:15 warns that bitterness defiles. Jonah is an example of that principle in action. His hatred of the Assyrians was so great that it eventually displaced his appreciation for God. By rejecting God's attributes of grace and forgiveness, Jonah was rejecting God Himself.

Ask Yourself . . . Am I allowing bitterness to destroy my ability to appreciate God and His blessings?

The Lord overlooked Jonah's momentary death wish and responded instead to his emotional state. "Have you any right to be angry?" He asked (vs. 4).

The implied answer to that question is no. Anger is not always bad, and more than one biblical character expressed anger at God. But in this case, Jonah's anger was wrong because he had no legitimate reason for it. Jonah should have accepted the fact that whatever God does is

right. Furthermore, Jonah should have had the same forgiving attitude toward the Ninevites that God had.

When we are angry, it is a good idea to ask God's question of ourselves: Do I have a right to be angry?

d God Uses an Object Lesson (4:5-11)

The LORD God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the vine. But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered

—Jonah 4:6, 7

Jonah's anger was not the kind that evaporated rapidly. His bitterness over the repentance in Nineveh was not dissolved even by the Lord's question (vs. 4). Jonah was still mad, so God would have to deal with him further.

After his visit to Nineveh, Jonah did not immediately return to Israel. He first took up temporary residence in the plain east of the city. With Nineveh in view, he constructed a hut or booth of some kind using available materials. His plan was to wait and see "what would happen to the city" (vs. 5). Evidently, Jonah still harbored some hope that God might destroy Nineveh.

Possibly Jonah had stone or clay for the walls of his shelter, but since timber was scarce in that area, he

may not have had the materials to make much of a roof. At any rate, the shelter provided some protection from the sun (vs. 5), but not enough to make him really comfortable (vs. 6). Shade is an important consideration for people living in Mesopotamia's hot climate.

Noting the situation, God "provided a vine" (vs. 6), which grew up "overnight" (vs. 10), to "ease [Jonah's] discomfort" (vs. 6). Jonah, of course, was "very happy about the vine." It was a spot of pleasure in an otherwise unpleasant time for him. He may even have interpreted the vine as a sign of God's renewed favor toward him.

Jonah's happiness was short-lived. He apparently got only one day's enjoyment out of the vine, because "at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered" (vs. 7). Later that day "God provided a scorching east wind" (vs. 8), along with the usual sunshine, so that Jonah felt faint with the heat.

The vine, the worm, and the wind were all "provided" by God (vss. 6-8), just as earlier the great fish had been "provided" (1:17). These things appeared at God's will to teach Jonah a lesson.

Faint from the sun, Jonah again began longing for death. Dying seemed better than continuing to live (4:8; compare vs. 3). And as before, the reason for Jonah's death wish was his anger, only this time he was angry

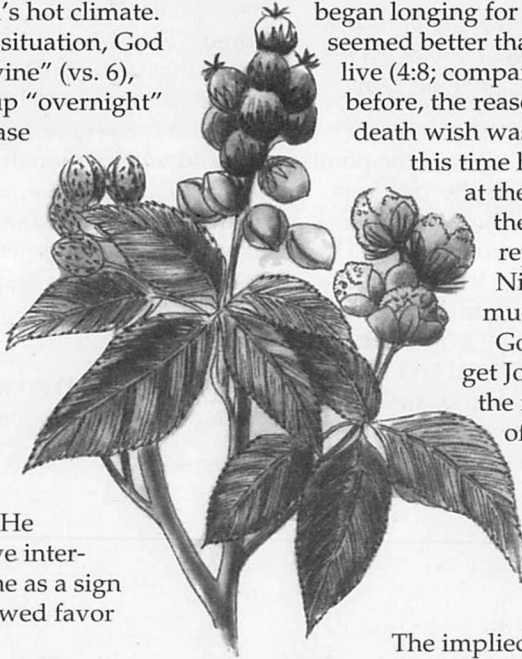
at the destruction of the vine, not at the repentance of the Ninevites he so much hated.

God again tried to get Jonah to consider the reasonableness of his anger.

"Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?" God asked (vs. 9; compare vs. 4).

The implied answer to the question, again, is no. But this time Jonah declared that he did have the right to be angry and that in fact his anger was so bad he wanted to die (vs. 9).

Aren't we often the same way? We don't like it when someone shows us that we are in the wrong. Even if we see their point, we often stick to our wrongdoing out of pride or willfulness. But if it's



The plant that shaded Jonah was possibly the castor oil plant, which puts out broad leaves and grows as tall as 12 feet high. It withers quickly if damaged.

God who is showing us where we are wrong, we'd better let our stubbornness crumble up and go away. Besides, we'll feel good about making a change once we've gone ahead and made it.

Ask Yourself . . . Do I tend to stick to my unrighteous anger or other wrongdoing even when my fault has been pointed out to me?

Jonah still hadn't gotten the point. So God showed how the vine was not the real issue. The vine was an object to teach a lesson (vss. 10, 11).

Arguing from the lesser to the greater, the Lord compared the vine to Nineveh. The vine was just a plant. It was short-lived and moreover Jonah had no responsibility for it. But the city of Nineveh, on the other hand, had a large population

of people and animals. The people could not "tell their right hand from their left" (vs. 11), meaning they needed God because they were as ignorant (morally and spiritually) as children.

Jonah was concerned about a mere plant. Therefore, God wondered, "Should I not be concerned about that great city?"

The tension raised by God's final question is never resolved. We are not told whether Jonah learned the lesson God had taken such pains to teach. Clearly, he stands as a warning to succeeding generations of the dangers created by despising God's blessings.

Ask Yourself . . . What is the chief message of the Book of Jonah for me?

5

The Lion of Zion Roars

Amos 1:1—5:17

a Judgment on Syria, Philistia, and Phoenicia (1:1-10)

**The LORD roars from Zion
and thunders from Jerusalem;
the pastures of the shepherds dry
up,
and the top of Carmel withers.
—Amos 1:2**

The Book of Amos opens with a brief heading describing who wrote it, what it's about, and when it was written (vs. 1). Amos was not a professional prophet but instead earned his living from the land. Though he lived in the southern kingdom of Judah, he received prophetic insights about the northern kingdom of Israel. He prophesied for the Lord in the first half of the eighth century B.C.

After the heading comes Amos's announcement of his main theme: judgment. In verse 2 we read that the Lord "roars [like a lion] from Zion" and "thunders [like a storm] from Jerusalem." These loud noises are signs of God's displeasure. He would pounce, like a lion, upon the

Israelites and crash, like a storm, upon them because of their sins.

At the sound of the Lord's voice, "the pastures of the shepherds dry up" (literally, "the pastures of the shepherds mourn"). Also, "the top of Carmel withers." Mount Carmel, located in Israel, was known for its rich vegetation. When God would judge Israel, He would have an effect like a devastating drought on the land.

Starting the main body of his prophecies, Amos used a clever tactic to capture his audience's attention. He did not set in immediately to declare their guilt. Instead, he began by delivering oracles (prophecies) of judgment against some of the Israelites' neighbors: the Syrians, Philistines, Phoenicians, Edomites, Ammonites, Moabites, and Judahites.

Amos's Israelite listeners would probably have been happy to think that those others were going to get what they deserved. But the smile on the Israelites' faces must have faded as Amos began to shine his spotlight closer and closer to Israel itself. In the end he would show that Israel was as surely destined for judgment as were the other nations.

The oracles follow a pattern. First, God declared why He was going to exercise His wrath upon the nation. Then He said what, specifically, He would do to them.

'For Three, Even for Four'

All eight of the judgments against nations in chapters 1 and 2 of Amos begin with the phrase "For three sins of [some place], even for four, I will not turn back my wrath" (1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6). This numerical formula is similar to others used in Hebrew poetry (examples: Job 5:19; Prov. 6:16; Mic. 5:5). It is meant to point to an unspecified number. The nations were guilty of a multitude of sins; therefore, God would judge them.

Syria. Amos's first oracle deals mainly with Damascus, capital of Syria, also called Aram (vss. 3-5). Damascus's sin: treating the people of Gilead, a region of Israel, so badly that it was as if they had driven threshing sledges over the Gileadites. In ancient times kernels were

separated from the straw and chaff by driving sledges studded with stones or iron over the grain.

It's not clear whether Amos was referring to a specific incursion by Syria into Gilead, or whether he was referring more generally to violence committed against Israelites by Syrians. During the eighth and ninth centuries B.C., the Syrians made numerous attempts to seize Israelite land, including the region of Gilead (I Kings 22:29-36; II Kings 8:28, 29; 10:32, 33; 13:3).

Amos went on to describe how Damascus would be judged (Amos 1:4, 5). Presumably, these prophecies were fulfilled about thirty years later, when the Assyrian emperor Tiglath-Pileser III captured Damascus in 732 B.C.

God would destroy by fire the "house" (palace) built by Hazael and the "fortresses" (probably a royal complex of buildings) constructed by Ben-Hadad (vs. 4). (Since the prediction of fire is repeated in seven of the eight oracles, this probably represents the destruction of warfare.) Hazael was a king of Syria (reigned about 842-796 B.C.) who had attacked Gilead. Ben-Hadad (reigned about 796-775 B.C.), Hazael's son, likewise attacked Israel.

God would also break down "the gate of Damascus" (vs. 5)—more literally, "the bar of Damascus." Cities in the ancient world used large bars made of wood, bronze, or iron to

secure a gate. If a gate's bar was broken with a battering ram, that meant the city lay open to its enemies.

Furthermore, God would destroy rulers in the "Valley of Aven" (meaning "valley of wickedness") and "Beth Eden" (meaning "house of pleasantness"). Some scholars think these names are symbolic references to Damascus. Others, however, believe they are the ancient names of other locations. The Valley of Aven has been identified with the Beqaa Valley, northwest of Damascus. Beth Eden has been linked with Bit-Adini, a city-state that was located on the banks of the Euphrates River.

The Syrians' ultimate punishment would be exile to Kir, their original homeland (see 9:7; II Kings 16:9). Kir may have been somewhere in southern Mesopotamia.

Philistia. The subject of Amos's second oracle is Gaza, along with other coastal Philistine cities (Amos 1:6-8). Gaza's sin was taking captive "whole communities"—presumably, communities of Israelites—and selling them to the Edomites (vs. 6). Scripture does not record a specific instance when that happened. However, the Bible does indicate that Philistia had ongoing border skirmishes with Israel and Judah. It's easy to imagine,

therefore, that the Philistines would round up and sell the people from an Israelite town they had captured.

The Philistines were part of a group called the Sea Peoples, probably originating from Crete or the northern Mediterranean area. Each of the five Philistine cities—Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, and Gath—was governed by its own ruler. According to the oracle, God's judgment would take in four of the five cities of Philistia. The fifth city,



Gath, may not have been mentioned because it was of little account in Amos's day (due to earlier warfare) or because it was under Judahite control.

Because of Gaza's sin of selling communities of Israelites, its "walls" and "fortresses" would be destroyed (vs. 7). Historical records indicate that Gaza fell to the Assyrians about 732 B.C., to the Egyptians about 609 B.C., and to the Babylonians a few years after that.

God would also destroy the rulers of Ashdod and Ashkelon (vs. 8). History shows that Ashdod was conquered by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar (reigned about 605–562 B.C.). Ashkelon fell to the Assyrians under Tiglath-Pileser about 732 B.C., and Ashkelon's king was deported to Syria in 701 B.C.

Finally, God would turn His hand against Ekron "till the last of the Philistines is dead." Little is presently known about the later history of Ekron, although it is reasonable to assume that Ekron suffered from the Assyrians and Babylonians, as did other Philistine cities. Philistia came to an end as a distinct territory in the early sixth century B.C.

Phoenicia. The third oracle is concerned with the Mediterranean port city of Tyre, which in Amos's time was the leading city of Phoenicia (vss. 9, 10). Like Gaza, Tyre was guilty of selling "whole communities" as slaves to Edom (vs. 9). But in Tyre's case, such behavior violated a "treaty of brotherhood." This probably refers to the treaty made between Solomon of Israel and

Hiram of Tyre (I Kings 5:12). We don't have any evidence of Tyre's selling Israelite slaves, but Amos obviously knew of such behavior.

By its sinful actions, Tyre had let itself in for the standard punishment: the burning of its walls and fortresses (Amos 1:10). Historians tell us that Tyre became subject to the Assyrians. Later, it was violently conquered by the Babylonians and the Greeks.

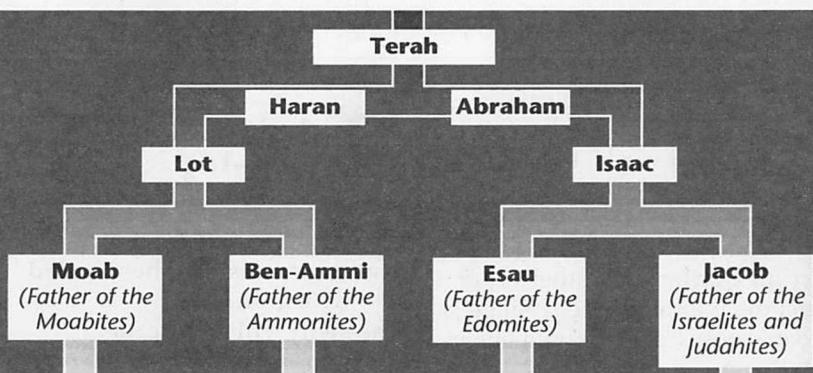
Ask Yourself . . . How do I feel about statements of wrath upon the ungodly?

b Judgment on Edom, Ammon, Moab, and Judah (1:11—2:5)

**Because they have rejected the law
of the LORD
and have not kept his decrees . . .
I will send fire upon Judah
that will consume the fortresses
of Jerusalem.**

—Amos 2:4, 5

Having delivered his oracles against the Syrians, Philistines, and Phoenicians, Amos aimed his spotlight a little nearer his Israelite listeners. His next oracles concern the Edomites, Ammonites, Moabites, and Judahites—all of whom were related to the Israelites by blood, especially the Judahites. This judgment business was getting a little close to home!



Edom. According to the fourth oracle, another nation to feel God's wrath would be Edom, which lay southeast of Judah and Israel (vss. 11, 12). Edom deserved judgment because of its violence, mercilessness, and unbridled anger directed against the Israelites (vs. 11). The Bible records a long history of animosity between the two peoples (Num. 20:14-21; I Sam. 14:47; II Sam. 8:14; II Kings 8:20-22; Obad. 8-14).

Because of the Edomites' behavior, the Lord would destroy Teman and Bozrah—major cities of Edom (Amos 1:12). The Edomites came under the control of the Assyrians in the late eighth century B.C. Later, they were forced out of their homeland by the Nabateans.

The Edomites kept their anger alive by brooding over past offenses, both real and imagined. We can fall into the same trap. The New Testament warns that allowing anger to fester will give Satan a foothold in the believer's life (Eph. 4:26, 27). This does not mean that we should deny our anger. But it requires us to submit to the control of the Holy Spirit and to work for reconciliation.

Ask Yourself . . . Am I giving Satan a foothold by allowing my anger to fester?

Ammon. Amos's next target was the Ammonites, who lived across Israel's eastern border (vss. 13-15). Ammon's crime: "he ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead in order to extend his borders" (vs. 13). The land of Ammon was mostly desert, so its people often tried to expand their territory by invading Israel's fertile Gilead region (example: I Sam. 11:1-11). We don't know, however, which particular time the Ammonites committed the kind of brutality that Amos condemned.

For the Ammonites' crime, their capital of Rabbah (present-day Amman, Jordan) would be destroyed in battle and their leaders would be exiled (Amos 1:14, 15). This prophecy was fulfilled when the Babylonian emperor Nebuchadnezzar came against Rabbah about the year 590 B.C., sacking the city and taking many captives.

Moab. The subject of the fifth oracle is Moab, the nation lying between Ammon and Edom (2:1-3). Amos did not charge the Moabites with a crime against the Israelites.

Instead, their crime was burning the bones of an Edomite king (vs. 1). In the ancient world, burning the corpse or skeleton of an enemy was a way of showing disrespect. The Moabites must have committed this crime during one of their wars against the Edomites (see II Kings 3).

Moab's punishment would be much like Ammon's (Amos 2:2, 3; compare 1:14, 15). Moab's city of Kerioth (location unknown) would be destroyed in war and the Moabite leaders would be killed. This prophecy was presumably fulfilled when Nebuchadnezzar subdued Moab in the sixth century B.C.

Judah. The next oracle focuses on Judah, Israel's sister nation to the south (2:4, 5). The two nations' peoples had once been joined. The Israelites and Judahites shared the same ethnic origin, history, and religion. So Amos's Israelite listeners may have become uncomfortable to learn that even Judah was subject to God's judgment.

Judah's sins included disobeying God's law and worshiping "false gods" (vs. 4)—or more literally, "falsehoods." The Old Testament is filled with evidences that God's chosen people frequently turned away from the one who chose them. This was still going on in Judah during Amos's day.

Because of Judah's sins, the Lord would deal with Judah as He would deal with the Gentile nations (vs. 5). Jerusalem, along with the rest of Judah, was ruined by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.

C Judgment on Israel (2:6-16)

**"Now then, I will crush you
as a cart crushes when loaded
with grain.**

**The swift will not escape,
the strong will not muster their
strength,
and the warrior will not save his
life.**

**The archer will not stand his
ground,
the fleet-footed soldier will not
get away,
and the horseman will not save
his life.**

**Even the bravest warriors
will flee naked on that day,"
declares the LORD.**

—Amos 2:13-16

While the spotlight had been on Judah, the Israelites could feel the heat. But now the light was shining right in their faces. The oracles against the foreign nations had only been prologue to the oracles against Israel.

The oracle against Israel that is found in verses 6 through 16 contains the same elements that the earlier oracles have, but in an expanded version. Israel's sins are set against God's goodness (vss. 6-12). Then God's judgment against Israel is described (vss. 13-16).

The first sin of the Israelites involved a perversion of justice (vss. 6b, 7a). "They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of

sandals." The term translated "the righteous" has a legal meaning; it could be translated "the acquitted" or "the innocent." Apparently Israelite judges were taking bribes, even bribes as cheap as a pair of sandals, to decide cases against the poor and the oppressed.

Another common Israelite sin was sexual impurity (vs. 7b). Fathers and sons dishonored God by having sexual relations with the same girl. This was a kind of incest and it meant that other sexual sins, such as fornication, were being committed. If the girl was a prostitute associated with a pagan religion, then idolatry was involved as well.

Verse 8 appears to describe two sins in which injustice was combined with idolatrous worship. (1) The law of Moses allowed cloaks to be taken as collateral for a loan, as long as they were returned by

sunset (Exod. 22:26, 27; Deut. 24:12, 13). But the Israelites were keeping such garments overnight to sleep in them when they worshiped at pagan religious shrines. (2) The law permitted fines to be paid to victims as restitution for loss (Exod. 21:18, 19, 22; Deut. 22:19). But the Israelites were probably using unfair means to get such fines, and then they were using wine acquired this way in the debauchery associated with pagan religious worship.

Such sins were all the more disgraceful in view of all God had done for the Israelites. At the time of the conquest of the promised land, God had helped them destroy the Amorites and other powerful inhabitants of Canaan (Amos 2:9). God had brought the Israelites out of Egypt, through the Sinai desert, and into Canaan (vs. 10). He had raised up prophets and Nazirites from among

Nazirites

Old Testament law provided a way for a man or woman to take a special vow of dedication to the Lord (Num. 6:1-21). This was the Nazirite vow. The term Nazirite comes from the Hebrew word *nazir*, which means "to consecrate" or "to set apart."

The Nazirite vow had three restrictions. For the duration of the vow, a Nazirite could not (1) eat grapes or any product of grapes, (2) cut his or her hair, or (3) come into contact with a corpse.

