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SCHOOL OF PREACHING**

**VICTORY LECTURES  
October 24 — 28, 2004**

**God's Servants,  
the Prophets:  
Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah**

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Louis Rushmore, Editor**

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**“Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour”**  
**(Romans 13:7).**

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## DEDICATION

It is with a sense of deep affection and immense respect that this year's lectureship book is dedicated to brother **Denver Cooper** and his good wife **Florence**. This hardworking and dedicated couple has spent more than sixty-two years serving Christ in his church. One could only guess at the hundreds of thousands of miles they have traveled over the states of West Virginia, Ohio, Pennsylvania and many others, heralding the soul-saving Gospel wherever they have been able to find people who would listen. Brother Cooper has preached in every facility from tents to the fine meetinghouses our brethren have built over the years. He has been a builder of churches and a starter of churches, doing mission work in several of the “hard” areas of our state. Wherever he has gone, and whatever work in which he has engaged as a servant of Christ, Florence has been there at his side, aiding, encouraging and even helping financially to make it possible for the Gospel to be spread to those who are in the benighted world of sin. Even now that they have arrived at what many call “the golden years,” the Coopers carry a workload that would challenge much younger people.

Brother Cooper has served the Cause for which Jesus died while supplementing his income in various ways, never complaining because the brethren could not, or would not, provide more support. Their chief concern has not been support provided by the brethren, but faithful service in the Kingdom of the Master. They set a great example for us in this regard, as well as in many others.

Denver prepared himself to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ by studying at the feet of great preachers here in the Ohio Valley and at Freed-Hardeman University (then College) in Henderson, Tennessee. Such great teachers as N.B. Hardeman, W. Claude Hall and a host of others increased the fires of zeal that burned within his bones to reach the lost with the only message of salvation known to man. His work has carried him from the Ohio Valley to the mountains of Virginia and West Virginia and back. For several years, he served on the Board of Directors of Ohio Valley College in Parkersburg, WV, and he was one of the prime movers in establishing the West Virginia School of Preaching under the oversight of the elders of the Hillview Terrace church here in Moundsville. He currently serves as Director of WVSOP, working closely with her faculty, staff, students and the elders who oversee this work. All concerned with the school in any way find it both a pleasure and a joy to work with brother Cooper. The school enjoys peace, harmony, financial growth and steady student growth, and it optimistically looks forward to a bright future, if the Lord wills that there be a future.

The Coopers are the parents of nine children and two-dozen grandchildren. They give these family members the love and attention they deserve, and they always show signs of great pleasure when the family is in their company. Denver and Florence continue to show a devotion to one another that must be enviable by some who have been married a great number of years less than have the Coopers. They now have grandchildren that are following in their grandfather's footsteps as students at Freed-Hardeman University. This brings great pleasure to this fine couple. Family success is due in part to their fine sense of humor!

We are thankful to God for every good done by these great servants of God; we find great pleasure in working with them in the Body of Christ, and in our school. We take genuine joy in dedicating this book, **without their**

**knowledge**, to them. We pray for them long life and faithful service.

D. Gene West

## Elder to be Honored

“Let the elders who rule well we counted worthy of double honor...” (1 Tim. 5:17). These immortal words of the apostle Paul resound a principle of supreme importance. Those who have dedicated their lives to faithful service in the kingdom as overseers of God’s flock are pleasing to the Lord and ought to be honored by men. To the Thessalonian brethren Paul said, “And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake” (1 Thess. 5:12-13). Because of these inspired words, it is deemed appropriate to reserve this space to annually pay tribute to one who has faithfully served in the office of a bishop.

With this volume, we respectfully recognize brother **Francis Sellers** who has faithfully shepherded the Pennsboro Church of Christ for the past twenty-one years. He, along with his good wife Fern, has long been a marvelous example of Christian service and devotion. Not only is he a man who “desired the office of a bishop” (1 Tim. 3:1), but has humbly and steadfastly served in that capacity since 1983. During those years, while many have wavered in the winds of change and doctrinal error, brother Sellers has provided rock-solid leadership for the people of God in Pennsboro.

Brother Sellers has a great respect for the preaching of the Gospel of Christ and the need to train men for that task. From its very inception, Francis has been a great supporter of West Virginia School of Preaching and has contributed heavily to its success. He, along with the three other godly elders, continues to lead the Pennsboro congregation in this and many other good brotherhood works. With this opportunity, we gratefully acknowledge his faithful service

in the past and offer our prayer for God's blessings of healthy leadership for years to come.

Terry G. Jones

## Preacher to be Honored

When one thinks of the preacher to be honored, **Lewis Mikell**, one's mind quickly goes to Paul's declaration, "...I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2), and for good reasons when one surveys brother Mikell's eighty-two years of life.

Our brother, Lewis Mikell, was born at Morriston, Florida, May 14, 1922, the son of Edward and Maggie Mikell. His mother passed away at the early age of 30, when brother Mikell was only seven years of age. This resulted in his growing up in four different homes. As far back as he can remember he was determined to become a preacher. Upon finishing high school in Williston, FL, against some well-meaning advice that he not go, he left by passenger train for the "far-away" David Lipscomb College, an exceedingly lonely experience. Only his determination to become a preacher kept him there. While a freshman at Lipscomb, he was employed for regular preaching December 7, 1941, with the New Union congregation at Manchester, TN. This congregation grew from 25 members to 90 during the 2 years he was there. Interestingly, he was invited back to Manchester in July of 2003 to bring the congregation (now 400 members) up to date on their early history. Only two remembered him from 60 years ago.

Brother Mikell later finished his ministerial training at Harding College. He has now been preaching 63 years come this November 30, 2004. His determination to be a faithful and an effective Gospel preacher has never abated, even at his current age of eighty-two, averaging over 100 sermons annually. He is currently sharing the work with

brother Terry Varner at West Union, WV, and holds a few Gospel meetings.

During his preaching career he has held 700 Gospel meetings in addition to doing located work for 25 years in the following places: Cross City, FL, his first located work (for which he was paid \$10.00 a week); Wildwood, FL; Fayetteville, NC (missionary work for the benefit of Fort Bragg soldiers); Beckley, WV; Point Pleasant, WV and Johnstown, PA. He has lived the most of his life at Gallipolis, OH (his present residence).

Brother Mikell married Ruth Holstein on June 18, 1946. Ruth passed away February 25, 1988. Ten years later, January 10, 1998, he and Eva Marie Hanshew were married.

Brother Mikell's determination from early age to preach the Gospel of Christ remains unabated, and he says, "Sixty-three years of preaching has been a most rewarding life."

Russell King

## Preface

This year's lectureship study is based on the Old Testament minor prophecies of Hosea, Joel, Amos and Obadiah. The material found in these books is so rich it is virtually impossible for it to be sufficiently covered, even in a lectureship as extensive as this one. It is impossible to overstate the importance of these prophets and their messages to the people of God in ancient times. It is likewise impossible to overstate the importance of the lessons that can be drawn from these prophets for our modern times. Sometimes as one reads the messages of these great men, he has the feeling that they have been able to peer into our times and read some of our daily newspapers, or watch our television programs.

The keynote speakers for this series of lectures are men of great ability. Furthermore, they evidence great love for the truth. These men have spent lifetimes in the service of Christ as preachers, educators and authors, and they have done so faithfully without veering from the Word of God into forbidden fields. These men are qualified, as are the other speakers on this program, to study with us from these great and profound prophets.

Since the beginning of the West Virginia School of Preaching, the Victory Lectures have been one of the highlights of each year, and we believe this year will be no exception to that rule. Our students, faculty and the many guests who come to be with us each day are rewarded with the gems of knowledge that are strewn by the speakers from the Word of God. This year will be no exception to that rule.

Even though these prophets spoke in the days of dim antiquity, they spoke of things that still affect the lives of all true Christians on the earth. They told beforehand of the great work of *Yahweh* in bringing redemption to his people through the death of our Magnificent Master on the cross.

and the proclamation of the Gospel to a spiritually benighted world. The influence of these prophets on the spiritual history of the world is not something to be taken lightly, or totally ignored. So, it is with a deep sense of satisfaction that we present this book for the benefit of those who are with us this week, and for those who cannot be with us due to circumstances beyond their control.

We send this work forth with the prayer that it will be a blessing to all those who read and understand the masterful material presented here. The blessing of being able to sit in the quiet and comfort of one's own home, and reading again the words of the men who have labored to bring this book into existence will be great. We commend this work to you, hoping it will be a blessing in the years to come, and we *commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.*

D. Gene West

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# My Servants the Prophets

By Clarence DeLoach

“Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have even sent to you all **My servants the prophets**, daily rising up early and sending them” (Jer. 7:25). In these words, the Lord reminds sinful Judah of his enduring patience in sending a band of men, whom he designated as “My servants the prophets.” That is a special designation reserved for only a few on the pages of inspiration. When God spoke to Joshua, he referred to Moses as “Moses My servant is dead” (Josh. 1:2). When speaking to Satan, God called Job “My servant Job” (Job 2:3). This obviously speaks of a close relationship that a special few had with the Lord.

## The Men

When the apostle Peter described the manner in which the “prophecy of scripture” came, he said it “never came by the will of man,” i.e., men did not devise it, think it up—it was not human genius or brilliance, “but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:20-21).

The prophets were in character, “holy men of God, moved or carried along by the Spirit of God, were the media and messengers of God’s prophetic Word (Rom. 16:26). Jesus divided the Old Testament into three sections—”the law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44). To embrace all of the Old Testament, he spoke to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, “beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded to them in all

the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27).

The prophets gave witness to the will of God in general and to Christ in particular. They revealed God to men and sought to bring men to God. These special servants are called by several designations.

**They were prophets.** The Greek *prophetes*, from which our English word *prophets* comes, simply defines one who speaks or proclaims a message on behalf of another. A classic example of this is seen in Aaron who would be Moses' prophet.

Then Moses said to the Lord, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before nor since you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech, and slow of tongue." So the Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth, and teach you what you shall say." But he said, "O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomsoever else you may send." So the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses, and He said: "Is not Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. And look, he is coming out to meet you. When he sees you, he will be glad in his heart. Now you shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth. And I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and I will teach you what you shall do. So he shall be your spokesman [prophet] to the people. And he himself shall be a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God" (Exod. 4:10-16).

Moses was God's prophet and Aaron was Moses' prophet. A prophet is a spokesman.

When Jeremiah was called of God to preach to Judah, God said, "You shall be as my mouth" (Jer. 15:19). Ezekiel was commissioned, "Go to the house of Israel and speak with my words to them" (Ezek. 3:4). The burden of the prophet was to speak Jehovah's words to the people. Their message was prefaced with the significant words, "Thus saith the Lord," a phrase that occurs over three thousand times in Scripture.

Various Hebrew words like *hittiph* sometimes translated "prophecy" meant "to let drop," no doubt referred to the saliva dropping from the mouths of the prophets as they spoke. The term *nabi* means to boil forth and relates to one who freely speaks from a heart impelled or moved by the Spirit of God.

The Greek word for prophet primarily speaks of a "forth-teller," i.e., a preacher, proclaiming, whether it is related to practical religion or future events. The prophet, then, was a messenger of God for his own time and also for beyond his time. He was both a preacher and a predictor. Nathan, the prophet, preached to David (2 Sam. 12:7). John the Baptist was a great prophet who proclaimed a message (Matt. 3:2). But, Isaiah not only preached powerfully to the religious, spiritual, moral and political issues of his time, but predicted with beautiful portraits the Messiah to come.

**They were Seers, or See-ers.** "Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he spoke thus: Come, let us go to the seer" for he who is now called a prophet was formerly called a seer" (1 Sam.9: 10). The prophet-like figure was called a seer (*chozeh*) fifteen times and a seer (*ro'eh*) ten times while the term prophet (*nabhi*) occurs more than three hundred times—including both false and true prophets. The seer possessed supernatural insight and foresight. The divine seers entered into the "counsel" of God, the "plan" of God, the "ways and thoughts" of God.

**They were men of God.** Often they are designated “Man of God.” A “man of God” came to Eli (1 Sam. 2:27). Saul’s servant said, “Look now, there is in this city a man of God, and he is an honorable man” (1 Sam. 9:6). The expression “Man of God” denotes a godly man. This phrase is found seventy-six times, and thirty-six times to Elisha. Several unnamed prophets are called “Man of God” (1 Kings 13).

**They were servants.** At the evening sacrifice, Elijah the prophet said, “Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known that you are God In Israel and **I am your servant**, and that I have done all these things **at your word**” (1 Kings 18:36). As obedient servants they acted on the Word of God.

**They were messengers** (Isa. 42:19). The message delivered was often unpopular, and the messenger was persecuted. Jeremiah was abused and mistreated. In 1 Kings 22 an interesting story is revealed about Ahab, King of Israel, and Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, who joined efforts to invade and take Gilead. The false prophets of Baal—Ahab’s Yes-men, said, “The Lord says, ‘go up and take it.’” When Jehoshaphat inquired, “Is there not another prophet of Jehovah from whom we might inquire, Ahab said, ‘Yes, there is, but I hate him because he never prophesies good concerning me.’” So, Micaiah was brought. His message was—if you go up against Gilead your army will be defeated and the King will be slain. Zedekiah, the leader of the false prophets, went over to Micaiah and slapped him in contempt. Micaiah was put in prison and given bread and water to drink. He was persecuted for delivering the message of truth. But, the outcome was as “the saying of the man of God” (1 Kings 22:38). Jesus said, “for so they persecuted the prophets that were before you” (Matt. 5:12).

**They were watchmen.** The Lord said, “Also, I set watchmen over you, saying, Listen to the sound of the

trumpet! But they said, We will not listen” (Jer. 6:17). When Ezekiel was commissioned among the exiles, God said, “Son of Man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from my mouth, and give them warning from me” (Ezek. 3:17). As watchmen, they had the sobering responsibility of delivering faithfully the message God gave them whether the people liked it or not. That responsibility was sometimes called “the burden” (Nahum 1:1), but most often simply, “The Word of the Lord that came.”

**They were patriots.** Not only did they possess a combination of vision and understanding of man and God, but they possessed a passion for patriotism. They wanted their nation to be in right relationship with God. Divine insight enabled them to see the consequences of rebellion against God. They understood that God had given them a special land, and God could remove them for their disobedience. So, to the prophets, religion and nationalism was inseparably linked. Because of that conviction, they became powerful preachers of righteousness and judgment, using wind and sea, thunderstorms and earthquakes as well as gentler scenes of the land of Israel as symbols fit for their themes (Isa. 5:1; Jer. 8:7; 17:11; Hos. 14:5; Mic. 5:7-8).

**They were holy men.** Peter called them “holy men of God” who were moved by the Holy Spirit. They were men of high moral character, obedient to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and even feared by men. Several are on record as ready to die for their loyalty to the God-imparted truths they delivered. (See 2 Kings 9:7; 21:10-16; Jer. 26:20-23.) No wonder the themes of warning, judgment, repentance and righteousness are as relevant today as ever. They were not mere social reformers, but preachers of divine revelation for the spiritual needs of men. Their task was to announce the coming of the Messiah. Peter declared, “To him [Christ-Messiah] gave all the prophets witness” (Acts

10:43). This emphasis bound all their utterances together in an amazing unity and connects them to the fuller revelation of the New Testament.

## **The Manner**

**They were all human.** Sadly, many have looked upon Bible characters as museum specimens rather than living personalities. Though holy men, they were still men. Human frailties characterized them. Inspiration did not make them perfect, except when revealing God's message. Some, no doubt, like Elisha, lacked in a sense of humor. Some, I can imagine, were hard to live with. Some delivered their words of burning rebuke as if they took harsh joy in them. The prophets, like the apostles of Christ, were to be directed in life and conduct, by the very message they had received from God.

**They were rugged individualists.** They belonged to no one, except the Lord. They were unpopular because they spoke their mind—a mind God had enlightened. Though they were God's messengers, they retained their own personalities and styles. They were not puppets on a string or robots. God used their unique personalities and styles to reveal his message. In some cases, as in Hosea, the messenger became a walking example of the message he proclaimed. Amos was from the country—a herdsman and tender of sycamore trees, while Isaiah was a statesman, a prophet who advised kings. While Isaiah and Micah were contemporaries, they were very different in style. Isaiah was acquainted with the elite of Jerusalem, while Micah was from an obscure village. Isaiah dealt with political issues, while Micah's burden was personal religion and social morality. Both, with unique styles, were mightily used of God for his purpose. Inspiration did not destroy the style and personality of the human agent, but used and empowered it. "The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His word was in my mouth" (2 Sam. 23:2). "Then the Lord

put forth His hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said to me, Behold, I have put My words in thy mouth” (Jer. 1:9). These verses explain the manner in which God used human agency to reveal his message.

**They were, for the most part, lonely men.** Their loneliness was not because they were aloof from their people. They were men among men. So, why were they lonely? It was because of their insight; they saw what others could not see because of supernatural influence. It put them in a class apart. Isaiah pictures God as telling him plainly not to fear what others feared, not to call out danger when they called out danger. In Jeremiah’s day, the people were afraid not to rebel against Babylon, but Jeremiah urged submission to Babylon. He saw the futility of rebellion. This caused him to be regarded as a traitor. But, the Lord said to him, “Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord” (Jer. 1:8). The prophets could not trust the confidences that others trusted. Some thought of themselves as unafraid because they considered themselves as heaven’s favorites. The leaders of Israel turned from one pagan nation to another in search of an alliance they thought would make them secure. They left God out of their plans. It was the challenging work of the prophets to remind the leaders and those they led that their security was in God, and there was no salvation apart from him.

**They were men of fiery earnestness.** They were sure of the message they delivered. They possessed conviction—believing that what they had to say was a matter of life and death. Like Paul, they could say, “I have believed and therefore I speak” (Acts 27:25). And they spoke without apology, but with power. No man is worth hearing who has ceased to believe in the importance of his message. The tragedy of our time is preachers who speak after they have ceased to believe. God’s preachers must keep in mind that they exist, not for themselves, but for the

message they are to deliver. The prophets were a dynamic and fiery group whose manner and message continue to touch us to this day.

**They were unpopular.** Generally, they were hated. After all, they rebuked the popular sins of the time, whether committed by princes or paupers. The false prophets—the yes-men of the day, were dealt with for what they were—hireling puppets of kings. They described a kind of religion that had lost touch with life. The prophet Isaiah has God asking, “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to me?” Then the Lord said, “I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats.” What was the problem? “Your hands are full of blood!” The solution was personal righteousness. “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean, put away evil, cease to do evil, learn to do good, seek justice, rebuke the oppressor, defend the fatherless, plead for the widow” (Isa. 1:10-17). The prophet Amos thundered against a religion that is mere formality with the kernel of personal righteousness missing (Amos 5:21-24). Being hated, the prophets were persecuted; “which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?” asked Stephen (Acts 7:52). The honor and esteem of the prophets among the people came after they were dead, not while they lived.

**They were men who had seen the Lord.** They had met the Lord (Isa. 6:1-4). Their conversion and calling was real. They knew how to pray—and how to listen to God. They lived in his fellowship. They were commissioned and compelled by their God-given mission.

## **The Message**

1. Practical lessons from the prophets.
2. The great blessing of divine revelation for man’s life and conduct.
3. National righteousness is far more important than national power.

4. The tremendous value of one man who is committed to God.
5. Men displease God by empty and insincere worship.
6. Ease, luxury and idleness lead to sin.
7. God suffers pain when those he loves desert him.
8. Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people
9. Great privilege brings corresponding responsibility.
10. How reasonable are God's basic requirements! How unchangeable are his basic demands!
11. True religion is an inward, spiritual genuine response of the heart to the righteous God.
12. Sin always results in ruin. Individual judgment is inevitable.
13. In every crisis, God is faithful and can be trusted.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Clarence DeLoach was born in Dickson, County, TN March 20, 1936. He married the former Eddie Lowe, and brother DeLoach is the father of four children and the grandfather of eight grandchildren.

Brother DeLoach began preaching when in high school at age 15 and celebrated 50 years of preaching in August 2001. His college training was at Freed-Hardeman and David Lipscomb colleges. Brother DeLoach taught in two Christian schools: Ohio Valley College and Boyd-Buchanan School in Chattanooga.

He has conducted over 500 Gospel meetings in 25 states. His local work has been done in Tennessee, Georgia, Ohio and West Virginia. Brother DeLoach has conducted daily radio programs for over 33 years and 25 years on television. He has authored three books: *Bound to Abound, Contending for the Faith* and a book on the Holy Spirit. All three books are now out of print. Three books are now in preparation. Brother DeLoach has produced two video

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### **My Servants the Prophets ~ By DeLoach**

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series for World Video Bible School: *The Preacher and His Work* and *Growing in Spiritual Worship*.

He serves on the staff of *Christian Bible Teacher* and *Voice of Truth International*. Recently retired from fulltime pulpit preaching for the Walnut Street church of Christ in Dickson, TN, brother DeLoach is currently on staff as Associate Preacher and has been with the Walnut Street congregation in some capacity since August 1990. Brother DeLoach conducts about 25 Gospel meetings a year and speaks in four lectureships each year.

Clarence DeLoach is a member of the Advisory Board of Freed-Hardeman University, board member of the American Heart Association and is Lieutenant Governor of Kiwanis Clubs of Middle Tennessee, Division 2-W.

# The Testimony of Jesus: the Spirit of Prophecy

By Clarence DeLoach

## Introduction

We often speak of Jesus as “the Great Redeemer” or “the Great Physician,” “the Great Prophet and High Priest,” and, indeed, he is. But in this study, our focus is upon “the Great Fulfiller.”

When John was about to worship the angel who had showed him the throne and those around the throne, the angel forbade him saying, “I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10). What a significant statement that the idea is that Jesus and his Gospel is the essence, the focus, the heart of the inspired teaching of Scripture. The testimony of and about Jesus is the focus of the Bible.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For assuredly I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled” (Matt. 5:17-18).

Jesus Christ is both the subject and goal of prophecy, and “the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow” (1 Pet. 1:11). The Old Testament is made up largely of three things: (1) unsatisfied longings, (2) unexplained ceremonies, and (3)

unfulfilled prophecy. In Jesus, the longings are satisfied, the ceremonies are explained and the prophecies are fulfilled. One could write over the 39 books of the Old Testament the word **expectation**, for there is the air of expectancy—someone is coming. You could write over the 27 books of the New Testament the word **manifestation** for the great one came. Dr. Graham Scroggie wrote, “Christ is the focal point of history. All history before Him was a preparation for his first Advent, and all history since He came has been a preparation for his second Advent.”

As we examine expositorially the great text in Matthew 5:17-18, I want you to see Jesus prophetically, practically and perfectly fulfilling the Word of God.

## **Jesus Prophetically Fulfills**

Note again verse 17, “Think not that I have come to destroy the law or the prophets, I have not come to destroy but to fulfill.” Would you like to understand the Bible? Would you like for its truth to leap off the page into your heart? Would you like to know the key that will unlock the Bible to you? Well, that key is a person, and his name is Jesus.

This is beautifully illustrated in an event that took place the day of the resurrection and recorded by Luke in chapter 24. Two disciples were on the road to Emmaus. They were sad as they walked along, perhaps with their heads downward, when a third party caught up to them, and began to converse with them. They did not recognize him as Jesus, but Jesus began to talk with them about the Scriptures. At verse 27, Luke reports, “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.” That means that Jesus began in Genesis 1:1 and went through Malachi—that’s all of the Old Testament from Moses through the prophets.

What that means is—if you read the Old Testament and you don't see Jesus, you need to go back and read it again. In Peter's sermon to Cornelius, he said, "To Him give all the prophets witness" (Acts 10:43). Prophecy is not primarily about something, it is about someone. Jesus said, "You search the scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of me" (John 5:39).

Prophecy is truly an amazing thing. It centers on Jesus! You can take your telephone and push a few numbers, and if you have the right numbers, you can center on one person on the other side of the globe. You thereby eliminate about six billion people and center on one. Prophecy is like that!

- Genesis 3:15 says he would be the **seed of woman**. By the process of elimination, he would not be an angel, or God sitting on a throne, but someone of the **human race** (Gal. 4:4).
- Genesis 9 reveals from what **section** of the human race. When this number is pushed you eliminate the sons of Japheth and the son of Ham, and center on the sons of Shem. From that section of the human race the Messiah would come.
- Genesis 12 focuses on the very nation of that section of the race. When this number is pushed, we learn that the Messiah would be a descendant of Abraham. So, you have the race, the section of the race and the nation of the human race.
- Genesis 49 reveals the very tribe of that nation from which the Savior would come. He would be of the tribe of Judah.
- First Samuel 7 reveals the family of that tribe. When this number is pushed, it reveals the family of Jesse.
- Isaiah 7:14; Micah 5:2. God keeps tightening the focus. The Messiah, Immanuel, would come from a certain woman of that family—a virgin shall

conceive. Yes, and even the **place** where she would give birth—Bethlehem of Judea.

What a portrait the prophets painted of Jesus—full, complete, perfect! How could they do it? Peter answers, "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21). Twenty to twenty-five prophets worked on that portrait for fifteen hundred years and filled in every detail. It would not have happened by chance! Peter Stoner wrote a little book years ago, called *Science Speaks*, in which he took the prophecies of Christ and calculated the probability that they could have been fulfilled by one person by chance, at a given time. There are over 330 prophecies of Jesus, but Stoner only took eight. As a scientific mathematician he figures the probability to be 1 to 10 raised to the 17<sup>th</sup> power—that's 1 to 10 raised to the 17<sup>th</sup> power—that's 1 followed by 17 zeros. That's just 8, but there are 330! It is staggering! Jesus prophetically fulfilled the Word of God.

## **Jesus Practically Fulfills**

Our lord fulfilled not only the prophets, he fulfilled the Law. The Law was God's Holy demands upon his people. The Old Testament is not only filled with prophecies, it is full of requirements. Jesus fulfilled the **moral requirements**. Jesus is the only one who kept the law and its moral commands to perfection. He could stand before men and say, "Which of you can convict me of sin?" (John 8:46). All men are convicted by the Law as transgressors (Rom. 3:23).

Jesus fulfilled the ceremonial aspects of the Law. Every ceremony reflected and all the sacrifices focused on him. God built within his Old Testament people a "conditioned response." Every time an animal was slain and the blood was shed, God was teaching his covenant people that sin means death, and that blood was essential to atone for sin. Every sacrifice pointed in the direction of

Jesus who would be the ultimate answer to man's sin problem. Every sacrifice, ritual and ceremony was God's way of teaching that the "wages of sin is death" and that man's greatest need is the Redeemer.

Jesus fulfilled the moral law and the ceremonial law, so we don't need that old high priest, because Jesus is our High Priest (Heb. 8:1-3). We don't need those old bloody altars of Judaism, because the blood of Christ cleanses from all sin (1 John 1:7; Rev. 1:5; Matt. 22:28). We don't need the old Sabbath, because Jesus is our rest (Heb. 4:3-9).