Nazirites were usually treated with respect by others. But in Amos's day, some Israelites showed their contempt for God's law by forcing Nazirites to drink wine (Amos 2:12).



them for their spiritual well-being (vs. 11). Yet the Israelites repaid God's goodness by committing sins, such as forcing the Nazirites to break their vow and stifling the prophets (vs. 12).

The result of Israel's disobedience of God would be devastating judgment (vss. 13-16). God would crush the Israelites by allowing them to be thoroughly defeated in battle. No one in Israel—not even the fastest, strongest, and bravest—would be able to escape or withstand that punishment.

Amos's words came true in about forty years. Around 723 B.C., the Assyrians conquered all of Israel, killing thousands and deporting thousands more. That was the end of the northern kingdom of Israel.

God's promises of judgment for Israel and for the other nations may seem harsh to us. In reality, however, they are evidence of God's love. Their aim was to move sinners to repent so that the repentant could receive mercy.

When people ignore God, they do so at their own risk. When people reject Christ as their friend, then they must fall into His hands as an

enemy. God is not afraid to judge; He prefers, however, to show mercy.

Ask Yourself . . . Have I committed any social or spiritual sins, as did Amos's contemporaries, of which I have not yet repented?

Amos 3:1—5:17 in Brief

The passages coming after Amos's opening oracle against Israel confirm God's plan to judge the northern kingdom. God reminded the Israelites that He had revealed His plan of judgment to them (3:1-10), presumably through the prophets. He reaffirmed His plan to judge Israel harshly (vss. 11-15). He said He would overthrow the Israelites because they persisted in sinning, refusing to take advantages of opportunities to repent (chap. 4). He offered a lament for Israel (5:1-3) and called on the Israelites to change their ways (vss. 4-15). Yet this passage concludes with the Lord's affirming that there was coming a time of sadness in Israel (vss. 16, 17)



The Lord's Judgment of His Own

Amos 5:18—6:14

a The Truth about the Day of the Lord (5:18-27)

Woe to you who long
for the day of the LORD!
Why do you long for the day of the
LORD?
That day will be darkness, not
light.

—Amos 5:18

Last week's lesson looked at Amos's way of putting the spotlight on some of Israel's neighbors that were due for judgment, and then shining the same light on Israel. This lesson examines vows of judgment made by the Lord against Israel. Because the Israelites had turned away from God, within a generation He would take their nation away from them and scatter the survivors into foreign exile.

In this section's first stanza (vss. 18-20), Amos challenged the Israelites' smugness about the day of the Lord. Evidently they expected that God would punish other nations but deliver Israel on the day of the Lord. Thus the Israelites were look-

ing forward to that day. But Amos explained that the day of the Lord would not be a bright day of deliverance for them; it would instead be a dark day of judgment for them.

Using two illustrations, Amos showed what it would be like when the Israelites' false security was exposed. First, he said they would be like a man who was breathing a sigh of relief after having escaped from a lion, only to find himself confronted with a bear. Second, he said the Israelites would be like a man who had gotten safely home and had begun to relax—and just then was bitten by a snake.

In his treatment of the day of the Lord, Amos's concern involved the coming destruction of Israel by the Assyrians, which occurred about 723 B.C. On another level, however, his words may refer to what will happen to the wicked Israelites of his generation (along with all other wicked people) in the end times, such as when they are resurrected for final judgment. At any rate, Amos implied that if the Israelites did not get rid of their false theology about the day of the Lord, they were in for an unpleasant shock.

Undoubtedly, part of the reason

the Israelites had a false sense of security was that they kept up the religious rituals. The Israelites did not worship at the Jerusalem temple, which was in Judah, but they had their own religious centers at Bethel and Dan (I Kings 12:28, 29). They probably reasoned that as long as they continued to exhibit the traditional signs of worship, God would be pleased with them and would continue taking care of them.

Not so. In the second stanza of this section (Amos 5:21-24) we read God's own declaration that He loathed the Israelites' religious practices—specifically, the observance of religious holidays, the offering of sacrifices, and the performance of sacred music. God would not accept the Israelites' worship.

Of course, God had ordained the rituals of worship. However, such rituals were supposed to support personal righteousness, not replace it. The people were acting as though they worshiped the Lord, but in fact their human relationships indicated otherwise. For this reason, their external signs of worship, far from pleasing God, infuriated Him.

God wanted real signs of faith and obedience. That's why he commanded, "Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" (vs. 24). The arid Middle East has many riverbeds, called wadis [WAHD-eez], where water flows only after a rain. Unlike these wadis, Israelite society was to flow



Ancient harp. God said He would not listen to the music of the Israelites' harps (Amos 5:23; see also 6:5).

continually with justice for people and righteousness toward God.

Our religious practices are different from those of the Israelites, and yet we share a common problem with them. We must be careful that we do not come to rely only on external religious acts. God looks beneath the surface of our lives and wants to see that we love His Son and have an enduring commitment to justice.

Ask Yourself . . . Is my commitment to fairness in dealing with people intermittent or permanent?

Some of the details in this section's last stanza (vss. 25-27) are debatable, but the basic sense is plain. The Israelites did not truly worship the Lord; therefore, He was going to send them into exile far from their homeland.

The Hebrew construction of verse 25 indicates that the question posed within it demands a negative response. That is, the Israelites of the wilderness generation (more than six hundred years before Amos) did not offer sacrifices to the Lord. But the Bible indicates that sacrifices were actually offered on at least two occasions during the wilderness wandering (Exod. 24:4, 5; Num. 7). Bible scholars resolve this apparent contradiction by suggesting that sacrifices were not offered on a regular basis

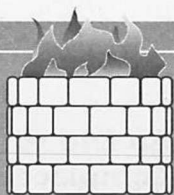
until the nation settled in Canaan.

More than one explanation has been offered for the reason God posed this question. According to one view, the point is that Israelite disobedience toward God began as early as the wilderness generation. According to another view, the point is that the wilderness generation demonstrated that a relationship between the people and their God was not dependent on the sacrificial system.

Verse 26 confirms other Old Testament passages showing that Israelites were involved with false worship. However, it's not known if the false worship of verse 26 had occurred in the wilderness or if it was occurring in Israel during Amos's time. Or both.

Some scholars suggest the words translated "shrine" and "pedestal" may refer to two names (Sakkuth and Kaiwan) of the Assyrian god associated with the planet Saturn. Whether or not they are right, verse 26 indicates that the Israelites performed pagan religious ceremonies, probably parading the images of foreign deities fixed to the tops of poles. This verse also implies that it was foolish of the Israelites to worship gods they had made with their own hands.

For the Israelites' sins, God was going to exile them "beyond Damascus" (vs. 27). This refers to the deportation of Israelites to Assyria. From Israel's perspective, Assyria was beyond Damascus on the trade routes of the Fertile Crescent.



Sacrificial Offerings

Three of the five major kinds of offerings prescribed by the Mosaic law are singled out in Amos 5:22.

- The burnt offering could be a bull, ram, or bird that was wholly consumed by the fire. Its uses were to show worship, to atone for unintentional sins, and to express commitment to God (Lev. 1; 6:8-13).

- The grain offering consisted of grain, flour, oil, incense, bread, and salt. Its uses were to show worship, to recognize God's goodness, and to express commitment to God (chap. 2; 6:14-23).

- The fellowship offering (also called the peace offering) could be bread or an animal. Its uses were to show worship and to express thanks and fellowship (chap. 3; 7:11-34).

The two major kinds of offerings not mentioned in Amos 5:22 are the sin offering and the guilt offering.

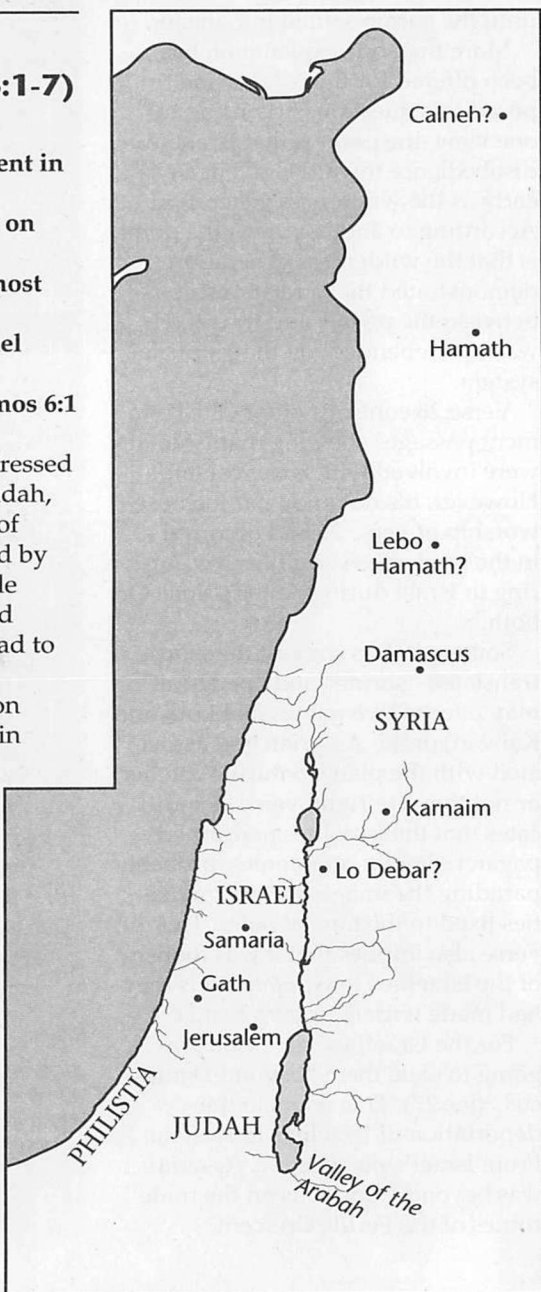
b An End to Complacency (6:1-7)

Woe to you who are complacent in
Zion,
and to you who feel secure on
Mount Samaria,
you notable men of the foremost
nation,
to whom the people of Israel
come!

—Amos 6:1

This section of Amos is addressed to the wealthy of Israel and Judah, but especially Israel. Because of their riches (most likely gained by exploiting others), these people felt secure. Yet Amos informed them that they were on the road to destruction.

Amos pronounced woe upon those who were “complacent in Zion” and those who felt “secure on Mount Samaria” (vs. 1). Jerusalem (“Zion”) was the capital of Judah; Samaria, the capital of Israel. Amos additionally called the leading Israelite citizens “you notable men of the foremost nation, to whom the people of Israel come!” The Israelite leaders held a high opinion of themselves and their country, and this opinion was confirmed in their minds by the way that other Israelites depended on them.



In Amos's day Assyria and other potential enemies of the Hebrew peoples were in a relatively weak condition. This state of affairs allowed Judah and Israel to enjoy a period of economic prosperity and political expansion. From Amos's words it seems that leaders in the two capitals, instead of humbly thanking and obeying God because of their good fortune, were proud of their accomplishments and were feeling self-confident.

Verse 2 appears to be the words of flatterers to the leading citizens of the northern and southern kingdoms. The speakers point to conquered cities (Israel controlled Calneh and Hamath, while Judah controlled Gath) and indicate that Israel and Judah were greater than those places. There is, however, a hidden warning in this, since like the three places named by the flatterers, Judah and Israel would be conquered.

A series of indictments against the wicked people of Israel follows in verses 3 through 6.

Verse 3 presents an ironic contrast. The powerful Israelites were trying to put off (presumably, by disbelieving in it) the evil day of judgment for their sins, yet they were bringing near (presumably, by oppressing the poor) a reign of terror. In other words, they were trying to avoid calamity for themselves while causing calamity for others.

Verses 4 through 6 describe the life of leisure and pleasure led by the wicked Israelites. They spent their time lounging, eating, playing

music, drinking wine, and anointing themselves. And all the while they failed to "grieve over the ruin of Joseph" (vs. 6). Two of the tribes of Israel, Manasseh and Ephraim, were descended from Jacob's son Joseph; thus "Joseph" in this verse stands for the northern kingdom of Israel. Some Israelites indulged in luxurious living while their nation was rushing to its doom because of their sinfulness.

The details in these verses reveal that the Israelites Amos addressed were living on a material level far above that of the common people. The poor at night slept on the floor on mats, but the rich lay about much of the time on fine couches and beds. The poor might go months without being able to afford meat, but the rich regularly ate the best kinds of meat. The poor worked all day just to scrape by, while the rich could spend their time idly dabbling in music. The poor would drink a cup of wine occasionally, but the rich were in the habit of drinking wine by the bowlful. The poor occasionally poured a little oil on their heads to kill the lice, but the rich used the finest lotions when they wanted an anointing.

We should note that the practices Amos listed may not have been wrong in themselves. But they became wrong when they were taken to an extreme and were done at the expense of others.

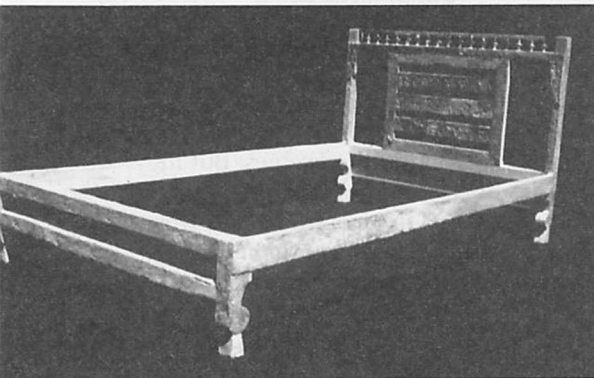
Christians who achieve a measure of power or wealth ought to seriously consider the example set by the Israelites. It's better by far to

limit our self-indulgence rather than to allow those around us or society at large to stay hurting. Certainly, whenever leisure and luxuries start causing us to ignore God's will, an alarm should begin to sound in our consciences.

Ask Yourself . . . Am I spending my time and money in ways that harm my fellow human beings or dishonor God?

For the rich Israelites, the party was about to come to an end (vs. 7). Those who prided themselves in being first among the nations would soon be the first to go into exile. Their feasting and lounging was just about over. Life as the slaves of the brutal Assyrians would not be nearly as pleasant as the life they were used to.

To represent the Israelites' luxurious living, Amos described how they would "lie on beds inlaid with ivory" (Amos 6:4). This ivory-covered bed, dating from Amos's time, was discovered in a royal tomb at Salamis, Cyprus. Much ivory has also been found in the ruins of Samaria.



C Israel's Coming Defeat (6:8-14)

For the LORD God Almighty declares,

"I will stir up a nation against you, O house of Israel, that will oppress you all the way from Lebo Hamath to the valley of the Arabah."

—Amos 6:14

Through Amos, God let the Israelites know more about the destruction He would soon be sending their way. It would be a complete defeat for the Israelites. They thought they were safe, but before long the Assyrians would be beating down their gates.

To strengthen the credibility of what the Lord had to say, Amos explained that God had sworn an oath on His own authority. What God swore is this: "I abhor the pride of Jacob and detest his fortresses; I will deliver up the city and everything in it" (vs. 8). The "pride of Jacob" was probably the fortifications or other structures in which the Israelites trusted for safety. Thus the Lord's message was that while the Israelites were confident that their military readiness would be enough to protect them, God knew better. He would allow foreigners to thoroughly destroy "the city" (prob-

ably the capital, Samaria), meaning that all of Israel would be vulnerable to the invaders.

Ask Yourself . . . Is there anything in my life that God hates?

After the lines of poetry in verse 8 comes their prose amplification in verses 9 and 10. These verses describe a situation in which only a small number of men survive the early part of an onslaught, but later most of these men die too. One of them, who survives by hiding, discourages an ally from even mentioning the Lord's name, probably out of fear that this would lead to God's sending still more destruction. That's how bad the situation would be when Israel got the judgment it had coming.

In verse 11 the poetry resumes with the statement that God had given a command for destruction. He would smash the “great house” and the “small house.” In other words, using the Assyrians as His instrument, He would cause a thorough destruction in Israel.

The next stanza (vss. 12, 13) begins with two absurd questions, both demanding the answer no. Horses do not run on rocky crags and oxen do not plow there. Those actions would be unnatural, if not impossible.

The purpose for the questions (vs. 12a) is revealed by what comes after (vs. 12b). The Israelite leaders were doing things just as unnatural as

Oaths

In the ancient world, people took an oath to back up a statement's truthfulness. Oaths were used as a guarantee that a promise would be kept. Sometimes they were even used as evidence in court.

Oath-takers often called for some punishment to be inflicted upon them if they broke the oath. Israelites would swear by someone greater than themselves, usually the king or the Lord.

Adapting Himself to a human custom, God sometimes made an oath as a guarantee of performance (see Heb. 6:17). When His oath was accompanied by a promise of blessing, it was given for assurance. With a promise of judgment, it amounted to a curse.

Since there was no one greater, the Lord swore by Himself (Amos 6:8; see also 4:2; 8:7).

horses and oxen working on rocky crags. They were turning "justice into poison" and "the fruit of righteousness into bitterness."

God had made a covenant with the Israelites. He had given them the law so that they would know what He expected of them. He had shown them mercy after mercy. Yet despite all this, the Israelite leaders were perverting the cause of justice in their nation and leading the way in unrighteous behavior.

Mixed up with the Israelites' injustice and unrighteousness was their pride. Verse 13 describes them as rejoicing in their conquest of Lo Debar and Karnaim. Probably both of these cities were captured or recaptured from the Syrians by the Israelite king Jeroboam II during his campaigns of expansion (II Kings 14:25-28).

Those two towns were probably chosen for mention because of the meanings of their names. Amos evidently misspelled the name of "Lo Debar" (Amos 6:13), or Debir, so that it meant "no thing." This meant the Lord regarded as nothing the victory over which Israel rejoiced. The name translated "Karnaim" comes from the Hebrew word mean-

ing "horns." Since horns were a symbol of strength, the name probably appears here because the Israelites thought their victories were achieved by their own strength.

Pride in achievement becomes sin when it is divorced from a recognition of our dependence upon God. The Israelites were not wrong to rejoice in their successes. Their failure lay in taking credit for things God had accomplished through them.

Ask Yourself . . . When I accomplish something, do I remember to give glory to God, or do I pridefully take the credit for myself?

Before long, the Israelites' pride in their conquests would be wiped away because God was going to stir up a nation against them (vs. 14). This, of course, was the Assyrian Empire. Israel's defeat would be complete—from border to border. Coming from the north, the Assyrians would overrun the Israelites from the northernmost extent of their control, represented by Lebo Hamath, to the southernmost extent of their control, represented by the valley of the Arabah.

7

Prophecies of Judgment and Restoration

Amos 7—9

a Visions of Locusts, Fire, and a Plumb Line (7:1-9)

The high places of Isaac will be destroyed
and the sanctuaries of Israel will be ruined;
with my sword I will rise against the house of Jeroboam.

—Amos 7:9

In his continuing attempt to warn the Israelites of the judgment God would soon be sending their way, Amos related to them some visions and other prophecies of judgment he had received from the Lord. Unexpectedly, however, the very end of Amos's book presents promises of a restoration beyond judgment.

This lesson includes four inter-related visions that Amos had. The first two visions—locusts (7:1-3) and fire (vss. 4-6)—both present judgment God agreed to withhold. The third and fourth visions—plumb line (vss. 7-9) and ripe fruit (8:1-3)—both present judgment God would not withhold.

Vision of locusts. Amos's first

vision was of a plague of locusts similar to the one Joel described. The locusts were probably migratory or desert locusts (see p. 10).

The prophet saw that the Lord "was preparing swarms of locusts after the king's share had been harvested and just as the second crop was coming up" (vs. 1). The locusts harvested the second crop before the people could do so (vs. 2).

Evidently in Amos's day Jeroboam II of Israel required that the first harvest of grain (usually done in April after the rains) be given to him to support his large royal, military, and governmental establishment. This was a kind of tax. A little later in the season, the farmers harvested for themselves what grew up after the first harvest.

Large numbers of migratory locusts sometimes would hatch in the springtime, if the conditions were right. Then they might gather in huge swarms and attack cultivated areas. If the locusts devastated the fields before the Israelites could get the second crop harvested, the people would not have enough grain to feed their cattle through the coming winter.

Fully understanding what human

suffering would be caused by the loss of the second crop, Amos interceded on behalf of the Israelites. He cried out to the Lord to forgive the people of the northern kingdom. Amos pointed out that the nation of Israel ("Jacob") could not survive God's wrath, since it was small in comparison to Him.

The Lord responded to Amos's prayer by relenting. He would not send a locust plague to take away Israel's second crop.

Vision of fire. Amos's second vision of destruction was of fire. This may have been literal fire sent from heaven to destroy the wicked. Or it may have been symbolic fire, perhaps representing a severe drought.

Amos heard the Lord call for judgment by fire. The Lord's command was obeyed, and fire "dried up the great deep and devoured the land" (vs. 4). The "great deep" may be the Mediterranean Sea. The "land" is the land of Israel.

As he did with the vision of locusts, Amos responded to the vision of fire by interceding with God on behalf of the Israelites (vs. 5). This time, however, instead of asking God to forgive the Israelites, he simply asked God to put a stop to the judgment by fire. Amos once more pointed out that Israel could not survive such a judgment,

because it was small.

God again responded to Amos's prayer by relenting. He would not send a fire to dry up the great deep and devour the land (vs. 6).

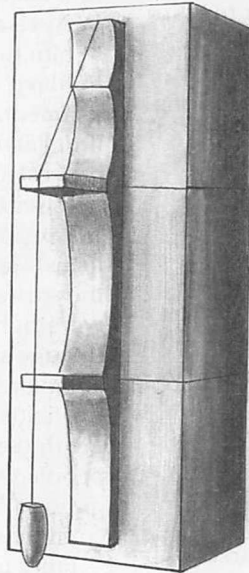
Vision of a plumb line. Amos's third vision was of a plumb line, which was a builder's tool made of a cord with a stone or metal weight (called a plumb or plumb bob) at the end. Suspended next to a wall, a plumb line could be used to check how close the wall was to true vertical.

Amos saw the Lord "standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb, with a plumb line in his hand" (vs. 7). The meaning of this sight is made clear by the conversation that followed. The Lord got

Amos to say what was in His hand: a plumb line. Then the Lord said, "Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel" (vs. 8). This meant, symbolically, that God would check the Israelites to see how faithful they were to Him.

God next said, "I will spare them no longer." This means that Israel would fail the plumb line test. The nation was not like the wall next to which the Lord stood. Israel was out of plumb spiritually; it was unfaithful. Therefore, God was now determined to judge the nation.

One type of plumb line used in the ancient Near East.



After the earlier visions, Amos had successfully pleaded for mercy on behalf of the Israelites. But now there was no point in his doing so. God had an immovable intention to judge the sinful Israelites, and He would not relent.

In a few lines of poetry, we have some of the specific things God would do to Israel (vs. 9). God would destroy the "high places of Isaac," the "sanctuaries of Israel," and the "house of Jeroboam." The nation's religious establishment was corrupted by faithlessness and idolatry, while the governmental establishment was characterized by disobedience to God. So now God would ruin both.

Probably fewer than 40 years passed before this vision's prediction of destruction was fulfilled. When the Assyrians came against Israel about 723 B.C., they destroyed the places where the Israelites worshiped.

It did not even take that long before the royal line to which Jeroboam belonged was cut off. Jeroboam himself seems to have died of natural causes around 753 B.C. (II Kings 14:29), but his son and successor, Zechariah, reigned only half



An excavated Canaanite "high place," or sanctuary, in Megiddo. The prophet Amos, in his vision of the plumb line, declared that "the high places of Isaac will be destroyed" (Amos 7:9).

a year before being assassinated (15:10).

Like the people of Israel, Christians are tested by a "plumb line": the Word of God. Without a standard, we might not know when we are "leaning" spiritually. But the Bible is our standard. We should constantly be checking whether our lives are "true to vertical" or "out of plumb," because we know that God is checking us that way!

Ask Yourself . . . Thinking of my life as a wall, in what ways is it not parallel to the plumb line of God's Word?

b Amos Resists Pressure to Quit (7:10-17)

Then Amaziah said to Amos, "Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah."

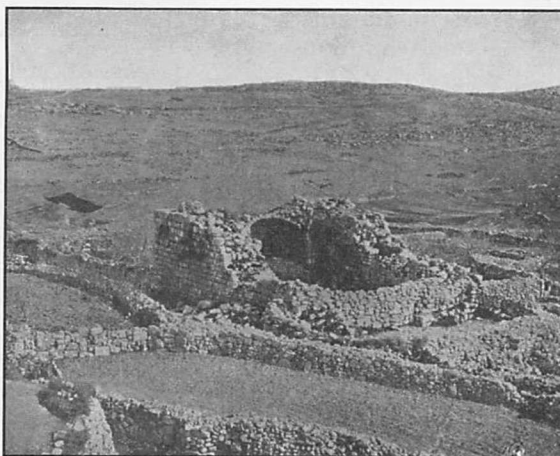
—Amos 7:12, 13

Since Amos's four visions (locusts, fire, plumb line, ripe fruit) are closely related, one might expect them to follow one right after another. But that's not the case. Between the third and fourth visions comes a historical passage (vss. 10-17). Yet while this passage is an interruption in the series of visions, its position within the book makes sense. The wording of Amos's third vision sparked the controversy that is described in the historical passage.

Amos had been delivering his prophecies—or at least some of them—in Bethel, one of Israel's two main religious centers (the other was Dan). The head of Bethel's priestly establishment at that time was a man named Amaziah. Not surprisingly, Amaziah did not like what the foreigner from the south was saying. God was displeased with the Israelite rulers? God hated Israel's worship? God was going to destroy Israel? Perhaps Amaziah was most upset at the words about Bethel that Amos had communicated for God (3:14; 4:4; 5:4-6).

When Amaziah heard Amos's vision of the plumb line, he thought he had a lever to dislodge Amos from Bethel. He wrote to King Jeroboam II, accusing Amos of "raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel" (7:10). This was a charge calculated to grab the attention of a king. If Jeroboam was like most kings, he was always straining to hear whispers of rebellion.

In his communication to the king, Amaziah quoted Amos as predicting Jeroboam's death and the Israelites' exile (vs. 11). For the first part, Amaziah probably went beyond Amos's actual words. Amos had



Today the Arab village of Beitin (top left) is close by the ruins of ancient Bethel (bottom).

declared that God would raise a sword against Jeroboam's house (see vs. 9), whereas Amaziah quoted the prophet as saying Jeroboam himself would die by the sword (vs. 11). For the second part, however, Ama-

ziah accurately communicated the prophet's warning of exile for the nation (see 5:5, 27).

We don't know what reply, if any, the priest received from Jeroboam. Probably if the king was convinced that Amos posed a threat to his reign, he would have ordered the prophet killed. We have no evidence that Amos was murdered.

On his own initiative, Amaziah ordered Amos to leave Bethel and go back home to Judah (7:12). His words "Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there" suggest that Amaziah suspected Amos of coming to Bethel to make money. Prophets sometimes received support by donations from those who heard their prophecies. Amaziah called the sanctuary at Bethel "the king's sanctuary and the temple of the kingdom" (vs. 13). While true, this description contained a veiled threat that royal power might be used to cleanse Bethel of the offending prophet.

Amos did not take Amaziah's attack lying down. He defended his own prophetic ministry (vss. 14, 15) and then prophesied against Amaziah (vss. 16, 17).

Since Amaziah had implied that Amos was prophesying to make money, Amos refuted that charge. The phrase translated by the NIV "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son" (vs. 14) can be translated in other ways. But with any translation, the basic meaning is the same: Amos was not a professional prophet. He had a growing agricultural business when God had called him

to prophesy to Israel (vs. 15), so he did not need money from prophecy.

Since God had called Amos to prophesy, prophesy he would. Amaziah had told Amos to stop prophesying against the Israelites (vs. 16), but Amos had a prophecy for them, and especially for Amaziah (vs. 17). Probably this prophecy was fulfilled at the time of the Assyrian invasion.

Amaziah would be captured and taken away to spend the remainder of his days in "a pagan country." (Since the word "pagan" literally means "unclean," this was a particularly hateful prospect for a priest who had spent his life trying to keep ceremonially clean.) Amaziah's wife would not go with him into exile, but would instead stay behind and be forced into prostitution, as often happened after an invasion. His children would be put to death. His property would be confiscated and split up among others. All this added up to an unhappy future.

Amaziah would not be alone in his misery, however. Many of his fellow citizens would also go into exile.

Like Amos, we must resist attempts to make us break off our obedience to God. We may never face anyone as hostile as Amaziah was, but throughout our lives we'll find much to distract us from what we know to be right. If we are firm and persevere, God will honor us.

Ask Yourself . . . When, if ever, has someone talked me out of doing what I knew God wanted me to do?

C A Vision of Ripe Fruit (8:1-3)

"In that day," declares the Sovereign LORD, "the songs in the temple will turn to wailing. Many, many bodies—flung everywhere! Silence!"

—Amos 8:3

With the historical interlude completed, the Book of Amos presents the fourth vision of judgment. The fourth vision is similar in some respects to the third.

The fourth vision was of a basket of ripe fruit (vs. 1). The basket probably looked like an ordinary harvesting basket made of woven wicker. The fruit in the basket may have been any kind of tree fruit, such as olives or figs, that was harvested in the fall.

The Lord asked Amos what he saw (vs. 2). Amos, of course, answered, "A basket of ripe fruit."

This answer opened the way for the Lord to make the play on words that is the point of this vision. The Lord said, "The time is ripe for my people Israel; I will spare them no longer." In Hebrew, the word translated "ripe fruit" and the word translated "time is ripe" are different but sound the same. The Lord used this coincidence to make His point memorable: He would judge Israel. And this vision, like

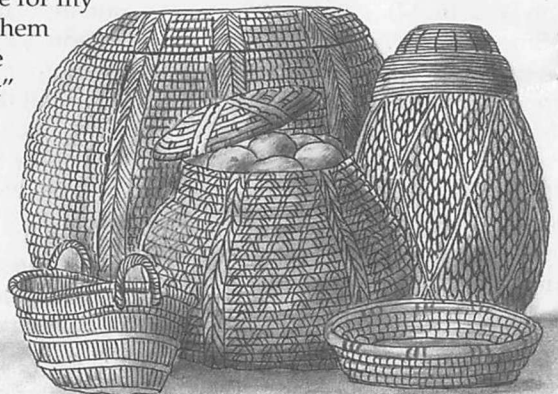
the vision of a plumb line, shows that there was no stopping the judgment. The Israelites' wickedness had gotten to a point where God had to punish it.

Sometimes we may be tempted to try to forget about our unrepented sins, to go on as if nothing has happened. But God knows all. We should ask forgiveness before we accumulate His displeasure.

Ask Yourself . . . Am I in any way ripe for God's displeasure at this time?

As with the vision of a plumb line, this vision contains a description of what would happen when the vision's prophecy was fulfilled (vs. 3; compare 7:9). (The fulfillment must have taken place at the Assyrian invasion of 723 B.C.) Whereas the Israelites had been singing joyful religious songs (though hypocritically), they would one day wail in sorrow over what was to happen to their nation. Many bodies of dead

Kinds of ancient baskets.



Israelites would be scattered all about by the violence of their attackers. Because of the horror of this scene, Amos called for respectful quiet: "Silence!"

Amos 8:4—9:10 in Brief

The remainder of chapter 8 lists some reasons for the coming judgment and describes the judgment itself. The powerful Israelites were guilty of cheating and oppressing the poor. God knew all about that. Consequently, He would bring a time of great unhappiness and spiritual emptiness to the nation.

The first 10 verses of chapter 9 make up another judgment prophecy. This prophecy stresses that judgment was inevitable and that it would take in all Israelites—no one would be exempt.

are wonderful promises of restoration after judgment.

The first promise is that God would "restore David's fallen tent" (vs. 11). The word translated "tent" refers to a simple booth or hut, such as those the Israelites lived in during the annual feast of tabernacles. David's tent was broken down and ruined, but God would rebuild it. Usually this tent of David's is taken as a symbol of his royal line or his kingdom.

Once "David's fallen tent" was rebuilt, God's people would "possess the remnant of Edom" (vs. 12). Here, Edom represents all of Israel's enemies. At the time of the prophecy's fulfillment, God's people would in some sense control or encompass many nations, including former enemies. These nations would "bear [God's] name," or follow Him.

Ask Yourself . . . In what ways would I like God to restore what's been damaged in my life?

Amos used some agricultural exaggerations to describe the abundance of blessings in the time of restoration (vs. 13). One person will still be reaping (usually done in the spring) when someone else begins to plow (usually done in the fall). A person will still be planting (usually done in the winter) when another is pressing the grapes (usually done in the summer). Furthermore, the vines will produce so abundantly that wine will run down from hills and mountains like water after a rain.

God also promised to bring back

d Promises of Restoration (9:11-15)

**"I will plant Israel in their own land,
never again to be uprooted
from the land I have given
them,"
says the LORD your God.
—Amos 9:15**

At its end, the Book of Amos makes a sudden turnaround and presents a message of hope. Here

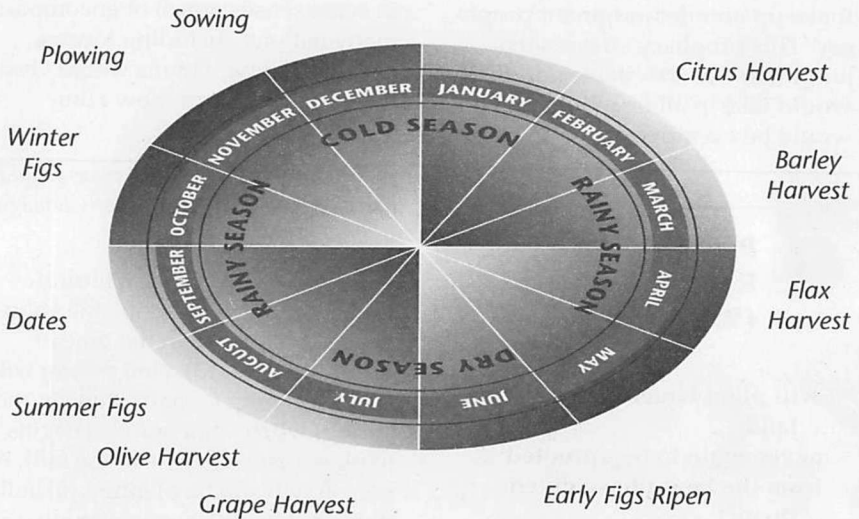
His people from exile so that they could return to their normal urban and rural ways of life (vs. 14). They could have peace then, because God would never again send them into exile (vs. 15).

Bible commentators interpret the final section of Amos in different ways. Some commentators believe the promises were, at least in part, fulfilled when the people

of the southern kingdom of Judah returned to their homeland after their exile in Babylon. The apostle James's quotation of part of this section (see Acts 15:16-18) indicates that the promises are in some sense fulfilled in the church. But many commentators believe that the final fulfillment of these promises lies yet in the future.

Israel's Agricultural Cycle

This chart shows the usual agricultural cycle in Israel. Amos predicted a time of such blessing that activities performed on one side of the cycle would not be finished before it was time to begin activities on the other side (Amos 9:13).



8

Unfaithful Wife, Faithful Husband

Hosea 1—3

a **Hosea Has a Family** (1:1—2:1)

The LORD said to [Hosea], “Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness.”

—Hosea 1:2

Like the Book of Amos, the Book of Hosea begins with the name of the prophet and the names of kings who reigned during his ministry (vs. 1). Hosea the son of Beeri prophesied in the mid- to late eighth century B.C.—the time period that saw the end of the northern kingdom of Israel.

At the beginning of his ministry, Hosea received an unusual command. The Lord told him to get an “adulterous wife” and “children of unfaithfulness” (vs. 2). The same word is translated “adulterous” and “of unfaithfulness.”

The command is interpreted in different ways. One theory is that Hosea was to marry a prostitute and to have children who would commit sexual sins. A similar theory is that Hosea was to marry a woman who would become a prostitute after he

married her and to have children who would commit sexual sins. Another theory is that Hosea was to marry a woman who was spiritually unfaithful to God and to have children who would be spiritually unfaithful to God.

The purpose for God’s command is clear. The prophet’s family members were to be living reminders of how Israel was “guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD” (vs. 2). The word translated “adultery” here is the same one for “adulterous” and “of unfaithfulness” earlier.

We don’t know how Hosea felt about God’s command, but we know what he did. He obeyed God. Unlike his fellow prophet Jonah, Hosea gives us an example of obedience to the Lord.

Ask Yourself . . . Does my obedience to God falter when He requires hard things of me?

Hosea married a woman named Gomer (vs. 3). The couple had three children, each of whom God gave a symbolic name. Every time someone heard the names of these children, that person would learn God’s message to Israel.

Jezreel. Hosea and Gomer's first child was a son, whom God named Jezreel. The word Jezreel means "God sows" or "God scatters," so perhaps God chose this name in part to indicate how He would scatter the Israelites by sending them into exile. The biblical text, however, links the name with events that had happened and would happen in places called Jezreel.

The king of Israel at the time of Jezreel's birth must have been Jeroboam II. In the town of Jezreel, Jeroboam's great-grandfather Jehu had gained the throne by murdering Joram, the previous king, as well as Joram's relatives and supporters (see II Kings 9:14—10:11). Similarly, God would punish the "house of Jehu" (Hos. 1:4) by cutting off Jehu's royal line. This happened when Jeroboam's son and successor, Zechariah, was assassinated about 752 B.C.

Furthermore, God would "put an end to the kingdom of Israel." This happened when the Assyrians overran Israel about 725 to 723 B.C. God pictured the defeat of Israel as the destruction of a bow in the Valley of Jezreel, which lay north of the town of Jezreel (vs. 5).

Lo-Ruhamah. God named Hosea and Gomer's second child (a girl) Lo-Ruhamah, which means "not loved" (vs. 6). God chose this name to teach that "I will no longer show love to the house of Israel, that I should at all forgive them."

While God would no longer show love to the house of Israel, He would "show love to the house of

Judah" by saving it (vs. 7). God said He would not save the Judahites by enabling them to win a battle. Instead, He would save them in a way that would demonstrate that the salvation came directly from Him. This probably refers to the way God broke the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem in 701 B.C. by putting thousands of the Assyrian soldiers to death (see II Kings 19:35, 36).

Lo-Ammi. God named Hosea and Gomer's third child, another boy, Lo-Ammi (Hos. 1:9). This name means "not my people." Hundreds of years earlier God had chosen the Israelites to be His people in a special sense. But now God was ready to take away that relationship from the people of the northern kingdom.

In the remaining three verses of this section, Hosea 1:10—2:1, the theme suddenly changes from judgment to blessing. The blessing would involve population growth, a relationship to God, and reunification of the northern and southern kingdoms.

These promises were perhaps partly fulfilled when Jews returned to Judah from Babylonian exile beginning about 538 B.C. However, most conservative commentators believe the final fulfillment comes later. Some commentators believe these promises are fulfilled in the Christian church. Other commentators believe they are yet to be fulfilled in Jewish history.