But, Jesus fulfilled the judicial law when he took your sin and mine to the cross, and by death fulfilled the law that judged us guilty. He died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:1-4). He redeemed us from the curse of the law by being made a curse for us (Gal. 3:13). He met the righteous demands of the law against us in his atoning death. Paul affirmed, "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes" (Rom 10:4).

All this simply means that we are "not under the law" (Gal. 3:19-25) because Christ has fulfilled and removed it. The Law said, "Do this and you will live"; the Gospel says "live and you will do." The Law said, "Pay all you owe"; the Gospel says, "I freely forgive you all." The Law said, "Cursed is everyone who continues not in all things written in the law to do them"; the Gospel says, "Blessed is the man whose iniquities are forgiven." The Law states, "The wages of sin is death"; the Gospel proclaims "the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." The Law demanded holiness; the Gospel provides holiness.

Why? Because Christ fulfilled the Law and paid the debt the Law imposed and now the righteousness of the Law is fulfilled in us.

## **Jesus Perfectly Fulfills the Word**

Look at Verse 18, “For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till **all is fulfilled.**”

What is a jot and a tittle? It was the smallest Hebrew letter and the smallest marking of the pen. What are the implications? Jesus is saying that the smallest detail will not pass—all is fulfilled. Every word of God stands! Jesus said, “The scriptures cannot be broken” (John 10:35). Jesus believed in the inerrancy of the holy Scriptures! Jesus accepted the infallibility of the Word of God! Jesus affirmed the indestructibility of the Word! He believed and taught the authority and inspiration of the Scriptures. (See Isa. 49:7-8; 1 Pet. 1:24-25.)

If we believe Jesus, we will accept his high and lofty view of the Scriptures. If there are errors in the Old Testament, then (1) Jesus was ignorant of them, and therefore could not be omniscient—God in human flesh, or (2) he knew there were errors but pretended there were not, and therefore, would have been dishonest and a fraud. Are you prepared for either of those conclusions? I am not! The only other conclusion is that the Word of God is the inerrant, infallible, indestructible and authoritative Word of God. This has been the stance of Bible believers through the years.

## **Conclusion**

Jesus is the great fulfiller. He fulfilled the Word of God prophetically, practically and perfectly. The One who came the first time to fulfill the “eternal purpose of God” is also coming a second time to fulfill history, judge the world and reward his own. And, he is the One who can fulfill your life and give it meaning, direction and purpose. He can be your satisfaction today. Christ is what your soul hungers for.

# Hosea—The Betrayed Prophet (Overview of Hosea)

By Dan Kessinger

The lives and messages of the Old Testament prophets have fallen into a level of undeserved obscurity. With the exception of a few obvious Messianic predictions, typical Bible students know little of the prophets, and even less of the so-called “minor” prophets. In one sense, this degree of disinterest is justified by the knowledge of Jesus and his spiritual kingdom. In that instance, the believer of the New Testament is made to understand that the Law under which God’s servants operated for fifteen hundred years has been removed entirely. Thus, the specific laws the prophets cited are no longer valid, though an introduction to an otherwise fine reference book emphasizes the Law of Sinai as a valid concept for Christians today (Laestch vii). Likewise, Jesus’ disciples recognize him as the ultimate fulfillment, the crown jewel of all Old Testament prophecy. Thus, many fail to study the messages of these servants of old beyond studying Messianic predictions and their fulfillment.

It must be understood that these prophets wrote their messages for a reason, and the writings were preserved into the Christian era for a purpose. After all, there were great prophets who did not write books (Elisha, Micaiah, Nathan and Gad to name but a few). Other prophets wrote (e.g., Elijah), but those writings were not intended for posterity. The very existence of the prophecies of Isaiah through Malachi would serve as a reminder that their words are powerful today.

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While it may be true that one can learn of Christ, obey the Gospel and live faithfully without ever having read the Old Testament (much less the prophets), it cannot be said that one has reached a mature understanding of the nature of divinity, even the character of the incarnate Son. The rebellious nature of men is explored with great detail, including the predictable human foibles typical of every generation. The mercy and justice of God are revealed in a way that shows us not only his tender appeals to man, but also the end of man's rebellion.

Perhaps the most striking feature of all is the insight into the heart of the prophet himself. The prophet's call and ministry are integral to the message of the prophets. They came from various walks of life, but these differences were only incidental to their work. They were God's men. They were called to conflict, but their enemies were always the opponents of Yahweh and his Law. Their words of comfort were reserved for those who were on God's side, their condemnations directed at whomever stood against the Lord. Though they were but weak men sometimes loathing the burden of the Lord, they shouldered it and proceeded faithfully. Personal comfort and convenience were set aside in the pursuit of the proclamation of truth. Kings were condemned, armies were defeated, nations were defied and sin was exposed. They were many and varied, but their lone voices formed a harmonious choir singing God's song.

In some ways, Hosea typified the life of a prophet. He was a lone figure, the only writing prophet from the North in the divided kingdom (Lewis 13). Amos wrote extensively of the northern kingdom, but was himself a native of Judah. Hosea was contemporary with Isaiah and Amos, and wrote his message in the days immediately preceding the fall of Israel in 722 BC. Hosea mentions the Assyrian threat several times specifically in chapters 7, 11, 12 and 14. The internal dating of the book places it in the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah of Judah, and

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Jeroboam II of Israel (Hos. 1:1). This date is almost identical to the dating of Isaiah (Isa. 1:1), though Isaiah does not mention the northern king. In the opinion of this writer, Hosea's date should be interpreted differently than that of Isaiah; Isaiah's visions were evidently widely dispersed over a period of approximately fifty years (750-700 B.C.). Hosea's date probably refers not to a lengthy period of writing, nor to a number of visions, but to social conditions of that same general time period. Also, since Uzziah reigned 52 years and Hezekiah for 29, there is much room for discrepancy even with identical references between the two prophets. By contrast, Amos dates his prophecy only according to the reigns of Jeroboam and Uzziah (Amos 1:1).

Like so many other prophets, the message of Hosea was destined to fall on mostly deaf ears. Hosea does not reveal the reaction to his preaching, but if Isaiah's message were to be ignored (Isa. 6:11-12), the same must have been true of Hosea's oracle. Moreover, the fall of Israel and its utter rejection of spiritual values is duly recorded.

Yet the Lord testified against Israel and against Judah, by all of His prophets, namely every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways, and keep My commandments and My statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets. (2 Kings 17:13)

Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah alone. (2 Kings 17:18)

If Hosea enjoyed any success, it is reasonable to classify it as a very limited influence on a very small number. As

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Hezekiah also learned, Israel in the 700's BC was a land and a time of scoffers.

So the runners passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, as far as Zebulun; but they laughed them to scorn and mocked them. Nevertheless some from Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. (2 Chron. 30:10-11)

Hosea is basically divided into two sections: Chapters 1-3 deal with the saga of Hosea and his unfaithful wife, Gomer. Chapters 4-14 are a series of denunciations of the sins of Israel, the longsuffering of God and impending disaster because of sin. Included in this section are also several references, some more clear than others are, to Jesus and the church age. While not all of these specific prophecies have a direct influence on the allegorical relationship suggested by Hosea and his wife, they all at least emanate from the essence of God and Israel. It is from beginning to end a story of one-sided love.

The Lord is planning ways and means of proving to His Church His everlasting love...While making His plans, the Lord once more turns to His Church, and out of the abundance of His heart His mouth speaks the sweetest words which human ears can hear, a declaration of unending love by the divine Bridegroom, a message which to this day fills our heart with joy and gratitude toward our God and Savior, who addresses these words to us also. (Laestch 34)

Converting the Israelites in Hosea's day was a Herculean task. To the eyes of men, there was no pressing need for change. The reign of Jeroboam II was a period of unprecedented prosperity in the divided kingdom. Israel

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and Judah together grew to re-control almost all of the territory of Solomon's kingdom. With the stability enjoyed by long peaceful reigns in North and South, economic prosperity abounded.

Meanwhile, the morals of a corrupt land were sinking even lower. Israel had continually served false gods and engaged in wholesale immorality. The little remaining worship of God had been utterly perverted into Baal cult practices in the name of Jehovah. Prosperity had come at the expense of ethics in general, with the poor being abused and cheated. While Ahab had been removed, the legacy of Jeroboam lived on. After Jehu's revolution, he also served Baal. With Jeroboam II, the dynasty of Jehu had reached the ominously predicted fourth generation.

And the Lord said to Jehu, "Because you have done well in doing what is right in My sight, and have done to the house of Ahab all that was in My heart, your sons shall sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation." (2 Kings 10:30)

The tendency to ignore spiritual matters in times of prosperity is neither new nor temporary. The period of the judges illustrates the tendency of men to do as they will spiritually until they are physically tormented. While the common people heard our Lord gladly (Mark 12:37) and the poor were rich in the faith (James 2:5), it is frequently the prosperous who are spiritually bankrupt (Jam. 2:6; Rev. 3:17). Amos called that generation in Israel "cows of Bashan" (Amos 4:1). They were just as content as any well-fed bovine on the day before slaughter. In our generation, the preacher (?) Jesse Jackson defended an immoral president because jobs were plenteous. According to God's prophets, such an attitude is not only wrong, it is cow-like dull-mindedness.

The gospel of health, wealth and prosperity did not owe its beginnings to the 20<sup>th</sup> century proliferation of

televangelist charlatans. This time of peace and ease demonstrated that God was through calling Israel to repentance through either blessings or chastisement. In a political sense, the prosperity was empty and short-lived. Israel was “whistling through a graveyard” it would soon occupy in a permanent sense. The Assyrian juggernaut was just over the horizon.

The Assyrians were perhaps the most uncompromisingly bloodthirsty regime in history. A study of Assyrian history begins and ends with her foreign policy. Though domestic issues are a vital issue in analyzing a government, Assyrian monarchs are noted for little interest in governing at all, preferring conquest for conquest’s sake. With regard to Israel, there was an increasingly inevitable path toward destruction by the northeastern lion.

It was in the face of this destruction that Hosea was called to an incredible role of loneliness and heartache. The most outstanding feature of Hosea is of course his infamous marriage. The question of Hosea’s marriage has been debated, with some going as far as to suggest the marriage to Gomer a complete allegory or drama.<sup>1</sup> It is this writer’s conviction that the marriage was real, and that the events transpired exactly as recorded for us in Hosea. Hosea actually married a woman who had the character of a harlot, and that character had been revealed to him, or at least could be suspected by a discerning observer. As Harrison observes, a straightforward reading of the text shows Gomer to be a woman who had been immoral before and after her marriage to Hosea (864). However, Harrison (864-867), and Lewis (27) also suggest a proleptic reading of “the woman of harlotries.” This writer is convinced that the simplest reading is in this case warranted.

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<sup>1</sup> The allegorical interpretation of Hosea’s marriage is discussed in almost any book on the subject.

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This writer is further convinced that the moral problems of this relationship can be reasonably explained. Perhaps Hosea already loved Gomer and desired her as a wife in spite of the potential problems of her character. Hosea would neither be the first nor last man of God to encounter this dilemma. Though many such attempts are doomed to failure, it must be remembered that such immorality can be repented of and left in the past where it belongs.

This writer is finally convinced that this kind of speculation loses sight of the real lesson of Hosea and Gomer. Wherever one's speculations lead him concerning Hosea's judgment and God's strange command, the tragic story of Hosea's one-way love affair is the focus. In order to understand the extent of God's patience with sinners, one must enter into the heart of a man who did not marry a pristine virgin only to see her betray him. The courtship itself was an act of mercy and forgiveness. It is a story that lends no room whatsoever for assigning fault. It was not just unfaithfulness, but an act of contempt toward (probably) the only man who ever had treated Gomer with respect and kindness.

Even while they remained married, it is hinted that Gomer's second two children were not Hosea's. And when Gomer has departed from Hosea and sunk to the level of a modern "crack" prostitute, Hosea rescues her and buys her back. This was an action with no conceivable profit for Hosea, and one that was certainly humiliating for him. Why does he do this? He does so because he is instructed to do so as an illustration of God's actions toward his people (Hos. 3:1). He does so because he still loves this broken woman who has betrayed him.

The names in the Book of Hosea are also significant. "Hosea" means "savior," similar to Joshua (originally named Oshea) and Jesus. Hosea as a living illustration of God's actions toward Israel certainly fits the bill. The three

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children born to Gomer are also named significantly to the lesson of Hosea. Not only was Jezreel the cite of the summer palace of the Israelite kings, it means “scattered.” The name was an implied threat in the scattering of a defeated nation. Interestingly, it also carries the significance of scattering or sowing seed, a second meaning utilized with a ray of hope in Hosea 2:23. The daughter Lo-Ruhammah wore a name that means “no mercy” (Hos. 1:6). Again this significance is obvious to a people marked for destruction. Finally, Gomer bore a son named Lo-Ammi, which means “not my people” (Hos. 1:9). This name has a chilling finality in its prediction of destruction. The only name in the book that seems to have no real significance is that of Gomer.

As one observes the themes explored in the teaching section of the book (4-14), one is impressed with the focus and consistency. Each one derives its beginnings from the relationship of God as a loving and patient husband to his wayward spouse.

Obviously, sin and its consequences must be considered as key. Under this heading, Hosea denounces a variety of social ills, including lying, murder, stealing, adultery and a lack of mercy in chapter 4. Hosea also championed the cause of the abused poor in chapter 12, exposing the deceit of the merchants, calling them “Canaanites.” In defiance of the explicit commandment of the Pentateuch, these unethical merchants had corrupted standards of weights and measures to squeeze more from the already overburdened destitute of the land (Hos. 12:7).

Hosea also condemned the false religion of the land. In chapters 8 and 10, he made reference to the calves. These symbols of the Canaanite cult had been a sore point and a bone of contention with God since their introduction by Jeroboam the son of Nebat who “made Israel to sin.” Consider this denunciation in conjunction with the “shrieking priests” who were in misery because of the

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emptiness of their idol. Given this constant sin, the sacrifices of the Israelites were void and vain. In chapter 5, they seek the Lord with sacrifice, but he cannot be found. God will have mercy, not sacrifice from his people (Hos. 6:6).

Another of the great themes in Hosea is of rebellion and mercy. Of all the peoples on the face of the earth, Israel had every reason to be faithful to God. They were a redeemed people, according to chapters 7 and 11. Like the harlot Gomer, they had been taken from the depths of humiliation and honored. Like Gomer, this privilege was conditioned on but being faithful. Like Gomer, Israel preferred attention from her treacherous lovers to that of her husband.

On the few occasions Israel managed any level of virtue, it was short lived. Hosea compares the faithfulness of Israel to a morning fog or a dew (Hos. 6:4). And still God sought them. In chapter 12, we find reference to the many lessons and even the great variety in methods of teaching that had come to the Israelites. It was as though no message from any prophet of God had any effect on them whatsoever.

Since God's great lengths to convert Israel had met with failure, it was time for action. In shocking language that cannot be misunderstood, Israel was charged with committing whoredoms on every barn floor (Hos. 9:1). She then attempts to remedy the problems caused by these sins by seeking more trysts with her lovers in the pagan nations. She is even more determined to be unfaithful to pay the debts of her unfaithfulness. She is like a bird caught by a hunter (Hos. 9:8).

These lovers will be the death of her. The few children born in this unholy nation will not survive. God's retribution is the answer, but it breaks his great heart. In chapter 11 and verse 1, God reminisces over calling Ephraim out of Egypt. This verse turns out to have

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Messianic implications that would not have been clear from this book alone. God reflects on “teaching Ephraim to walk” (Hos 11:3) as well. God pours out his heart over the fate of this doomed, loved, nation of traitors. His heart’s greatest desire is to roar like a lion in defense of this defenseless, silly bird (Hos. 11:10-11).

The last great theme of Hosea is resurrection. In fulfillment, it would appear that Israel was beyond such retrieval, but God offers it if they would but hear. They were offered a return from the grave and death in chapter 13. In the opinion of this writer, the reference to a revival of this doomed nation after three days in Hosea 6:1-3 has a double significance. It was a call for reformation that would be answered with promise of a new prosperity. However, God already knew they would not hear his call. Thus, the three day reference suggests a shadowy prophecy of a much more literal revival in the person of Jesus Christ.

The references of hope in Hosea have their fulfillment, not in fleshly Israel, but in a new Israel that was to come. The promise of return and prosperity like the cedar of Lebanon had no fulfillment in a nation that ceased to exist, but cast a glimmer of hope in a nation of God. This nation was not Israel of old, but the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

The message of Hosea is quite simple: repent. The marriage of Hosea, the children, the unfaithfulness, the punishment, the heartache and every word of the book is an appeal from a loving God to an unfaithful spouse to repent. The God of justice has a heart that is breaking for his people who are in sin. Hosea is an unflinching revelation of the ultimate love of a God in heaven who calls, who waits, who loves.

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### Biographical Sketch

Dan was born in Riverview Michigan, the son of Bob and Doris Kessinger. After brief boyhood stints in Kentucky, West Virginia and Georgia, his family returned to West Virginia to stay in 1973. He and his wife, the former Mary Amy West, have two boys, D.J. and Thomas.

Dan graduated from Walton High School in Roane County, WV, and attended Ohio Valley College where he earned associate and bachelor degrees in Biblical Science.

Dan preached his first sermon in the spring of 1982 at the Mt. Zion church of Christ in Walker, WV. He has served congregations in Belle, Long Valley, Gandeeville, Proctor and since February of 1994, the Dewey Ave. church of Christ in St. Marys.

In addition to his local work (including a weekly radio program), Dan conducts Gospel meetings and appears on lecture programs each year. He is a frequent contributor to religious journals, and is the author of *A Cloak of Malice*. He has worked with WV Christian Youth Camp since 1984 and West Virginia School of Preaching since 1995.

# Worship with No Heart

## Proverbs 4:23

By John Barcus

The Bible says, “out of the heart are the issues of life” (Prov. 4:23). The heart is involved in some aspect in all that we do. It all depends on the kind of heart that is put forth, whether it be a dead heart, a heart of indifference, a cold heart or a passionate heart quickened by the love of God (John 14:15). God was having difficulties accepting the worship (if it could be called such) of Israel due to a lack of righteous living and sincerity of heart.

Religious appearance and ceremony are **not** alternatives to sincere worship and personal righteousness. In Amos’ day, Israel tried to make them so, and they received God’s scathing denunciation through his prophet. What they offered unto God was the best of its kind:

**fatted beasts and  
hymns of praises**

**But their love and obedience was missing.**

God does not say that Israel did not offer sacrifice at all, but Israel did not offer them unto him. The “unto **me**” is emphatic! If God is not served wholly and alone, he is not served at all. Israel justified himself to himself by his half-service. This had been his way from the first. He thought this was accepted because he did certain homage to God by acknowledging him in his own way. Therefore, in his service, Israel was satisfied but not justified. Matthew 15:8 says, “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth and honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.”

The religion of Israel as practiced at her altars was an insult to God because the hearts and lives of the

worshippers were so evil. They were careful to “keep the Sabbath,” yet would murmur under their breath. “When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? And the Sabbath that we may buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes?” (Amos 8:5-6). No wonder God said, I hate such religion as that! It was mockery of all that God desired from them, and such religion must always bring his condemnation.

The words of Amos must have come as a shock to the people. They were sure that the offerings were what God wanted. Did not the burnt offerings, which were totally consumed on the altar, represent total surrender to God? And the peace offering portions eaten “before the Lord,” were they not a fellowship with God? But their lives and hearts were not surrendered to God and without that, the abundance of burnt offerings meant nothing. How could there be any fellowship between a wicked people and a righteous God? Therefore, God is moved to say, “Away with such things.”

The Psalmist says, “Make a joyful noise unto the Lord” (Psalms 98:4). Does God desire our praise or not? Only if it is from the heart and from the lips of those who desire to do what is right and good. But the songs of Israel were so much noise. Their religion was in vain.

What, then does God want? God wants sincerity and passion of heart when it comes to worship. A dear faithful brother in Christ used to teach, “put some fire in your sermon or put your sermon in the fire.” Away with “worship with no heart” and let us become passionate about our worship to God. Because in our conversion to the Lord there has been a change so deep, clear, entire and abiding that we are called “a new creature,” that we want to worship him in spirit and in truth (cf. John 4:24).

Paul says, in a very familiar passage “and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily as to the Lord, and not unto men” (Col. 3:23). The word is teaching us, whatever we’re doing in life

we are supposed to do with all our being for the Lord's sake. This would surely be inclusive of our worship to God. Often we lack passion in our worship to God because our hearts have been allowed to grow cold. Scripture tells us that God does not want cold or lukewarm hearts (Rev. 3:16). God wants Christians whose hearts are on fire to worship him, and who will obey him from the heart.

Passion is priceless in our worship to God. We need the passion of God and Christ in our lives (John 3:16; 4:24-34; Matt. 23:37). God is doing great things in our lives:

**we are saved,  
in Christian families,  
belong to faithful congregations,  
good health (not dead) and  
live in a great country, etc.**

How, then, can we not worship God enthusiastically (cf. Ecc. 9:11)? Let us refuse to be intimidated by the world in allowing it to be more passionate in things that are "in vain" to God (Matt. 7:21) than we are in living, worshipping and praising God.

In our worshipful experience, passion is priceless. When it comes to worship, let us be passionate in our prayers. James says, "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man..." (Jam. 5:16). We need to be zealous and enthusiastic! Aren't you tired of not seeing much happen in your prayer life and worship experience to God? Don't you want to see God at work in your life? He is not dead, sick nor does he have a headache. God is just fine. The same God that parted the Red Sea and gave David the victory over Goliath is the same God that will meet us in worship when our prayer life is real.

Prayer should make the adrenaline flow with excitement as we worship and praise God. Hear Paul in Romans 9 and 10. We must be persuaded that these were prayers of passion. Passion is also needed in our study of the Word of God. The Psalmist speaks volumes of his love

and passion for God's Word (Psalms 119). Paul encourages us to diligently study of the Word of God (2 Tim. 2:15). Thank God that we live in a country where we are able to read and study the Word of the Lord. Therefore, let us be passionate about our Bible study. Let us:

**read it,  
learn it,  
memorize it,  
obey it and by all means  
understand it.**

Job said, "Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12). Bible study can certainly have a powerful impact in our lives (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 4:12). With all the competition from the religious world, let us show our God and the world "**passion**" from people in our worship presented unto him. Let us:

**Sing with "passion" (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).**  
**Preach with "passion" (1 Cor. 1:21; John 1:21).**  
**Give with "passion" (1 Cor. 16:1-2)**  
**Take the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:23-26)**  
**Remembering the "passion" of our Lord.**

If we are going to put out time into worship, why not do that with passion. Amos taught Israel that religion means much more than mere worship. It is not the smoke of burnt offerings that is acceptable to God but the incense of a true and loyal heart. His whole lesson message serves as a most fitting prelude to James' definition of religion: "Pure religion and undefiled before our God and Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the World: (James 1:27).

To the question: Just how much injustice and wickedness can a nation endure and survive? Is there a limit? To what degree can the home be degraded, the courts and legislative halls be corrupted, and financial institutions

## **Worship with No Heart ~ By Barcus**

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be defrauded? How many of our youth must continue to give over to vices and degradation? How many thousands of prisoners do we continue to support? How much can a nation endure before judgment strikes, whether from a fire of our own making or from the hands of God!

Indeed, there is a need for righteous lives and sincere worship to live up to the longsuffering of a loving God. Yes, there is a worship that God hates, a worship where there is no heart, passion or right living. “In God we trust” is a noble motto. Yet, it is absolutely meaningless unless we seek to live righteously before God. (Titus 2:11-12).

Where there is proper and proved worship, God will most surely receive and **bless the sincere worshippers!**

## **Biographical Sketch**

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# **Seeking God in an Evil time Amos 5:1-20**

By Emanuel Daugherty

The book of Amos was written about 755 B.C. when God called Amos from his occupation as a herdsman of sheep and a dresser of sycamore trees (7:14-15). He came at a time when Israel was at the peak of her power politically and economically. Times were good—they lived in summer houses and winter houses, their women lived a life of luxury and opulence, sitting on their ivory couches on cushions of silk and telling their husbands to bring them drink (3:12, 15; 4:1). Their king, Jeroboam the second, had extended Israel's northern border to the Euphrates River. Religiously, they had absorbed idolatry, were cultic and morally depraved. They were at the height of their power, but within a little more than thirty years the nation of Israel would be no more. Assyria was waiting in the wings.

## **The Lament of Amos (1-3)**

“Hear ye this word which I take up for a lamentation over you.” The depth of their sin and the desperation of their condition are seen as Amos begins Israel's funeral dirge (a song expressing deep grief over death, 2 Chron 35:25; 2 Sam 1:17-27). It is as if they are already dead and the funeral songs are being sung. But, it is not too late; the judgment can yet be averted if they will “seek Jehovah.” Four times in this chapter, the prophet appeals to them to seek Jehovah (4, 6, 8, 14). But, they would not, and because of their refusal, two “woes” are pronounced: (1)

upon their mistaken concept of “the day of the Lord” (5:18) and (2) upon them who are “at ease in Zion” (6:1).

“The virgin of Israel is fallen” refers both to her lack of moral purity and that she since becoming a nation had never fallen to the foe, had never been conquered. But, that is about to change. Amos writes and speaks of it as if it has already happened, although their actual defeat is yet a few years in the future (721 B.C.).

Israel would be a nation no more, “she is cast down upon her land.” Cook’s commentary says she is “stretched at full length, as one who will move no more.” Note the completeness of Israel’s fall:

1. She is fallen.
2. She shall not rise again.
3. She is cast down on the ground, stretched out as in death.
4. There is no one who can help her get up.

But there will be a remnant (3:12, 4:11, 5:3, 15, 9:8, 11), which the prophet describes as a city that sent forth a thousand into battle shall have but a hundred return, a town of one hundred will have but ten inhabitants left to it. Israel would be scattered among the nations and only a few here and there would trickle back to the land and to the God and religion of Israel.

## **The Appeal of Jehovah (4-17)**

**“Seek ye me and ye shall live.”** Four times the appeal is made in chapter five to “seek Jehovah,” but they would not. They were to seek him heartily, sincerely, and constantly. Her failure to seek God and abandon her idols was the reason for her death. “Seek not Bethel... Gilgal...Beer-sheba”—places where idols had been erected.

**“Seek Jehovah and ye shall live.”** The house of Joseph is a reference to the 10 tribes (see also Obad. 18; Zechariah 10:6). One can seek Jehovah and find him only

by following his Word, which they were not content to do. It is the plague of mankind (Isa. 55:6; Psa. 32:6).

The consuming fire of God's justice will swallow them up, the alter to idols built by Jeroboam I, center of Israel's false worship with her false priests, princes, prophets, etc. None at Bethel would be able to quench the fire of God's wrath.

"Ye who turn justice to wormwood, and cast down righteousness to the earth." "Wormwood is a term that could be applied to all excessively bitter plants. This means that their justice or judgment, which should have dealt to each his due, had become the bitterest of injustice" (Hailey 107). Isaiah said, "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet and for bitter" (5:20).