Some details in these verses deserve special comment. The promise that the Israelites would be as numerous as the sand on the

seashore (1:10) was a repetition of a promise originally made to Abraham (Gen. 22:17). The apostle Paul applied the promise of divine adoption (Hos. 1:10) to the inclusion of Gentiles in the Christian church (Rom. 9:26). The "one leader" under whom "the people of Judah and the people of Israel" would be reunited (Hos. 1:11) is probably the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. The reference to God's people coming up "out of the land" is probably a reference to a return from exile. The names of Hosea and Gomer's children are used in all three of these verses as contrasts to promised blessing.

b

Punishment for an Unfaithful Wife (2:2-13)

**Rebuke your mother, rebuke her,
for she is not my wife,
and I am not her husband.**

—Hosea 2:2

Evidently, Hosea and Gomer were for a time separated because she was unfaithful (see 3:1-3). Verses 1 through 13 of chapter 2 are about punishment for an unfaithful wife; however, this wife is not Gomer but Israel. Maritally unfaithful Gomer continued to serve as a symbol for spiritually unfaithful Israel.

Legal terms and images abound in verses 2 through 13. The picture we have, therefore, is one of God, the "husband" of Israel, bringing

charges of adultery against His "wife." But in addition to bringing charges, God pronounces sentence upon Israel.

No longer considering Israel His "wife," God called on her "children," or individual Israelites, to rebuke her (see vs. 2a). Their testimony would contribute to her conviction.

There was some hope of the "wife's" escaping judgment if she changed her ways and showed this change by getting rid of the signs of her unfaithfulness (vs. 2b). But if she did not do this, then God would punish her. First, He would strip off her clothes (vs. 3a). (This reflects the ancient practice of shaming an adulterous woman by exposing her nakedness in public.) Second, He would make her like a desert (vs. 3b). Third, He would not show love to her children (vs. 4).

Simply put, the meaning of these verses is that unless the Israelites gave up idol worship and its trap-pings, God would punish them with shame, hardship, and distance from His love.

The children of God's "wife" were "children of adultery" who had been "conceived . . . in disgrace" (vs. 5a). This means that individual Israelites, as well as the nation as a whole, were guilty of spiritual unfaithfulness to the Lord.

Although the primary focus of this passage is on Israel's national sin, it has an important message for individuals today. The mother's actions affected her husband and children. Similarly, the notion that

"I can do as I please as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else" is a dangerous lie.

Ask Yourself . . . How will the choices I make today affect those around me?

God described Israel as His sinful wife chasing after her lovers (vs. 5b). He would therefore block her path (vss. 6, 7a), frustrating her efforts to get to her lovers. So then she would decide to go back to her husband (vs. 7b).

This means that a time was coming when the Israelites would be sorry that they worshiped foreign gods and would want to return to the Lord.

But since the Israelites' return to God had not yet happened, they still had not acknowledged that life's good things, such as crops and money, came from Him (vs. 8). The Israelites instead credited foreign gods for their good things (see vs. 5b).

This ancient relief sculpture shows the god Baal holding a club in his left hand and a lightning bolt in his right. On God's behalf, Hosea accused the Israelites of being unfaithful to God by worshiping Baal.



Baal Worship

Chief among the Canaanite gods was Baal, the god of storms. Because he was believed to send the rains that made the crops grow, he was also the god of fertility.

When the Israelites occupied Canaan, they did not destroy all the Canaanites, as God had decreed. Taking up agriculture in the promised land, the Israelites became attracted by Baal worship, which tried to encourage the fertility of crops and livestock.

Despite occasional purges, Baal worship was popular in Israel for centuries. Baal worship was especially common in the northern areas, where it was often combined with Yahweh worship.

They even used their wealth in the worship of these gods, represented in verse 8 by the god Baal.

Since God's "wife" had not recognized Him as the source of good things in life, He would take those things away from her (vs. 9). Furthermore, He would expose her lewdness and break her connection with her lovers (vs. 10). He would put an end to the cycle of religious ceremonies (vs. 11), which had become poisoned by mixture with idolatry. He would ruin her important fruit industry (vs. 12). In short, He would punish her for her religious adultery (vs. 13).

God was here describing what would happen to the Israelites because of the Assyrian invasion.

As with other parts of Hosea, more than one interpretation is taken of this passage. The reconciliation that's pictured here may refer in part to the return of the Jews from exile in the sixth century B.C. Some commentators believe these verses are ultimately fulfilled in the Christian church, while other commentators believe the verses are now being or are yet to be fulfilled in Jewish history.

God's relationship with the nation of Israel formally began in the wilderness of Sinai, after He brought the nation out of Egypt. Now God intended to lead His "wife" back to the desert to start over again with her (vss. 14, 15). He would give her back the vineyards that He would by then have ruined (vs. 14; compare vs. 12). The name of the Valley of Achor—which was the scene of a disgraceful episode in Israel's early history (Josh. 7)—meant "valley of trouble," but now it would be a "door of hope" (Hos. 2:15). The "wife" would sing with thanksgiving as at the time of the Exodus.

As part of the new relationship between God and His "wife," she would call Him "my husband" instead of "my master" (vs. 16). The word translated "master" is *baal*.

God would not even want people to mention the names of "the Baals" (vs. 17). This plural reflects the fact that people in different areas worshiped varied forms of the Canaanite god, such as Baal-Berith and Baal-Melqart.

The erasure of the word *baal* is a measure of God's hatred for

C An Everlasting Marriage (2:14-23)

**I will betroth you to me forever;
I will betroth you in righteousness and justice,
in love and compassion.
I will betroth you in faithfulness,
and you will acknowledge the LORD.**

—Hosea 2:19, 20

Earlier, God's anger at the Israelites was such that He declared, "She is not my wife, and I am not her husband" (vs. 2). But here God looks at a time when He would romance His "wife" and betroth her again. Beyond the punishment would come a kind of second honeymoon.

idolatry. It is also a measure of the religious purity of God's "wife" in the predicted time.

Conditions would be so changed during the foretold time that peace would reign among all creatures (vs. 18). God would make a covenant with animals (described in language reminiscent of the Creation story) so that there would be peace among them. Furthermore, God would end war among humans. (This would seem to taper off into the far future from Hosea's day.)

Although God was estranged from His "wife" because of her sin, He would eventually betroth her to be with Him permanently (vss. 19, 20). The "righteousness and justice," "love and compassion," and "faithfulness" mentioned in these verses are perhaps to be taken as the dowry (bride price).

In the predicted day God would reverse the judgments that He sent against His "wife" (vss. 21-23). Previously, He had promised to ruin her agriculture (vss. 9, 12), but now He would see that she got the products she needed (vss. 21, 22). Previously, He had used the names of Hosea and Gomer's children to predict judgment, but now He used them to predict blessing. The name Jezreel (meaning "God sows") shows how God would plant His "wife" in the land. The name Lo-Ruhamah (meaning "not loved") would no longer be appropriate for His "wife" because He would now show love to her. Likewise, the name Lo-Ammi (meaning "not my people") would no longer be appro-

priate because they would be God's people and He would be their God.

God's willingness to restore His relationship with His "wife" can remind us of His desire to have a loving relationship with us. When we let God down, as Israel did, we have only to repent and ask for His forgiveness to experience a rush of His love for us.

Ask Yourself . . . Do I wish for a "second honeymoon" with the Lord? What do I need to do to prepare for that?

d **Hosea Reconciles with His Wife (3:1-5)**

The LORD said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress."

—Hosea 3:1

Earlier, God had ordered Hosea to marry a woman whose unfaithfulness would mirror Israel's spiritual unfaithfulness. Now He ordered Hosea to reconcile with a woman as a way of mirroring God's reconciliation with His people. Probably this refers to Hosea's reconciliation to his wife, Gomer, from whom he had become separated (but not divorced) after the birth of their third child.

Gomer had left Hosea for another man, yet God told Hosea to seek her out and show love to her (vs. 1). God explained this strange com-

mand by paralleling it with the love God showed to the Israelites. Just as Gomer engaged in adultery, so the Israelites engaged in false worship. (The "raisin cakes" were a delicacy that represented self-indulgence; they were probably used as part of heathen worship.)

Ask Yourself . . . What are the things in my life that are competing for the affections that rightly belong to God?

Although it may have come hard for him, Hosea did as the Lord asked. He gave "fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley" for her (vs. 2). In other words, Hosea paid partly in money and partly in goods for Gomer.

The purpose for this payment is not clear. Perhaps Hosea had to buy Gomer out of slavery. If so, then he may have made the payment to Gomer's lover-owner. Or perhaps the payment was a bride price, indicating that Hosea was going to start over again with Gomer. If so, then he may have given the payment to Gomer's father.

Once Hosea had Gomer again, he laid down a set of rules (vs. 3). Rule 1: She was to live with him "many days." Rule 2: She was to "not

be a prostitute." Rule 3: She was not to "be intimate with any man." Rule 4: Hosea said he would "live with you."

If this is the correct translation of Rule 4, it means that Hosea would keep up his end of the marriage. However, some people believe the Hebrew text at this point should be interpreted to mean that Hosea would not have sexual relations with Gomer.

Hosea's rules were meant to reform his wife. But the new life-style he forced on her also mirrored the coming condition of the Israel-

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

Units of Measurement

Reconciling with his wife, Hosea gave "fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley" for Gomer (Hos. 3:2). Some Bible translators say that the phrase "jug of wine" belongs in place of the phrase "a lethek of barley." But disregarding that possibility, here are the possible modern equivalencies to the units of measurement mentioned in the verse:

Shekel = 2/5 ounce

Homer = 6 bushels

Lethek = 3 bushels

ites. Just as Gomer would have to do without the sexual promiscuity she liked, Israel would be forced to do without the religious promiscuity it liked. This indicates that God would take drastic measures to prevent the Israelites from continuing to worship the heathen gods.

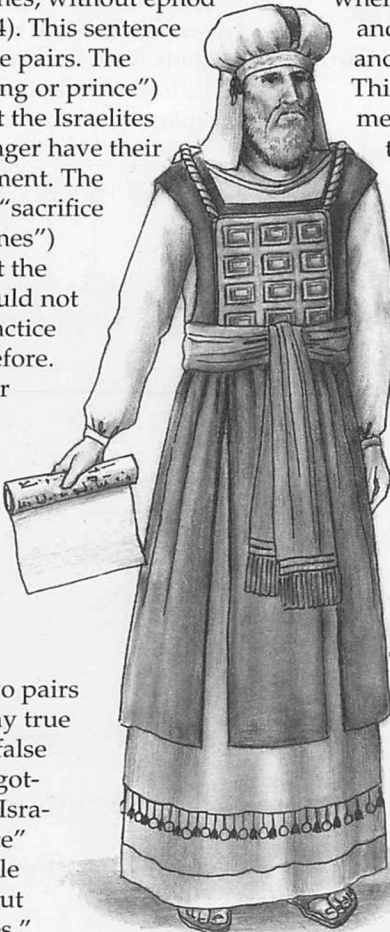
A time was coming when "the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or idol" (vs. 4). This sentence contains three pairs. The first pair ("king or prince") indicates that the Israelites would no longer have their own government. The second pair ("sacrifice or sacred stones") indicates that the Israelites would not be able to practice religion as before. The third pair ("ephod or idol") indicates that the Israelites would not be able to use divination to learn truths.

The last two pairs reflect the way true religion and false religion had gotten mixed in Israel. A "sacrifice" was acceptable in worship, but "sacred stones,"

or pillars, were used in Canaanite idolatry. The ephod was a priestly garment containing the Urim and Thummim, which were used in discerning God's will. But the "idol" (which translates *teraphim*, meaning "household gods") was used in pagan ways of seeking knowledge from the god represented.

The state Hosea described would not be final. A time would come when the Israelites would "return and seek the Lord their God and David their king" (vs. 5). This is a clear reference to the messianic King (Christ), from the dynasty of David (compare Jer. 30:9 and Ezek. 34:24). On that day, God's chosen people would finally repent and "come trembling to the Lord and to his blessings."

Again, while interpreters differ on exactly how this prophecy is to be fulfilled, it unquestionably anticipates the messianic kingdom.



An artist's conception of how a high priest looked, according to Exodus 28. The dark outer garment is the ephod. Hosea prophesied that a time was coming when Israel would not have an ephod (Hos. 3:4).

2

Accusation, Evidence, and Sentence

Hosea 4—10

a The Lord's Charge against Israel (4:1-12)

Hear the word of the LORD, you
Israelites,
because the LORD has a charge to
bring
against you who live in the land:
"There is no faithfulness, no love,
no acknowledgment of God in
the land."

—Hosea 4:1

Gomer's unfaithfulness, Hosea's reconciliation with her, and the names of their children all served to teach the Israelites what God thought about them. But Hosea also spoke for God in the more common way of delivering oracles and prophecies to the people. The rest of

the Book of Hosea, beginning with chapter 4, is made up of a collection of those oracles and prophecies.

Chapter 4 begins with courtroom language. The Israelites had violated God's law, so now He brought an accusation against them (vs. 1a). He charged them with sins of omission and with sins of commission. The Israelites were not doing what they ought to have done; they were doing what they ought not to have done. "There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God" (vs. 1b). "There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery . . . [and] bloodshed" (vs. 2).

Ask Yourself . . . What sins of omission or commission have I been guilty of in the past week?

The Israelites' sins had an effect

Violations of the Ten Commandments in Hosea 4:2

SINS COMMITTED	COMMANDMENTS VIOLATED
Cursing	3rd (Exodus 20:7)
Lying	9th (Exodus 20:16)
Murder	6th (Exodus 20:13)
Stealing	8th (Exodus 20:15)
Adultery	7th (Exodus 20:14)

on land, people, and animals (vs. 3). Evidently, God sent a drought to punish the Israelites. The phrase translated “the land mourns” could

The TORAH

The word “law” in Hosea 4:6 translates the Hebrew term *torah*. It is based upon a root word that means to throw, shoot, or aim at. This general idea of direction was extended, so that the term came to refer to guidance or instruction.

Torah became a term for the first five books of the Bible, also known as the Pentateuch. It also referred to the entire body of God’s commands to His people. To the Jewish mind, Torah was a way of life. The rabbis believed that obedience to the Torah was a means of earning salvation.

compared the Israelites to people who “bring charges against a priest.” Contempt for a priest was a capital crime (Deut. 17:12).

Next, God addressed Israel’s religious leaders. He accused the priests and prophets of stumbling (Hos. 4:5)—probably a symbol of judgment. The nation of Israel, the “mother” of the people, would eventually be destroyed. But the people were already being destroyed by a lack of knowledge about God, caused by the failure of religious leaders to do their duty.

The priests would receive an appropriate punishment. Because they rejected knowledge, God would reject them. Because they had ignored the law, God would ignore their children (future Israelites).

Verse 7 accuses the Israelite priesthood of increasingly sinning against God. Furthermore, this verse describes how the priests transferred their worship from God (“their Glory”) to other gods (“something disgraceful”).

The priests encouraged false worship because they enriched themselves by it. Verse 8 describes them as feasting on the sins of God’s people and relishing wickedness.

Both priests and people were guilty; both would be judged (vs. 9).

The New Testament shows that Christian leaders have a weighty responsibility to serve well. But the followers in a religious group have a responsibility to obey God regardless of what the leaders do. God expects church leaders and followers alike to be true to Him.

also be translated “the land dries up.” People and animals were suffering from a lack of water.

Although God brought a charge against the Israelites (vs. 1), He did not want them to bring charges against one another (vs. 4). God

b The Charge Continued (4:10-19)

The Israelites are stubborn,
like a stubborn heifer.
How then can the LORD pasture
them
like lambs in a meadow?

—Hosea 4:16

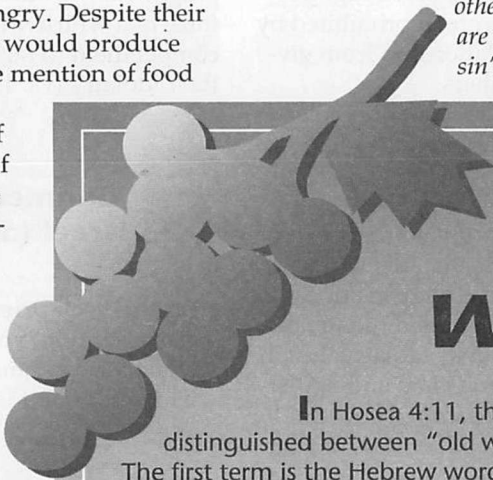
The punishment suffered by Israel's disobedient priests was designed to show them the futility of sin (vs. 10). Regardless of how much they gorged themselves, they would still be hungry. Despite their prostitution, they would produce no offspring. (The mention of food may refer to the priestly custom of eating a portion of the sacrifices. The mention of prostitution may refer to pagan ritual prostitution.)

Although drunkenness was often a part of idolatrous worship, the mention of old and new wine in verse 11 is probably symbolic. God's people had become spiritually intoxicated by Baal worship as a result of priestly unfaithfulness. The effect was

to "take away the understanding." More literally, the Hebrew says the wines "take away the heart of my people."

What was true of Israel's false worship is also true of sin in general. Sin can blind the mind and harden the heart. It can dull our spiritual senses so that the things of God are no longer appealing. Hebrews 3:13 warns of the need to "encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness."

Ask Yourself . . . How can I encourage others so that they are not hardened by sin's deceitfulness?



NEW WINE

In Hosea 4:11, the prophet distinguished between "old wine and new." The first term is the Hebrew word *yayin*, the usual term for wine. The second term is *tirosh*; it may refer to wine of a recent vintage. Both wines were fermented and capable of intoxicating.

Wine was part of the daily offering (Exod. 29:40). New wine in particular was part of the priest's compensation for service (Num. 18:12). New wine was also used in pagan worship.

Instead of turning to God for direction, the priests sought it from senseless objects made of wood. The term for "idol" in Hosea 4:12 literally means "tree"; idols were often made of tree trunks. The "stick of wood" probably refers to divination using pieces of wood.

The spirit of prostitution that had infected the priests, both in a spiritual and literal sense, spread to their offspring. Following the custom of their fathers, the women of these priestly families gave themselves over to ritual prostitution (vs. 13). The thought behind the Hebrew word that is translated "daughters-in-law" is of a woman prohibited by the marriage relationship from giving herself to others.

The men of Israel not only tolerated such promiscuity, they had encouraged it by their own participation (vs. 14). Because of their initiative, the Lord held them even more responsible than the women.

Indictment gives way to appeal in verse 15 as Hosea urged Judah not to follow Israel in its idolatry. Judah was told to avoid Gilgal and Bethel ("Beth Aven," meaning "house of wickedness")—both centers of false worship. Judah was also ordered to refrain from using the Lord's name in frivolous oath taking.

Verses 16-18 lament the Israelites' determination to continue in disobedience. Their attitude was like that of "a stubborn heifer" (vs. 16). God therefore could not "pasture them like lambs in a meadow," meaning He could not let the Israelites continue to live peacefully in the land.

"Ephraim," mentioned in verse 17, stands for the entire nation, not just the tribe of Ephraim. Israel was worshiping idols, so it was to be left alone. This isolation may refer to Judahites keeping away from the Israelites or to God's rejection of Israel.

Although God had disciplined the Israelites, they continued in their prostituting ways. The statement "their drinks are gone" in verse 18 probably alludes to judgment by drought.

Unwilling to listen to God, the people were to be abandoned to judgment. It would come with the force of a whirlwind and would compel them to face the shame of their idolatry (vs. 19).



Judgment against Israel (5:1-7)

Hear this, you priests!

Pay attention, you Israelites!

Listen, O royal house!

This judgment is against you.

—Hosea 5:1

This portion of Hosea's prophecy begins with a call to the priests, people, and royal house of Israel (vs. 1). The priesthood and royalty comprised the two halves, religious and political, of the nation's leadership. These leaders were guilty of drawing the people into infidelity to God.

Having gotten the attention of the three groups, God announced



This Assyrian relief sculpture, dating from Hosea's era, shows one way nets were used in hunting. Hosea compared idolatrous religion to a snare, which was a kind of trap for catching small animals, and to a net (Hos. 5:1).

judgment against them. The reason for this? Because they had set a "snare" and a "net" (vs. 1) and had been "rebels" (vs. 2). Probably these are all symbolic references to the promotion of idolatrous religion at such places as Mizpah and Mount Tabor. A possible translation of the first line in verse 2 has it referring to a third site, Shittim (see New Revised Standard Version).

The Bible is very clear in its condemnation of people's enticing others to sin (Matt. 18:6). Those who have power or authority must be especially careful not to influence others to disobey God.

Ask Yourself . . . Have I ever done something that enticed someone under my authority to sin?

The Lord's decision to discipline the Israelites for their wrongdoing was a fair one because He knew all the facts about Israel, or Ephraim (Hos. 5:3). He knew, for example, that Israel had "turned to prostitu-

tion," both literally and figuratively. As a result, Israel was "corrupt" (meaning "ceremonially unclean").

The Israelites needed to return to God, but He knew they would not do this (vs. 4). They were deep into their false religion and would not come out of it. Their hearts were wicked and cold toward the Lord.

The language of the courtroom returns in verse 5, which warns that Israel's own pride had provided condemning testimony. But pride goes before a fall, and proud Israel was set to take a major tumble. This stumbling would be judgment because of its sin. Furthermore, Israel would cause Judah to stumble too. Probably this means that the Israelites would get the Judahites into trouble with God by encouraging them to take part in false worship.

Because of their stumbling, the Israelites would try to placate God by offering their flocks and herds as sacrifices (vs. 6). But though they would seek God in this way, they

would not find Him. He would withdraw from them, probably because their repentance would not be genuine. (In other words, their behavior would not have changed.)

The translation of verse 7 is debatable, but certainly the verse gives added justification for judgment against Israel. It says the Israelites were unfaithful to God. The reference to “illegitimate children” hints at the natural and spiritual results of religious prostitution. The monthly New Moon festivals, which were supposed to be a source of blessing, would become destructive.

d Judgment on Both Kingdoms (5:8-15)

**For I will be like a lion to Ephraim,
like a great lion to Judah.**

**I will tear them to pieces and go
away;**

**I will carry them off, with no one
to rescue them.**

**Then I will go back to my place
until they admit their guilt.**

—Hosea 5:14, 15a

The verses in this section apparently reflect the fact that in Hosea’s day Judah and Israel were warring with one another. In this context, the Lord declared that He posed the greatest threat to the two nations if they continued to disobey Him.

When watchmen in Hosea’s day would see an approaching army, they would announce the threat

by blowing on a horn. That kind of alarm was needed in southern Israel (vs. 8). Gibeah, Ramah, and Bethel (“Beth Aven”)—all cities in the territory allotted to the tribe of Benjamin—are believed to have been included within the borders of Israel during Hosea’s career. These cities would be attacked in the order in which they are named if the army of Judah marched along the main road leading north from Jerusalem.

Verse 9 contains God’s testimony that the destruction would be severe in Ephraim. Here “Ephraim” may refer only to the tribe of Ephraim, rather than to Israel as a whole. Occupying territory in southern Israel, the tribe of Ephraim would bear the brunt of Judah’s attack.

The Lord compared the attempt by Judah’s leaders to gain territory from its neighbor Israel to the moving of boundary stones (vs. 10). In those days large stones were often set up to mark the border between one person’s property and another’s; moving the stones was a serious offense. Similarly, God’s wrath would come against the Judahites like a flood because of their aggression against the Israelites.

But while the people of Judah would be judged, so would be the people of Ephraim (vs. 11). Here “Ephraim” may stand for all of Israel. Both nations would be consumed, as God would act “like a moth” or “like rot” upon them (vs. 12).

The conflict between Israel and Judah was hard on both, like a physical disease or injury (vs. 13). Israel

Israel and Judah in the Late Eighth Century B.C.



Around 732 B.C., Israel under King Pekah and Syria under King Rezin joined forces to invade Judah (II Kings 16:5). Their purpose was to depose Judah's new king, Ahaz, and replace him with a man of their own choosing. Ahaz appealed to Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria for aid. The Assyrians destroyed Damascus, the capital of Syria. Before they could do the same to Samaria, the capital of Israel, the Israelites revolted against Pekah. They replaced him with Hoshea, who pacified Assyria by paying tribute.

The invasion of Israel by Judah described in Hosea 5:8-11 is not recorded in the Old Testament's historical books. However, Ahaz may have ordered it as retaliation for Israel's aggression against Judah.

responded by turning to Assyria. Evidently, the king of Israel asked the Assyrian emperor to promise Israel protection against Judah in return for tribute.

This attempt was futile; the Assyrian emperor could not give Israel true security. In fact, no one could protect Israel or Judah if God wanted them harmed. And He did want them punished for their sin. He would be like a man-eating lion attacking them (vs. 14).

But after the attack, God (like a lion going off to wait in its lair!) would wait for His people to confess their sins and seek His favor once again.

When people indulge in sinful and destructive habits, they begin to see the effects in their lives. For example, when a parent is abusive and insensitive to his family, he starts to see the family break apart. Or when a person seeks pleasure in drug taking, and she begins to find herself consumed by an addiction. But as the pain rises in their lives, sinful people can find a sure



This Assyrian relief sculpture shows King Jehu of Israel bowing before the Assyrian emperor. In the waning years of the Israelite kingdom, Israel alternately defied and submitted to the Assyrians. Through Hosea, God condemned Israel for applying to the "great king" of Assyria for help (Hos. 5:13).

source of deliverance by repenting of their sins and seeking the Lord.

Ask Yourself . . . Does the suffering I have brought on myself prompt me to seek the Lord?

Hosea 6—10 in Brief

Chapter 6 opens with a call to return to the Lord (6:1-3). The Lord's response, however, compares Israel's love to the morning mist (vss. 4-10). Such repentance was insincere and inadequate to deliver anyone from judgment.

Israel's sins of deceit, theft, adultery, and drunkenness are repeated in Hosea 6:11 through 7:7. Israel is compared to a flat cake that had only been half turned and was thus inedible (7:8-13). Because the Israel-

ites were easily led by nations such as Assyria and Egypt, they are compared to a senseless dove. They would be captured like a bird in a net. Although judgment caused God's people to cry out in misery, they were insincere (vss. 14-16).

Hosea 8 attacks Israel's spiritually bankrupt political system and the calf worship of Samaria. These verses also condemn the people for

attempting to manipulate God with their sacrifices. Their sin offerings had become offerings of sin.

The Lord promised to put an end to such hypocritical worship by sending Israel into exile (9:1-9). He assured the people that the prophet's warnings were not the ravings of a maniac. He said even the children would suffer because of Israel's disobedience (vss. 10-17).

The coming exile would eventually strip Israel of its monarchy, its altars, and its false idols (10:1-8). Samaria and the high places of Israel would be destroyed. Verses 9-15 close this section with a mixture of appeal and warning. Although Hosea urged God's people to sow righteousness and reap the harvest of unfailing love, he also predicted the complete destruction of Bethel.

10

God's Love and Forgiveness

Hosea 11—14

a God's Love for His Children (11:1-11)

How can I give you up, Ephraim?

How can I hand you over, Israel?

How can I treat you like Admah?

How can I make you like
Zeboiim?

My heart is changed within me;
all my compassion is aroused.

—Hosea 11:8

The final prophecies in the Book of Hosea contain a mixture of doom and hope for God's people.

Doom because the people were disobedient. Hope because God is merciful.

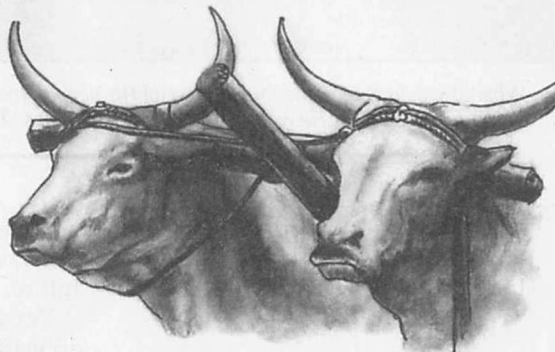
The first four verses of chapter 11 look backward in time and present a picture of God's tender care for the Israelites. God compared the Israelites to a child and Himself to their father. He was recalling the nation's infancy, which occurred when He had led them out of Egypt.

Despite God's care for the nation, the Israelites had

quickly turned away from Him. They had become involved in Baal worship, which was common among their neighbors.

Like a father, God had taught Israel ("Ephraim," vs. 3) to walk. In other words, He had helped the nation get established and become successful in its early history. But the ungrateful Israelites did not acknowledge that the goodness they enjoyed came from God.

In verse 4, the comparison changes from that of parent and child to that of farmer and beast. But the point is the same. The Lord was like a compassionate farmer who leads



Looking back to the time when He had rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, God said, "I lifted the yoke from their neck" (Hos. 11:4).

his animal kindly, lifts its burdens, and bends down to feed it. This shows that God had lovingly taken care of the Israelites in their early history.

Christ shows the same love to His followers. He calls us and teaches us. He leads us with love, eases our burdens, and gives us what we need.

have a different focus. These verses look not to Israel's past but to its near future—a future involving defeat and exile. These verses predict the captivity of the Israelites by the Assyrians in around 723 B.C.

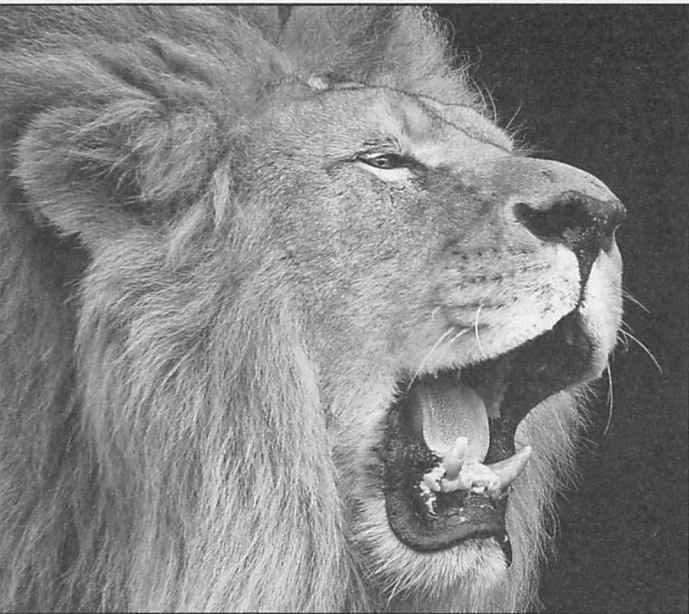
The Israelites' refusal to repent meant that they would again be held captive, just as they had been

enslaved centuries earlier in Egypt. Verse 5 seems to predict that this time the Israelites would be held in Egypt and in Assyria. "Egypt" here may stand symbolically for Assyria. However, it is known that some Israelites fled to Egypt (Jer. 42:13-22).

The captivity would follow an invasion by the Assyrians in which Israel's cities would be scenes of violence as the invaders breached the city gates (Hos. 11:6).

One casualty of the invasion would be Israel's confident plans for the future.

Verse 7 follows with an indictment accusing Israel of a bent to apostasy. It is coupled with a warning that prayer in the time of distress would be useless; God would not respond.



When it would come time for God to call His people, the call would be unmistakable, for He would "roar like a lion" (Hos. 11:10).

It does us good to stop occasionally and take stock of all the ways the Lord shows us His love.

Ask Yourself . . . How has the Lord acted lovingly toward me this week?

The next three verses (vss. 5-7)

Verses 8 through 11 have yet another focus. This time the distant future, not the near future, is in view. These verses may have been partly fulfilled by the return of Judahites from Babylonian captivity. But their ultimate fulfillment lies in either the Christian church or future Jewish history, according to different interpreters.

Even though God was determined to let Israel's cities be destroyed and let the people be taken into captivity, He would not entirely destroy His people. Because of His love, He would not let the Israelites be utterly wiped out like the cities of Admah and Zeboiim, which were destroyed in Abraham's day along with Sodom and Gomorrah (Deut. 29:23). The people deserved that fate, but God would have a sort of change of heart and would again show compassion.

Humans are often unfaithful, but God would be faithful to His love for the people (Hos. 11:9). So He would hold back the ultimate expression of His wrath. In the end, He would exhibit mercy and not anger.

Ask Yourself . . . When was the last time I discovered that God had shown me mercy although I was unaware of it the time?

Not only would God withhold His wrath, but also He would call the people back to the land (vss. 10, 11). This call would be like a lion's roar. It would cause the people to come from wherever they lived to Israel, where God would settle them in their homes.

b The People's Disobedience to God (11:12—12:14)

Ephraim has surrounded me with lies,
the house of Israel with deceit.
And Judah is unruly against God,
even against the faithful Holy One.

—Hosea 11:12

Despite the promises of the preceding verses, a condemning tone returns in Hosea 11:12—12:14. Israel is the main object of condemnation, but as we see from 11:12, Judah was included too.

Israel and Judah had been unfaithful to the covenant: Israel was guilty of lying and deceit; Judah was unruly against God. But in contrast to these unfaithful nations, God remained "the faithful Holy One."

Some of Israel's mistakes are described in verse 1 of chapter 12. Israel acted like a fool trying to chase the wind. It was lying and violent. It tried to achieve peace simultaneously with Assyria and Egypt, the rival superpowers of the day.

Because of wrongdoing by His people, God accused them and would punish them (vs. 2). But this punishment would be no more than the people deserved; it would be a repayment for their sinful deeds.

In verse 2, the people of Israel are called by the name of Jacob, one of their ancestors. (Jacob's alternate name was Israel.) In verses 3 and

The LIFE of **JACOB**

Jacob was the son of Isaac and Rebecca and was the twin brother of Esau. When the brothers were grown, Jacob took advantage of Esau to buy the birthright from him. Later, Jacob used deception to receive the firstborn's blessing in the place of Esau.

To escape Esau's fury, Jacob fled to relatives in Paddan Aram. On the way, at Bethel, he saw a vision of a stairway to heaven. In Paddan Aram Jacob worked for his Uncle Laban in return for the right to marry Laban's daughter Rachel.

When the time came for Jacob to leave Paddan Aram, Jacob was involved in three important events: he made a peace treaty with Laban, he wrestled with the Angel of the Lord, and he reconciled with Esau. Then he settled in the vicinity of Hebron.

Jacob had twelve sons. One of them, Joseph, rose to a high position in Egypt. Jacob spent his final years in Egypt surrounded by his family.

For the story of Jacob, see Genesis 25:21-34; 27—35; 42:1-5, 29—43:14; 45:25—47:12, 27—50:1

4, as well as in verse 12, the historical Jacob is mentioned.

Three events in Jacob's life appear in verses 3 and 4. The first is the way Jacob grasped his twin brother's heel while they were in their mother's womb (Gen. 25:26). The second is his wrestling match with the Angel of the Lord (32:24-29). The third is his vision at Bethel (28:10-15).

The purpose for mentioning these events is probably revealed in Hosea 12:5. That verse includes several names for God, thereby precisely identifying the God of Israel: Yahweh. Jacob had been blessed because he was faithful to Yahweh. Similarly, if Israel and Judah were faithful to Yahweh, rather than to false gods, they would be blessed.

But the two nations were not particularly faithful to the Lord in Hosea's day. That's why they were told, "You must return to your God; maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always" (vs. 6). They needed a change both in the way they responded to God and in the way they treated people.

Verse 6 is a good one for Christians to memorize. It contains a capsule description of what God expects of

us. It reminds us of both our need to depend on God and our duty to act justly and lovingly toward others.

Ask Yourself . . . What part of verse 6 presents the greatest challenge to me personally?

One way in which Israel combined injustice and flawed spirituality was in its attitude toward wealth (vss. 7, 8). Israel was dishonest in its trade with other nations. This dishonesty had helped create wealth, which in its turn led the nation to imagine that “they”—that is, the prophets—would not convict it of sin. Since wealth was considered a sign of God’s blessing, Israel thought God was pleased with them. Israel was wrong.

Verse 9 predicts a future when the Israelites would be forced to exchange their comfortable homes for flimsy huts like those they used during the feast of tabernacles (Lev. 23:42, 43). Hosea 12:9, then, is a glimpse of conditions during the Assyrian captivity.

This prediction of coming hardships was hardly something new. God had already given the Israelites ample warning through the prophets, who had visions and who acted out parables (vs. 10). One might call Hosea’s family a parable.

Hosea asked two questions, both of which demand the answer “yes” (vs. 11). The two questions involve Gilead and Gilgal as examples of Israel’s disobedience. The people of Gilead were wicked and the people of Gilgal were sacrificing bulls in

idolatrous worship. Thus both places, along with the rest of the nation, would be judged.

Hosea referred to two more events from Israel’s past as illustrations of God’s care for His people. Verse 12 recalls how Jacob served Laban in exchange for a wife (Gen. 29:14b-30). Hosea 12:13 recounts how God used Moses to rescue Israel from Egypt.

These two verses are linked by the theme of God’s provision: the Lord provided Jacob with a wife and early Israel with a deliverer. In the same way, God provided the Israelites of Hosea’s generation with many good things. Yet Israel was not grateful and obedient to God in response. Such disregard had provoked God to anger so that God was now determined to let Israel suffer the consequences of its wrongdoing (vs. 14).

Hosea 13:1-16 in Brief

Chapter 13 contains many of the elements we have seen already in the Book of Hosea. We find here descriptions of Israel’s disobedience, recollections of God’s faithfulness and past care for the nation, predictions of dire judgment, and promises of mercy. The elements are all mixed up together.

One of the most interesting parts of this chapter is a reference to redemption from death (vs. 14; compare I Cor. 15:55).

C A Final Message of Hope (14:1-9)

I will heal their waywardness
and love them freely,
for my anger has turned away
from them.

—Hosea 14:4

Unfaithfulness and judgment have been the dominant themes until this point in the Book of Hosea. However, those themes are submergled by the theme of hope as Hosea's prophecy draws to its close. Here in the final verses we have a call to repentance (vss. 1-3), a picture of restoration (vss. 4-8), and a concluding challenge to the book's readers (vs. 9).

The prophet called his fellow citizens to return to the Lord (vs. 1). Probably he originally delivered this call near the end of the northern kingdom, when people were beginning to realize that defeat by the Assyrian forces was likely. Hosea attributed the nation's downfall to its sins, so that's why the people needed to return to God.

Hosea urged the people, "Take words with you and return to the Lord" (vs. 2a). These "words" were the words of a sincere prayer of repentance.

The prophet went so far as to offer a model prayer for the people (vss. 2b, 3). This prayer begins with an appeal for forgiveness. Then it moves into an admission that political alliances ("Assyria"), military

might ("war-horses"), and idols ("what our own hands have made") could not provide true security. Only God could provide that kind of security.

Ask Yourself . . . What have I been depending on for my security and well-being?

If the people were to pray in the way Hosea described, God would provide a magnificent restoration. Verses 4 through 8 describe just such a restoration. The ultimate fulfillment of the promises contained in these verses was well beyond Hosea's generation. Yet the suffering Israelites must have taken some comfort in knowing that a far better time was coming.

The picture of restoration begins with some straightforward language (vs. 4). In the future time, God would heal His people instead of punish them. He would show them His love instead of His wrath.

The remainder of the restoration picture, however, contains a lot of symbolic language (vss. 5-8). It is a garden of images meant to express the fruitfulness and blessing that God's people would experience. In these verses, God is compared to dew and a green pine tree. Israel is compared to a lily, a cedar of Lebanon, an olive tree, grain, a vine, and Lebanese wine.