**"Seek him that maketh Pleiades and Orion"** (Note 4:13). "Literally, 'Seek the MAKER.' The seven stars are called in Hebrew *Kimah*, a word meaning a heap, being a cluster of seven large, and many smaller, stars known among the Greeks by the name of Pleiades (The Bear)..." (Cook vol 6, 540). "Orion (The Hunter), in Hebrew *Kesil*, means foolish, impious." See Job 9:9, 38:31-33. The names of these constellations are found in no other Bible books. The point Amos is making: Seek the Creator of the starry heavens! He is the only one who can turn dark despair into glorious light!

**Israel was asked to seek him who is able to "turn the shadow of death into the morning."** The words "the shadow of death," are a compound word rare in Hebrew. It never means natural darkness, but something more intense—that of spiritual darkness, eternal separation from God (e.g., Matt. 8:12; 25:30). It is a poetical word found only in Isaiah and Jeremiah, Job and Psalms. Only God can make spiritual darkness as bright as the morning. "Jehovah is his name!"

The depth of their sins against the poor is seen in this sentence, “They hate him that reproveth in the gate, and abhor him that speaketh uprightly.” At the city gates, the chief places of concourse and travel, wise men, good men, gave counsel and advice and judgment was given. Kings held court “in the gate” (Deut. 25:7; 1 Kings 22:10; 2 Sam. 15:2; Isa. 29:21). But, Israel despised those who stood for truth, justice and righteousness. “There was no place for the honest judge... nor was there any place for the honest witness who would refuse the bribe and speak the truth. Justice and integrity were strangers to the court and unknown quantities in Israel” (Howard 81).

Thus, the poor man had no court of appeal, no recourse for injustices and was forced to pay heavy taxes, bringing him to abject poverty. But, those who had robbed them and cut them off from any appeal to justice were not going to get to enjoy their ill-gotten prosperity.

The times were so evil that the sensible man would keep his mouth shut, the wisest course being to be as inconspicuous as possible. There is “a time to speak, and a time to be silent” (Ecc. 3:7) and, in this case, wisdom was the better part of valor.

## **The Last Call to “Seek Me”**

**“Seek good and not evil.”** One cannot seek good without divorcing himself from evil (Isa. 1:16-17; Matt. 6:24). What a Satanic delusion that men think they can be religious and immoral at the same time!

“As ye say...” They believed the Lord would be with them no matter how corrupt they became.

“Hate the evil and love the good.” This is conduct just the opposite of what they had been doing. A complete reversal of life was needed. It is readily apparent that we must love what God loves and hate what God hates (cf. (Psa. 119:104, 128). If Israel would do this, God would again be gracious unto them and spare them. But, at best,

there would be only a remnant. The majority was too steeped in sin to repent.

Those who had the care of the land would mourn for the destruction to their prized vineyards. “Woe” is unto them because Israel would not “hear this word” (3:1; 4:1; 5:1) and did not “seek Jehovah” (5:4, 6, 8, 14), but sought out their idols and works of darkness instead. “Woe” will come upon them (5:18; 6:1).

## **The Day of the Lord (18-20)**

**“Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord.”**

“The origins of the concept of the day of the Lord are unknown and various suggestions have been made. What is clear, however, is that by the time of Amos this was an idea which had long since taken root in the religious thought of Israel” (Howard 84).

The general pattern for the phrase “the day of the Lord” contains these elements: (1) Judgment and redemption of God’s people (Israel and Judah, the church in the New Testament), and (2) God’s judgment and redemption of the nations (Joel 3:14), (3) individuals, e.g., the king of Babylon (Isa. 13-14; the fall of leaders in government and religion (Joel 2:30-31; Matt. 24:29). The day of the Lord is any great manifestation of God’s power in judgment and redemption (Joel 1:15; Mal. 3:1-6; Isa. 2:2-5; Amos 9:11ff).

Generally speaking, the day of the Lord is a day in history, which when passed, history continues. However, it is also true that each day of the Lord points to **the** day of the Lord, the great last and final day of all days, the day when Christ comes in final judgment on his people and the nations of the world (2 Pet. 3:10; 2 Thess. 1:7-10). The prophets used the term to mean days of doom and/or days of deliverance. All the universe is at the disposal of God in executing his judgments and blessings (Joel 2:10, 30-31; Rom. 1:18ff).

“The day of the Lord” is often misunderstood. Many see it **only** as a reference to the final coming of Christ and the end of time. However, it can be said that any day of judgment or redemption is the day of the Lord, a day when he intervenes to punish sin, a day when he avenges his people by punishing those who brought hurt on them. Amos rebuked the northern kingdom of Israel for looking forward to the day of the Lord when in actuality they were the ones who were to receive the punishment because of their moral and spiritual corruption (Amos 5:18ff).

Let it be clearly understood, the day of the Lord in Old Testament references is not pointing toward the last and final Judgment Day. The day of the Lord in Old Testament theology refers to any judgment of God that may come on Israel and Judah for their sins against God; it may be a judgment on the Assyrians, Babylonians, Edomites or any nation having to do with God’s people for their excesses in carrying out God’s justice against his people.

It is thought by liberal theologians and those influenced by them that this passage from Amos is the first reference to the day of the Lord in the Old Testament. However, if, as conservative scholars contend, Joel and Obadiah are kept in the pre-Assyrian grouping, as the Hebrew canon assigns them, then the difficulty is removed for Joel uses this term **five** times and Obadiah **once**. Thus, the concept is not new to Israel at the time of Amos at all. This also is added evidence for the early dating of Joel and Obadiah.

In Amos Five, those who desired the day of the Lord were in for a great surprise, but not a happy one. It would not be a pleasant day of rejoicing, but a day of sorrow, destruction and darkness. It would be a day of wrath and judgment on a stiff-necked rebellious nation. As Jeremiah would later say, “...it is the time of Jacob’s trouble” (30:7). The day of the Lord will be a day of “light” and gladness only to those who are truly prepared to meet God.

Amos illustrates the terrors that day will bring—a man fleeing from a lion is met by a bear! And, upon running breathlessly into his house to escape the bear, he leans against a wall and is bitten by a snake! “They would flee from one terror to be met by another until at last death strikes home” (Hailey 111). The relentless wrath of God would be their continuous haunting nightmare! Israel would find no place to hide and no escape from God’s righteous judgment.

## **Conclusion**

The only way Israel could avoid God’s wrath and judgment was to “seek Jehovah.” This would mean that they would have to come to their senses by repenting of their sins—forsaking idolatry and coming back to the Living God, worshiping him again with sincerity of heart and faithful following of God’s will.

Men of the 21<sup>st</sup> century must do the same. There is a “day of the Lord” still coming on all men (Acts 17:30-31). We can only seek God by looking into his Word, by “searching the Scriptures” (John 5:39-40; Act 17:11). Men and women today are spurning their day of grace when God’s love and mercy, his salvation is being offered! Beware, lest the coming day of the Lord catches you unprepared! “Seek Jehovah!”

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## **Biographical Sketch**

Emanuel Daugherty presently resides in Wheeling, WV. He was born in Philippi, WV in 1939; brother Daugherty was baptized in 1950 by Miris Wright in Warren, OH. In 1958, he married Judith Null, to which union were born Bruce, Ramona and Rachel. Emanuel and Judy have eight grandsons and four granddaughters.

Brother Daugherty graduated from Braceville High School in Trumbull County, Ohio in 1956, the Memphis School of Preaching in 1968 and Alabama Christian School of Religion (now Southern Christian University) in 1982.

Emanuel Daugherty as preached for the Alkire Road church of Christ in Grove City, OH (1968-1989) and the Dewey Avenue church of Christ in St. Marys, WV (1989-1994). He taught nine years at Central Ohio School for Preachers and Teachers in Columbus, OH (1971-1980) and served as Director and teacher for West Virginia School of Preaching (1994-2003). Brother Daugherty has held Gospel meetings in West Virginia, Ohio, Illinois, Kentucky, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee and Wisconsin. Currently, he is a faculty member of the West Virginia School of Preaching and preaches for Salem church of Christ in Glen Easton, WV.

# **God's Controversy and No Knowledge**

## **Hosea 4:1-6**

By Wirt Cook

### **Introduction**

The book of Hosea is like no other in God's Holy Writ. To demonstrate the despicable nature of departure from God for manmade idols, and the things of man, he uses an illustration of an adulterous relationship. Thus, when man departs from God, for whatever reason, he has committed spiritual adultery. He has forsaken that sacred commitment he made with God when he became a Christian. In some cases, rebellion is the cause of departure, but in many cases, the cause is ignorance. Whether by neglect or indifference people become ignorant of God's will. It doesn't happen overnight. It happens over the years, over generations. Perhaps we are living in a generation that has forgotten God or has forgotten God's Word.

In our text, Israel, God's chosen people, is addressed, "hear the word of the Lord, you children of Israel." God then makes this charge, "I have a controversy with the inhabitants of the land." Laestch says that controversy here means "'lawsuit,' He is about to institute a court proceeding against the people" (41-48). The charge is: There is no truth in the land, there is no mercy in the land and there is no knowledge of God in the land. He then gives the evidence for these charges; "swearing, lying, killing, stealing, and adultery" is rampant in the land. There is one bloodshed after another and another. The result of their sins was that the land would mourn. Those who live in

the land will waste away or die. So also will the beasts of the field, the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. In other words, the devastation will be total and complete. The reason for their problems and demise is simply stated, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos. 4:6). The summation is that God charges his people with ignorance of his Word and as a result, they will be destroyed as a nation of his people. The same pronouncement is made by Isaiah, contemporary of Hosea, in Isaiah 5:13, “Therefore my people are gone into captivity because they have no knowledge.”

We know that God could make the same charges against today’s society. Nevertheless, it causes one to wonder if God could level the same charges at Christians, spiritual Israel, the children of God, the church of Christ, today. Is it not ignorance that is the reason for the many problems that exist in the world and the church? Why so much dishonesty, filthy language, lying, stealing and killing in our world? Why so much immorality, fornication, adultery, homosexuality and the toleration of such in the world and even in the church? Why the “new views” of biblical interpretation, woman’s role in the church and names of designation of the church? Why is it no longer wrong to use instruments of music in worship, to accept those immersed for reasons other than remission of sins and salvation, and in some cases the unimmersed, into the fellowship of the church? I submit to you that the reason for these changes and toleration of such is primarily ignorance of God’s Word, the Bible. In some cases, it may be rebellion, which would be more serious than ignorance.

## **God Does Not Condone Ignorance**

Several times in the Scriptures, the phrase, “I would not have you to be ignorant” or similar statements are used to affirm that God desires us to be knowledgeable concerning his will (1 Thess. 4:13; 1 Cor. 10:1; 12:1; Rom.

11:25; 2 Pet. 3:8). I am sure it is because God wants “all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:5). Jesus encourages, “Come...learn of me...” (Matt. 11:28-30) that we might be pleasing to God and continue to walk in the light of his Word.

Knowledge has always been a priceless possession for the people of God. Consider some of the Psalms and Proverbs that confirm this fact.

- Psalm 1:1-2 “Blessed is the man...” whose “...delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.”
- Psalm 119:10-11 “With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee.”
- Psalm 119:16 “I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.”
- Psalm 119:24 “Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counselors.”
- Psalm 119:72 “The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.”
- Psalm 119:97 “O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day.”
- Psalm 119:104 Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.”
- Psalm 119:105 “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”
- Psalm 119:130 “The entrance of thy word giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple.”
- Psalm 119:161 “...but my heart standeth in awe of thy word.”
- Proverbs 8:10 “Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold.”
- Proverbs 10:14 “Wise men lay up knowledge.”

- Proverbs 1:5 “A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels.”

God has always intended that knowledge play a vital role in the lives of his people. Notice what the apostle Paul says regarding this; we “desire that ye may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col. 1:9). Paul commended the Romans in that they were “filled with all knowledge.” He also encouraged the Corinthians to “abound in knowledge” (2 Cor. 8:7). In the writings of the apostle Peter, he charged Christians to give a diligent effort to “add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge” (2 Pet. 1:5). He further commands them to “grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). Yes, even as stated by the prophet under consideration, God desires “the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings” (Hos. 6:6).

However, in spite of these commands and encouragements concerning knowledge and warnings regarding ignorance, there seems to be a “famine in the land...,” not of food or water, “but of hearing the word of the Lord” (Amos 8:11). To emphasize the point, consider the following questions that are basic to Christian faith and understanding. How many of these could you answer correctly?

1. Where is the Great Commission located?
2. Where is Jesus teaching concerning the new birth found?
3. Who was the first Gentile convert to Christianity and where is the story found?
4. Who accompanied Paul on his first journey and where is it found in Scripture?
5. Show from Scripture the prophecy and fulfillment of the church.

The answers are found in the following Scriptures:

1. Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:44-48;  
John 20:21-23.
2. John 3:1-7.
3. Cornelius, Acts 10.
4. Barnabas and John Mark, Acts 12:25—14:28.
5. The church is prophesied in Isaiah 2, Daniel 2,  
Joel 2 and is fulfilled in Acts 2.

I heard it said many years ago that “Ignorance is bliss.” I read later the remainder of the quotation; “Where ignorance is bliss it is folly to be wise.” This is certainly not a maxim of Scripture for the very opposite is taught. When a person desires ignorance over knowledge, he is a fool. “Fools hate knowledge” (Prov. 1:22). As one old brother prayed, “Lord, I am thankful that I am ignorant,” another was heard to remark, “He sure has a lot to be thankful for.”

## **The Calamity of Ignorance**

When one is ignorant of God’s Word, the results are tragic. Imagine not knowing what to do to be saved. Or even worse, believing you are saved when you are not because you have believed erroneous teaching. God’s Word shows the consequences of those who are ignorant. On one occasion Jesus said to the Sadducees, “Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God” (Matt. 22:24). One lives in error when he does not know the teachings of Christ.

Ignorance further causes a person to create and follow his own system of religion when he does not know or comprehend the righteousness of God, even though he may be very sincere and zealous. Paul stated concerning the Jewish people, “Brethren my hearts desire and prayer for Israel is, that they might be saved . For I bear them record that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own

righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:1-3). A person's zeal, no matter how great it is, if it's not according to truth, it is a misguided zeal. When one does not have a love and desire for Truth, then he may be sent delusion to believe a lie (cf. 2 Thess. 2:10-11). This would be tragic indeed in that he could not be saved. Peter even talked about those who "wrest the scriptures to their own destruction" (2 Pet. 3:16).

Then there are those, like the Gentiles of Ephesians 4:18, who are described as "Having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart." So, ignorance causes one to become God's enemy. It would also lead one into lusts and desires that are forbidden and away from a life of holiness (cf. 1 Pet. 1:14-15).

The sin of ignorance was involved in the death of our Savior, Jesus Christ. When Peter preached to the Jews shortly after Pentecost, he accused them of denying the Holy One and killing the Prince of Life, but he went on to say, "Now brethren, I know that through ignorance you did it, as did also your rulers" (Acts 3:17).

In consideration of the previously stated Scriptures, the tragic conclusion that was stated by the prophet Hosea would be just as applicable today as it was then. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos. 4:6). The destruction is vividly portrayed by the apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 when he states, "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that **know not God** and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power."

## **The Compensation of Knowledge**

There are many benefits that come when a person learns. Think of all the things you have learned over the years that have made your life more pleasant and enjoyable. Growing up in the coalfields of southern West Virginia, our main staple was cornbread and pinto beans. Down through the years I have benefited from eating new and different foods, except for the extra weight. I still love the cornbread and beans, but there is so much more to life than cornbread and beans. Of course, this holds true in every area of life. Vacationing out west for the last two years have helped me to have a greater love and appreciation for our great country. I have learned much about the places I had heard about all my life, because I was able to go there and experience it first hand. The more you know, the more you benefit from what you know.

This certainly is the case in our spiritual lives and relationships. Consider the Scriptures that show what we gain when we increase in our knowledge of God's word. First of all, we are led to Christ by hearing and learning of the Father. Jesus said, "Therefore everyone who hears and learns from the Father comes to me" (John 6:45). By increasing in our understanding of Truth, we are made free from the bondage of sin and the clutches of Satan. Jesus says, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). Of course, Truth is God's Word (cf. John 17:17). Second, our spiritual strength is enhanced by growing and abiding in our knowledge. "A wise man is strong, yea a man of knowledge increaseth strength" (Prov. 24:5). Paul says as we increase in the knowledge of God, we are "strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power" (Col. 1:10-11). Third, according to Peter, our understanding of God's grace and peace is multiplied to us when we increase our knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord (cf. 2 Pet. 1:2). The inner serenity provided by our

comforter, the Holy Spirit, is realized as we read, study and apply his precious Word to our lives. Fourth, we “escape the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 2:20). Fifth, knowledge makes us fruitful in the work of the Lord, and when we lack knowledge, we are described as being spiritually blind and shortsighted (cf. 2 Pet. 1:5-9). And last, but certainly not least, a knowledge of God’s Word works as a deterrent to involving ourselves in sin. The Psalmist stated this on at least two occasions: “Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee” (Psa. 119:11). “Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way” (Psa. 119:104). In times of temptation, it is well to remember this truth, that the Word of God will keep one from sin. It is illustrated in the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness and his dealing with the devil (cf. Matt. 4:1-11). A mother concerned about her son leaving home and going out on his own presented him with a copy of the Bible with the following inscription: “Son, this book will keep you from sin and nothing but sin will keep you from this book.”

Because of the compensation, the Scriptures provide we must have the attitude and commitment of Paul when he said, “But, indeed I count all things loss for the excellence of the **knowledge** of Christ Jesus my Lord, ...and count them as rubbish that I may gain Christ” (Phil. 3:8).

## The Crucial Nature of Knowledge

We are told that “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Peter further instructs, “according as His divine power has given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” (2 Pet. 1:3). These

passages point out the crucial nature of knowing the Word. We are made complete and armed with everything necessary to accomplish God's will in our lives.

Consider how many things we could not do, which we are instructed to do, without knowledge of the Scriptures. "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15). How could we possibly give answer to those who question us about our faith without knowledge? We are also instructed to commit the Word of God to faithful men who shall be able to teach others (cf. 2 Tim. 2:2). This is impossible without our first learning the Word. The Hebrew Christians were rebuked because they were supposed to be teachers, but because of their immaturity, they needed to be taught (cf. Heb. 5:12-14). Elders are instructed to "by sound doctrine...exhort and convict those who contradict" (Titus 1:9). How would we know they were contradicting without knowledge, much less being able to exhort and convict them. The list of things we must accomplish that are crucially connected with knowledge is endless. How can we exhort, convict, instruct, expose, incite, contend, defend, teach or preach without knowledge? Impossible!

We deem Philip to be an effective preacher, teacher and soul winner. Why? Because he simply preached Christ to the Samaritans. But his teaching involved the things concerning the kingdom of God, the authority of Christ, the plan of salvation and motivational instruction toward obedience to the things he had taught. This is all implied by the statement, "When they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12; cf. Acts 8:4-12). Further proof of Philip's knowledge and ability in communicating the Word is found in Acts 8:28-40, which shows that he preached Jesus to the

Ethiopian. But, again, it is implied that he instructed him in many of the things mentioned above, because of the response of this man. “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” How did he know he should be baptized? You see, preaching Christ Jesus involves knowledge of the whole counsel of God.

## **Accumulating Knowledge**

How does a person accumulate knowledge? Through study. However, there are a number of things that precede and enhance our study. Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” and again, “Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:3, 5). The poor in spirit and meek person is one who willingly admits that he is deficient in his knowledge of God. When this admission is made, that person becomes teachable. I read a quotation recently that stated, “The doorstep to the temple of wisdom is a knowledge of your own ignorance.” Paul said, “If any man thinks that he knoweth anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know” (1 Cor. 8:2).

Besides meekness, a person needs to develop a deep-seated desire to know God’s Word. “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby” (1 Pet. 2:2). The story is told of a man who was imprisoned in a dark, dank dungeon. When they brought his meals to him, they would turn on a light that he might see to eat. However, he would read his Bible when the light was on instead of eating. When questioned about this practice, he stated, “My hands can find my mouth in the dark, but my eyes cannot find the words without the light.” Obviously, his hunger was for righteousness. It is not ironic that Jesus used the two strongest cravings that a person has when he encouraged, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst, after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matt. 5:6). May we long for God’s Word as much as our

daily bread. Socrates was once approached by a young man and asked what he had to do to become a man of wisdom and learning. Socrates took the man by the hand, led him to the nearest stream of water, pushed his head under the water and held it there until the man began to frantically struggle to get free. When the man finally broke free and came up gasping for air, Socrates asked him, "When you were under the water, what did you desire more than anything else?" The man replied, "Air." Socrates then said to him, "When you want knowledge as badly as you wanted air, you will become a wise and learned man." Just as the essential needs of the body are met because of our desire for air, food, water, etc., so we must desire the Word of God that our spiritual needs can be met. A young preacher was once lamenting the fact that he could not get the congregation with which he was working to read and study its Bibles. He concluded his lament with the statement, "Well, I guess you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink." An older and wiser preacher replied to him, "Son, your job is not to make them drink, but rather to make them thirsty." As preachers and teachers of the Word, let us strive to create in others a desire to learn.

Love for the Lord is an essential in our quest for knowledge. We are to love the Lord God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. When we love the Lord, we will love his Word. A young lady read a book and found it dull and uneventful. Months later she met the author and fell in love with him. She read the book again and found it to be the most interesting book she had ever read. What made the difference? She had come to know and love the author. God's Word will certainly mean much more to us when we love him. We will find it fulfilling when we engross ourselves in study of the depths and riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God (cf. Rom. 11:33-36).

A person must exercise discipline and not let anything interfere or take the place of his study of God's Word. Jesus said, "search the scriptures" (John 5:39). The Bereans "searched the scriptures daily" (Acts 17:11). Paul encouraged Timothy to "give attendance to reading" (1 Tim. 4:13). Paul also said, "When you read you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ" (Eph. 3:4). The admonitions are clear but, even so, we are guilty of letting many things get in the way of reading and studying. I remember a lesson I heard at Bible camp several years ago. The teacher had a large Bible with cords tied around it. On each cord was a tag with a word: indifference, business interest, television, travel, recreation, sports, social affairs, shopping, etc. His point was that these things bind the Bible for many people and keep them from opening it. As he talked about each one, he would untie the cord until finally the Bible was free to be opened and read. Is the Bible bound to us for some of the same reasons? James A. Garfield, even when he was President of the United States, read his Bible at least one hour every day. Are we any busier than he was? Brother Gus Nichols used to tell the students at Freed-Hardeman College that he studied the Bible five hours every day. Brother Franklin Camp heard about it and stated, "If brother Nichols needs five hours a day, I need six." How many do you need?

Desire for learning is created in children from birth. Most people that love the Lord and his Word were taught by their parents at a very early age. When they were babies on momma's lap in that old creaky rocking chair, they heard of God's love and care through songs that put them to sleep. As toddlers, their parents and siblings read them Bible stories of the heroes of the Old and New testaments. When old enough, their parents encouraged them to read their Bible and work their Bible lessons. Daily devotionals and singing of spiritual songs were a practice of the family. So, when adulthood is reached, love for the Lord has been

instilled and will continue throughout life. This is the way it was in Timothy's household. "That from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures" (2 Tim. 3:15). At a very early age, Timothy was nurtured in the faith by his mother and grandmother (cf. 2 Tim. 1:5).

The educational process is continued in the church, which is the institution of spiritual learning. Elders are responsible to provide the best learning environment possible. This is accomplished by having qualified teachers that set a good, wholesome example. They provide educational material that is Bible-centered and adapted to the learning level of the students. They also provide facilities that best meet the needs of the various groups to be taught. Elders must insure that the congregation they oversee is built upon the foundational teachings of the inspired apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ as the preeminent example to be followed.

## **Communicating Knowledge**

The ancient scribe Ezra "prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments" (Ezra 7:10). When our hearts, minds and attitudes have been properly prepared and the Word of the Lord has been learned, then it must be applied. James instructed us to be "doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22). It is the one that "does the will of God" (Matt. 7:21) who will enter the kingdom now and eternally. What good is knowledge that is not applied? It is like the old man that was going through a stack of books in his library and found them to be termite-ridden. Ironically, the title of one of the books was *How to Control Termites*. Knowledge accumulated but not applied! May God help us to commit ourselves in mind, in body and in soul to the application of his Word (cf. Rom. 12:1-2; 1 Pet. 4:19).

But, as in the case of Ezra, knowledge is not only to be accumulated and applied, it is also to be communicated. It cannot be hoarded, it must be shared. Paul said, “The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2). We have examples of those who, after learning of the Christ, immediately told others about him. Andrew found his brother Peter and told him, “we have found the Messiah” (John 1:41). Philip sought out Nathaniel and said, “we have found him, of whom Moses in the law and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth” (John 1:45). Is not this the whole story of the Book of Acts? The disciples, in fulfillment of the great commission, went everywhere preaching and teaching the Word. Understandably, when the Word of God increases, the number of disciples increases (cf. Acts 6:7). Do we not have the same charge today? Let us increase the communication of God’s Word that the church might grow. We surely want others to be benefited by a knowledge of God’s Word rather than remain ignorant.

## **Conclusion**

In each generation, it is the responsibility of the Christians of that generation to assure that God is not forgotten, to insure that people are not ignorant of his Word. Seemingly, our generation is content to let God and his Word be erased from society. We have a minority of people that want to do away with God. They want any reference of God, Christ or the Bible stricken from every document, monument, record, memorial, coinage, motto or pledge that is associated with our country. We know, for the most part, that this nation was founded on the principles of the Bible, that most of our founding fathers were God fearing, Bible-believing men that had membership in a denominational church. But now, we have those who would undermine all the things that have made this nation great. I

believe that most people are ignorant of what is really happening in our society. If we are content to remain this way and let the minority of atheists and humanists have their way, then we can expect the worst. The Proverb writer has rightly stated, “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 14:34). If those who have purposed to do away with any reference of God or his Word in our society continue to be successful, what hope do we have? After all, it is the commands of God that are righteousness (cf. Psa. 119:172), and sin is exposed through God’s Word (Psa. 119:11, 104). So the results would be, “Where there is no vision (Revelation from God) the people perish” (Prov. 29:18). It would be as Hosea has stated, “My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge” (Hos. 4:6). Would it not be great if all Christians everywhere would speak out in defense of Bible principles wherever they are found. Then it would be as Habakkuk forecast, “The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14).

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### **Biographical Sketch**

Wirt Cook was born in Mingo County, West Virginia in 1936. He attended elementary and high school in West Virginia and Ohio. He is a veteran of eleven years of military service with the United States Navy (1954-1965). He was baptized into Christ in 1963 by Charles L. Brown while serving with the military at the Naval Air Station in Lakehurst, New Jersey. He is married to the former Miss Dorothy Faye Donley of Belfry, Kentucky. They have five children and ten grandchildren. He is a graduate of Sunset School of Preaching and Southern Christian University (BS in Biblical Studies).

Brother Cook has served the following congregations in his forty years of preaching the Gospel: Toms River, NJ (1967-1972); Lewistown, PA (1972-1973); Athens, OH (1973-1977); North End Church of Christ, Parkersburg, WV (1977-1995); Johnstown, PA (1995-1997); Orrville, OH (1997-2002); Rosemar Church of Christ, Parkersburg, WV (2002 - present).