Verse 8 indicates that in the future time, God's people would look only to Him and not to other gods. The Israelites had thought that their fruitfulness had come from the

idols they worshiped, but in the future God's people would certainly receive their fruitfulness from the Lord.

Ask Yourself . . . How does God make me fruitful through Jesus Christ?

The Book of Hosea concludes with a challenge to the reader (vs. 9). In effect, this verse says, "Reader, if you are spiritually wise, you will have insight into the Lord's teachings that make up this book and will follow them."

Verse 9 begins by asking "Who is wise?" and "Who is discerning?" These questions are designed to

make the reader think to himself or herself, Am I wise and discerning? And since (as we learn elsewhere in Scripture) the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, to be wise and discerning in the sense that Hosea meant requires a faith relationship with God. If we have that relationship and are spiritually wise, then to us belong Hosea's promises that we will "realize these things" and "understand them."

Hosea declared that "the ways of the LORD are right." In other words, the teachings of Scripture, including those in Hosea's book, describe the acceptable way for living one's life. But while some follow the ways of

Cedars of Lebanon. God said that His people would be like a cedar of Lebanon (Hos. 14: 5, 6).



the Lord, others don't. "The righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them."

This verse shows us the value of studying the Book of Hosea, as well as other books in Scripture. Make no mistake about it, Bible study can be hard. But if we come at the Bible with a heart that's open to receive God's teachings, we can gain

insights into the meaning of passages we examine. Those insights are important not because they represent a mental achievement but because they show us how to live.

Ask Yourself . . . How wise and discerning am I in spiritual matters?

11

Judgment for Those Who Deserve It

Micah 1—2

a Judgment for Jerusalem and Samaria (1:1-7)

What is Jacob's transgression?

Is it not Samaria?

What is Judah's high place?

Is it not Jerusalem?

—Micah 1:5

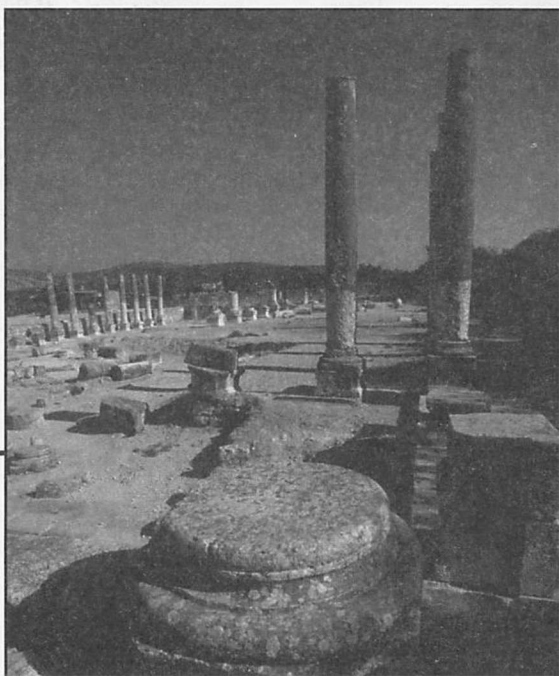
The opening verse of this book identifies its author, historical context, and nature. The author was the prophet Micah, whose home was Moresheth (or Moresheth Gath) in Judah. Micah prophesied during the reigns of the Judahite kings Jotham (about 750–732 B.C.), Ahaz (about 735–715 B.C.), and Hezekiah (about 715–686 B.C.). The book deals with both Israel and Judah, as represented by their capitals.

Verse 2 constitutes an introduction to the prophecy

that follows. God called the peoples of the world to listen to a witness against them. The meaning seems to be this: As the peoples of the world would see the way God would judge His own people—the Israelites and Judahites—because of disobedience, these peoples would see the way He would treat them unless they turned to Him.

This reminds us that we have a responsibility to learn from judgments in the past. The Bible contains numerous stories of times when

Ruins at ancient Samaria. Micah prophesied that God would destroy Samaria (Mic. 1:6, 7).



God inflicted His wrath upon sinners. These stories can spur us on to redouble our efforts at obedience to God.

Ask Yourself . . . What biblical account of judgment has had the greatest impact upon me?

Verses 3 and 4 draw attention to a visitation of the Lord. In this visitation He descends from heaven and uses the high places as His stepping-stones. Under His feet the mountains melt and the valleys split apart. All this is symbolism for the way God would send judgment on His rebellious people.

According to verse 5, the purpose for the judgment would be to punish the sins of Israel ("Jacob") and Judah. People from both nations had violated God's covenant by worshipping other gods. The mention of the two capitals in verse 5 may mean either (1) that false worship was going on in both cities or (2) that the political leadership of both nations was involved in the sin of idolatry. Perhaps both were true.

For Israel's transgression, God would utterly destroy the city of Samaria (vss. 6, 7a). In particular, God would destroy the city's idols and all that went along with idol worship. Possibly in this passage God was foretelling what would happen when the Assyrians would capture Samaria. However, at that time the city was not seriously damaged. (It was destroyed six hundred years later, then rebuilt.)

The second half of verse 7 is not

entirely clear. It may mean that Samaria's conquerors would destroy Israel's idols, which had been paid for by pagan religious prostitution, and then the conquerors would reuse the precious metal for idols of their own. Or perhaps it means that the metal from idols was used by the Assyrian invaders as payment for prostitutes.

b Lament over Judah's Destruction (1:8-16)

Because of this I will weep and
wail;

I will go about barefoot and
naked.

I will howl like a jackal
and moan like an owl.

For her wound is incurable;
it has come to Judah.

It has reached the very gate of my
people,
even to Jerusalem itself.

—Micah 1:8

It was not an easy thing for Micah to tell about the destruction of Samaria (vss. 6, 7). The thought of it affected him deeply. He vowed to display signs of mourning publicly (vs. 8).

Undoubtedly, Micah grieved for the Israelites' sake. But he grieved more because of what the destruction of Samaria meant for his own people, the Judahites. Samaria's destruction showed that God was willing to turn His wrath upon His covenant people if they persisted in

sinning against Him. Thus the judgment ("wound," vs. 9) upon Samaria threatened Jerusalem, too. And as a matter of fact, the Assyrians all but overtook Jerusalem in 701 - the way they overtook Samaria about twenty-two years earlier.

Ask Yourself . . . Do I, like Micah, grieve over the fate of those who reject God?

While Micah predicted that Jerusalem would be threatened with judgment, he predicted that other cities of Judah would actually be judged (vss. 10-15). This accurately describes what happened in 701 B.C. The Bible and Assyrian records agree that the Assyrian emperor Sennacherib captured dozens of cities in Judah but failed to capture Jerusalem.

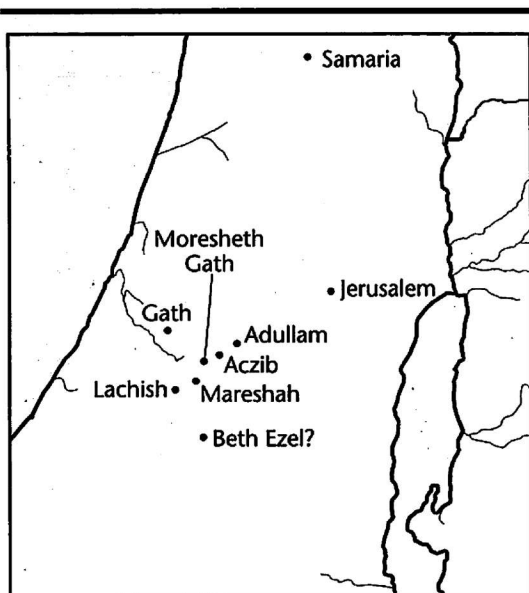
Most of the cities in verses 10 through 15 (all except the first) were cities of Judah and targets of the Assyrian invasion. Micah chose to mention most of these cities (all except the last) because of what their names mean or sound like. In other words, these verses contain a series of puns in which a city's name is linked with the rest of the prophecy related to it.

Verses 10 through 16 constitute a lament (mourning song) over the coming destruction in Judah.

Gath. No one was to tell about Judah's danger nor to weep in Gath (vs. 10). "Gath" sounds like the Hebrew for "tell." Since Gath was a Philistine city, Micah didn't want to give the Philistines cause to rejoice over Judah's troubles (compare II Sam. 1:20).

Beth Ophrah. The people of Beth Ophrah were to roll in the dust (Mic. 1:10b). "Beth Ophrah" means "house of dust." Thus while the people of Judah were to refrain from weeping in Gath, they were to show a typical sign of mourning—rolling in the dust—in Beth Ophrah.

Shaphir. The people of Shaphir were to pass on in nakedness and shame (vs. 11a). "Shaphir" means



This map shows some of the cities named in Micah's lament (Mic. 1:10-16). The locations of the others are not known.

"pleasant," but the people of Shaphir would have anything but a pleasant time when the invaders would lead them out of their hometown as prisoners.

Zaanan. The people of Zaanan would not come out (vs. 11b). "Zaanan" sounds like the Hebrew for "come out." When the invaders were in the land, the people of Zaanan would not leave their city to engage them in battle, probably because they were afraid.

Beth Ezel. Beth Ezel was in mourning and its protection was taken away (vs. 11c). "Beth Ezel" means "house of taking away." The protection this town provided to Jerusalem would be removed once it was captured by the invaders.

Maroth. The people of Maroth would writhe in pain while waiting for relief (vs. 12). "Maroth" sounds like the Hebrew for "bitter," and Maroth would get bitterness instead of relief, because judgment

was coming. If even Jerusalem was not left unharmed, certainly Maroth would be hurt.

Lachish. The people of Lachish were to harness a team of horses to a chariot (vs. 13). "Lachish" sounds like the Hebrew for "team." The people of Lachish would have to escape at high speed to get away from the invaders. They deserved such judgment because they had been the "beginning of sin to the Daughter of Zion [Jerusalem]" by becoming one of Judah's first centers of idolatry.

Moreseth Gath. Jerusalem would give parting gifts to Moreseth Gath (vs. 14a). "Moreseth" sounds like the Hebrew for "betroted." The "parting gifts" make up a dowry, or



This relief sculpture from the Assyrian royal palace depicts the successful siege of Lachish by the Assyrians in 701 B.C. Micah prophesied that Lachish, along with other cities of Judah, would be punished (Mic. 1:13).

bride price. Jerusalem would have to give up Moresheth Gath to the invaders as a man gives up a dowry.

Aczib. The town of Aczib would prove deceptive to the nation's kings (vs. 14b). "Aczib" means "deception" in Hebrew. The meaning here is unclear. Since Jeremiah applied the same word to a stream that dries up (Jer. 15:18), Micah's use of the word perhaps means that Aczib would disappear. Or perhaps the idea is that Judah's royalty would lose revenue once Aczib fell into foreign hands.

Mareshah. A conqueror would come against the people of Mareshah (Mic. 1:15a). "Mareshah" sounds like the Hebrew for "conqueror." Sennacherib would conquer Mareshah.

Adullam. The glory of Israel would come to Adullam (vs. 15b). This prophecy does not contain a pun, but it does contain a historical allusion. While David was on the run for his life, he hid out in Adullam (1 Sam. 22:1). Similarly, the "glory of Israel" (Mic. 1:15b)—meaning Judah's leaders—would have to escape from Jerusalem to Adullam because of invaders.

Verse 16 forms a conclusion to the lament. This verse calls Jerusalem to shave her head in mourning for her children. Here is a look ahead to the time when the people of Judah would leave the land for exile—an event that was not caused by the Assyrians in 701 B.C. but by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.

One day the people of Jerusalem would all grieve as Micah grieved.

C Disaster Planned for Planners of Iniquity (2:1-5)

**I am planning disaster against this people,
from which you cannot save yourselves.**

**You will no longer walk proudly,
for it will be a time of calamity.**

—Micah 2:3

Micah next turned his attention to unscrupulous people in Judah. God had appropriate punishment in mind for these sinners.

When a prophet pronounced woe upon somebody, this was a way of warning about impending judgment against them. Micah pronounced woe upon people who stayed awake at night hatching evil plots and then got up in the morning to carry out their plans (vs. 1). These people were successful in their schemes "because it [was] in their power to do it." These were the influential ones of Israel.

Specifically, Micah had in mind people who committed the crime of land grabbing (vs. 2). These unscrupulous people used fraud (probably through manipulation of the court system) to snatch real estate belonging to others.

God was aware of what was going on in Judah. He planned "disaster" (vs. 3) for the people who plotted "evil" (vs. 1). The same word is translated "disaster" and "evil." The rich people planned evil, and evil

they would get. They would “no longer walk proudly.” They would face “a time of calamity.”

When that time came, the people would raise a lament about what had happened to them (vs. 4). In this lament they would declare that God had allowed others to take their land from them. (A suitable punishment for people who had stolen others’ land!) This suggests that Micah was looking ahead to the time of the Babylonian captivity.

This section of the book ends with a prediction that the wicked people would “have no one in the assembly of the Lord to divide the land by lot” (vs. 5). Commentators are divided over what this prediction means. Some commentators say it means that the wicked would have no descendants among those who would later return from exile and occupy land in Judah. Other commentators say this verse means the wicked will have no descendants among those who receive allotments of God’s benefits in the end times.

The threats in these verses can remind us that the nature of our behavior often determines the consequences of that behavior. The apostle Paul warned the Christians of Galatia: “The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life” (Gal. 6:8).

Ask Yourself . . . What kind of harvest will I reap from today’s actions?

d False Prophets for a Wayward People (2:6-11)

If a liar and deceiver comes and says,

“I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer,”

he would be just the prophet for this people!

—Micah 2:11

Micah was not the only prophet in Judah. There were others—some true prophets, some false prophets. The false prophets did not care for Micah’s message, which contradicted their own. So they tried to shut him up. “Do not prophesy about these things,” they said (vs. 6).

The last phrase of verse 6 can be translated in two ways. As the NIV translates it, this phrase was the false prophets’ way of saying that the disgrace Micah had prophesied for Judah was not coming. But if the phrase is translated “Reproaches will not be turned back” (New American Standard Bible), then it shows that the false prophets felt personally reproached as long as Micah predicted judgment.

Furthermore, Micah’s opponents accused him of being too negative in his theology (vs. 7a). They felt that the kind of wrath he predicted was inconsistent with God’s nature. God was too loving ever to judge His covenant people, they believed.

The second half of verse 7 can be interpreted in different ways,

depending on whether you take it as spoken by the false prophets or by God. If the false prophets said these things, they were pointing to their large following among those who claimed to be upright as evidence for the validity of their message. If God spoke these things, He was correcting the false prophets' one-sided view by declaring that He does good only for the upright.

Verses 8 and 9 describe vicious acts committed by people of Judah. Evidently, the rich and powerful people were acting like an enemy toward the poor and powerless of their own nation. One minute a person would be feeling as safe as a soldier home from war; the next minute, wicked people would be stealing the clothes off his back. One minute a widow and her children would be enjoying their comfortable home and other blessings given by God; the next minute, wicked people would be tossing the family out in the street.

Once again, God promised an appropriate punishment for wrongdoers. Those who had stolen homes would themselves be cast out from their homeland (vs. 10). This is another prediction of captivity. The people's sins had "defiled" the land, or made it unclean, so badly that it was as if the land could never be purified. Therefore, the land was uninhabitable; the people could not have contact with the land, like any unclean thing.

Verse 11 contains Micah's sarcastic description of the kind of prophet the people of Judah really wanted.

A person who prophesied only prosperity (represented by "plenty of wine and beer") was just the sort of prophet the people wanted. They did not want to hear the truths a prophet like Micah told.

This goes to show that our evaluation of those who preach God's Word should not be based on whether or not we like their message. Our evaluation must be determined by the message's accuracy.

Ask Yourself . . . *Am I ever tempted to ignore messages from God's Word that are not what I want to hear?*



A Flock Penned and Released (2:12, 13)

I will surely gather all of you, O Jacob;

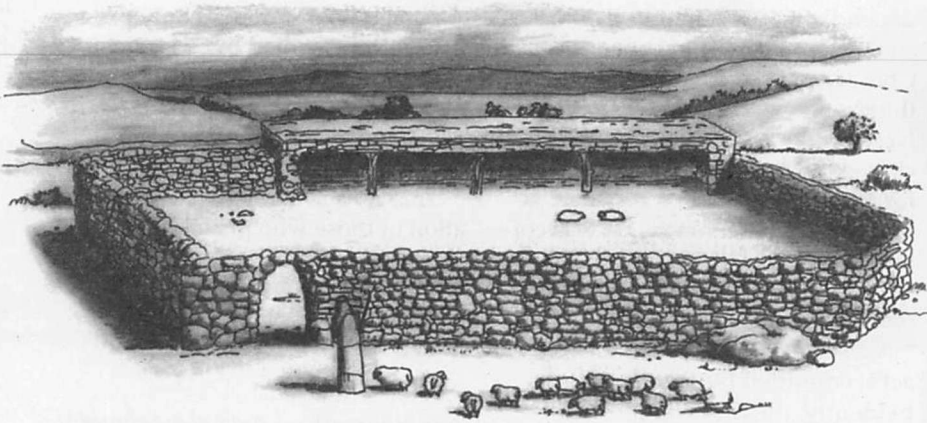
I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel.

**I will bring them together like sheep in a pen,
like a flock in its pasture;
the place will throng with people.**

—Micah 2:12

After predicting exile, Micah offered some words of hope. The people would be gathered together; then led out.

The words of hope were for a "remnant of Israel" (vs. 12). In the Bible a remnant is usually a group who survives judgment because of their faithfulness and therefore



A sheep pen. Micah compared a remnant of Israel to sheep breaking out of a pen with the Lord leading the way (Mic. 2:12, 13).

inherits the promises and blessings of the Lord. The remnant Micah spoke of would be gathered like sheep in a pen or like a flock in a pasture. The words translated “throng with people” carry the idea of a large crowd’s murmuring.

Suddenly, there would appear among the throng one who would break through the enclosure and lead the others out (vs. 13). The person is the “king” and apparently is either the same as the “Lord” or associated with the “Lord.”

These two verses, so simple in themselves, have been interpreted in a number of different ways. Here are four possible interpretations of the passage:

- The bringing together is the gathering of Judahites in Jerusalem

before or during Sennacherib’s siege. The breaking through is the miraculous ending of this Assyrian siege. The king is God.

- The bringing together is the gathering of Judahites in Babylon during captivity there. The breaking through is the Jews’ return from captivity. The king is God or perhaps Sheshbazzar.

- The bringing together is the gathering of Christians in the church. The breaking through is the removal of obstacles to divine blessing for Christians. The king is Christ.

- The bringing together is the gathering of Jews to the Jewish homeland in the end times. The breaking through is the removal of obstacles to divine blessing for those Jews. The king is Christ.

12

Good News for the Faithful

Micah 3—5

Micah 3:1-12 in Brief

The third chapter of Micah contains three oracles. In the first oracle (vss. 1-4), God accused the leaders of doing injustices and hurting the people. God vowed not to hear the prayers of those evil leaders.

In the second oracle (vss. 5-8), God accused the false prophets of leading the people astray and of modifying their messages, depend-

ing on their fee. God promised that darkness would come over the prophets and they would not hear from Him. Unlike those prophets, Micah truly declared God's words.

In the third oracle (vss. 9-12), God again accused the nation's leaders of injustice and violence. Rulers, priests, and prophets all took bribes. Consequently, God declared that Jerusalem would be destroyed.

a

The Mountain of the Lord (4:1-5)

In the last days

the mountain of the LORD's
temple will be established
as chief among the mountains;
it will be raised above the hills,
and peoples will stream to it.
—Micah 4:1

Chapter 3 closed with a warning that the temple mount in Jerusalem would become a mound overgrown with thickets. But then chapter 4 opens by looking beyond that desolation to a day when the

temple mount would become the center of widespread devotion to the Lord. Some commentators interpret verses 1 through 5 as a mainly literal description of a future reign of Christ on earth. Other commentators take these verses as a mainly symbolic description of the Christian church.

The first three verses appear in a nearly identical form in the book by Micah's contemporary Isaiah (see Isa. 2:2-4). Did Micah borrow from Isaiah or did Isaiah borrow from Micah? Or did both prophets use some other source? We don't know.

In the ancient world, religious shrines and temples were often located at the tops of mountains



The Jerusalem temple mount in the foreground, with the Mount of Olives in the background. Micah said the temple mount would be "established as chief among the mountains" (Mic. 4:1).

or other high places, because of the idea that they were entrances to heaven. In similar fashion, the Israelites built their temple on a Judean hilltop. Other mountains, even ones nearby, are taller, yet Micah prophesied that the temple mount would be raised higher than other hills (Mic. 4:1). He meant that the temple mount would become the most important hill because it would be the place where peoples of the world would come to worship the Lord.

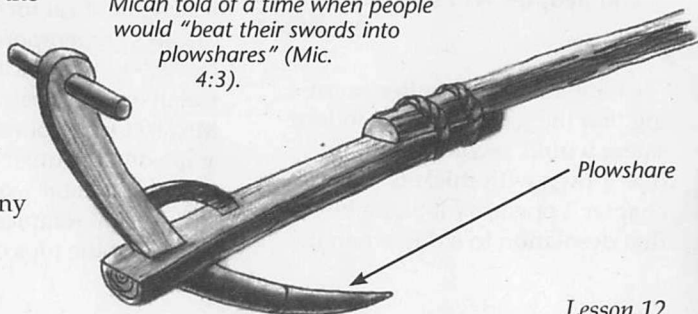
God chose the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as His covenant people. In one sense, the Israelites were exclusively God's people. Yet here and there in the Old Testament we find hints that a time was coming when individuals from many of the world's people groups would follow the Lord, Yahweh. In this vein, Micah described a time when "many nations" would

eagerly worship the Lord at the Jerusalem temple and would obey God's law (vs. 2).

When God would be honored by the peoples, life on earth would be different, better (vss. 3, 4). God would establish just relations between nations. People would give up their violent ways, converting weapons into tools and abandoning the arts of warfare. They would have a sense of security, enjoying life on their own property without fear.

These verses tell how faith and biblical principles can improve life. Christians are sometimes accused of wasting time on evangelism when the world has so many pressing needs for peace and justice. Certainly, Christians should advocate peace and justice. But we know that the surest way of making life better is by presenting the transforming

Micah told of a time when people would "beat their swords into plowshares" (Mic. 4:3).



Gospel of Jesus Christ in a winsome way.

Ask Yourself . . . What is my proper role in helping people both near and far come to the Lord?

The era when peoples would worship the Lord had not yet begun in Micah's lifetime. Other nations still worshiped other gods. So what were the people of Judah to do as they waited for the promised era of widespread submission to their God? Hold fast. On behalf of his fellow Judahites, Micah made a commitment to remain true to the Lord forever (vs. 5).

Biblical prophecy should motivate believers to obedience.

b Restoration for the Daughter of Zion (4:6-13)

As for you, O watchtower of the flock,
O stronghold of the Daughter of Zion,
the former dominion will be restored to you;
kingship will come to the Daughter of Jerusalem.
—Micah 4:8

One way to look at the present collection of verses is to see in them three linked prophecies (vss. 6-8; 9, 10; and 11-13), each contrasting present distress with future blessing.

Probably the distress was the danger presented by Assyria and Babylon, culminating in the Babylonian Captivity. The future blessing was the restoration of Judah after the captivity. However, the meaning of these verses may go beyond those historical fulfillments to an ultimate fulfillment in the messianic era.

In the first oracle (vss. 6-8), God characterized His people as "the lame," "the exiles," "those I have brought to grief," and "those driven away" (vs. 6). Clearly, the people of Judah had been (or would be) suffering. Yet God would make them into "a remnant" and "a strong nation" (vs. 7).

The people would be strong because they would have a strong ruler: God. Judah's human kings had gotten the nation into a lot of trouble, but Judah's heavenly King would rule perfectly from Mount Zion.

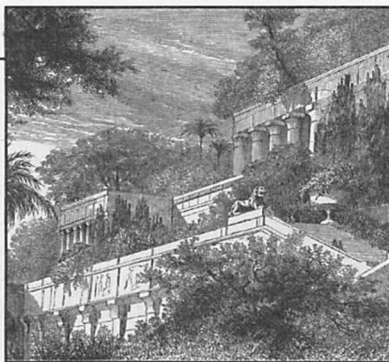
God addressed Jerusalem as the "watchtower of the flock" and the "stronghold of the Daughter of Zion" (vs. 8). Ancient peoples sometimes built stone watchtowers so that they could keep an eye on fields or flocks. The word translated "stronghold" is *ophel*, which may refer to a fortified area in eastern Jerusalem. God used the terms "watchtower" and "stronghold" simply to designate the capital of Judah. After a time of difficulty, God would restore dominion and kingship to Jerusalem.

The second oracle (vss. 9, 10) begins with a couple of questions. Perhaps Micah posed these ques-

tions to a people threatened by foreigners. In that case, Micah sarcastically asked the people why they were frightened, since they still had their political leaders in whom they had trusted (vs. 9). His point was that all along the people should have been following God instead of ungodly leaders. Now they would have to live with the consequences of their choice.

Micah did not have a message of immediate hope for the people. In the short term, the "Daughter of Zion," or the people of Jerusalem, would have to suffer like a woman in labor (vs. 10). They would have to leave the city and go into exile in Babylon.

In the long term, however, there was hope. While the people were in



An artist's view of the hanging gardens of ancient Babylon, where the Judeans spent a long captivity (Mic. 4:10).

Babylon, the Lord would redeem them, or buy them back.

In the third oracle (vss. 11-13), Micah turned his attention from the bright future back to the gloomy present. Jerusalem's enemies were at that time gathered against

her and were looking forward to her downfall (vs. 11).

The gloating of the unbelieving nations was both misguided and premature. Those nations misinterpreted Judah's circumstances because they misunderstood God's plan (vs. 12). He planned to protect His people and gather their enemies "like sheaves to the threshing floor." This is an image of destruction that people in an agricultural society would instantly have understood.

God planned to use His people

GRAIN THRESHING

After a grain harvest, workers would carry the reaped stalks to the threshing floor—a large open area, often at the top of a hill. There, typically, cattle or oxen would trample the stalks, drawing behind them a heavy wooden sledge. The beasts' hooves, as well as sharps studs embedded in the underside of the sledge, separated the kernels from the straw and chaff.

Because of the destruction done to the stalks of grain, threshing became a symbol of judgment (see Mic. 4:12, 13).

to carry out His destruction of their enemies. He called Jerusalem to rise and thresh her enemies like a strong ox (vs. 13). Once the people did this, they would be able to confiscate the wealth of their enemies and use it for the Lord's service.

The last of the three linked prophecies can remind us of the danger of viewing our circumstances as a gauge of God's approval. Isaiah 55:8 tells us, " 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the LORD." Romans 8:28 says, "In all things God works for the good of those who love him." We may have to suffer for a while, but if we love the Lord, He has a plan of mercy for us.

Ask Yourself . . . How well am I doing at trusting in God's plans?

C A Ruler from Bethlehem (5:1-6)

**You, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the
clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times.
—Micah 5:2**

Here is another prophecy that begins with present distress and ends with future blessing. In this prophecy only one verse is devoted to the present distress; the remain-

ing five verses focus on the future blessing. Jerusalem looked as though it was on the verge of military disaster, but a time was coming when a new ruler would lead God's people to victory.

According to verse 1, Jerusalem was (or would be) under siege. Here Micah called Jerusalem "city of troops," which more literally is "daughter of troops." This title, then, is a play on the city's previous title: "Daughter of Zion" (1:13; 4:8, 10, 13). It's not clear whether the "troops" (5:1) were those inside the city or those besieging it.

This siege laid against Jerusalem was probably either the Assyrian siege of 701 B.C., or the Babylonian attack of 586 B.C. Whichever was the case, the king of Judah at that time would be struck "on the cheek with a rod." In other words, he would suffer personally.

While Judah's ruler would receive a blow, God's people would eventually have a new Ruler, one who would bring success and not failure. God said this Ruler would be "for me," meaning that the Ruler would do God's will (vs. 2).

The Ruler would come from Bethlehem Ephrathah (probably Ephrathah was the town's earlier name). Bethlehem was located about six miles southwest of Jerusalem. It was a small town, but it had the honor of being the birthplace of both King David and the coming Ruler.

According to Micah, the new Ruler's "origins are from of old, from ancient times." This probably means that the Ruler would come from the

royal lineage of David, who had been dead for more than two hundred years in Micah's day. But it may also hint at the eternal nature of the Ruler.

The only king who was born in Bethlehem, sprang from Davidic stock, and has an eternal nature is, of course, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Ruler Micah foretold.

Old Testament prophecies of Christ can be a powerful part of our evangelistic presentations. If we can show unbelievers that Hebrew prophets predicted numerous aspects of Christ's life hundreds of years before He was born, they will come face-to-face with His super-

Micah warned that God's people would have to wait a while and go through some hardships before their messianic Ruler would appear for them. Commentators interpret verse 3 in two main ways. According to the first interpretation, the verse refers to Christ's birth coming after the Babylonian Captivity. According to the second interpretation, the verse predicts that Christ's second coming will happen after a national restoration of Jews.

The choice of which interpretation you favor determines when you believe Christ fulfills verse 4—beginning at His first coming or beginning at His second coming.

Either way, this verse describes the Ruler as God's agent bringing peace and security to His people.

Verses 5 and 6 describe a victory over the Assyrians. Curiously, Micah appears to have provided two scenarios for this.

In the first

scenario (vss. 5, 6a), a group of leaders would defend against an attack by the Assyrians so well that they would conquer the would-be conquerors. The numerical formula "seven . . . even eight" points to an indefinite number of leaders (vs. 5). The "land of Nimrod" is probably a



Bethlehem. Seven hundred years before Christ, Micah predicted that He would be born in Bethlehem. (Mic. 5:2).

natural nature. And perhaps they will take to heart Christ's offer of forgiveness.

Ask Yourself . . . Am I familiar enough with messianic prophecies in the Old Testament to tell someone else about them?

poetic term for Assyria (vs. 6a; see Gen. 10:8-11).

In the second scenario (Mic. 5:6b), the promised Ruler—that is, Christ—would deliver the people from the invading Assyrians. In verse 6b, the first “he” refers to the promised Ruler of God’s people; the second “he” refers to the Assyrian leader.

Since neither scenario has yet been fulfilled in a literal sense, most commentators believe “Assyria” here stands for all the enemies of God’s people.

d Triumph and Discipline for the Remnant (5:7-15)

Your hand will be lifted up in triumph over your enemies, and all your foes will be destroyed.

—Micah 5:9

This section of Micah is made up of two distinct prophecies. The first prophecy (vss. 7-9) predicts that God’s people would prevail over their enemies. The second prophecy (vss. 10-15) predicts acts of destruction by God.

The first prophecy is concerned with the “remnant of Jacob” (vss. 7, 8). Probably this refers to the people of God in the messianic era.

This prophecy is mostly made up of a couple of comparisons, both of which follow the same format.

One comparison (vs. 7) is between the remnant of Jacob and dew. The other comparison (vs. 8) is between the remnant and a lion.

Of the two comparisons, the first is more difficult to interpret. The point of verse 7 may be that the remnant would be a blessing to other peoples of the world as dew is a blessing to dry land. Or the point may be that the presence of the remnant among other nations, though hated by those nations, would nevertheless be as inevitable as the appearing of dew in the morning.

The second comparison, between the remnant of Jacob and a lion, is plain enough. The remnant would be so powerful in its relations with other nations that it would be like a lion that can attack other animals at will (vs. 8). Plainly speaking, the remnant would have success over its enemies.

Verse 9 reinforces the point of the second comparison (perhaps also the first). This verse predicts triumph over foes.

Ask Yourself . . . What “enemy” (sin, fear, or suffering) would I most like to lift my hand in triumph over?

The second prophecy continues the theme of destruction, but here it is God who does the destroying, not His people. This prophecy is primarily made up of vows by God to destroy things that drew His people away from Him: their military might (vss. 10, 11) and their occult and pagan religious practices (vss. 12-14). Then the prophecy ends

Asherah

Worship

Micah quoted the Lord as vowing to destroy "Asherah poles" (Mic. 5:14). Asherah was the Canaanite goddess of the sea, consort of El and mother Baal. In some periods, Asherah worship flourished in both Israel and Judah. It appears that Asherah was worshiped in three forms: (1) as an image, probably a statue representing her; (2) as a living tree; and (3) as a tree trunk (tree with the branches cut off).



other books, God hated idolatrous religion.

Related targets are the "Asherah poles" and "cities" (vs. 14). Poles (tree trunks) were used in Asherah worship. Cities were centers of pagan worship.

God is just as concerned today as ever that His people are free of influences that distract us from Him. So it does us good once in a while to try to look at our lives from God's perspective and identify things that displease Him. What about our desire for wealth? What about those sinful habits we have refused to give up? What about our inconsistency in prayer and worship and Bible study?

with a brief vow by God to punish disobedient nations (vs. 15).

First in God's lists of targets for destruction are His people's "horses" and "chariots" (vs. 10). Evidently, the nation had a cavalry that it trusted in for its defense.

Next targets: "cities" and "strongholds" (vs. 11). Probably the people thought they would be safe from attack inside their fortifications.

"Witchcraft" and "spells" make up a different kind of target (vs. 12). The people apparently sought power through divination and incantations, thereby earning God's disapproval.

God also targeted for destruction "carved images," "sacred stones," and idols the people made with their hands (vs. 13). As we have seen in

Ask Yourself . . . If God were to destroy the things in my life that tend to draw me away from Him, what would be His targets?

The litany of targets for destruction in verses 10 through 14 give us the impression that while God planned to destroy things that drew His people away from Him, He did not plan to destroy the people themselves. But that was not true for other nations. God would judge other nations for not obeying Him (vs. 15). Since these nations were enemies of His people, this judgment would have the secondary effect of delivering His people.

13

Reversal of Fortune

Micah 6—7

a A Scene at Court (6:1-8)

He has showed you, O man, what
is good.

And what does the LORD require
of you?

To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your
God.

—Micah 6:8

The final two chapters of Micah contain some of the elements we have seen in earlier parts of the book. Here we find accusations against God's people for their wrongdoing and predictions of suffering. But the book ends on a note of supreme confidence that God would be faithful to His people.

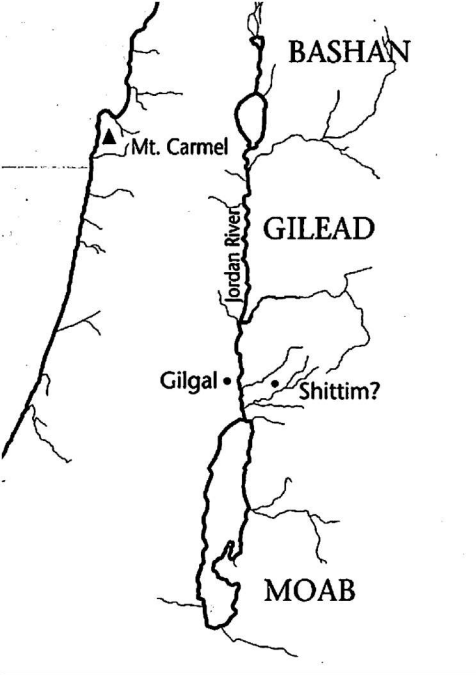
Micah 6:1-8 describes a legal situation in which God brought charges against His people for violating their covenant with Him. In a nutshell, this is what seems to be happening: First, God engages the prophet Micah to plead His case (vs. 1). Next, Micah brings the mountains into court as witnesses (vs. 2). Then God presents evidence that His accusa-

tion is just (vss. 3-5). After that, a citizen asks God what it would take for Him to drop the charges (vss. 6, 7). Finally, Micah gives the nation God's terms (vs. 8).

God wanted the mountains and hills to witness the lawsuit, and Micah obliged Him by calling them to hear the case (vss. 1, 2). This is poetic language, of course, but what does it mean? A clue to the meaning may lie in the phrase "everlasting foundations of the earth." The mountains were very old; they had been around throughout Israel's history and had seen what the Israelites had done. Therefore, they could agree with the Lord that His people had broken the covenant.

God did not want to leave room for the nation to claim that He, rather than it, was at fault. The nation could not legitimately argue that He had been unfaithful to it (vs. 3). In fact, He had shown the nation great love, and to prove this He recounted four areas of His mercy toward the nation in its infancy (vss. 4, 5).

First, God mentioned how He had rescued the nation from slavery in Egypt. The Egyptians had forced the Israelites to do construction projects, but God used miracles to convince



Pharaoh to let the Israelites go (Exod. 1:1—15:21).

Second, God mentioned the leaders He had given the nation. These leaders included Moses, the deliverer (Exod. 3:10), lawgiver (Deut. 4:45), and prophet (18:15); Moses' brother, Aaron, the high priest (Lev. 8); and Miriam, their sister, a prophetess (Exod. 15:20). With such leaders, the nation had fine guidance.

Third, God recalled the incident in which He preserved the early Israelites from a threat presented by the Moabites. Balak, the king of Moab, had wanted the soothsayer Balaam to curse Israel, but instead God caused Balaam to bless the Israelites (Num. 22—24).

Fourth, God cited the young nation's final journey into the promised land, from Shittim on the east

side of the Jordan River to Gilgal on the west. During that journey, God parted the Jordan River just as earlier He had parted the Red Sea (Josh. 3—4).

A new voice speaks in Micah 6:6 and 7. This is a worshiper who represents the whole nation.

The worshiper responded to God's accusation in a way that reflected the spiritual state of the people. The worshiper wanted to know what sacrifices God required to appease His anger for the nation's wrongdoing. The speaker's suggestions begin with the typical and quickly go to the extreme—

(1) "burnt offerings," (2) "calves a year old," (3) "thousands of rams," (4) "ten thousand rivers of oil," (5) "my firstborn."

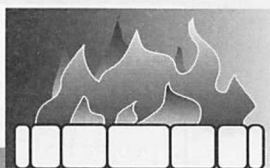
The worshiper was much mistaken in thinking that God would be pleased by sacrifices in this case. God had ordained the sacrificial system for the Israelite people (although, of course, He never approved of child sacrifice). But in this case the people were clearly using the system to try to buy His favor. They were willing to carry out rituals, but were not truly obedient when it came to dealing with others.

So God clarified what He wanted (vs. 8). All along He had required His people "to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

Those three requirements are ones that Christian adults today ought to strive to fulfill. God still expects His people to treat others with Christlike love and to live a

life of devotion to Him.

Ask Yourself . . . How well have I been fulfilling the three requirements?



CHILD SACRIFICE

In Micah's prophecy a representative worshiper asked God if He required a sacrifice of the worshiper's firstborn (Mic. 6:7). This reminds us that child sacrifice, while probably never common, was known in both Israel and Judah.

Israel's neighbors carried out child sacrifices (II Kings 3:26, 27) and this practice crept into Israel with the worship of foreign gods. The god Molech, especially, was associated with child sacrifice. Idolaters built a sanctuary to Molech called Topheth ("burning place") south of Jerusalem, and there sometimes burnt children (23:10). Undoubtedly, it was to Molech that the Judahite kings Ahaz and Manasseh sacrificed their sons (16:3; 21:6).

b A Warning of Punishment (6:9-16)

Listen! The LORD is calling to the city—

and to fear your name is wisdom—

"Heed the rod and the One who appointed it."