He has conducted Gospel meetings in ten states and has directed eight campaigns for Christ in four states. He has spoken on a number of brotherhood lectureships and has conducted daily radio programs in Athens and Marietta, OH and Parkersburg, WV. He appeared as a regular panelist on "The Bible Answers" TV program on WOWK-

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TV in Huntington, WV and “The Open Bible” TV program on WTAP-TV in Parkersburg. He served as moderator on “The Open Bible” for seven months. He was also responsible for raising funds to put “In Search of the Lord’s Way” on WOWK-TV in Huntington.

Brother Cook has written articles for *The Christian Bible Teacher*, *Therefore Stand*, *The Bible Herald*, *The World Evangelist* and *The West Virginia Christian*. He has taught Bible-related courses at Ohio Valley College and Kiev Bible Institute, Kiev, Ukraine. Brother Cook, along with Emanuel Daugherty, Charles Pugh and Terry Varner, was instrumental in starting the West Virginia School of Preaching in Moundsville, WV. In January of 2002, the Cooks moved back to Parkersburg where Wirt serves as preacher for the Rosemar Road Church of Christ.

# An Unfaithful Wife

## Hosea 3:1-5

By Gary Durham

How can I understand and appreciate the love of God? I hold my wife's warm hand and look into her eyes and I know love. I hold my granddaughter in my arms as she rests from a day of playing and I know love. When it comes to the love of God, however, there is no touching or holding. But, I know that God is love and he desires to love me. I can rest confident in my understanding of God's love because of two individuals I have come to know from the far distant past—Hosea the prophet and Gomer his wife. Their stormy marriage has been recorded for our learning in the book that bears the prophet's name. The third chapter will be at the center of our attention, and a better understanding of God's love will be our goal.

One might reasonably inquire at this point concerning the connection between Chapter Three and God's love. In response, I would point out that by observing how the love of God is portrayed in these five verses of Scripture one can see deep within the loving heart of God—a heart that has room for me and anyone else who wants to love and be loved by God.

If Hosea was able to love his unfaithful wife and God could love adulterous Israel, then there is hope for me. The message is clearly engraved for all to read and apply to their own relationship with God. God is able to love the unlovable and reach out to them with patience and compassion. I relate this special chapter with 1 John 4:10, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." God loving and reaching out to save me from my sins

challenges my ability to comprehend the greatness of such a love. How can I grasp such an idea? This is where we travel back in time, rub elbows with Hosea and learn from his ability to love his very unlovable wife. The lessons we learn will be as relevant to us today as they were to others when the ink was still wet from Hosea's pen.

Our search for a better comprehension of God's love does not require an extensive journey—only five verses. Granted, they are hidden away in a segment of the Bible where few students bother to go, but such does not diminish their value in any way. They still possess the vitality and power to shed light on the love of God and help us stand on higher spiritual ground. As we press on, it might be helpful to use a key word to summarize each verse. Let me suggest the following words: **command, cost, change, comparison and compassion.**

As each verse comes before us, it would be wise to move at a deliberate and thoughtful pace. Let us walk each road, stand for a while on the street corners and listen for the hurting heart of God as it beats through the troubled life of his prophet. Hosea's response to the treacherous deeds of his unchaste wife will enlighten us to the great depths of God's devoted love for unfaithful and deceitful Israel.

First of all, we take note of the **command** that God issued directly to Hosea: "Then said the Lord unto me." In these opening words, God can be seen taking his first strokes with his divine brush to paint a scene where he and Hosea are united by the pain of a common problem—unfaithful wives. Hosea is given the task of loving Gomer who had dealt treacherously with the vows she had taken to remain forever faithful to her husband: "Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress." It needs to be noted "there is a division among scholars as to whether the woman was Gomer or another woman. Unless the woman was Gomer, the parallel between Hosea and Gomer and between Jehovah and Israel

breaks down” (Hailey 146). There appears to be no credible reason for getting another woman involved in this sad scenario. “We take the woman to be Gomer, and her friend to be the prophet, her husband. After she had born him three children, she fell into adultery and forsook him” (Spence and Exell 12). God and Hosea knew Gomer to be a wife who had traveled a hard road and ended up on a dead end street. Although we might wonder who would even want her back, God told Hosea to bring her home. God had a plan in mind concerning Hosea and his wife.

In the latter part of Verse One, we draw back the curtain and view how God is going to use the life of Hosea to emphasize the agonizing pain He had experienced because of heartless Israel: “According to the love of the Lord toward Israel.” “The parallel between Hosea and Gomer and between Jehovah and Israel is clear and striking. Hosea’s experience with Gomer was parallel with Jehovah’s experience with the nation” (Hailey 146). God and his prophet had to confront the pain of betrayal and still yet love the one who inflicted the pain. In other words, they were both willing to love the unlovable.

Gomer and Israel had taken their eyes off their rightful husbands and foolishly let them come to rest on the sensual enticements of the world: “who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine.” The flagons of wine (or raisin cakes) indicate the reason Israel became unfaithful to God. “Raisin cakes are delicacies, figuratively representing the idolatrous worship which appeals to the senses, and gratifies the carnal impulses and desires” (Keil and Delitzsch 68). In the struggle between spirit and flesh, it is clear that Gomer and Israel decided to please the flesh at the expense of the spirit.

In Verse Two, the **cost** of doing business with evil is set forth. Hosea is called upon to shoulder the cost of recovering his wife from the morass of immorality that had entangled her: “So I brought her to me.” Gomer had

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deserted the sanctity of Hosea's home and journeyed deep into the wilderness of depravity where she was no more than a piece of damaged property to her so-called lovers. They didn't care about her situation, so why not sell her to Hosea before her value fell even more. "Perhaps her first paramours, having satisfied themselves, grew tired of her and sold her into slavery. This is always the end of illegal love, or false love. Sensual love or carnal love always tires and grows cold. True love is altogether different. True love is a love that loves with the mind, the heart, the will and not with the flesh" (Butler 463). It is not too difficult to see how God and Hosea demonstrated true love for their wives, but received false love in return.

The price placed on Gomer provides us with additional insight into her degraded social standing: "For fifteen pieces, or shekels, of silver, and for an homer of barley, and a half homer of barley." Hosea pays a combination of silver and barley. "The fact of barley being despised, generally, as human food, and usually employed in the feeding of animals might have symbolized the mean and servile state into which Gomer had fallen" (Coffman 58). The whole amount, about thirty pieces of silver, may also be looked upon as the price for which, according to Exodus 21:32, it was possible to purchase a slave. Love cost Hosea just as God's love for his bride cost him.

A definite **change** in the relationship between Hosea and Gomer is presented in the third verse: "And I said unto her, Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot." "The prophet imposes certain restrictions of a very stringent character on his wife; he places her in a state of isolation; her past excesses and his purpose of effecting her reformation necessitated such measures" (Spence and Exell 86). Hosea is determined not to let Gomer return to her former lifestyle of sinful behavior if he has anything to do with the situation.

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We might be tempted to celebrate with Hosea over the return of his prodigal wife, but there is instead a great sense of sorrow and regret over the way Hosea's marriage to Gomer had been scarred and deformed by the ravages of sin. They will live under the same roof, but will not share in the pleasures of the same bed as it was before she went astray: "And thou shalt not be for another man; so will I also be for thee." The normal relations between a man and his wife are changed in the life of Hosea and Gomer.

Hosea had tasted the bitterness of disloyalty from Gomer and it will take time for the scars to heal. This new state of conjugal abstinence "is to be a period of chastening and testing. It is done out of love for her in order to reform her and train her up as a faithful wife. She must prove her fidelity and repentance before she is restored to full wifehood" (Butler 464).

Gomer is placed in a position where she will have to abide for a long and indefinite period of time until she can again stand in a proper relationship with her husband. In Verse Four, the **comparison** of unfaithful Gomer with disloyal Israel is made clear. Gomer is forced to abide for a long time apart from Hosea, and so it will be for Israel and God: "For the children of Israel shall abide for many days." This speaks of the dark days of exile, which were looming on the horizon for the ten tribes of the northern kingdom of Israel. God will stir the Assyrians to come in 721 B.C. to force Israel out of her comfortable and corrupt communion with the false idols of the land.

Like Gomer is deprived of her normal relationship with her husband, so it will be for Israel and the blessings she had enjoyed by the grace of God: "Without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without terephim." Israel, who had deserted and spurned the love of God, would sit, like Gomer, alone in her misery. "They were guilty of a heinous sin in that they had refused to love One

who had loved them so devoutly. They had answered true love with infidelity” (Yates 57).

Israel’s spiritual corruption will be brought to an end as she becomes a faceless nation in a foreign land. They will not have the “liberty of any public profession or exercise of religion, either true or false” (Henry 1138). All the blessings, which come from being God’s people, will be denied them by the heavy hand of their oppressors. They will only wait, just like Gomer was waiting, upon the Lord to acknowledge them after their time of chastening and testing.

The elements of civil government, the kings and princes, will be removed from their midst. No public worship will be available for Israel during the days of foreign captivity, whether legitimate or illegitimate. “The prophet mentions objects connected with both the worship of Jehovah (sacrifice) and that of idols (images) because they were both mixed together in Israel, and for the reason of showing to the people that the Lord would take away both” (Coffman 61). “The Ephod was the holy garment which the High-priest wore, with the names of the twelve tribes and the Urim and Thumim, over his heart, and by which he inquired of God. The Terephim were idolatrous means of divination” (Pusey 42). Israel is facing an uncertain future where there will be no communication with God to guide and help them. As Gomer is isolated from her former way of life, so Israel will be isolated from God.

The first four verses of Hosea Three project a sense of gloom and despondency for both Gomer and Israel. Their unfaithfulness and moral corruption set in motion a strong current of divine condemnation and appropriate punishment for their sins. Joy appears to be in short supply as they reap the bitter harvest, which they had nurtured in their rebellious hearts. The last verse of this chapter, however,

comes forth in a fashion that is as refreshing as a cold drink of water in a dry and thirsty land.

The warm sunshine of God's **compassion** is felt in the fifth verse. This is the point we have been striving to reach to help all of us understand more fully how God has consistently demonstrated an amazing and wondrous willingness to love the unlovable. God is truly the God of the second chance for those who are willing to reach out to him in humble obedience. Just as our text teaches, God will forgive and extend his communion with his wayward children who desire to return home: Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God." The long and lonely night of waiting will come to an end for Israel, but only under certain conditions as laid down by God. As Gomer must prove herself worthy of Hosea's trust by turning from her lovers, so must Israel prove herself to be obedient and trustworthy in the eyes of God.

The end of our journey through Hosea Chapter Three is nearing its end, but a word of caution needs to be voiced. Let us be extremely careful with our interpretation of Hosea's final words: "And David their king; and shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days." This intriguing prophecy speaks of a return of Israel to God and David their king. We know of course that "the patriarch David was long dead and buried, and his sepulchre was in Palestine at the time when the prophet wrote; one, therefore, in the Davidic line, a descendant from, and dynastic representative of the patriarch must be meant" (Spence and Exell 88).

Other prophecies found throughout the Old Testament lead us to conclude that only one individual would be able to fulfill what Hosea was predicting would happen in the future—Jesus the Messiah. "The strong Messianic thrust of this passage is undeniable. It is no longer the old Israel which is in focus here, for the new Israel suddenly enters the picture. The words 'afterward' and 'in the latter days'

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which begin and close the passage make this certain. Also, the return to David the king can only mean that the return will be to the Lord Jesus Christ, the true son of David” (Coffman 63).

God made a promise to David (2 Samuel 7:12) in which he told him that “when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of they bowels and I will establish his kingdom.” The words of Peter in Acts Two proclaim the fulfillment of God’s promise to David. When he preached in Jerusalem on that special day, we see that “by the gospel of Christ great multitudes of Jews were brought home to God, and incorporated in the New Testament church, served God in Christ, and were accepted of God as His Israel” (Henry 1139).

The physical Israel that Hosea knew, as well as the two tribes of the southern kingdom, was destined to be scattered to the four winds of time, but there would be a new “spiritual” Israel comprised of all who seek and find the Messiah. This would occur in the “latter days” or last dispensation of God, which is, of course, the New Testament age in which we now live, where the door of salvation stands open to Jews and Gentiles alike. It is, then, rather sad to think about those Jews who are still waiting on the coming of their Messiah. He has already come and they wait in vain and hope for a restoration of physical Israel to its former glory, but such is not to be.

As we leave our study, the image of Gomer sitting alone and waiting in a dark room of despair comes to mind. So it is with Israel today (all the physical descendants of Jacob) as she still waits in the darkness of her desire for a Messiah who has already come and is now at the right hand of the Father in heaven.

I believe that the third chapter of Hosea has now answered my opening question regarding how to better understand and appreciate God’s love. If God expected

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Hosea to love Gomer in spite of all she had done, and he was willing to love adulterous Israel, then he can surely love me. He, of course, demanded that Gomer and Israel repent of their sins and do better by him and Hosea. God places the same requirements on me because he will not accept just anything in the name of love. The terrible faults of Gomer and Israel were not hidden from his sight and neither are mine, but I know that God is willing to help me overcome and win the final victory through Christ.

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### Biographical Sketch

Gary D. Durham is a native of West Virginia who has been preaching for thirty years with the last twelve being at

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# **Who Agrees With God? Amos 3:1-8**

By Ben Jones

## **Introduction**

Until the return of our Lord, this world will be populated with men who flatly reject God and his Word. Preachers of all ages have contended with critics and skeptics, facing opposition, persecution and ultimately death. Yet, no less of a fate has befallen many of God's messengers at the hands of those who themselves claim allegiance to the Lord. When the prophet Amos arrived in Bethel to pronounce judgment on Israel, he spoke to a nation made overconfident by its own self-righteousness. The people were busy with feasts and burnt offerings. The king had enlarged the borders of the land (2 Kings 14:25). It should come as no surprise that Amos' message of doom and gloom seemed entirely out of place to the people.

Amos follows the basic structure of many prophetic books: (a) oracles against nations, (b) oracles of doom for Israel, and (c) oracles of hope (Lewis 17). The judgments of doom concerning Israel's neighbors were no doubt met with a certain measure of satisfaction. Similar indictments against Israel herself were not so favorably received. Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, would forbid Amos to prophesy (7:13). Although the Lord had previously sent famine, drought, blight and plague upon the nation, the people themselves felt secure from calamity (9:10). They had silenced God's prophets in the past (2:12). One might speculate then, as to the reception of this lone shepherd,

spouting outlandish rhetoric. “Just who is this Amos fellow, and what is he talking about?”

## **Shall two walk together, except they have agreed?**

Met with such opposition and indifference, Amos paused from his prophecy to establish the divine authority behind his message. He challenged Israel to “Hear this word that Jehovah hath spoken against you” (3:1). In the third verse, he posed a now familiar question to the people, “Shall two walk together, except they have agreed?” The Hebrew word translated as agree or agreed is *ya’ad*, which Brown, Driver and Briggs define as “to meet or assemble by appointment.” (Note the ESV translation “unless they have agreed to meet.”) The “two” under consideration are Jehovah and the prophet (Hailey 99). Keil notes that the question contains something more substantial than the truth that two people cannot walk together without having a previous arrangement. “Amos went as prophet to Samaria or Bethel, because the Lord sent him thither to preach judgment to the sinful kingdom. But God would not threaten judgment if He had not a nation ripe for judgment before Him” (Keil 175).

## **The Lord God has spoken!**

The question then serves a dual purpose. Amos is confirmed as one who walks with God, because he met the conditions of their agreement. (This was quite simply to prophesy what the Lord had spoken (3:8).) But for Israel to accept the prophecy as truth, the nation would inevitably be forced to a painful conclusion: If Amos agrees with God, we do not. By failing to keep the terms of their agreement, Israel had failed to walk with God. The question, presented in the prophet’s defense, was also a stinging accusation of guilt against the people.

The latter proposition, Israel's breech of agreement with God, figures prominently in the form of the chapter as a prophetic lawsuit. As with many of the Minor Prophets, the Lord sent Amos as a messenger to inform disobedient Israel of the failure to maintain the terms of their suzerainty covenant. Several judicial elements may be observed in Amos 3:1-15.

The plaintiff and the defendant are introduced (3:1a); a short history of the past relationship and the breech in the relationship are pronounced (3:1b-2); the cross-examination is characterized by the use of rhetorical questions (3:3-6), and the status of the prophet-lawsuit messenger is confirmed (3:7-8). Witnesses are summoned from the surrounding nations (3:9) to hear the announced judgment (3:10-15). (Dillard and Longman 380)

Though Amos delivered his message to the northern kingdom, the guilty verdict undoubtedly included Judah as well. Each kingdom received a separate judgment in the second chapter, but the Lord's prosecution in the third chapter hearkens back to a covenant with a united people from the days of Moses (3:1) and Abraham (3:2, cf. Gen. 18:19). The different paths taken by the twelve tribes all led away from God and toward certain destruction.

## **Who agrees with God?**

Amos presents his case with a series of rhetorical questions designed to lead Israel to an undeniable recognition of guilt. While the passage itself does not specify their sins, the arguments highlight at least three principles crucial to walking with God.

## **An Agreement on the Nature of God**

“You only have I known of all the families of the earth” (3:2). This claim does not just indicate knowledge of Israel, but a special acknowledgement. Keil writes this concept “not only includes the idea of love and care, but expresses generally the gracious fellowship of the Lord with Israel” (Keil 174). This fellowship, however, is not without conditions. God’s nature is loving, merciful and patient. He would not desert Israel. But God’s nature is also holy, just and righteous. Israel was therefore exhorted to be a holy people (Lev. 11:44). When Israel sinned, God’s nature demanded they be punished.

Israel mistakenly believed that outward identification with God was equal to spiritual fellowship with him. They perverted justice and mercy in order to take advantage of the poor and helpless, all the while trusting that burnt offerings and songs of praise would secure God’s favor. The people believed no harm would befall them because they were God’s people. Amos corrected this misconception. As a lion’s roar is heard only when its prey has no opportunity for escape, God’s judgment against the nation was imminent and inescapable.

## **An Agreement on the Nature of Sin**

The questions regarding the bird and the snare illustrate that Israel was to blame for her own fate. “Israel was flying into the trap she had set; she would be caught in the net of her own sins” (Hailey 100). The people’s false confidence had led them into any number of sinful activities. Father and son were sharing the same woman (2:7). A general spirit of materialism had enslaved many to their own insatiable desires.

This image of a bird in a snare is seemingly echoed in the New Testament. “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare” (1 Tim. 6:9). James further

develops this idea. “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed” (Jam. 1:14). Both Old and New testaments attest that unchecked temptation leads to sin, and sin leads to death. And yet, men of every generation have deceived themselves with the belief that “I won’t get caught.” Despite God’s warnings, Israel chose to follow a path that ultimately led to its own destruction.

## **An Agreement on the Surety of God’s Word**

The final questions in the passage inquire about a trumpet of warning sounding out a calamity. The meaning is made clear by the following verse. “Surely the Lord does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets” (3:7). Israel is reminded that God is in control of the world. His people will not be the victims of calamity unless he wills it. Such a judgment, however, would not come without warning. And so just as a trumpet’s blast alerts a city to danger, the prophet’s word foretells God’s judgment. God’s Word is sure, and his messengers are bound to speak it.

Israel, unfortunately, had chosen to ignore the warning cries. God chose some of their sons as his messengers, but the people’s command was “do not prophesy” (2:12). As a result, the time for escape had passed them by. Repentance and restoration were still possible for the faithful remnant, but the time of God’s judgment was now at hand. Confronted with the power of God’s Word, the people could but fear. Amos could but prophesy.

## **A Brief Application**

In an age of pluralism and postmodern philosophy, it is not difficult to find men and women who generally do not agree with God. Yet, like Israel of old, there are a number of self-deceived people within the Lord’s church who seek

the blessings of a walk with God while failing to agree with his Truth. A balanced understanding of God's character, man's sin and the sacred Word is vital to the church today. Notions of cheap grace and compromised teachings on God's plan of salvation pervert the nature of God. Discipleship is a lost concept to a generation of Christians who regard exhortations to holy living as Pharisaical traditions. When God's Word is presented in some places, the people command, "Do not preach." God's people do not have the option to agree to disagree in matters of faith and obedience. The only agreement man can have with God comes by submitting one's life to the truth of God's Word.

## **Conclusion**

Amos prophesied to a people who had failed to uphold their covenant with God. There was no harmony between God and Israel because the nation refused to walk with him. The Assyrian lion was about to strike the northern kingdom. As destruction loomed on the horizon, the soon to be captives may have felt that God had deserted them during a time of need. The lesson many learned too late was that they had deserted God by failing to agree with his covenant. When there is a lack of harmony between God and man, it is always due to man's failure. May we ever strive to agree with God.

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### **Biographical Sketch**

Ben Jones is a native of Grant Town, WV. He received his early biblical instruction at the Pumpkin Center Church of Christ, in Fairview, WV, where his grandfather serves as an elder. He is a 1994 graduate of North Marion High School, and a 1998 graduate of Freed-Hardeman University. He is about to begin his third year as the preacher for the Kaiser and Douglas Church of Christ in Ravenswood, WV.

# This Is That

By Clarence DeLoach

Acts, chapter two, has been called the “hub of the Bible.” Several years ago James D. Bales wrote a book called *The Hub of the Bible*, in which he treated the relationship of Acts 2 to the whole Bible. When the inspired apostle Peter began his sermon on that day, he refuted the charge that the apostles were drunk when they spoke in tongues, i.e., the languages of those assembled. His inspired explanation was:

But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. Your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy. I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. (Acts 2:16-21)

Peter quotes from Joel 2:28-32 to explain that what they saw and heard that day was not the result of the outpouring of wine, but an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

## The Last Days

Joel stated “and it shall come to pass in the last days.” In our English Bibles, Joel 2:28 does not have “in the last days,” but rather “after this.” Joel’s time frame “after this” is the same as indicated by Isaiah’s and Micah’s “in the last days.” Peter, by inspiration informs us that Joel was speaking of “the last days.” To the Jewish mind, the last days referred to the reign of the Messiah. In effect, Peter was saying, “the time you have long anticipated has come, the last days have arrived.” Later in the New Testament, the writer of Hebrews affirmed:

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has **in these last days** spoken to us by His son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Heb. 1:1-3) (emphasis added, CL)

It is evident from the New Testament that the last days refer to the last period of God’s Dealing with man. It is the Christian dispensation—the age of the Gospel of the grace of God. (See Acts 20:23-24.) It describes the time from Pentecost until Jesus comes again. It is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

The theory of dispensational-premillennialists projects the last days to an imagined future of one thousand years. This not only has no support from the New Testament, but is refuted clearly from the Scriptures. We are living in “the last days” now! Premillennial writers struggle with the force of Joel’s declaration and Peter’s explanation. Peter

did not say, “This reminds me of” or “This is similar to,” but “This is that.” The period from Pentecost until Jesus comes to judge the world is “the last days.”

## **What Would Occur in the Last Days**

When Malachi finished his writing, the Jews understood that prophecy had disappeared, not to be seen again until the Messiah came. They were excited about the preaching of John because they saw a revival of prophecy. What they had seen, Peter explained was only in a limited fashion, but would be expanded. The sound of the wind, the appearance of fire and the speaking in tongues all heralded an outpouring of the Spirit.

God had promised to pour forth of his Spirit in the last days. Not everything Joel announced occurred on the day of Pentecost. For example, there is no record of “visions” or “dreams” that day. Evidently, Peter said that what was happening on Pentecost was the beginning of Joel’s prophecy. Later in Acts, several Christians like Peter and Paul saw visions (Acts 10:17; 16:9).

Joel prophesied that in the days to come miraculous gifts would be given to all flesh. Note the following facts.

1. They would be given regardless of gender, i.e., “sons and daughters.” vs. 17. Some women did later receive certain gifts. (Acts 21:9)
2. They would be given regardless of age, i.e., “young men and old men.” vs. 17
3. They would be given regardless of social status, i.e., “even slaves.” vs. 18

The expression “all flesh” does not denote every individual, but refers to representative groups of humanity—that is, Jews and Gentiles. The miraculous measure of the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles at Pentecost and upon Cornelius in Acts 10, thus Jews and Gentiles.

But, during the Christian age, every penitent, baptized believer receives “the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). God gives the Holy Spirit “to those who obey Him” (Acts 5:32). This is the indwelling of the Spirit in a non-miraculous way (Rom. 8:9, 11, 16, 26).

## **Joel’s Prophecy and Apocalyptic Language**

Joel’s prophecy in verses 19-21 has puzzled many Bible students. Of this particular part of the prophecy, Peter did not give an explanation, so we would conclude that understanding it was not essential to understanding Peter’s message. This part of the prophecy is apocalyptic language similar to that in Daniel and Revelation, i.e., highly symbolic.

Perhaps it will be helpful to remember that Joel’s prophecy of the “sun turning into darkness” and the “moon turning to blood” was often used in the Old Testament when God acted in a special way to bless or curse. The signs and wonders in the heaven and in the earth were used of change, particularly in governments. For example, when Babylon was overthrown, God said, “For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light; the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine” (Isa.13: 10). When God judged Edom and Egypt, similar language was used (Isa. 34:4-5; Ezek. 32:1, 7) These catastrophes were apocalyptic descriptions of what would take place with their power when they were overthrown.

Joel’s prophecy describes the shaking when the old Jewish lights would cease. When Christ died, the earth quaked, rocks were split, the veil of the temple was torn and graves were opened. These physical signs, in addition to the apocalyptic signs occurred as the Old System was brought to an end. A key word to help us understand is “before.” Joel said, “The sun will be turned into darkness

and the moon into blood **before** the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come.”

Some believe that such is a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. while others think it to be a reference to the great day when Jesus comes. But the great and notable day that Joel describes would be a time of salvation, not a day of judgment. The destruction of Jerusalem was a day of destruction and judgment upon Jerusalem. The second coming will be a time of judgment upon the world.

It is my conviction that Joel’s prophecy of the “great and notable day of the Lord” refers to the day of Pentecost. God had moved “heaven and earth” to bring the church into existence with the preaching of the Gospel. It would be a time when “whosoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” It would be the same time that Isaiah described when “all nations shall flow into it” and we would be “taught of His ways and walk in his paths” and the “word of the Lord would go from Jerusalem” (Isa. 2:2-3). Peter, in the close of his sermon, explained how they could call on his name (Acts 2:37-41). Paul used that very expression when talking about the salvation available to us.

For whosoever shall call on the Lord shall be saved. How, then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? ...but they have not all obeyed the gospel. (Rom. 10:13-16)

Ananias told Paul, “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).

Pentecost was a great and notable day. When Peter was describing the events that occurred with Cornelius and the Gentiles to the apostles and brethren in Jerusalem, he spoke of what had happened, i.e., “the Holy Spirit fell upon them,

as on us at the beginning.” He refers to Pentecost as the beginning.