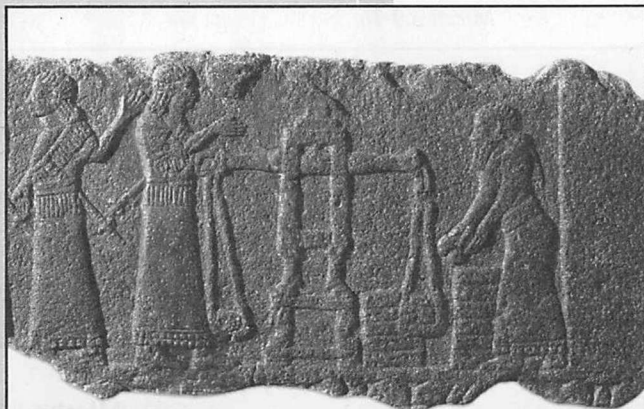
—Micah 6:9

These verses comprise another prophecy in which God listed some crimes committed by the people of Judah and described the ways in which He would punish them.

The prophecy begins with Micah's call for the people to listen to the Lord's words (vs. 9). The "city" in this verse is Jerusalem, which represents the nation of Judah as a whole. The "rod" Jerusalem was to heed was the punishment God would send.

The people of Judah were far from acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. Verses 10 through 12 contain a collection of social sins of which they were guilty.

Verses 10 and 11 indicate that some in Judah had gotten wealthy through dishonest means. They had "ill-gotten treasures." They used "the short ephah." (Since an ephah was a measure equal to about three-fifths of a bushel, this means sellers were cheating buyers by measuring out less than the full amount.) They also cheated by weighing goods falsely on a scale balance.



This sculpture shows Assyrians using scales. The Lord condemned people who mis-used scales (Mic. 6:11).

Scales

In the ancient world, merchants and others used scales to measure goods and even money, since there was no standardized coinage. Scales consisted of two pans suspended from a crossbar. Weighers would place precisely weighted stones in one pan and place the item(s) for weighing in the other.

Although the law of Moses forbade the falsification of weights and measures (Lev. 19:35, 36; Deut. 25:13-16), this dishonest practice sometimes occurred. One way to obtain an inaccurate measurement was to shorten the length of one of the arms of the crossbar. Another way was to use falsely marked stones. Some merchants used two sets of weights in their transactions, one for buying and one for selling.

Furthermore, the rich were violent and the people lied (vs. 12). These charges perhaps indicate that the rich were using force to steal property and that people were committing perjury in court to support dishonest business practices.

"Business is business." "It's a dog-eat-dog world." "You've got to get them before they get you." People in the marketplace today use all sorts of excuses to justify their cheating. But God calls His people to a high standard of business integrity.

Ask Yourself . . . Do I bend over backward to be fair and honest in all my dealings?

Verse 13 introduces a three-verse description of ways in which God would punish the Judahites for their sins. These punishments would include hunger, loss, and futility. Thus the people who had tried to get wealthy by dishonest means would have to do without material goods.

The sins of the people were not all social; some were religious (vs. 16). The Lord condemned the people of

Judah for following the traditions of Omri and Ahab, who were kings of Israel more than a century earlier. This wicked father and son engaged in and promoted idolatrous religion (see I Kings 16:25, 26, 30-33). The people of Judah in Micah's lifetime were worshiping in the same ways.

Because of this, God was going to give Judah over to ruin. Then when Judah was ruined, her neighbors would heap scorn on her. It would be a case of adding insult to injury.



Lament over a Wicked Society (7:1-7)

**The godly have been swept from the land;
not one upright man remains.
All men lie in wait to shed blood;
each hunts his brother with a net.
—Micah 7:2**

In these verses we find Micah taking a different approach in describing Judah's ripeness for judgment. He spoke a lament as though he were the only righteous person in the nation. Of course, he was exaggerating, but these verses indicate that wickedness had become widespread. Occasionally, when we hear about the evil things going on all around us, we too might begin to wonder if there are any godly people left.

Micah began his lament by comparing himself to someone who

was hungry for some fruit but got to the vineyard and orchard too late—the fruit had all been picked (vs. 1). That is, when Micah looked for godly companions, none were to be found. In plainer language Micah said, "The godly have been swept from the land; not one upright man remains" (vs. 2a).

From here, Micah went on to describe the wicked people. They preyed on each other like animals (vs. 2b). The nation's leaders took bribes, used power selfishly, and conspired against others (vs. 3). Even the best people were like briars and thorn hedges; that is, they were obstructions (vs. 4a).

Micah interrupted his lament briefly to insert another warning of judgment (vs. 4b). Because the people were so wicked, the day of judgment foretold by "your watchmen"—that is, the prophets—had come.

Micah went on to describe the terrible state of his society by saying no one could be trusted, no matter how close the relationship—between neighbors, between friends, between spouses, between son and father, between daughter and mother, between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law (vs. 6). Godlessness had gotten so bad that it poisoned even the most intimate relationships.

Verse 7 records the prophet's own testimony of faith in God. Despite the widespread wickedness in Judah, Micah, for one, would "watch in hope" for the Lord and "wait" for Him. He was confident that God would hear his prayers and act.

A line from a well-known Christian song runs "Though none go with me, still I will follow." We, like Micah, need a commitment to be true to the Lord no matter what others do. Of course, true followers of the Lord are not as scarce as Micah described them. But sometimes we may need to take issue with the crowd if we are to obey the Lord and our consciences.

Ask Yourself . . . Is my faith strong enough for me to do the right thing even if I seem to be the only one doing it?

d The Nation's Restoration (7:8-13)

Do not gloat over me, my enemy!
Though I have fallen, I will rise.
Though I sit in darkness,
the LORD will be my light.

—Micah 7:8

Here we listen as Micah speaks on behalf of Jerusalem, which was looking forward to a time of deliverance from its plight (vss. 8-10). Then we hear a response of promises to Jerusalem (vss. 11-13). Probably the plight of Jerusalem was due either to the Assyrian siege of 701 B.C. or to the Babylonian victory in 586 B.C. The promises applied in part to the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the Babylonian Captivity, but also apply in part to the messianic age.

This section begins with a warning to Jerusalem's "enemy"—a nation or nations that threatened

her—not to gloat over her misfortune (vs. 8). Jerusalem had fallen but would rise; she sat in the dark but would have the Lord for light. The enemy would be wise to hold back its gloating, since Jerusalem would bounce back from her hardship.

Jerusalem acknowledged that she deserved to suffer from God's wrath because of her sins (vs. 9). But the suffering would be temporary. The Lord would change from being Jerusalem's discipliner to being her advocate. In the dispute between Jerusalem and her enemy, He would vindicate Jerusalem and bless her.

Ask Yourself . . . Am I quick to admit my sin and accept the Lord's discipline?

Jerusalem's enemy would witness God's goodness to her and be mortified by it (vs. 10). The enemy had taunted Jerusalem with the words "Where is the Lord your God?" but now they would know where He was—on the side of His people.

The second half of verse 10 predicts that despite Jerusalem's being downtrodden, her enemy soon would be in that position. Just as the enemy had witnessed Jerusalem's downfall, Jerusalem would witness the enemy's downfall. God would destroy His people's enemy.

No longer speaking on behalf of Jerusalem, Micah spoke to her (vss. 11-13). He assured her that one day her walls would be rebuilt and Judah's territory expanded (vs. 11). This seems to look forward, at least in part, to the period after the Exile. But Micah also promised the nation

that people would come to it from distant places, such as Assyria and Egypt (vs. 12). This seems to look forward further—to the messianic era.

Israel would prosper, but as for other areas, they would “become desolate” (vs. 13) because of the deeds of ungodly peoples who lived in them. The Bible often associates the Hebrew term translated “desolate” with divine judgment upon sinners.



This drawing represents a scene in a sculpture showing an Assyrian king placing his foot on the neck of a conquered foe. This common ancient practice, which symbolized subjugation, is reflected in Micah's words that Jerusalem's enemy would be "trampled underfoot" (Mic. 7:10; see also vs. 19).

e Appeal and Praise (7:14-20)

**Who is a God like you,
who pardons sin and forgives the
transgression
of the remnant of his
inheritance?**

**You do not stay angry forever
but delight to show mercy.**

—Micah 7:18

The final section of Micah contains several different elements. First, Micah prays on behalf of God's people (vs. 14). Next, God responds with an assurance (vs. 15). Then Micah states confidently that the nations would submit to God (vss. 16, 17) and that God would show mercy to His people (vss. 18-20).

In the opening prayer (vs. 14) Micah compared God's people to sheep and God to their shepherd. Micah called on God to lead His people as a shepherd leads his sheep.

Micah went on to describe the flock as living “in fertile pasturelands” (vs. 14). The Hebrew text more literally says that they were living “in the middle of Carmel.” Carmel is a mountain range famous for its forests.

Micah also asked for God to let His “sheep” feed in Bashan and Gilead. These were fertile grazing areas on the eastern side of the Jordan River. In certain periods Israel possessed those areas, but it probably

did not possess them at the time Micah wrote. Thus this request may be a request for God to return those areas to the nation.

The next verse appears to be God's response to the prayer in verse 14. God promised to show wonders as in the time of the Exodus. The wonders in that earlier time included the ten plagues on Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, and the appearance of God on Mount Sinai.

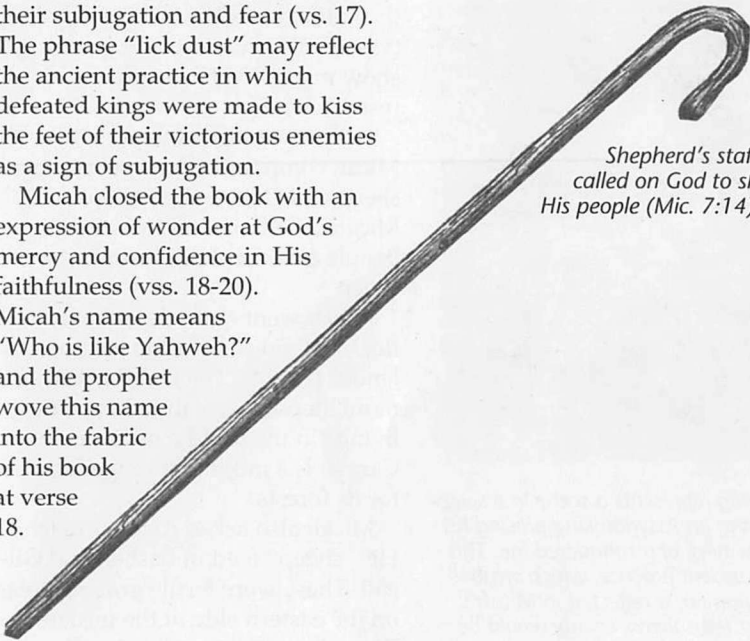
While God's people could expect to benefit from His power, other peoples would not fare so well (vss. 16, 17). They would have to endure shame, powerlessness, silence, and deafness (vs. 16). They would also be made like animals, in terms of their subjugation and fear (vs. 17). The phrase "lick dust" may reflect the ancient practice in which defeated kings were made to kiss the feet of their victorious enemies as a sign of subjugation.

Micah closed the book with an expression of wonder at God's mercy and confidence in His faithfulness (vss. 18-20). Micah's name means "Who is like Yahweh?" and the prophet wove this name into the fabric of his book at verse 18.

This verse and the next convey the idea that God is forgiving toward His people. By His faithfulness, He would be true to the patriarchs, men whose descendants He promised to bless.

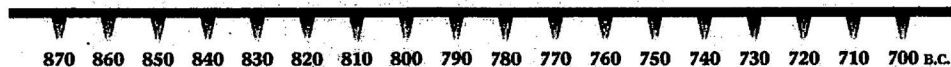
Those of us who know Christ's love have experienced the kind of pardoning love Micah described. We know the faithfulness of God in both discipline and forgiveness. Filled with the power of the Holy Spirit we strive to act justly, love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God.

Ask Yourself . . . Have I told someone else of God's pardoning love recently?

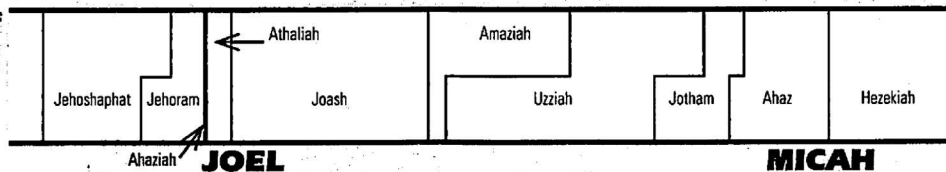


Shepherd's staff. Micah called on God to shepherd His people (Mic. 7:14).

EARLY MINOR PROPHETS in Historical Context

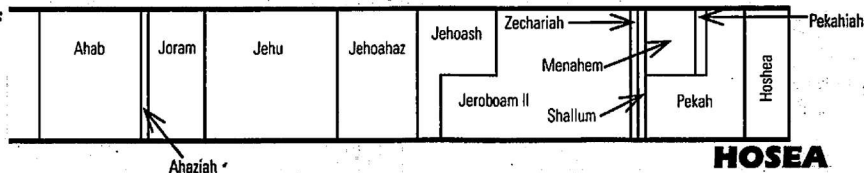


Rulers of



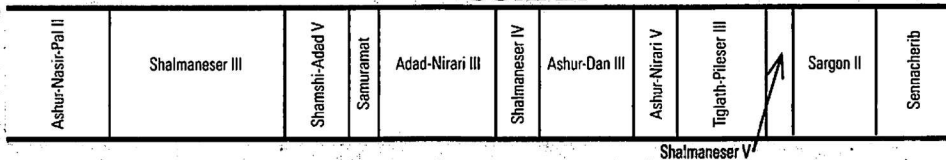
OVERLAPPING
REIGNS USUALLY
MEAN THAT
FATHER AND
SON RULED
TOGETHER.

Rulers of



JONAH

Rulers of



Those Funny-Looking Names

A Pronunciation Guide

Achor . . . AY-kohr	Haran . . . HAY-ran	Nebuchadnezzar . . . neb-you-kadd-NEHZ-uh
Aczib . . . ACK-zihb	Hazael . . . HAZE-ay-el	Paddan Aram . . . PAAH-dun—AIR-am
Admah . . . AD-mah	Hebron . . . HE-bron	Pekah . . . PEA-kah
Adullam . . . aah-DULL-uhm	Herodotus . . . heh-RAHD-uh-tuss	Pethuel . . . peh-THYOU-el
Amaziah . . . am-ah-ZEYE-ah	Hezekiah . . . hehz-eh-KEYE-ah	Plutarch . . . PLOO-tarck
Amittai . . . ah-MITT-eye	Hosea . . . ho-SAY-uh	Rabbah . . . RABB-ah
Amman . . . ah-MAHN	Hoshea . . . ho-SHE-ah	Ramah . . . RAY-mah
Antiochus . . . an-TIE-uh-kuss	Jehoash . . . jeh-HO-ash	Sakkuth . . . SACK-kuth
Asherah . . . ah-SHE-rah	Jehoshaphat . . . jeh-HOSH-uh-fat	Sennacherib . . . seh-NACK-uh-rib
Baal . . . BAY-ahl	Jehu . . . GEE-hew	Shalmaneser . . . shall-man-EE-zuhr
Baal-Berith . . . BAY-ahl-buh REETH	Jeroboam . . . jehr-oh-BOH-am	Shaphir . . . SHAY-fuhr
Baal-Melqart . . . BAY-ahl-MELL-kart	Jezreel . . . JEHZ-re-el	Sheshbazzar . . . shesh-BAZZ-uh
Balaam . . . BAY-lam	Joram . . . JO-ram	Shittim . . . SHITT-ihm
Balak . . . BAY-lack	Jotham . . . JO-tham	Tekoa . . . teh-KOH-ah
Bashan . . . BAY-shan	Kaiwan . . . KAI-wan	Teman . . . TEE-man
Beer . . . beh-EE-reye	Karnaim . . . kar-NAY-ihm	Terah . . . TEE-rah
Ben-Hadad . . . ben-HAY-dad	Kerioth . . . KEER-ih-awth	Thummim . . . THUM-ihm
Ben-Ammi . . . ben-AM-eye	Lachish . . . LAY-kish	Tiglath-Pileser . . . TIHG-lath-pih-LEE-zuhr
Beqaa . . . bih-KAW	Lo-Ammi . . . low-AM-eye	Topheth . . . TOE-feth
Beth Ezel . . . beth—EE-zehl	Lo-Ruhamah . . . low-roo-HA-mah	Urim . . . YOU-rim
Beth Ophrah . . . beth—AHF-ruh	Manasseh . . . mah-NASS-eh	Uzziah . . . you-ZEYE-ah
Bozrah . . . BAHZ-rah	Mareshah . . . maah-REE-shah	Zaanan . . . ZAY-ah-nan
Calneh . . . KAL-neh	Maroth . . . MAY-roth	Zebaiim . . . ze-BOY-ihm
Debir . . . DEE-buhr	Megiddo . . . muh-GIDD-oh	Zechariah . . . zeck-uh-REYE-ah
Ephraim . . . EE-fray-ihm	Micah . . . MEYE-kah	Zephaniah . . . zeff-uh-NIGH-uh
Ephrathah . . . EF-rah-thah	Mizpah . . . MIHZ-pah	
Esau . . . EE-saw	Molech . . . MOH-leck	
Gath Hopher . . . GATH—HE-fur	Moreseth Gath . . . MOH-resh-eth—gath	
Gibeah . . . GIHB-ee-ah		
Hamath . . . HAY-math		

Art Credits

Maps and charts by Russell Barr. Illustrations by The Oriental Institute, University of Chicago (p. 100) and Caffy Whitney (pp. 10, 16, 36, 39, 50, 58, 62, 72, 81, 96, 98, 111, 112). Photographs by The Library of Congress/The Matson Photo Service (p. 14, l and r); Sungjin Kim/Getty (p. 22); NMB (p. 28); James Fergusson (architect) (p. 34); The British Museum (pp. 77, 108); Corbis (p. 34); Archaeological Museum, Nicosia, Cyprus (p. 54); Avishai Teicher (p. 59); Daniel B. Shepp (p. 65); Excavated by Claude Schaeffer, 1888 (p. 68); Paul Randall Williams 2012/British Museum (p. 77); Steven G. Johnson/British Museum (p. 80); Tambako the Jaguar (p. 82); Library of Congress/Public Domain (p. 87); lenazap/Getty (p. 89); Oren Rozen/British Museum (p. 92); Chris Yunker (p. 98); Duncan 1890 (p. 100); Jason Maehl/Getty (p. 102); Lessing Images (p. 108)



RESOURCES THAT MAKE EACH LESSON A SUCCESS



Teaching Guide

Teacher preparation is quick and practical with the 13 preplanned lessons in the *Teaching Guide*.
Order one per teacher.

Teaching Resources

Visually enhance each lesson with flannel graphs, Bible story figures, posters, charts, maps, and more.
Order one per class.

Student Guide

Resources for in-class activities such as age-appropriate puzzles, word searches, and more that enrich and extend learning. Order one per student.

Handwork (available for 2s & 3s and 4s & 5s)

Hands-on materials that provide age-appropriate crafts to reinforce each Bible story. Order one per student.

Takehome

Great for ongoing application of the lesson throughout the week, the takehome papers reinforce the Bible stories with fun-filled activities.
Order one per student.

Power for Living (available for Adults)

An engaging weekly take-home paper for adults that impacts hundreds of thousands each week with stories about real people that emphasize how biblical truths relate to everyday living. Order one per student.

These resources are available in age-appropriate versions for every age level.

David©Cook

A

Adult
DBSS
Student Book
No. 4092

ISBN 978-1-589197-45-9



9 781589 197459