## **Pentecost—The Beginning**

This was the time when the Gospel was first preached in its fullness. Gospel means good news, and there was a sense in which the Gospel was preached to Abraham (Gal. 3:8), and during the personal ministry of Jesus (Mark 1:15), but the Gospel was not preached in fact and fullness until the death, burial and resurrection of Christ occurred (1 Cor. 15:1-3). Peter and the apostles, on the day of Pentecost for the first time declared to the Jews assembled that “God raised Him up” (Acts 2:24). The Christ “whom they crucified,” God made both “Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).

Joel’s prophecy by inspiration was explained by Peter, another inspired writer, as “this is that.” You can know the fulfillment when an inspired New Testament writer says, “this is that” or “all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying” (Matt. 1:22). How unlike the modern speculations of would-be prophets!

Pentecost was an important day for the Jews. It was one of their three annual feast days. It celebrated the offering of the first fruits of the wheat harvest, so it was a feast day, a day of thanksgiving and a day of offering. How appropriate was the setting! On this “feast day,” the people present were given the opportunity to feast on the new manna from heaven, the Gospel. On this “day of thanksgiving,” they could give thanks to God for his grace in making a new way of escape from their sins. On this “day of offering,” they were given the opportunity of offering, not animal sacrifices as before, but themselves to the Lord.

Pentecost was the beginning of the Lord’s church. It was the day the kingdom came with power (Mark 9:1). It

was the day of the coming of the Holy Spirit with power (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:5, 8).

Pentecost was the beginning of the reign of Christ, thus fulfilling Zechariah's prophecy, "Even he shall build the temple of the Lord; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne; and the counsel of peace shall be between them both" (Zech. 6:13). Not two things, (1) He would sit and rule upon his throne, and (2) He would be a priest on his throne. The **sitting** and **ruling** would take place at the same time. On Pentecost, Peter said, "According to the flesh he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ" (Acts 2:30-31). The conclusion is obvious—Jesus is now sitting and reigning on the throne of David. But, while reigning, he is also serving as our High Priest. Since Pentecost, Jesus is our great High Priest.

Pentecost was a day of salvation and conviction. The Holy Spirit would "convict the world of sin" (John 16:13). Those who heard the Gospel were "pricked in their hearts and asked what shall we do" (Acts 2:37-38).

It was a day of hope. It was a day when "the promise of God" was fulfilled. Men could find grace and the "remission of sins" through the blood of Christ. God's plan of the ages was made known. Paul called it "the hope of Israel." David's words, "Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance" (Acts 2:28), had come to pass.

It was a day of first fruits. Not only was it a day of conviction, but it was a day of conversion. About three thousand souls became the first fruits of the gospel harvest. (Acts 2:41-42).

## **Conclusion**

Peter said, "This is that" of which Joel spoke. What a day **that** day was! For the first time, the good news of

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Christ's death, burial and resurrection was preached. For the first time, Christ was declared to be "both Lord and Christ." From that beginning, a new ray of hope was given the world. From that day, the glorious church has existed.

We are part of that glorious heritage. God shook heaven and earth to bring that church to reality. We have now received a kingdom that cannot be shaken, but shall stand forever (Heb. 12:28; Dan. 2:44).

# **Joel – The Prophet of Pentecost (Overview of Joel)**

By W. Terry Varner

The Book of Joel is a short book of great style and tremendous literary beauty. “It may be reckoned among the classics of Hebrew literature” (Thompson vol. 6, 732). We encourage the student to read and study it for its many lessons.

**The Prophet.** The name “Joel” is composed from two divine names, “Jehovah and El” (Boyd 11), meaning, “Jehovah is God.” “He was active in Judah, probably Jerusalem, and very likely was a citizen of Judah” (Laetsch 112). The name Joel emphasizes the sovereignty of God as represented in the judgments set forth in the book.

**The Historical Background.** Knowledge of the historical background—social, religious, political, economic—helps and is essential in understanding any book of the Bible under study.

There is sufficient evidence for placing the prophecy of Joel in the time of king Joash of Judah (cf. 2 Kings 10-12). Queen Athaliah, the daughter of Jezebel, was a wicked, murderous usurper who led Judah into idolatry of the false god, Baal. Jehoida, the high priest, deposed Queen Athaliah and placed Joash, the rightful heir to the throne. However, Joash was just a boy and not old enough to carry on the work of the kingdom. Consequently, Jehoida took the lead in the control of the state government and in tutoring Joash to be king. Second Kings 12:2 reads, “And Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all his days wherein Jehoida the priest instructed him.” Jehoida

led Judah in a number of religious reforms by returning the temple to its rightful place of prominence in the life of Israel. However, the reform “seems to have been superficial and short-lived. The people turned reformation into formalism” (Butler 151).

God called for Israel’s repentance and sent the prophet Joel to carry his message to Israel. Israel was faced with a devastating plague of locusts that destroyed the vegetation. This was followed by a devastating drought and then fire. This was one of the judgments prophesied by Moses that would come upon Israel for her disobedience (cf. Deut. 28:38-39). Solomon earlier had recognized the possibility of such a plague, but asked Jehovah to hear the people’s cry (cf. 1 Kings 8:37-39).

**The Date.** The time of Joel’s prophecy is unknown. He does not date his book with reference to any king in Judah. We believe the above historical information of (1) Joash being too young to carry out the matters of state and (2) Jehoida, the high priest, carrying out the matters of state until Joash was old enough to rule Judah, serves as the *time* for the prophet Joel (ca. 835-796 B.C.). “In the dating of Joel several conditions must be met. (1) The temple stands, (2) the city walls are intact, (3) there is no idolatry, and (4) there is no king to mention. Liberals say this did not exist until after the exile. But these conditions did exist in the time of the minority of Joash” (Stancliff 26). Because of the lack of evidence for specific dating, the date of Joel has been a matter of no small dispute among scholars. Dates have been suggested from 900 to 300 B.C. (See Hailey 22-23 for charts showing the wide diversity of dates and scholars who hold them. Kirkpatrick sets forth a number of arguments for the early date that are worthy of serious study [57-73]).

We argue that Joel wrote during the reign of Joash (ca. 835-796 B.C.) and consider but three points of internal evidence from the Book of Joel:

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*First.* The list of enemies of Judah—Tyre and Sidon (3:4) to her north. The Philistines (3:4) to her west. Egypt (3:19) to her southwest. Edom (3:19) to her south. Israel’s enemies in later years—Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia—are totally absent; yet, all of these were later enemies of Judah.

*Second.* The interdependency of the later prophets shows a number of connections for an early date for Joel. Consider the following connections with other prophetic books: (1) Joel 1:15 and Isaiah 13:16. (2) Joel 2:2 and Zephaniah 1:15. (3) Joel 2:3 and Isaiah 51:3 and Ezekiel 36:35. (4) Joel 2:10 and Isaiah 13:10. (5) Joel 2:32 and Obadiah 17. (6) Joel 3:10 and Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3. (7) Joel 3:16 and Isaiah 13:13. (8) Joel 3:17 and Ezekiel 36:11 and Isaiah 52:1. (9) Joel 3:18 and Amos 9:13.

*Third.* The mere fact that Joel is placed second in the canon of the six earlier prophets suggests an early date for the book. Some place Joel as the first of these prophets (Winters 263). Had Joel written at a later date, one would have expected Joel to have been listed among the latter or post-exilic prophets.

**The Message.** Because of Israel’s sins, God sent his prophet Joel with a message calling for repentance, “Who knoweth whether he will not turn and repent” (2:14). If they repented, God would bless and forgive them. Joel uses the term “Israel” in (2:27; 3:2, 16). Joel uses it “as the covenant name of God’s chosen people, not as the distinctive name of the Northern Kingdom, to which he makes no allusion whatsoever” (Kirkpatrick 47).

The principal thrust of Joel concerns a coming day of judgment, called “the day of the Lord” (1:14-15; 2:1-2, 11-14, 28-32; 3:14). The “day of the Lord” is used in a twofold sense of (1) the immediate day in which the people to whom he spoke were then living. This judgment came in the plague of the locusts, drought and fire. Joel calls the people to repent with the promise of divine blessings

resultant upon their repentance (2:18-32). (2) The “day of the Lord” is extended to one final judgment of all the wicked (3:1-21) and culminates in the Great White Throne Judgment of Revelation 20:11-15. This final judgment is preceded by a time of refreshing of the Christian age in which occurs the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the blessings promised in the Christian age. Coffman states it clearly:

The theme of Joel is quite clearly “The Day of the Lord,” an expression applied in scripture, not merely to great visitations of God in punishment of wicked men, or nations, but also, by extension, to the great and final day of the Eternal Judgment. Joel is, in a sense, a source, from which the holy apostles and the Lord Jesus himself derived their holy teachings regarding “That Day,” of course, expanding and developing the thoughts through the means of their own unqualified inspiration. This make Joel one of the most important books in the Bible, despite its smallness. (vol. 1, 5-6)

The prophet Joel begins his great book with the gloom of a locust plague, a plague greater than any Israel had experienced or would experience (1:2-3; 2:2). The plague represented God’s divine judgment upon the sins of Judah. The divine judgment emphasized the meaning of Joel’s name, i.e., “Jehovah is God.” Joel sets forth the mercy, glory and sovereignty of God. God rules; men are amenable. God is gracious; man so undeserving.

The book of Joel divides itself into two major sections: (1) The Calamity on Judah (1:1-2:17) and (2) Blessings for Israel (2:18-3:21).

## The Calamity on Judah (1:1-2:17)

**The Locust Scourge (1:1-4).** In (1:1), “The word of the Lord came” to Joel. The phrase identifies (1) the *substance* of Joel’s message as “the word of the Lord,” (2) the *source* of his message as from “the Lord,” thus divine revelation, and (3) the *speaker* is God’s prophet, “Joel the son of the Pethuel.” Nothing more is said of either Joel or his father, Pethuel. Pethuel means “the open-heartedness or sincerity of God” (Keil vol. 1, 169). The identity as used here is to distinguish the prophet from the dozen or so other biblical characters by the same name. In (1:2), Joel’s address is to Judah, which included the “old men” and all “the inhabitants of the land.” He asked if any could recall such a plague of locusts in their lifetime.

In Joel 1:3-4, Joel introduces the locust calamity and its subsequent effect that was so severe that all Israel was urged to remember the experience in their history by passing it from one generation to the next. It would remind the subsequent generations of God’s judgment and serve as a deterrent to sin. The verse is reminiscent of Moses’ instruction to Israel (cf. Exod. 10:2), but nothing, in their past or future, is comparable (cf. 2:2).

Joel lists four of the twelve Hebrew terms for various varieties of locusts (1:4). (1) “The palmerworm” (*gazam*). (2) The “locust” (*arbeh*). (3) “The cankerworm” (*yeleg*). (4) The “caterpillar (*chasil*). These are found in the reverse order in (2:25). What one swarm of locust “ate and left,” the next swarm “came and ate” until the invasion of the locusts, which is described as an army (2:1-11), had devastated the land. They came and destroyed “before our eyes”(1:16).

Various examples of locust plagues have been studied and illustrated by Whiting in the *National Geographic Magazine* (511-550). The student of Joel would profit from reading this account for his understanding of the

development, power and destruction caused by a locust plague. One needs to keep in mind that the locust plague of Joel was a “destruction from the Almighty” (1:15), described as “his army” (2:11). Nothing like it had occurred before or since (2:2). Apparently, none of the “old men” (1:2) could ever recall as severe a plague of locusts as this one. Emphasized is the exceptional nature of the locust plague in Joel’s time.

**The Call for Repentance (1:5-14).** Joel admonishes Judah to “awake” and to “weep” showing a penitent heart, and “howl” or acknowledge their sin (1:5). Joel calls for repentance of (1) the “drunkards” and (2) those who desired “new wine,” or the fresh juice of the grape (cf. Isa. 65:8). The people believed their needs were met in strong drink and they found great joy in new wine, but Joel implies a person’s real needs are met in God. Their dependence on the juice of the grape was to be “cut off.”

The locusts are personified and viewed collectively as “a nation come upon my land,” that is strong and numerous. They are described as a “great people” (2:2) and as an “my army” (2:11, 25). Their strength and weapons were as “the teeth of a lion.” Their teeth, though tiny, were in proportion to their small bodies and were as strong as a lion. As God’s instruments of judgment, they are able to consume, destroy and devastate the crops, the land, and thereby heap misery on the people. God speaks of them as his locusts (2:25) and as “coming upon my land.” God called the land “my land” (1:6), “my vine” and “my fig tree” (1:7). Joel in speaking for God, speaks of the Owner of the land, as well as, describing God as the Giver and Sustainer of all things (cf. Psa. 24:1; Job 41:11; Psa. 50:12; 1 Cor. 10:26). The words of Joel show God’s gifts to his people are to be destroyed.

Joel describes the destruction by the locusts as wasting the “vine” and barking the “fig tree” (1:7). The “vine” and the “fig tree” served Israel as symbols of peace, prosperity

and pride (Josephus). The branches of the trees lost their bark and were gleaming white. The destruction from the invasion of locust should have produced “lament” (1:8) or mourning among the people. The grief was to be deep, intense and poignant. It was to be comparable to the personal bereavement of an espoused virgin who lost her husband before the marriage was consummated (1:18). Joel called for “godly sorrow that worketh repentance” (2 Cor. 7:9-10).

God appeals to Judah through the temple services that served as their center of life. The devastation of vegetation (1:7, 18-20) and the difficulties of keeping flocks (1:18-20) suspended the daily temple services. The “meat offering” and the “drink offering” (1:13) involved a lamb each morning and evening, mingled with flour, oil and wine (cf. Exod. 29:38-40; Num. 28:3-8; Lev. 2:1). Their sins “cut off” the efficacy of their offerings to God and interrupted their fellowship with God (cf. Isa. 59:1-2). Because of their sins, God no longer met them (cf. Exod. 29:42-46). Coffman states, “The seriousness of this cessation of the daily offerings was inherent in the people’s conviction that by the various means of those sacrifices their fellowship with God was perpetuated and maintained” (vol. 1, 17). This caused the priests to mourn because they (1) no longer could exercise their office, (2) realized the seriousness of the need for daily sacrifices, and (3) the loss of their livelihood.

In the next section, Joel states that the fields are “wasted” or do not produce and the vineyards are “dried up” and the olive trees are “barked” so that there is no fruit and oil (1:10-11). The destruction and devastation is thorough. Nothing escapes; even the “joy of the sons of men” (1:12,16) is destroyed. The farmer’s crops fail. The trees wither. The destruction produced “shame...howls” (1:11). Joel’s description of the devastation by the locusts is

confirmed by Conley's words, "The locusts destroyed everything—the trees, the leaves, and the grass" (202-227).

With both material and spiritual starvation upon the people, Joel calls for repentance to begin at the center of life, the temple (1:13-14). Joel begins where repentance must begin—in the people's hearts. They could do nothing to physically restore their losses, but correction of their spiritual problems began by repenting and doing God's will. The "priests" (1:13) were to dress in "sack-cloth" which was the customary clothing of mourning and repentance (cf. 2 Kings 19:1-2; Lam. 2:10). Sackcloth was normally made from weaving goat and camel hair and attached to a coarse garment (Watson 833). They were to "lie all night" in sackcloth before the altar in penitence and "howl," that is, wail, lament and pray with loud crying to God. The night of wailing was to be followed by (1) calling "a fast" (1:14). Fasting demands concentration upon the spiritual and subordinating the physical (cf. Lev. 16:29-31; 23:27-29). (2) A "solemn assembly" (1:14) of all the people to the temple. The "elders" (see 1:2-4) were probably to declare to the assembly that the great calamity was from God and such devastation had never occurred during their lifetime. Knowledge that the locust plague was a judgment from God would (should) produce penitence and petitions to God.

**The Day of the Lord (1:15-20).** The destruction by the locusts was to be understood as "from the Almighty." It is described as "the day of the Lord" or "the day of Jehovah" (ASV). The phrase is used five times in Joel (1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14) describing God's judgment on their sins. While all days are God's, all are also "our" days in the sense that we have a stewardship of time and responsibility (cf. Eph. 5:6; 1 Cor. 4:6). The phrase "the day of the Lord" is a "time of judgment" appointed by God in relation to *how* we use our days, life and time. Being free moral agents, we may choose to use our days, life or time

either for evil or righteousness (cf. Rom. 6:17-18). To the wicked, the sinful and the unbeliever, God's judgment is a day of vengeance; whereas, to the righteous and godly it is a day of salvation (cf. Matt. 25:31-46; John 12:48; Acts 17:30-31; Rom. 1:18-19; 2:5-10; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; Heb. 8:8-13). It is a day in which God's omnipotence, benevolence and justice is expressed in his sovereignty, his goodness and his severity (cf. Rom. 11:22). It involves not only the last and final day, or Day of Judgment, but also the many forerunners and types of that day in every judgment of God upon men. The phrase is used "to designate a judgment from God...a day of terror to the enemies of God but a day of deliverance to the people of God" (Hailey 36).

Joel shows their situation is hopeless and the people helpless (1:16-20). He appeals to the evidence before their eyes. The severity of the locust plague is compounded by drought. Cattle die (1:16) and seed rots (1:17). The cattle and sheep groan (1:18- 20). Water is scarce (1:20). To further compound their problems, fire destroys whatever vegetation remains (1:19). Their "joy and gladness" (1:16) is gone (cf. Deut. 12:7).

Their sin is described as affecting the whole of creation. The countryside is depicted as mourning (1:10-12, 16-20; cf. Rom. 8:22). We should be humbled when brute beasts, which are without soul and conscience, suffer in God's visitations on man in his judgments. A contrast is set forth showing the response of the brute beasts and the insensitivity of the people. The suffering of nature did not awaken the people to their sins. Joel cries out in behalf of the people (1:19); thereby showing men are amenable to God and only in him do we have the answer to our helplessness and hopelessness.

**Joel's Warning (2:1-3).** The call for repentance (1:3-14) and an examination of the evidence which the people knew (1:16-20) is followed by the command to "blow ye the trumpet in Zion...sound the alarm...let all the

inhabitants tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh” (2:1). “Zion” represents the dwelling place of God. The text implies that safety and salvation is with God. The blowing of the trumpet in Numbers 10:1-10 served Israel by calling: (1) an assembly (10:2), (2) the people to the tabernacle (10:3), (3) Israel to begin their journey (10:2,5-8), (4) an alarm to the danger of war (10:9), and (5) a holy assembly at festival time (10:10). It is used here in the sense of an alarm of the coming judgment of God (cf. Hos. 5:8; 8:1).

“Darkness” (2:2-3) can be understood both (1) literal, in the sense that the numerous locust darkened the sky, and (2) symbolic of the judgment of God, though we believe the latter understanding is primary. Before the locust plague, the land was “as the garden of Eden” (2:3), but the locusts devastated everything as they invaded in waves, “nothing shall escape them” (2:3).

**The Description of the Locust Plague.** The earlier reference to the *National Geographic Magazine* article, (see comments under 1:4), verify Joel’s description in these verses. They are described as God’s “army” (2:11, 25). Their appearance is as “horses” (2:4), i.e., numerous and strong. Their sound is as “chariots” and as “fire” that crackles in burning the stubble (2:5). They create despair and anguish on the people (2:6). They are unstoppable (2:7-9). They execute God’s commands without interfering with one another (2:8). Their number is so great that they darken the sky that gives light (2:10). This is typical biblical language that is often used to describe God’s judgment on nations as they fall (cf. Matt. 24:29; Mark 13:25; Luke 22: Rev. 6:12-14). Under the command and direction of God, the destruction is “great and very terrible” (2:11). God’s power and judgment is placed in a form of a question, “who can abide?” (2:11; cf. Rev. 6:17).

**The Call to Repentance (2:12-17).** The destruction and judgment by God’s “army” does not offset God’s decree for Israel’s repenting and embracing him. In despair

and destruction, there is hope if they “turn and repent.” Repentance is described three times in the Book of Joel: (1) “turn ye even to me with all your heart” (2:12), (2) “rend your heart...and turn to the Lord” (2:13), and (3) “return and repent” (2:14). David states repentance involves the heart; “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou will not despise” (Psa. 51:17). Contingent upon receiving God’s “mercy...grace...kindness” (2:13) is the demand for their repentance (cf. Exod. 34:6-7). Repentance involves turning from sin and embracing God’s will. God’s will will change toward them when they have “a change of will and conduct” (Hailey 50). Their repentance called for them to offer “meat and drink offerings” (2:14). One might ask, “How could they have a meat and drink offering to offer if all had been destroyed by the locust?” The answer is—God would bless them and thereby provide for them (2:18-27).

## **Blessings for Israel (2:18-3:21)**

**Israel’s Repentance and Removal of the Locusts.** Their repentance is to be followed by the “blowing of the trumpet in Zion” (2:15), not as an alarm for them to tremble as in (2:1), but to assemble *all* the people and to sanctify a fast. Their repentance would keep them from being mocked by the heathen who would ask, “Where is their God?” (2:17; cf. Deut. 28:36-46). “The priests are called upon to appeal to the Lord’s ‘tender nerve’: ‘Spare thy people, O Lord, and make not thy heritage a reproach and a by-word among the nations’” (Lewis 100).

Joel’s success in getting Judah to repent is implied. The message of the terribleness of the judgment by God (1:14) and the prayers of the priests and people brought repentance. God will now be merciful to his people and land (2:18). In (1:8, 11, 13; 2:1) the judgment by the locusts is a reality, but now we see the reality of divine compassion. Their repentance brings renewal of crops

(2:19) and the removal of the “northern army” (2:20), showing the direction from which the locusts came upon them. As God commanded his army of locusts to destroy, he now commands their (locusts) complete and total destruction. They were driven from Judah into the eastern sea (Dead Sea) and the western sea (Mediterranean Sea). The “stench” from their decay shows “judgment brings its dire consequences and leaves its reminders” (Hailey 51). May each of us remember this precious lesson.

The Lord “will do great things” (2:21). Food and crops will be available again for both man and beasts. God sends the needed rains (2:23) resulting in an abundance of temporal blessings, which the people were without during the plague (2:24-26). The mention of “the former [early] rain and latter rain” (2:23) is connected to God’s earlier promises when he established his covenant with them (cf. Deut. 11:13-15; Lev. 26:3-4; Psa. 65:9-10). The people will be satisfied and praise God (2:26). Twice within two verses, Joel assures them that “my people shall never be ashamed” (2:26-27). This must be understood as contingent upon their “continued faithfulness to Him” (Hailey 52). This passage is used by Paul to describe the same contingency for spiritual blessings upon Christians (cf. Rom. 10:11,13). God is “in the midst of Israel” and is their “God” (2:27). His sovereignty and their amenability are seen in (2:26-27).

**The Outpouring of the Spirit (2:28-32).** The *beginning* of the Messianic or Christian age is stated in the terms: “And it shall come to pass afterward” (2:28). After the temporal blessings were poured out, spiritual blessings were to follow. The scope of the spiritual blessings was expressed as universal, “and I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh” (2:28), or upon all mankind, both Jew and Gentile. The remainder of (2:28-29) emphasizes the universal membership in the Christian age of “all flesh”—

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"sons and daughters, old and young, servants handmaidens."

It is the case that God's people ("all flesh") of the Christian age are a spiritual nation or church/kingdom, and not the fleshly nation of Israel (cf. Rom. 2:28-29; 9:26; Gal. 6:16). We must look for its beginning, composition and fulfillment. The "outpouring of the Spirit" (2:28) commenced in Acts 2, the day the church/kingdom was established. Peter gives inspired credence to the *beginning* of the fulfillment of Joel's promise to the spiritual kingdom, the church, when he stated, "this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16). In Acts 2:17-21, the Holy Spirit places Joel 2:28-32 in the mouth of Peter and the pen of Luke. The composition of the spiritual nation is stated by Joel as being without distinction of sex, age and social order: (1) "sons and daughters" (cf. Acts 2:17; 21:9; 1 Cor. 11:5), (2) "old men and young men," and (3) "servants and handmaidens" (cf. Gal. 2:28).

Joel describes the coming of the last and final judgment of God on all humanity in the language of "the great and terrible day of the Lord" (2:31). It is our studied opinion that the *time* statements, of "it shall come to pass afterward" (2:28) and "I will show...and shall be" (2:30-31), demand that the application (2:30-31) encompass the duration of the Christian age. Admittedly, God judges various nations in time and these general judgments are typical and describe the final day of judgment. This is evident from various texts (cf. Isa. 13:10; 34:4; Jer. 4:23; Ezek. 32:1-8; Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21; Rev. 6:17-18). The context is the judgment of God during the Christian age. Hailey captures the meaning of God's judgments with clarity:

So, the outpouring of the Spirit and His work for the redemption and salvation of man would result in judgment on those who rejected His message. The rejection of the

truth of the Spirit by the Jews, and their persecution of Christians, became the forerunner by the Romans, A.D. 70. The destruction of Jerusalem, which fulfilled the prophecy, in turn becomes a prophetic type of the ultimate end of the world and of the judgment of God on the world of the ungodly—that is, on those who reject the Spirit in refusing to hear His Word. (54-55)

The phrase, “And it shall come to pass,” is during the Christian age and beginning with the outpouring of the Spirit, the blessing of deliverance and salvation is offered to all, “that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered” (2:32). The phrase, as used in Acts (22:16; 2:37-41), describes those who respond to or obey the Gospel of Christ (cf. Rom. 1:16; Gal. 6:2; Rom. 8:2). *All* spiritual blessings and *all* things that pertain to life and godliness are located in Christ (cf. Eph. 1:3; 2 Pet. 1:4). Salvation and deliverance are located “in mount Zion and in Jerusalem.” (See Hebrews 12:22-23 where we “are come to mount Zion...Jerusalem.”)

**All Wrongs Avenged (3:1-8).** “For” connects the things that follow to the things that have been said in (2:30-32). This is confirmed by the phrase “in those days, and in that time.” “Days” (plural) and “that time” suggest the period of time of the Christian Age rather than a specific day or point in time. “When I shall bring again captivity of Judah and Jerusalem” is understood in the light of (1) the Messianic prophecy that God shall “again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left” (Isa.11:11). (2) The statement of Jesus, “to preach deliverance to the captives” (Luke 4:18). (3) The statements of Paul, “there is a remnant according to the election of grace” (Rom.11:5) and “he led captivity captive” (Eph. 4:8).

This phrase, “when I shall bring again captivity of Judah and Jerusalem” (3:1), as well as all of Joel 3 is not to be applied to the return of Israel from the Babylonian captivity. We suggest the following reasons: (1) It occurs within the Christian Age which Joel has been describing (2:28-32; 3:1) and (2) James applies this section (Joel 3:1-8) to the Christian Age (Acts 15:12-18). It began with the preaching of the Gospel to the Jew first and then to the Greek, on the first Pentecost following the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:13:46; Rom.1:16), to bring “into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor.10:5). “All flesh” (2:28) everywhere, and for all time, is amenable to the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2; Rom. 8:2) in order to receive forgiveness and fellowship (1 John 1).

**The Valley of Jehoshaphat (3:2-3).** “Jehoshaphat” literally means “Jehovah judges” (cf. 3:12, Keil vol. 1, 220). This is not a reference to a literal valley. It is used here symbolically to describe God’s judgments on behalf of spiritual Israel “my people...my heritage...my land.” Since it is a universal judgment, the phrase, “I...gather all nations,” describes the on-going judgment of God against those nations who have been cruel to Israel (3:3). God vindicates Israel, and in him, there is hope and strength (cf. 3:16).

**Judgment Against Tyre, Sidon and Philistia (3:4-8).** These nations—Tyre, Sidon and Philistia—serve as examples of wickedness of those who would inflict cruelty on Israel. “If ye recompense me” (3:8), I will bring “swift speedily” (3:8) judgment on you. Men sow what they reap (Gal. 6:6-8; Rev. 22:11).

In Joel 3:7-8, there is difficulty in looking for a literal fulfillment. It occurred “in those days” (3:1; cf. 2:28-29) with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Christian era. We cannot document these verses with a literal, historical event. Hailey reasons for the following understanding:

Neither could Jews after the flesh or spiritual Israel have done this, for it would have been physically impossible for the one and morally impossible for the other....It would not be literal or physical selling, but an avenging by divine judgment of the shameful treatment inflicted on the people of the Lord. (58)

**The Divine Challenge to the Nations (3:9-17).** Joel returns to the theme of “all nations” (3:2, 11-12). They are to “prepare war” (3:9). This is a challenge to the nations to make war against his children by making implements of war and thinking themselves undefeatable—“strong” (3:10). The figure set forth in (3:10) describes the evil attitudes and hearts of the enemy. These figures are reversed in Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3 where the reign of Christ is described as making peace in the heart of his people (cf. Rom. 14:17). Joel calls for the nations to “assemble...come...gather” (3:11a) and then calls for God to defeat them (3:11b). They are to come to “the valley of Jehoshaphat” (3:12), where Jehovah judges, “as I sit to judge all the heathen” (3:12).

The nations are ripe for the judgment of God (3:13). Two metaphors are used to describe the judgment. Both metaphors are borrowed from farming. (1) The grain is ripe and ready to be harvested by the sickle (cf. Isa. 17:5; Rev. 14:15-19; 2 Cor. 2:15-16). (2) The vineyards are ripe with the grapes ready to be trodden (cf. Isa. 63:3). These metaphors describe the nations ready for God’s judgment—“for their wickedness is great.” Coffman describes the final judgment of humanity as occurring “at a time when human wickedness has run its course, borne its fruit, and arrived at a state where there is nothing to do except to reap it” (vol. 1, 67).

The prophet teaches the all-important lesson in the life of Judah as well as in the life of mankind, “Multitudes,

multitudes in the valley of decision” (3:14). We ever move toward the “day of the Lord” (3:14). We are ever in “Verdict Valley.” The battle is not with carnal weapons, but with sin that battles for our heart and soul. As the “day of the Lord” approaches and comes, the “sun...moon...stars” (3:15) give off no light; thus, the dread, darkness and doom of the judgment by God!

As God’s army of locusts brought judgment on Judah under his command, so God directs the “day of judgment.” As man and time marches toward this last, final “day of the Lord,” the ray of hope, light, deliverance, security and salvation is found only in “Zion, and Jerusalem” (3:16). “No strangers pass through her any more” (3:16) shows spiritual Zion (church) is impregnable in contrast to the physical city of Jerusalem (cf. Matt. 16:18)! While “the heavens and earth shall shake” (3:16), spiritual Israel or the church/kingdom, shall not shake or falter (cf. Heb. 12:28). While the nations of the earth fall, holy and spiritual Israel shall stand (3:17; cf. Dan. 2:44; 7:13-14). Firm is her foundation!

**Spiritual Israel’s Happiness (3:18-21).** “In that day” refers to the Christian era (2:28-3:17; Acts 2). Metaphorically, it describes the abundance of spiritual blessings by being in Christ (cf. Eph.1:3). The Messiah and Saviour provides the refreshing joys and life (cf. John 4:13-15; 7:37-39; 14:6; 1 Cor.10:1-5). The New Testament sums up these blessings as: (1) we “are complete in him” (Col. 2:10); (2) we are “filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph. 3:19); (3) we possess “all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph.1:3). (4) He “hath given unto us all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3); (5) we have “the peace of God which passeth all understanding” (Phil. 4:7); and (6) we have “the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge” (Eph. 3:19).

Both “Egypt” and “Edom” (3:19) were long-time enemies of fleshly Israel. Both represent the emptiness,

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wickedness, hopelessness, helplessness and evil from being out of the kingdom of Christ. The Christian era renders the enemies of God and his people impotent (cf. 2 Cor. 1:20; Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8; Rom. 8:31-39).

“Judah” and “Jerusalem” (3:20) represent “the remnant whom the Lord shall call” (2:32; 3:1), spiritual Israel, the church. We are not condemned for our faithfulness, for we are “more than conquerors” (Rom. 8:31-39); but men are condemned when they forsake him (Heb. 13:5). So will it be to the faithful throughout the Christian era.

At the “day of the Lord,” God by means of the last, final judgment will avenge the saints by judging the blood of those who oppress his saints. The saints are victorious “for the Lord dwelleth in Zion” (3:21). The book closes on a victorious note of complete triumph and victory. God is with us (cf. Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:8; Rom. 8:31-39). Amen!

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# Rend Your Hearts, not Your Garments

## Joel 2:12-17

By Andy Robison

The locust plague Joel describes was a type of localized judgment from the Lord (1:4, 6; 2:1-2, 11). Its severity had caused the farmers, drunkards and priests—yea, even the whole land to mourn and cry for deliverance (1:5-13). The fierceness of the locusts was to strike terror into the hearts of the children of Judah (2:3-10). But, this terror was not for the sake of a malevolent God basking in sadistic, supernatural voyeurism upon the suffering of his people. No, God desired something far better—the penitent return of his people to his righteous standard. Thus, 1:14 exhorted a national demonstration of true repentance:

Consecrate a fast,  
Call a sacred assembly;  
Gather the elders  
*And* all the inhabitants of the land  
*Into* the house of the LORD your God,  
And cry out to the LORD.

God desired penitence, for only such humble souls would be able to endure the Day of the Lord (2:11). The text in consideration of this lesson (2:12-17) is a turning point in Joel. Prior to it, the prophet spells out the horror of judgment from the Lord. After it, the remainder of the book focuses on the restoration of a repentant Judah, complete with the reinstatement of blessings and furtherance of their good name and reputation among the nations. In short, their fate depended upon their attitude and actions, whether they

would be those of humble submission or belligerent rebellion.

The text presents a timeless message—relevant for all nations and individuals of all times and places. The penitence God desired was neither showy nor superficial. God desires a true, whole-hearted turning to him. He will not tolerate any hypocritical displays of feigned righteousness.

## **Expressions of Grief (2:12-13a)**

That God desires outward expressions of grief only as an outpouring of a truly contrite heart is manifested in verses 12 and 13. Four images of sorrow are set forth as expectations of the recipients if they are to be spared the terror of the Day of the Lord.

### **Fasting**

Fasting in the Bible is meant to be a physical manifestation of the affliction of one's soul. The earliest references to anything resembling fasting were those of afflicting the soul on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29-34; 23:26-32; Num. 29:7). This affliction of soul came to be associated with fasting, specifically due to a reference in Psalm 35:13, in the ASV:

But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I afflicted my soul with fasting; And my prayer returned into mine own bosom.

Fasting was a common accompaniment of godly sorrow and overwhelming grief. The children of Israel fasted when they realized their sin of idol worship (1 Sam. 7:6). Ezra fasted and tore his clothes when he grieved over the backsliding of recently restored Judah (Ezra 9:3-5). The people of Nineveh, led by their ruler, fasted in petition to the Lord to save them from the prophesied destruction

(Jonah 3:5-10). Fasting was often employed in asking God's favor (Esther 4:16; Ezra 8:21-23).

Nevertheless, the act of fasting suffered its abuses at the hands of the hypocritical. God, through Zechariah's rhetorical questions, acknowledges that he knew the real, selfish purposes behind Israel's fasts (Zech. 7:4-7). Ahab fasted as he pouted, and then in the terror of judgment from the Lord (1 Kings 21:4, 27). The fasting of God's people was unacceptable so long as their behavior was out of line (Isa. 58:3-10). The Pharisees had perfected the art of fasting for the furtherance of the appearance of religiosity (Matt. 6:16-18). Fasting, though designed by the Lord as a genuine show of penitence, became a stumbling block to those who would abuse it to look religious outwardly but make no change on the inside.

## **Weeping**

Weeping is that uncontrollable emanation of tears from within the body over great emotional (and, in this case, spiritual) distress. It is, in popular thinking, associated with times of confusion, stress and loss (see Deut. 34:8; 2 Sam. 19:1; 2 Sam. 3:16; Jer. 31:15; Matt. 2:18). Elisha was so overcome at knowing the future atrocities of a pagan king that he wept and was unable to hide it (2 Kings 8:11-12). Weeping accompanied fasting (Esther 4:3). It was present as an overflow of grief attended the sorrow over sins (Ezra 10:1-3; Jer. 9:1-2, 10).

Though weeping was often a sign of sincere seeking of the Lord (Jer. 50:4), it too could be corrupted into nothing but a show (Mal. 2:13).

## **Mourning**

The antithesis of rejoicing (Isa. 66:10), mourning also accompanied fasting at sorrow over sins (Ezra 10:6; Dan. 10:2-3). When God's judgment was rendered, mourning inevitably followed (Exod. 33:4; Ezek. 7:16). Though

mourning is not so much an outward expression of grief, it was often associated with visible apparel, whether a type of clothing (2 Sam. 14:2) or torn clothing (1 Kings 21:27).

## **Rending of Garments**

Apparel was important to the psyche of the Old Testament Israelite. The priests had their special, holy apparel prescribed to them by God (Exod. 28:1-4; 31:10; 40:13). Changes in clothing were to be made at times when they shifted from their priestly duties to more common chores (Lev. 6:11; 16:4, 23-24, 32; Ezek. 42:14; 44:16-19).

Besides the priests in their garments, there were matters of cleanliness versus uncleanness associated with garments. There had to be a change and/or a washing of clothes upon occasions that would make any child of Israel unclean (Lev. 11:25, 28, 40; 13:6, 14:8-9, 47; 15:5-13, 21, 22, 27; 16:25, 28; 17:15; Num. 19:1-10, 19-21). The people washed their garments before approaching the mountain on which descended the holy God (Exod. 19:10, 14).

Clothing was a treasured symbol of the wealthy (Ezek. 27:24; Jam. 2:2-3). Thus, those clothed in soft garments were known as living a luxurious life (Matt. 11:8; Luke 7:25), and greedy guards gambled for the garment of the Lord (Psa. 22:18; Matt. 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34; John 19:23-24). When Gibeonites wanted to fool Joshua about their economic status, a prime part of their ploy was to pretend as if impoverished by putting on shabby clothing (Josh. 9:5, 13). When the Lord would judge the wealthy who were sinful, he would take away their finery (Isa. 3:18-20).

Changes of position in life were indicated by a change of clothing. A released prisoner changed his garments (2 Kings 25:29; Jer. 52:33). Esther wanted Mordecai's suffering to be eased, and so sent him fresh garments (Esther 4:4). Purification for holy work was signified by a change of clothing (Zech. 3:3-4). Captive women were to

receive new apparel (Deut. 21:10-13). When these captives changed nationality, they were to change their appearance. David signified the end of his mourning with a new set of clothing (2 Sam. 12:20). Thus, it is all the more impressive that Jesus, when transfigured, had his clothes to shine, appearing as white as light (Matt. 17:2; Mark 9:3).

With all this emphasis on clothing, it is little wonder that clothing became symbolic of attitudes in prophetic literature. Isaiah speaks of garments of vengeance (Isa. 59:17). Ezekiel pictures princes laying aside their usual attire to “clothe themselves with trembling” (Ezek. 26:16).

By extension, then, clothing became a sign of spiritual significance. The restored would put on beautiful garments (Isa. 52:1). Isaiah spoke of garments of salvation (Isa. 61:10). Paul shook dust off of his garments toward those who refused to believe (Acts 18:6). Revelation depicts the difference between defilement and cleansing by the whiteness of one’s garments (Rev. 3:4-5, 18; 7:13-14).

With all this emphasis on clothing and the representation of the spiritual well being of a person, it is understandable that those experiencing spiritual grief would resort to the practice of tearing their clothing. The leper was to make sure his clothes were torn as he shouted, “Unclean!” (Lev. 13:45). To them, the clothing represented their status with God. If their relationship with God was torn, what more appropriate way was there to express it than through the tearing of their garments? Joshua and Caleb ripped their garments due to the rebellion of the ten spies and the cowardly followers in Israel (Num. 14:6). Joshua tore his at the results of Achan’s sin (Josh. 7:6). Ahab tore his at the pronouncement of God’s judgment (1 Kings 21:27). Josiah rent his garments when he realized his people had not been keeping the commands of the recently recovered book of the law (2 Kings 22:11, 19; 2 Chron. 34:19, 27). Ezra ripped his clothes when he learned of Judah’s unlawful marriages (Ezra 9:3).

Besides the spiritual severing represented by the tearing of clothes, extreme grief afforded the expression. Such was the case with Reuben and Jacob at the loss of Joseph (Gen. 37:29, 34); Jephthah due to his rash vow (Judges 11:35); mourners for Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam. 1:2, 11-12); Tamar (2 Sam. 13:18-19); David, when he supposed all his sons were dead (2 Sam. 13:31); Elisha at Elijah's departure (2 Kings 2:12); the king of Israel at feeling helpless regarding healing Naaman of his leprosy (2 Kings 5:7); Hezekiah due to the Assyrian threat (2 Kings 19:1; Isa. 37:1); Job, at his troubles (Job 1:20); and Paul and Barnabas at being worshiped in Lystra (Acts 14:4).

God recognized this show of grief, as evidenced by his command not to have clothes torn at the punitive deaths of the ungodly priests Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:6). Also, the high priest was not to show such grief (Lev. 21:10). The Spirit-inspired record notes that the consummate sign of hardness of heart was in the refusal to tear clothes when an attempt was made to do away with God's Word (Jer. 36:24).

Yet, for all of this, even such a divinely approved and extreme expression of grief could be abused. The holiness of clothing in itself was taken advantage of when the Pharisees began to use it to call attention to themselves as individuals more spiritual than others (Matt. 23:5). The high priest mocked the rending of clothes when he feigned a belief that Jesus had blasphemed (Matt. 26:64-65; Mark 14:63). The Jerusalem mob did so in crying for the execution of converted Paul (Acts 22:23).

Like all other religious acts, the fasting, weeping and rending of clothes could become corrupted for purposes of show.

### **Excepted Command (2:13a)**

Thus, God, in Joel's great passage, demands more than all of these symbols of penitence—he requires the rending

## Rend Your Hearts, Not Your Garments ~ By Robison

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of the heart. Such rending cannot be faked. People, with all human frailties and limitations in knowledge, may be fooled by a phony fast, a counterfeit cry and a bogus rending of garments. But, an omniscient God will not be fooled. He is able to look past the acts of worship to the heart of it (1 Sam. 16:7; John 2:25). While observers may be able to judge as to whether an act is done according to truth, God is able to see whether it is done in spirit (John 4:24). The significance of the phrase “rend your heart, and not your garments” is to impress upon the people that God knows true motives behind every act of worship. The Psalmist was confident in his ability to praise God adequately because he knew what God really wanted.

O Lord, open my lips,  
And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.  
For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give *it*;  
You do not delight in burnt offering.  
The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit,  
A broken and a contrite heart—  
These, O God, You will not despise. (Psa. 51:15-17).

Such an admonition bears several obvious applications to the New Testament church and the modern world. How many go through the motions of the five correct acts of worship while living in such a way as to render their worship meaningless (cf. Isa. 1:10-17). How many upscale brethren give liberally, but will ultimately be condemned for not giving with a cheerful heart (2 Cor. 9:7)? How many sing that they love Jesus, but God knows otherwise? How many look very attentive during a sermon but have their thoughts scattered upon worldly or even immoral things? How many eat and drink condemnation to themselves during the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:27-29)? How many revel in good works but still need issues resolved before they can reasonably be accounted to be keepers of the will of God (Matt. 7:21-23)? How many cry

at an invitation song, but revert to recent ungodly behaviors as quickly as they exit the church-house door?

What of the many petitions of God for the protection of an ungodly nation? After 9/11, many were impressed with a local high school's student-led prayer vigil, including the local news media. Would it be interesting to see how God's view of such a vigil compared? Were the lives of the supplicants changed by the event? Were they previously righteous? Were they moving toward penitence? And what of them now? Have they continued in prayer or, in more prosperous seasons, forgotten any commitment to God? Only God knows, and that is the point. Men may make shows of prayers, and in many cases there may be no wrong in the action, but God judges the action by the character of the heart. So a nation rent its garments after the national tragedy—did its citizens rend their hearts?

Similarly, amazement must be expressed at the placement of some of the clichéd pleas of American society. A majority seems to want to keep the words “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance, but how many are willing whole-heartedly to pledge allegiance to God? An emblem of the national attitude is the emblazonment of “God Bless America” on the signs of businesses and homes. What of the lifestyles of those living in the homes? What of the activities of the businesses—are they good and upright or are they downright sinful?

God desires changed lives, not just colloquialisms offered as hollow expressions of reliance. So, he would still admonish, “Rend your heart, and not your garments.”

Thus, God would not accept Judah's outpouring of praise until they displayed an outpouring of justice (Amos 5:21-24). The doing of right must precede the best-conceived exhibitions of worship (Micah 6:6-8).

## Elicited Responses (2:13b-14)

### Without God's Mercy, There is No Hope

God hoped to elicit a response of repentance from Judah; all who were penitent could, in turn, expect a relenting from the Lord. God had promised destruction on a day of “darkness and gloominess” (2:2), but he is one who can change his mind when his people change their hearts.

The author uses intensive words for his description of God’s character. Grace refers to God’s unmerited favor, and mercy refers to the pity he shows us in the miseries of our sin. Such descriptions of God’s character are by no means limited in Scripture (Psa. 111:4; 2 Chron. 30:9; Neh. 9:31. Exod. 34:6).

The inviting hope of the passage is that God just might change his mind concerning the disaster he purposed to bring on a rebellious people if indeed they would repent. After all, he is a God “slow to anger, and of great kindness.” The statement at the end of verse 13 and the question that makes up verse 14 both have the same point: God will relinquish punitive purposes.

The King James rendering, “repenteth him of the evil” (13) and “Who knoweth *if* he will return and repent” (14) at first glance to many readers makes it seem as if God could be guilty of wrong and need to change as man does (Acts 17:30-31; Luke 13:3, 5, etc.) But, that does not jive with the character of God (Jam. 1:13). Therefore, something else is meant. The New King James rendering, “relent” brings out the meaning of the word more clearly. Unhappiness is at the root of the word. The children of Israel grieved (NKJV) for their brother Benjamin (Judges 21:6, 15). The same Hebrew word is used most often in the Old Testament to refer to God’s being sorry or changing his mind (Gen. 6:6; Exod. 32:14; Jer. 18:8, 10; Jer. 15:6). Still, there is an apparent problem when one reads 1 Samuel 15:29. But, this problem is resolved when one realizes that it is man’s

actions of freewill that can cause God to change course (Exod. 32:12, 14; 34:6-7; Jonah 3:10).

## **Wondering if God will Relent**

There is no wondering to be done. If man repents according to the completeness of God's instructions, God will relent from evil and provide salvation (2 Pet. 3:9). As a matter of fact, when man is penitent, God will restore the blessings he once took (14b; 1:9b, 13). God would leave a blessing—plenty of sustenance, including enough for the grain and drink offerings longed for by the priests in the days after the locust plague.

## **Egalitarian Call (15-17)**

Already, Joel has called for a national repentance (1:14). Here, he emphasizes the completeness of that penitence for which he called. Everyone, from greatest to smallest, is to be involved. And no wonder; when judgment comes in apocalyptic literature, all from smallest to greatest are involved (Rev. 19:17-18; 20:11-12). To avoid such judgment, then, it is logical that all would need to repent (cf. Rev. 19:2, 6).

The trumpet was to be blown in Zion. The trumpet served, in the days before media and P.A. systems, as the rallying call for a people coming together for some purpose—whether to meet or defend itself (Exod. 19:13, 16, 19). Being one of the loudest instruments, it was useful for this purpose. Saul used it to rally the people for war after a small battle got them rolling (1 Sam. 13:3). Nehemiah planned to use it to call together defenders for those who might be attacked while working on the walls of Jerusalem (Neh. 4:20). It was used to gather Israel (Jer. 4:5), and to sound an alarm (Joel 2:1). Trembling was associated with the sound of the trumpet (Exod. 20:18). A trumpeter was responsible for warning people; then, if they did not respond to the danger, the fault was their own

(Ezek. 33:1-6). So, the trumpet is to call together everyone of Judah.

When the people were called together for the purpose of repentance, they were to do the things that would make them pleasing before God, including consecrating a fast. At the sacred assembly, all the people were to be gathered, including the elders. These were leaders (Exod. 3:16, 18; 4:28; 19:7) who led in worship (Lev. 4:15; Deut. 29:1; Josh. 7:6) and rendered judgments (Deut. 25:7-9; Ruth 4:1-12). They were the men of prestige (Prov. 31:23).

Also to be present were the children and nursing babes. Usually, such innocents (Ezek. 18:20; Matt. 18:1-4) would be excused from an assembly of penitence. They had no sins for which to repent! But, God wanted all there to witness the contrition if Judah was to be spared.

Even the bridegroom and the bride, on the very day of their wedding (from the language) were to give up the urgency of their wedding and one year honeymoon (Deut. 24:5) for the purpose of the assembly.

The priests were to lead the people in their sorrow over sin. They were to weep in the midst of their duties (17a). They were to wail for the safety of the people—to lead in calling for God's forgiveness (17b). They were to beg God's mercy that the pattern of oppression from other nations would not repeat itself due to Judah's sin (17c). Only true penitence could keep such a horrible reproach from again taking place.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if America would so repent—from the least to the greatest? It would be ideal if leaders would so lead. What if a president publicly called for manifested grief over sin from everyone throughout the nation, beginning with himself? The king of Nineveh did (Jonah 3:5-10). Wouldn't it be fantastic if the "honorable" congresspersons would be honorable indeed in humble contrition for the ungodly laws enacted throughout the decades? The nobles joined the king of Nineveh in this

regard (Jonah 3:7). Judges and Justices could be supreme models if they would genuinely regret and publicly renounce any rulings based in atheism and furthering immorality.

If sorrow for sin is unlikely to be called for from the top down, perhaps it could be sustained from “grassroots” up. When God revealed the unfolding of his plan, he designed that his wisdom would be made known through “the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places” (Eph. 3:10). The church might not be made up of many “wise,” “mighty” or “noble” (1 Cor. 1:26) according to the world’s standards, but it is made up of those who believe in and trust the power of the Word of God to change men’s lives (1 Cor. 1:18-25; Heb. 4:12). When such people, who inevitably form any quality moral base of a society, hold to that enabling Word, and teach it to others, they carry the potential of changing society one life at a time. When lives are changed, then, it may follow, in a Democracy, that votes would be gathered to elect candidates who reflect the newly penitent character of this hoped-for citizenry. In short, the Word of God can change the attitudes of the citizenry, and the effect can trickle up, as it were, to the top with leaders perhaps willing to rend their hearts.

## **Conclusion:**

A friend, Michael Carpenter, has penned the following poem and set it to reverent music, basing his thoughts on Joel 2:12-17.

Turn to Me with all your heart  
Return to the Lord your God;  
For He is gracious and merciful  
And relents from doing harm.  
Turn from sin my children dear,  
Return to the Lord your God  
For you are torn, but I will heal,

and hold you in My arms.  
Turn to You, I come a-gain,  
Return to the Lord My God,  
For He has paid the price for me,  
And all to Him now I owe.

Such a turning, whether national or personal, requires a true rending of the heart. God knows whether or not a person or a culture truly turns. We wonder about the fate of friends and society, but hope for the kind of penitence God requires.

### **Biographical Sketch**

Andy Robinson is a 1983 graduate of John Marshall High School, a 1985 graduate of Ohio Valley College and a 1987 graduate of Harding University, with a B.A. degree in Bible and Vocal Music. He has accumulated 33 hours of graduate study from Harding Graduate School of Religion. He also attended Harding University in 1993-1994 to receive teaching certification.

Andy has worked for the Pennsboro, WV church of Christ, the Oakhurst church of Christ in Farmington, WV, the Camden Avenue church of Christ in Parkersburg, WV, and is presently with the Hopewell church of Christ in Washington, WV. He also spent two years teaching at Jackson, TN Christian School.

Andy tries to write hymns and, with the help of many others, has produced tapes and CDs for the benefit of West Virginia Youth Camp.

In 1988, Andy married Marsha Giesler of Rolla, Missouri. They have two children, Hannah, age 11, and Andrew, age 8.

# None But Me, Hosea

## Hosea 13:4-11

By Charles Pugh, III

### Introduction

As these words were written, the funeral for the 40<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America, Ronald Wilson Reagan, had just been conducted. As the words of Hosea Chapter Thirteen, the basic text for this presentation, have been read and studied, an observation that was made by President Reagan before a group of high school honor students on the grounds of the U.S. Naval Observatory on May 23, 1983, was recalled. In response to a question concerning voluntary school prayer asked by a high school student, Reagan said: “**We have to keep in mind that we are a nation under God, and if we ever forget that we'll be just a nation under**” (Reagan, emp. added).

The people to whom Hosea, the Old Testament prophet, was called to preach had failed to keep before them that they were a nation under the One true God. Because of their forgetfulness, they became *a nation under*—under the judgment and wrath of God whom they had forgotten (cf. Hos. 2:13; 4:6; 8:14; 13:6). Although they had the advantage of *special revelation* from God (cf. Rom. 3:1-2), their practice was, in principle, not different from other nations who were limited to a *general revelation* of God in creation (Rom. 1:20; cf. Acts 14:16-17). What Paul wrote concerning the Gentiles and their response to general revelation also describes the people of Israel to whom Hosea prophesied eight centuries before Jesus Christ, and their response to the special revelation they had been given (Hos. 4:1-2, 6; 8:12-14). Paul affirmed:

...Although they knew God they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds, and four footed beasts and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, **who exchanged the truth of God for the lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator**, who is blessed forever. Amen. (Rom. 1:21-25, emp. added).

The title of this lecture (“None But Me”) is taken from the declaration of God through the prophet Hosea when He (God) said, “**...You shall know no God but me**” (Hos. 13:4, emp. added). They had “changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man... four footed beasts...Rom. 1:23). They had “exchanged the truth of God for the lie” (Rom. 1:25). They needed a powerful sermon on the supremacy, sovereignty and sufficiency of God. They received such a sermon in the following:

When Ephraim spake, there was trembling; he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended in Baal, he died. And now they sin more and more, and have made them molten images of their silver, even idols according to their own understanding, all of them the work of the craftsmen: they say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves. Therefore they shall be as the morning cloud, and as the dew that passeth early

away, as the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the threshing floor, and as the smoke out of the chimney.

Yet I am Jehovah thy God from the land of Egypt; and thou shalt know no god but me, and besides me there is no saviour. I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought. According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted: therefore have they forgotten me. Therefore am I unto them as a lion: as a leopard will I watch by the way; I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved of her whelps, and will rend the caul of their heart; and there will I devour them like a lioness; the wild beast shall tear them.

It is thy destruction, O Israel, that thou art against me, against thy help. Where now is thy king, that he may save thee in all thy cities? and thy judges, of whom thou saidst, Give me a king and princes? I have given thee a king in mine anger, and have taken him away in my wrath. The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up; his sin is laid up in store. The sorrows of a travailing woman shall come upon him; he is an unwise son; for it is time that he should not tarry in the place of the breaking forth of children. I will ransom them from the power of Sheol; I will redeem them from death: O death, where are thy plagues? O Sheol, where is thy destruction? repentance shall be hid from my eyes.

Though he be fruitful among his brethren, an east wind shall come, the breath of Jehovah

coming up from the wilderness; and his spring shall become dry, and his fountain shall be dried up: he shall make spoil of the treasure of all goodly vessels. Samaria shall bear her guilt; for she hath rebelled against her God: they shall fall by the sword; their infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with child shall be ripped up (Hos. 13:1-16, ASV).

James Montgomery Boice titled the thirteenth chapter of Hosea as “*Death of a Nation*,” in his two-volume work, *The Minor Prophets*. He depicted Hosea Chapter Thirteen as a “spiritual autopsy” in which the hand of the divine surgeon identifies the cause of Israel’s death (84). In this presentation, I have divided Hosea 13 into the following seven sections for study:

1. The ***False Worship*** of Ephraim (verses 1-2).
2. The ***Fading Ways*** of the false gods and their worshippers (verse 3).
3. The ***Forgetful Waywardness*** of Israel (verses 4-6).
4. The ***Figures of Divine Wrath*** (verses 7-8).
5. The ***Failed Way*** of Israel (verses 9-13).
6. The ***Future Well-Being*** through ransom and redemption (verse 14).
7. Israel ***Famished by the Wind*** (verses 15-16).

## **False Worship**

The basic issue addressed by God in this chapter is that of the false worship that Israel was practicing. The issue was addressed as God referred specifically to Ephraim’s (1) ***prominence***, (2) ***pride***, (3) ***penalty***, (4) ***progressiveness*** in sinful innovations, and (5) practical application of the ***principle of subjectivism in religion***.

Ephraim’s ***prominence***. “When Ephraim spake, there was trembling...” (vs. 1). This is a reminder that from the blessing of Jacob (Gen. 48:14-20). Ephraim had been in a

place of prominence and power among the twelve tribes of Israel. Hailey summarized this prominence in the following:

Blessed by Jacob above Manasseh (Gen. 48:18-20), Ephraim had stood tall among the tribes in the days of the judges (Judg. 8:1-3; 12:4ff), and was the tribe from which the first king of the ten tribes had been selected (1 Kings 11:26ff). The prophet points to this exalted position held by Ephraim and the respect in which he was held by the other tribes; when he spoke, “there was trembling” and the people listened. (178)

*Position, prominence and power*, or the desire for such, have often been the root of many spiritual problems. Such was at the root of the devil’s fall, and he has used it on millions throughout human history (cf. 1 Tim. 3:6-7). How we handle any position, prominence or power that may come our way can have a direct bearing on our relationship with God generally, and how we worship particularly.

Ephraim’s *pride*. “[H]e exalted himself in Israel...” (vs. 1). This brief declaration of fact provides the reason for Israel’s false worship. Ephraim, representing the apostate northern kingdom, allowed its prominence to “go to its head” and it fell into false worship. “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18). Pride causes individuals (i.e., preachers, teachers, elders, deacons, athletes, executives, government leaders, husbands, wives, children, et al) to fall. Pride causes families, churches, businesses, schools, cities and nations to fall. There is a sense in which all false worship (as was the case with Israel’s idolatry) has its basis in pride. When men think too highly of themselves, they exalt themselves instead of God. Such always results in false worship (cf. Luke 18:9-14).

Ephraim's *penalty*. The text further says, "...[W]hen he offended in Baal he died" (vs. 1). When the idolatry began, death followed. "For the wages of sin is death..." (Rom. 6:23). Hailey says, "...Ephraim's death warrant was sealed when he introduced idolatry" (178). Although the Assyrian invasion that carried the northern kingdom away forever did not occur until years later, *spiritual* death was immediate when Jeroboam took human counsel, made two calves of gold to be worshipped, and "this thing became a sin" (1 Kings 12:27-30). Coffman described it as follows: "When God's covenant people forgot him and wallowed in the sensual immoralities of the old Canaanite paganism, their spiritual death ensued immediately; and the ultimate destruction of this kingdom became inevitable" (206).

Paul provided New Testament commentary on this Old Testament passage when he wrote, "But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives" (1 Tim. 5:6). When Hosea spoke these words, Israel was, in one sense, living. However, in another sense, Israel was dead when "through Baal he did wrong and died" (vs. 1, NASV).

Ephraim's *progressiveness in sinful innovations*. The prophet said, "And now they sin **more and more...**" (vs. 2, emp. added). Paul wrote of how "...evil men and impostors will grow **worse and worse**, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Tim. 3:13, emp. added). When one rejects the absolute authority of God, and introduces that for which he has no scriptural authority, then there is no stopping place. The results become worse and worse. Such was the pattern manifested in Israel as Hailey explained:

From the introduction of idolatry, Ephraim had accelerated the pace of sinning against Jehovah. From a perverted worship of Jehovah through the figure of the calf they had come to worship the idol itself; and from the calf-worship they had progressed to the introduction of a pure Baal cult. (178)

### **None But Me ~ By Pugh**

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The following words from J. W. McGarvey, recognized Bible scholar in churches of Christ during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, manifest the incessant progressiveness of sinful innovations in worship. In his autobiography, McGarvey stated:

Up to the year 1869 the churches of disciples, with possibly a few obscure exceptions had abstained from the use of instrumental music in their public worship, and the preachers with no publicly known exceptions were opposed to it. It was opposed by some as being inexpedient, and by others as being unscriptural. In the year 1864 I published an article in the Millennial Harbinger for November advocating the latter position. Early in the next year, A.S. Hayden, a distinguished brother in Ohio, replied, and the subject was pretty fully discussed in the Harbinger by several writers during the year 1865. All these writers held the practice to be inexpedient, but some denied that the Scriptures condemn it. This was the beginning of the discussion of the question among us. It had been a subject of protracted dissension among Presbyterians, Baptist and Methodists for a generation previous, *the practice gradually gaining ground, first in the cities, then in the villages, and finally in country congregations.* As the disciples were set for the restoration of Primitive Christianity, which was universally known to be free from the practice, they were the last religious body in this country to think of resorting to it. But *the influence of surrounding examples gradually wrought a*

*change* in the feeling of the rank and file of the membership, and *this leavened the sentiments of the preachers until there grew up in city congregations a decided inclination to be like their religious neighbors.* This inclination developed into action in the city of St. Louis in the year 1869, when the congregation meeting on Olive Street, in a building purchased from the Episcopalian with a pipe organ in it, resolved to use the organ in its worship, whereupon a considerable number of prominent and influential members withdrew and held meetings elsewhere. The affair awakened intense interest throughout the brotherhood, and was regarded as seriously imperiling the unity that had hitherto prevailed in the body at large. Prudent counsels however were brought to bear, and the parties to the division in St. Louis were induced to call in a Committee of eminent brethren to adjudge the case, and decide what should be done. The Committee consisted of Robert Graham, Isaac Errett, Alexander Procter and J. K. Rogers. They decided that the use of the organ should be discontinued, and that the members who had withdrawn should thereupon resume their places in the church. Peace for awhile prevailed and it was generally hoped that the controversy would spread no farther. But after a few months the members of the St. Louis church who favored the organ obtained letters of withdrawal, organized another congregation, and resumed the use of the instrument. In the meantime various

*brethren* in other States, who were *enamored of the instrument commenced its public advocacy, and it was rapidly introduced into the churches though in hundreds of instances its introduction was the occasion of strife and bitterness* (43-44, emp. added).

The history of Israel, as it opened the door to innovations in the worship of God, and the history of those among us in more recent years who have done the same, has been and will continue to be, one of a downward spiral into the oblivion of apostasy where there is eventually the loss of everything distinctive that identifies the true worship of God, even the loss of faith in the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible (cf. Pugh 117). Innovative worship is a malignancy with relentless progression (Coffman 207). The church in every generation needs this principle indelibly impressed upon it.

Ephraim's *practical application of the false principle of subjectivism in religion*. The text says, "...[A]nd have made them molten images of their silver, even idols **according to their own understanding**, all of them the work of the craftsmen..." (vs. 2, emp. added). The sin was idolatry, and it was the result of trusting in their own abilities, skills and understanding to make their own god and to guide their worship (cf. Prov. 3:5-6), rather than trusting in the objective revelation of the One true God that identifies (1) the true object and (2) the true pattern of worship (cf. Heb. 8:5; John 4:24).

In his book, *The Trivialization of God*, subtitled *The Dangerous Illusion of a Manageable Deity*, Donald W. McCullough, who at the time of publishing was President and Professor of Theology and Preaching at San Francisco Seminary, wrote about the very things that God addressed through Hosea in our text (i.e., things that make us prone to forsake God for other gods). He says that one of those

things is “individualism.” He refers to a Sheila Larson, a young nurse who describes her faith as “Sheilaism.” She says, “I believe in God. I’m not a religious fanatic. I can’t remember the last time I went to church. My faith has carried me a long way. It’s Sheilaism. Just my own little voice” (22). At this point, one is reminded of the words in Proverbs that state, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Prov. 14:12; 16:25), and also the words of Jeremiah who said, “O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jer. 10:23).

McCullough further observed:

[T]he American church often witnesses more clearly to the individualism in our culture. Consider the cafeteria-style spirituality so common today: Christians graze from church to church, sampling various dishes, enjoying the preaching at First Presbyterian and the evening praise at Calvary Chapel and the music at All Saints Episcopal. ...*An individualistic Christianity leads inevitably to an individualistic god.* Those who have been suckled at the breast of American culture will not easily be weaned from the milk of individualism. ...Sin...is the attempt to be like God, the attempt to seize God’s place at the center and to take control. So, however sin might manifest itself in thoughts and words and actions, it is *essentially* self-centeredness. Because self-centeredness leads inevitably away from the God of life and therefore toward death...we need much more than our self-enclosed desires can imagine, let alone achieve. (23-24)

However, the message of Hosea and the connection of that message to the formation of the northern kingdom of Israel teach us that this principle of subjectivism (i.e., individualism) in religion is not just a characteristic of American culture. It is as old as the fall of man in the Garden of Eden (cf. Gen. 3:5-6) and was evidenced when Jeroboam “devised of his own heart” (1 Kings 12:33) a system of worship that gave the people “the church of your own choice” when he made the two calves of gold and said to the people, “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem, here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!” (1 Kings 12:28). He gave the people a choice of either going to worship the calf at Bethel in the South or at Dan in the North (1 Kings 12:28). And worship they did—*falsely*. Hosea says, “[T]hey say of them, ‘Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves’” (Hos. 13:2). “This was the common act of submission offered to kings and gods. Likewise the kissing of the idol involved kissing its feet in an act of homage, submission and allegiance” (Walton, Matthews and Chevalas 759). There is evidence of this practice as early as Job (Job 31:27) and also in connection with Baal worship in the days of Elijah (1 Kings 19:18). In the great Messianic Second Psalm, the kings and judges of the earth are ordered to kiss the Son of God—God’s universal King (Psa. 2:7-12).

## **Fading Ways**

All of this religious subjectivism that resulted in the idolatrous ways of Israel was the reason for the passing of the kingdom into extinction. The prophet uses four figures to picture the impermanence and doom of Israel and its false gods. These figures are a rich and powerful means to communicate the message that only the One true God and the things of the Lord God will endure. Those who reject God shall be as (1) the morning cloud (mist) that appears for a little while and then vanishes, (2) the dew that passes

quickly under the blazing Middle East sun, (3) the chaff that is scattered into the winds, and (4) the smoke from the chimney that vanishes from sight. These figures (vs. 3) are inspired illustrations of such great affirmations in the Sacred Scriptures as the following:

All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever. (1 Pet. 1:24-25; Isa. 40:6-8)

All that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:16-17)

The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away... The Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish. (Psa. 1:4, 6)

...Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God. (Psa. 90:2)

## **Forgetful Waywardness**

In verses 3-4, there is a sharp contrast between the transitory nature of false gods and their worshippers, and the eternal nature of the One true God. **They** (i.e., the idols and false worshippers) shall be as the morning cloud, the dew, the chaff and the passing smoke (verse 3). However, in contrast, God says of himself:

**Yet I am** Jehovah thy God from the land of Egypt; and thou shalt know no god but me, and besides me there is no saviour. I did know thee in the wilderness, in the land of great drought. According to their pasture, so

were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted: therefore have they forgotten me (Hos. 13:4-6, emp. added).

Israel's forgetful waywardness was addressed by God in these verses through a consideration of (1) their **Past**, (2) his **Place**, (3) his **Provisions**, (4) their **Prosperity** and (5) their basic **Problems**.

The first issue with which God confronted this doomed nation was the challenge to remember the **past**. He said, “Yet I am Jehovah thy God from the land of Egypt...” (vs. 4a). The appeal is a reminder of the introduction to the Ten Commandments when God said, “I am Jehovah thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Exod. 20:2; cf. Deut. 5:6). It was as though God was saying, “You must not forget who I am and the historical fact that I delivered Israel from the house of slavery in Egypt proves who I am. No one else could do this but Me.” Through the Psalmist God said, “I am the Lord your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt; Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it” (Psa. 81:10). What had occurred historically in the past should have motivated them to right behavior in the present and the future. The historical event of the exodus from Egypt (i.e., “the house of slavery”) should have kept them faithful to the One true God. Although none of those to whom Hosea prophesied was living during the exodus, they had the evidence of its occurrence. They *knew* it had happened, and that the only rational explanation for it was that God performed it. Similarly, the historical facts of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (i.e., his death, burial and resurrection) should keep us faithful to the One true God. None living on earth today saw these great events occur, but we have the sufficient evidence of eyewitnesses that proves the reality of these historical facts (cf. Luke 1:1-4; Acts 2:22-32; 1 John 1:1-4), and we have the prophetic word made sure (2 Pet. 1:15-21). We *know* these things have happened, and that the only

rational explanation for it all is the One true God. Peter wrote, “[W]ho through Him [i.e., Jesus Christ] you believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God” (1 Pet. 1:21).

Following his challenge to remember the past, God affirmed ***his place***. He said, “And you shall know no God but Me: For there is no Savior besides me” (vs. 4b). God declares, **“None But Me!”** It was the first and foundational command that he had given them: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Exod. 20:3, ASV). The ASV Footnote on the word *before* is: “or, *besides me*.” The Psalmist wrote of it when he said, “That men may know that You, whose name alone is the Lord, are the Most High over all the earth” (Psa. 83:18), and again when it was written, “...You are great, and do wondrous things; **you alone are God** (Ps. 86:10, emp. added, cf. Deut. 32:39).

During the same period, when Hosea was preaching the need for Israel to recognize the place and priority of God, Isaiah saw the Lord in his supremacy and sovereignty “high and lifted up” (Isa. 6:1ff). As God was speaking through Hosea concerning his exclusiveness, as God, Savior, and King (cf. vs. 4, 10-11), he was declaring the following through Isaiah:

...I, the Lord, am the first; And with the last  
I am He. (Isa. 41:4)

“You are My witnesses,” says the Lord,  
“And My servant whom I have chosen, that  
you may know and believe Me, and  
understand that I am He. **Before Me there  
was no God formed, nor shall there be  
after Me.** I, even I, am the Lord, and  
**besides Me there is no Savior.** I have  
declared and saved, I have proclaimed, and  
there was no foreign god among you;  
Therefore you are My witnesses,” says the

Lord, “that **I am God.**” (Isa. 43:10-12, emp. added)

Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: “I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God...Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock...” (Isa. 44:6, 8)

In his book, *Does God Believe in Atheists?*, British author John Blanchard defines idolatry in the following: **“Anything which occupies the place in a person’s life which rightly belongs to God,** and therefore betrays a grossly distorted sense of values...” (493, emp. added). Israel’s failure to give God his rightful place was obvious in their worship of calves, Baal and other idols made in the likeness of man and animals. However, let no one be deceived into believing that these forms of idols are exclusive when it comes to defining and identifying idolatrous practices. The following excellent observations summarize the far-reaching influence of idolatry even in today’s world:

The worship of idols in the likeness of human beings, birds, animals and reptiles is widely recorded in biblical and secular history, and is still practised today... Yet **idolatry comprises much more than these gross and senseless practices.** **Worshipping false ideas of God is an obvious example of the same thing.** People want a **God who is powerful and loving enough to meet their needs and get them out of trouble, but not one who is holy and just, demands obedience and punishes sin.** As the God revealed in Scripture does not meet their specification, they invent others to take his place. As they

push God out of the back door, they welcome self-made idols in at the front door, and nothing more cruelly demonstrates humankind's fallen state than the way in which people 'exchange the truth of God for a lie' and seek to worship deities who are nothing more than figments of their own imagination.

One of the Old Testament writers ridicules the pagan idols of his day by saying:

They have mouths, but cannot speak,  
eyes, but they cannot see;  
they have ears, but cannot hear,  
noses, but they cannot smell;  
they have hands, but cannot feel,  
feet, but they cannot walk;  
nor can they utter a sound with their throats.

Far from being limited to an ancient and localized culture, these words are powerfully up to date. In a 1998 report in the *Daily Telegraph*, a spokesman for the Pagan Federation told of many people turning away from traditional beliefs, and said that up to 200,000 pagans in Britain saw themselves as the modern representatives of an ancient religion based on worshipping the sanctity of nature. A 1999 report spoke of there being some 400 religious cults in Britain and claimed that their number was 'growing by the month.'

Idolatry is not limited to overtly religious practices; it invades every area of human culture... In today's 'must-have' society, material possessions are an obvious example, and Scripture specifically speaks

of ‘greed, which is idolatry.’ The Swiss author Guy Appere says that this particular form of idolatry is ‘sometimes difficult to unmask, being hidden behind deceptive appearances such as caution, economy and prudence,’ but the Bible clearly shows that it can become a substitute for God by warning, ‘You cannot serve both God and Money.’ Writing elsewhere, Paul pinpoints another danger area when he says of some people that ‘Their god is their stomach.’ Food and drink have undoubtedly become gods to many people, but the principle extends far beyond the dining room. It includes all who worship at the altar of their own appetites. Paul’s core complaint against these people is this: ‘Their mind is on earthly things.’ Their only concern is to accumulate and enjoy what this life has to offer. If God is anywhere on their agenda, he is included in ‘Any Other Business.’ One’s own career, the arts, science, a cultural movement, physical fitness, a non-biblical religion, and even personal reputation are other danger areas. So is sport, either as a player or a fan. To give one simple example of the latter, a few months after the American baseball player Mark McGwire hit a season’s record seventy home runs in 1998, the ball he hit to set the new mark was sold at auction in New York for...[\$2.7 million].

Atheistic ideas, such as the theory of macro-evolution, or rationalism, can also become ‘gods’ but, like all the others, they are escape routes from our responsibility to the one true God. Idolatry is Scriptures’

fundamental prohibition: the first of the Ten Commandments reads, ‘You shall have no other gods before me,’ while the second specifically forbids the making and worship of idols. Far from being a mere technicality, idolatry, in any way, shape or form, is a capital offence against the majesty of God. (Blanchard 492-493, emp. added)

The third element that God considered as he addressed Israel’s waywardness was **his provisions**. He said, “I knew you in the wilderness, in the land of great drought” (vs. 5). God had said essentially the same thing when Moses delivered his farewell addresses (i.e., Deuteronomy) to Israel on the eve of their entrance into the land of promise under the leadership of Joshua. Moses reminded them of how God had provided when he said, “[W]ho led you through that great and terrible wilderness, in which were fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water...who fed you in the wilderness...” (Deut. 8:15-16).

It was not Baal who led them and fed them. It was Yahweh God Who “guided them in the wilderness like a flock; And He led them on safely...” (Psa. 78:52-53).

As he provided, they **prospered**. “According to their pasture, so were they filled...” (vs. 6). The pasturage answers to their economic prosperity. They were “sated with riches” (McComiskey 217). However, the provisions and prosperity from God became the occasion for their basic problem. God says, “They were filled and their heart was exalted; Therefore they forgot Me” (vs. 6b). They (1) *lifted up* the creature and (2) *left behind* the Creator. They exalted themselves and they forgot God. Butler stated:

Their trouble was *pride*. They did exactly what Moses warned them not to do (Deuteronomy 8:11-20). When they became affluent, they did like so many other nations

have done, and like America is doing today, they lifted up their hearts in pride and said, “My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.” Pride, whether it is military pride, political pride, affluent pride, or intellectual pride, causes men willfully to ignore the facts of history (2 Peter 3:3-7). Pseudoscientists, proud of their intellectualism, proud of their erudition, or their religious heritage, will deliberately ignore the historical, textual integrity of the Bible and substitute theology and philosophy for the Word of God. Pride is the trap that snared the devil, snared Eve, and then Adam, and snares many millions today.

(570)

**“They forgot Me.”** Here was their basic blunder. Not only did they exalt themselves, but they forgot God. The two go hand in hand. The one leads to the other. Coffman asked, “Why is it such a sin to forget God?,” and he answered:

First, it is a denial of the very reason for man’s being created by the Father, i.e., that of glorifying God; and if a man is not going to do the principal thing for which God created him, he is no better than a dog, and has become a thing of no cosmic value whatever. Man apart from his relation to God has the same eternal status as a bushel of turnips, a shovel full of coal, or any of the lower animals of nature. Secondly, forgetting God, is a mark of the basest ingratitude. It is always deplorable to see men forget friends from whose hands they received benefit and encouragement in the race of life; but what about God

remembered not?... [F]orgetting God is an irrevocable mistake, the fatal blunder, the mortal error from which there is no recovery; for God will remember and punish wicked men whether they remember him or not. (212-213)

## **Figures of Wrath**

Because of their forgetful waywardness away from God, he announced that he would deal with them as ferocious wild beasts deal with their prey. He said, “So I will be to them like a lion; Like a leopard by the road I will lurk; I will meet them like a bear deprived of her cubs; I will tear open their rib cage, and there I will devour them like a lion. The wild beast shall tear them” (vss. 7-8 NKJV). These animals are figures of the wrath of God. With the strength of a lion, the cunning swiftness of a leopard, the fury the mother bear whose cubs who have been taken and the eagerness of a lioness who seeks food for her young, God would meet Israel with his wrath. There would be no escape as he would even “rend the caul of their heart” (vs. 8). The caul is the covering or the enclosure (pericardium) of the heart. He would “tear the heart out of that wicked nation” (Coffman 214). Laetsch says, “When a nation deliberately and persistently rejects God’s mercies, there is left for it nothing, but God’s wrath” (102).

God had warned Israel through Moses concerning this when he said, “They have provoked Me to jealousy by what is not God; They have moved Me to anger by their foolish idols. But I will provoke them to jealousy by those who are not a nation; I will move them to anger by a foolish nation” (Deut. 32:21). The nations of the world of today need to hear the warning. America today needs to learn from it. The church, the holy nation (Gal. 6:16; 1 Pet. 2:9) of God, needs also to give heed. When we give our

heart to “what is not God,” and worship the creature instead of the Creator, God will “tear the heart out” of us.

## A Failed Way

The way that Israel had followed had failed. God said, “O Israel, you are destroyed, but your help is from Me” (vs. 9). The NASV says, “It is your destruction...” or “O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help” (KJV). In other words, “You can blame only yourself for what is happening and is yet to happen.” Butler wrote, “Man’s sin, judgment, sentence and destruction are not, in themselves, from God, but from man’s moral choice to rebel against God. **whoever casts himself against the Rock of Ages will destroy himself** (Matt. 21:42-44)” (571, emp. added).

Israel’s way had failed, because it was a way that provided no help. The Help (i.e., God) that was available they would not receive. “You are against Me, against your help” (vs. 9, NASV). They needed a King who could deliver and save them, but they had none. God confronted them with the words, “Where now is thy king, that he may save thee in all thy cities? and thy judges, of whom thou saidst, ‘Give me a king and princes?’ I have given thee a king in mine anger and have taken him away in my wrath” (verses 10-11). There was available the One who is King over all the Earth: “For the Lord Most High is awesome; He is a great King over all the earth” (Psa. 47:2). However, it was a rejection of him as King that led to the original establishment of a monarchy in Israel. When the elders of Israel had asked Samuel for a king “to judge us like all the nations” (1 Sam. 8:5), Samuel felt rejected. However, God said, “[T]hey have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them” (1 Sam. 8:7, NKJV). Hailey says, “Instead of leading them in the way of truth, their kings had led them into idolatry and rebellion against God. The kings were weak and without faith; they could now do nothing to save the people” (180).

It was God's wrath that took the king away (vs. 11), but it was *their* way that had failed. The cup of *their* iniquity was now full, and *their* sin and guilt were wrapped up securely. Divine justice would have the final say. The New English Bible renders verse 12 as: "Ephraim's guilt is tied up in a scroll; his sins are kept on record." The final portrayal of Israel's failed way is in the picture of the woman who is in great suffering because of the pains of childbirth, but the unwise son in the womb is incapable of performing his own natural function in the process of being born. "Pains as of a woman in childbirth come to him, but he is a child without wisdom; when the time arrives, he does not come to the opening of the womb" (vs. 13, NIV). What Israel had done in forgetting God and turning to idols was as unnatural as the fetal infant who is unable to be born. Rejection of God, the Creator, is a grossly unnatural thing that results in other grossly unnatural practices (cf. Rom. 1:20-28). Even as the prophet Isaiah, contemporary with Hosea, stated: "The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master's crib; but Israel does not know..." (Isa. 1:3, NKJV).

## **Future Well-Being**

As Israel was on the brink of its own destruction because of its false worship, failed and fading ways, and a forgetful waywardness away from God, there came the announcement of "***one of the most beautiful Gospel promises recorded in the Old Testament***" (Laetsch 103, emp. added). The faithful God once more promises everlasting salvation and, in the midst of doom and destruction, there are words that speak of the future well-being of the people of God. God said, "I will ransom them from the power of Sheol; I will redeem them from death: O death, where are thy plagues? O Sheol, where is thy destruction? repentance shall be hid from mine eyes" (vs. 11, ASV).

There are those who affirm that the first line of verse 14 is to be regarded as a question (i.e., “Shall I ransom them...? Shall I redeem them...?”) Cf. NASV, NIV, RSV, et al. Many who render the passage thusly hold that there would be too abrupt a change to move from the doom of verses 12-13 to an assurance of deliverance in verse 14. Coffman provides a good response to this view. He wrote:

What upsets the commentators is the totally unexpected appearance of a blessed promise like this in the midst of the most severe denunciations to be found in the whole Bible; but the setting is this: God had promised that through Israel “all the families of the earth” should be blessed, and Hosea had been charged with the task of revealing God’s purpose of rejection and destruction of the very Israel through whom the blessing of all men was promised to be conveyed! Did that mean that the hope of human salvation was lost? Indeed no! The ultimate victory of God, upon behalf of men, over the consequences of sin would yet be achieved. *“I will ransom them!”* thundered from the throne of God as the answer for any doubt. God was not being defeated in the apostasy of Israel; it was Israel that was being defeated. God would yet achieve his purpose through the righteous remnant which would remain, and particularly through the True Israel, even Jesus Christ our Lord! ...[T]he words of this sublime promise shine like a blazing lamp in the midnight darkness of Israel’s wretched apostasy. (219)

As far as making the first line of verse 14 a question instead of a declaration, there is no adequate basis for such. “There is no grammatical indication that we have a

question here... In fact no other such clause in Hosea is interrogative” (223). Laetsch says, “Nor is there any grammatical reason obliging us to accept the translation... ‘Shall I ransom...redeem?’” (105). Coffman states, “[I]t cannot honestly be translated as a question...” (220). Ward says, “This verse lacks an interrogative particle!” (221).

The word *ransom* has the basic meaning of “the transfer of ownership of a person or object to another” (McComiskey 224). The word *redeem* “shares the same general sense, but sometimes emphasizes the role of a kinsman in effecting redemption (Lev. 25:25, 48; Ruth 3:13)... The juxtaposition of these two words in Hosea 13:14 emphasizes the deliverance of God’s people from death” (224). Hosea 13:14 declares, in promise and prophecy, the victory over death and the realm of the dead that is the result of the **Person** and **work** of him who shared with us in flesh and blood as our kinsman Redeemer and through his death destroyed the devil and released us from the fear and dread of death (Heb. 2:14-15).

Paul refers to the latter part of Hosea 13:14 in the climax to his matchless discourse on the resurrection (i.e., 1 Corinthians 15). Paul first cited the words of Isaiah 25:8: “Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor. 15:54). (Isaiah was preaching the same powerful message of victory to Judah at the same time Hosea was preaching to Israel.) Paul then referred to Hosea 13:14: “O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?” (1 Cor. 15:55). Paul’s usage of Hosea 13:14 in the Resurrection Chapter (1 Corinthians 15) is inspired commentary on the meaning and application of what God said through Hosea. Why would Paul have used this passage as he did if it did not contain a great and glorious promise to be ultimately fulfilled in the work of our Ransom, our Redeemer and our Savior, Jesus Christ?

**Look to Gethsemane and Calvary for the  
victorious battle; to the empty tomb for**

**the indisputable evidence of the redeeming ransomer's victory; to Mount Olivet (Luke 24:50f) for the glorious Ascension and coronation of the victorious God-man (Eph. 1:20ff; Phil. 2:9ff). (Laetsch 104-105, emp. added).**

The phrase, “repentance shall be hid from mine eyes” (vs. 14b) means that God will not repent of this promise, which he has here provided. The word used here should not be rendered *compassion* as it appears in some recent translations: ESV, NASV, NIV, RSV. The idea of *relent* is at the heart of this word and “affirms the impossibility of God changing his mind with regard to the affirmations of hope in the preceding lines” (McComiskey 224).

What a glorious and powerful statement of the hope of the future well-being of the people of God is Hosea 13:14! It is more remarkable because it is addressed to a nation that for 250 years worshipped in idolatry. Although Israel would reject this final appeal as the last two verses of Chapter Thirteen make clear, God knew there would be a righteous remnant and true believers in ages to come. Therefore, as Coffman says, “What an unspeakable tragedy it would have been for God to have left this verse out. Don’t let the so-called scholars take it away from you” (222).

## **Famished By The Wind**

Finally, Jehovah God points out, one more time, the great consequences of the sin of Israel’s unbelief and unfaithfulness. Although Ephraim had enjoyed remarkable material prosperity (Morgan 195) the moral and spiritual degeneracy that saturated her would result in “an east wind...the breath of Jehovah coming up from the wilderness” (vs. 15a). Assyria was that wind sent by God as the instrument of his judgment and wrath (cf. 12:1). When the east wind from Assyria came “...his [i.e., Israel’s]

spring shall become dry, and his fountain shall be dried up: he shall make spoil of the treasure of all goodly vessels” (vs. 15b). Assyria came with great devastation, turning the land into a barren desert and reducing the people to poverty. Israel had flourished, but the Lord God removed the fruits of the prosperity of the idolatrous nation.

The final verse of Chapter Thirteen briefly gives gruesome details of the invasion of Assyria that resulted in the northern kingdom being carried away to extinction forever. “Samaria shall bear her guilt; for she hath rebelled against her God: they shall fall by the sword; their infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with child shall be ripped up” (Hos. 13:16).

The siege of the capital city of Samaria began in 723 B. C. and ended in 721 B. C. Second Kings 17:5 and 18:10 inform that the warfare lasted for three years. People were butchered; not even women and unborn children were spared; cities were burned, looted and demolished, thousands of youths were carried away into slavery and those too young to work were destroyed. Israel reaped the whirlwind of destruction, ruin, blood and death (cf. Hos. 8:7).

Now the king of Assyria went throughout all the land and went up to Samaria and besieged it for three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away to Assyria... For so it was that the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt...and they had feared other gods...[T]hey served idols... Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight; there was none left but the tribe of Judah alone...[T]he Lord removed Israel out of His sight, as He had said by all His

servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away from their own land to Assyria... (2 Kings 17:5-7, 12, 18, 23)

## **Conclusion**

Although Abraham Lincoln was truly a great President of the United States (perhaps in some ways the greatest), he was wrong when he said the United States of America is “*the last best hope of earth*” (Appelbaum 97, emp. added). The last best hope of Israel was the One true God. The last best hope of *every* nation and individual of earth is the One true God. Without God, we are without hope (cf. Eph. 2:12).

George Bailey said:

Our hope lies not in our buildings, but in our Bibles! Not in riches, but in righteousness. Not in the measure of great income, but in the treasure of great incentive. Not in attainment, but in atonement! The hope of America lies in our being as great morally as we are materially! In our being just as great spiritually as we are scholastically. In our being just as great faithfully as we are financially. Our hope lies as much in our saints as in our scientists. It lies more in our character than in our capital. It lies more in having purposes fulfilled than in having our purses filled full! (qtd. in Allen 33).

What Bailey said about America can be said about *every* nation. The Psalmist declared, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord...” (Psa. 33:12). Israel was blessed when Israel worshipped Jehovah God, and none else. Israel fell when Israel lifted up herself and other gods, and left Jehovah God. What was true then is true now. Every nation will be blessed when it acknowledges with reverence and respect the One true God. However, “The wicked shall be

turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God” (Psa. 9:17).

May the church of Christ—the holy spiritual nation (1 Pet. 2:9)—make known to all the nations the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who says, “Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God and **THERE IS NO OTHER”** (Isa. 45:22, emp. added).

Now to the King eternal,  
immortal, invisible,  
to God who alone is wise,  
be honor and glory forever and ever.  
Amen (1 Tim. 1:17).

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## **None But Me ~ By Pugh**

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### **A Biographical Sketch**

Charles C. Pugh III is in his 38<sup>th</sup> year of preaching the Gospel of Christ. He is an instructor at West Virginia School of Preaching, works in a limited way with the Bridge Street Church of Christ at New Martinsville, West Virginia, and writes extensively. He and his wife Sharon live in New Martinsville. They have three children and two grandchildren.

# Like People, Like Priest

By E. Claude Gardner

Leadership properly conceived results in a successful church that grows and is healthy. Religious leaders are responsible for the condition of the church.

In the time of the prophets, under the Old Covenant, the priests were charged with the reason God's people were so wicked and disobedient. Hosea declared it was "like people, like priest" (Hos. 4:6). Their sin with causes and consequences is described in Hosea 4:7-11.

As they were increased, so they sinned against me: therefore will I change their glory into shame. They eat up the sin of my people, and they set their heart on their iniquity. And there shall be, like people, like priest: and I will punish them for their ways, and reward them their doings. For they shall eat, and not have enough: they shall commit whoredom, and shall not increase: because they have left off to take heed to the LORD. Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart.

(All Scriptures are from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.) The priests were called "the messenger of the Lord."

For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye

have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the LORD of hosts. Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law.  
(Mal. 2:7-9)

The priests failed to teach, guide and warn the people and the result was punishment by being taken into foreign captivity. Hosea's description of their sins is disheartening but gives a lesson to the church today if it departs from God's Way. Old Testament events are recorded for us that we may profit by their disobedience. Paul indicates this is a reason for the Old Testament when he wrote, "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come" (1 Cor. 10:11; cf. Isa. 24:20; Ezek. 16:44).

Leadership for the church God has vested in the elders. They are assisted by the deacons. Although Gospel preachers are not in the governance of the congregation, they can be helpful in providing teaching, example and vision (2 Tim. 2:2-3).

## **Leadership Dearth**

Because of a real dearth of leaders, more qualified and approved leaders are needed. The government of the church is simple; Christ is the head (Eph. 1:22-23) and each autonomous congregation serves under him with elders. They are assisted by deacons. This plan is given in Scripture (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Tim. 3:13; Phil. 1:1).

The church of today in several places needs to "restore" this Bible plan for the **organization** of the church. Because some do not believe, there are qualified men, or because they want to devise their own way, there have been **substitutes** put in place. These are: operate by a committee, appoint leaders, one-man rule, deacons without elders, board of stewards and a hierarchy.

“Crisis in the Church” is a result of a survey of a limited number of congregations made by Stephen Rogers, Washington Ave. Church, Evansville, IN. His article stated: “The crisis today is a lack of leadership in the church.” In his limited survey of congregations, alarming results were revealed, as follows: 56% have no elders; those with elders have only two elders; nothing has been done to develop leaders by 38%, but the same percent mention “young men’s training programs” (8). However, 96% do not have a “program to train men to be effective leaders.” The survey, though localized, gives the sad picture across the land.

Here are consequences of leaderless churches. It will be easier for false teachers to “take over.” If a congregation ignores God’s plan, it may get accustomed to ignoring his plan in other areas. There will likely be loss of members because there is no shepherd to guide them. Likely the new plan will not be conducive to evangelism. The sad effect will lead to the death of a congregation.

Why are so many congregations leaderless? Here are some possibilities: Preachers fail to preach on God’s plan and, therefore, brethren are not properly taught. I have urged teaching and speakers on the lectureship in India to be devoted to the Bible plan because in this nation where one million have been baptized, only a small number of churches have. It is surmised that some preachers do not desire to be properly organized so the preacher can be the “pastor.” Others prefer no elders because they do not want to be supervised by elders. For shame there are men who do not want responsibility and they argue that the “substitute” plan seems to be working. It appears that some capable men are “hiding their light under a bushel” by citing their considerable business and professional interests. To these, they think that this does not permit serving as an elder and they must give business precedence.

Stephen Rogers gives a clear summary why men do not choose to serve when he wrote,

Men are SO hesitant to desire, to train for or to assume leadership in the Lord's church today. Why? Men are often so busy in other aspects of their lives; they are unwilling to take on more responsibility. Too, past troubles cause me to view leadership through totally negative eyes. Many men do not want the hassles and heartaches that they have seen elders and their families endure during past squabbles and splits. Too, unrealistic expectations by brethren hinder many from serving as elders. Brethren often make demands concerning qualifications that are not the Lord's qualifications. No one has the right to ignore or to minimize the qualifications the Lord gave; no one has a right to add to those qualifications. (8)

## **Strong Leaders Make a Difference**

Based on observation and experience, the following qualities are paramount. These are true anywhere for church, school, business or government.

Highly essential are these: **integrity**. John Brown, Chairman of the Board of Stryker Corp., states there are three essentials for a good employee: "Don't lie; don't steal; and don't cheat" (*Goals and Vision*). In any enterprise it cannot rise above the leaders. One reason John Brown has been the captain to lead Stryker Co. to become a Fortune 500 Company is because he and the rest have an annual, perpetual goal of 20% net increase each year. This has been accomplished for one-third of a century.

Any organization including the home should have immediate and long-range plans. Leaders should think in terms of five years and 25 years.

President Harry Truman thought President James K. Polk was an outstanding president, ranking behind

Washington, Jefferson and Jackson. Polk set forth **four** goals and he met everyone during his one term of four years (by his choice). He, by hard work, succeeded in accomplishing these goals. He would lower the tariff; he would recreate Van Buren's independent treasury; he would acquire Oregon from the British, and he would acquire California from Mexico (*Polk* 102-103).

Harry Truman called him "a great president. He said exactly what he was going to do, and he did it" (103).

A good leader knows where to go and how to get there. A successful leader will **work** diligently and one who will do whatever is to be done. He or she will not ask others to do what one is not willing to do. Paul stressed this point when he wrote Romans 2:21-22; "Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? Thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?" In the church, leaders should last ask members to do personal work, visitation or sacrificial giving unless they are willing to do the same.

In addition to setting the example of hard work, the leader must learn to **delegate** to others to help bear the load. They must not try to do all the work. Good leaders seek to train and prepare leaders to take their place.

**Risk** must be taken, but not recklessly. A leader should assess the possible failure of a plan, but then be daring to take a risk that very likely will succeed.

Leaders must be **decisive**. After all facts are considered, then a bold decision should be made. Battles in warfare have been lost because generals have been indecisive. In the church, great benefits have been forfeited because its leaders were unable to make decisions. They must accept **responsibility** for their course of action.

Above all, a leader must let God lead. Any leader should believe, “If the Lord wills.” As J.A. Thornton’s book suggests, *God Is My Co-Pilot*.

Here are a few practical ideas: be **available** to the followers. The leader should seek to know as many of the followers possible and their abilities. A good leader must be a good follower. He often should accept the lead of others.

## **Leaders Who Have Made a Difference**

It has been said that “a college is a long shadow of one man.” This describes the growth of several schools.

As one travels across the far southern end of Alabama, one can pass several communities and then come to the city of Enterprise. One is highly impressed with this beautiful city that shows evidence of enlightened leadership.

Jimmy Carter writes in his new novel a description of one of its characters by referring to the characteristics of a leader. He wrote of one person that he “...exuded the aura of a natural leader, sure of himself, and obviously speaking with authority” (*Hornet’s Rest* 257).

The *Creative Group* reported the most essential quality of a leader is strategic vision. Tracey Turner, executive director, also lists integrity as an essential by saying, “Integrity has always been an essential leadership quality, but the focus has intensified in the wake of widely publicized corporate misdeeds in recent years. Managers must make a concerted effort to earn employee trust. Even seemingly minor missteps can call their credibility into question.”

A business coach since 1985, Charles Parten, gives a half dozen qualities of a successful leader (emphasis mine, ECG).

- **Be humble** but driven. Effective leaders are never arrogant, but they are dedicated to their work and tenacious about their business goals.

- **Be competent** in your area or skill. Nothing is worse than an incompetent leader who believes otherwise.
- Have **deep personal convictions**. No business leader should be without a strong moral compass, especially in times of crisis.
- Have a **vision** of where you want your business or your career to go, and put it into written form.
- Your **word is your bond**. “Character and integrity are very important,” says Parten. You must be considered trustworthy to be effective.
- **Develop your successors**. Leaders must foster critical skills in those around them and develop the people who will be next in line. “This will perpetuate success,” adds Parten.

## **Gus Nichols’ Requisites**

The seven requisites for church leaders are submitted from the late and lamented Gus Nichols (qtd. in North 65ff). He stated,

1. The will and determination to do right in all things, and the Bible be the standard of right (Dan. 1:8; 2 Tim. 3:15-17).
2. To love the church and put its best interests first (Matt. 6:33; Eph. 5:25).
3. A willingness to give a reasonable amount of time to the work of the church (Eph. 5:16; Rom. 12:1-2).
4. Ability to work with other elders, deacons, preachers and class teachers. A man who cannot work in a double harness cannot be a leader in the church (1 Cor. 3:5-9).
5. The ability to make up one’s own mind after hearing all the facts. A man who is nothing but a rubber stamp to approve all things presented is especially inappropriate...

6. The ability to abide by group decisions. When men agree concerning some matter in a business meeting, and one is fickle enough to call up later and say he can no longer go along with all that was agreed on it is sure to cause trouble. The same is true if he is absent and then tries to pick flaws. Such does not make for peace (Rom. 14:19).
7. He must be dependable, a man who will do what he says he will do. He must make his word good even at great sacrifice if need be.

## **Christ, the Leader**

Not only is Christ the only Savior, he is a perfect example of leadership. He spent the night before he named his 12 apostles in prayer. When he called for those to be his followers, they followed him immediately. When he taught, he spoke with authority. When he decided on a course, he did not hesitate “for He set His face.” “And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51). He fulfilled prophecy of Isaiah 9:6-7.

Like Jesus, so did Isaiah set his “face like a flint.” The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people *is* grass” (Isa. 40:7). Ezekiel, “son of man,” was promised to be “harder than flint.” “But the house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me: for all the house of Israel *are* impudent and hardhearted. Behold, I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads” (Ezek. 3:7-8).

## **Weak and Bad Leaders**

All who hold some title that should reflect leadership are not always genuine leaders. Some of the pitfalls of inept leaders are being indecisive, visionless, making excuses,

consulting others to make the decision (a finger in the wind) and failing to stay ahead of the followers.

In 2004, there are religious leaders that illustrate “like people, like priest.” Max Lucado of San Antonio has blatantly made serious changes and the people have followed. He announced that “Christ” was eliminated from the church, instrumental music was acceptable and baptism is not essential to salvation. Since then, the attendance has risen from 3300 to 4500. “Like people, like preacher.” Jimmy Ferguson wrote in the church bulletin as follows:

An article appeared in the March 13<sup>th</sup> issue of the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* on Lucado and his “new direction.” In a recent interview to promote his new book, Lucado says, “I really have given up on trying to... please everybody else. I don’t think we’re called to do that.” That sounds strange given the fact that in October of 2003 Lucado announced that Oak Hills was dropping “Church of Christ” from its name “in an effort to reach people hesitant to attend a Church of Christ.” Sounds to me like Lucado wanted to please people who did not want to attend a church of Christ!! Subsequently, their average Sunday morning attendance jumped to about 4,500, up from 3,300 before the name change. Undoubtedly, Lucado did please a lot of folks. By inspiration, Paul wrote, “The churches of Christ salute you” (Rom. 16:16). Who can conceive of Paul wanting to drop “of Christ” from that text in order to attract more people?!? The uncompromising apostle wrote, “...for if I yet pleased men I should not be the servant of Christ” (Gal. 1:10).

Other preachers have had a disturbing influence over the church. Such partisan leadership has led to Sommerism, Ketchersidism and Shellyism.

## **Good and Bad Preachers**

“My people love to have it so” when God’s people were turned to wickedness and idolatry. The prophets and priests (religious leaders) were guilty of bad leadership. “A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love *to have it so*: and what will ye do in the end thereof?” (Jer. 5:30-31).

Today’s division in the brotherhood can be traced to false teachers and also to preachers who have neglected to do as Paul charged. “I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:1-2).

It is right to do as God told Jonah about what to preach in Nineveh. It was “preaching that I bid thee” (Jonah 3:2). We must “preacher the Word” and “the oracles of God” (2 Tim. 4:2; 1 Pet. 4:11). One should avoid in preaching, “I think,” “It is my opinion,” but rather “the Bible says...” We must strive to “speak where the Bible speaks and remain silent where the Bible is silent.”

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## **Biographical Sketch**

E. Claude Gardner is a preacher, a Christian educator, a writer and a community leader. He began preaching at age 15 and has preached in local and foreign evangelism in several states and a number of foreign countries. He has preached in 358 gospel meetings and he has written over 400 articles for Gospel papers. In 43 years, he was a teacher and administrator at Freed-Hardeman University, Henderson, TN. He was President of Freed-Hardeman for 20 ½ years, and served two years as Chancellor. He is now President Emeritus. And as advisor, he is Chancellor of Crowley's Ridge College, Georgia Christian School and Kakinada (India) College of Preaching.

He was married to Delorese Tatum (deceased). He married Glenda Jacobs in 2001. He has four children and six grandchildren.

# Famine in the Land

By D. Gene West

## Introduction

Some 750 years before the birth of Jesus, about the time Isaiah the great messianic prophet of Israel was completing his work, an obscure farmer and shepherd was called by God to be a prophet. His name was Amos, which is derived from the Hebrew word “amass” and means to lift a burden or to carry a great load. He certainly lived up to his name, for Yahweh laid upon him the great burden of declaring his divine oracles (prophecies) to apostate Israel. He valiantly bore the burden and fulfilled his ministry! Amos was a native of an area known as Tekoa, and began his work in the days of Uzziah king of Judah and Jeroboam son of Joash, king of Israel. He was assigned the task of crying out against the heathen nations of Assyria and Moab, and against Judah and Israel as well. He warned the nations of Judah and Israel of an upcoming judgment if they did not repent and return to Yahweh. Unfortunately, Israel did not heed the call of Amos to repent, and the result was she was led away into Assyrian captivity, from which only a remnant of the nation returned. Later, Judah was captured by the great warlord, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

In the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book that bears his name, Amos saw a vision of the summer fruit which was designed to let him know that the fall of Israel was near. God told Amos how the songs of the Temple would cease, and dead bodies would be scattered everywhere. He spoke out against the hypocrisy and money lust found in the land, and promised that those who could not wait for the Sabbaths to pass so they could return to obtaining wealth would suffer at the hands of their enemies. God promised to make Israel's sun go down at noon, turn their feasts into

## **Famine in the Land ~ By West**

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mourning, and their songs of mirth into lamentations or funeral dirges. He would cause them to suffer as they had not done so before.

Then God spoke to Amos of a special kind of famine that was to come on the land. This famine God himself would bring about. It had nothing to do with physical food or water, or with the ability to prepare physical food. The people, during this famine, would wander from sea to sea and seek to the north and the east running to and fro, seeking what would not be provided for them. The heathen gods, pagan idols, could not respond to them in giving them instruction, and Yahweh *would not!* Even the young would faint for thirst during this spiritual famine due to their having turned from God to worship the gods of the heathen nations around them.

In Amos 8:11, God told the prophet, “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord GOD, That I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD” (Amos 8:11 NKJV). Notice, from a negative perspective, this was not a famine of food or water; it was one far worse, for it involved spiritual life and death.

## **The Day of Starvation**

In the days when Amos spoke to Israel of her shameful idolatry and sin, the people refused to hear what the great prophet said. It had become traditional for Israel to turn against her prophets, ignoring them, mistreating them and even putting them to death on occasion. Jesus said:

Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of

Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!’” (Matt. 23:34-39 NKJV)

Jesus, no doubt, had reference to the way the prophets were treated by rebellious Israel who trampled underfoot the Word of God rejecting it with hardly a thought given to what they were doing. To the great prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Zechariah, they turned a deaf ear without even being concerned that they were ignoring message after message from Yahweh, God of Israel and mankind. Not only did they persecute and ignore the prophets of Yahweh, they had even forbidden them to prophesy, as Amos himself pointed out when he said, “But you gave the Nazirites wine to drink, and commanded the prophets saying, Do not prophesy!” (Amos 2:12). The people who had benefited most from the blessings God heaped on them from the time of his promise to Abraham to the moment Amos was speaking, simply did not want to hear the Word of God proclaimed. One finds it difficult to fathom such an attitude!

To the great captivity prophet Ezekiel God had said, “The word of the LORD came again to me, saying: Son of man, when a land sins against Me by persistent unfaithfulness, I will stretch out My hand against it; I will cut off its supply of bread, send famine on it, and cut off

man and beast from it" (Ezek. 14:12-13), Notice Yahweh's words, "persistent unfaithfulness." That is the sin of which Israel was guilty! She stubbornly resisted the teaching of the prophets engaging in persistent unfaithfulness. God promised he would send famine against that land. While Ezekiel probably spoke of physical famine, we recall that God also told Ezekiel to tell his people not to inquire of him because they refused to accept and act on the messages he gave the prophets. Consequently, God would answer none of their questions!

Have you ever noticed that God tends to give man what he wants? These people wished for the Word of God to stop coming to them; they did not want to hear the messages of the prophets! God told Amos the day was coming, and it was very near for the northern kingdom of Israel, that God would become as silent as the grave so far as speaking to them was concerned. They had not wanted to hear the words of Yahweh, so there was a famine of hearing coming on them, a time when he would speak no words for them to hear! They could scour the earth, run from the north to the east, and to and fro in the land searching for some word from Yahweh, but there would be none! They would be starving for a syllable from the mouth of God—there would be none! Such a judgment would be just, as all God's judgments are, for God does not force on mankind what he will not have.

### **A Present-Day Famine for the Word**

Today, there is a very similar famine for the Word of God in our land. However, this one is not because God has refused to speak to us, for he has given us the full and complete revelation of his Word. Peter declared, "Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by

which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Pet. 1:2-4). If, indeed, we have received all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who called us," there cannot be any further teaching needed.

James, half-brother of our Lord, in 1:25 of the book that bears his name, called the Word of God "the perfect law of liberty." If it is perfect, it is whole, complete, entire, needing nothing to complement it in any way. Jude, also half-brother of our Lord said, "...the faith...was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). If it is true that it was once for all delivered, then it cannot be possible that there is anything to be added to it. Indeed, "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they" (Heb. 1:1-4). We have God's completed revelation, so the famine for the Word in our land today is not because God has refused to speak.

Furthermore, so far as the production and ownership of Bibles are concerned, there are probably more in our nation than anywhere else on earth. While other nations of the world beg for Bibles in their native tongues, we are super-inundated with them! Never in the history of the world has man had such free access to the Word of God as we, yet the grand book is often neither read nor studied. To make bad matters worse, the courts of our land, bowing to the pressure of the godless ACLU, forbid the use of the Bible

in our schools and in many government buildings. Yes, we have a famine for the Word in the land, but it is not God-sent, it is self-imposed.

## **Causes for the Famine**

There are striking similarities between the causes for the famine of the Word in the days of Amos and in our own day. Among those causes both in ancient and in modern times is luxury and materialism. To ancient Israel Amos said, “Woe to you who are at ease in Zion, And trust in Mount Samaria, Notable persons in the chief nation, To whom the house of Israel comes! Go over to Calneh and see; And from there go to Hamath the great; Then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are you better than these kingdoms? Or is their territory greater than your territory? Woe to you who put far off the day of doom, Who cause the seat of violence to come near; Who lie on beds of ivory, Stretch out on your couches, Eat lambs from the flock And calves from the midst of the stall; Who sing idly to the sound of stringed instruments, And invent for yourselves musical instruments like David; Who drink wine from bowls, And anoint yourselves with the best ointments, But are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. Therefore they shall now go captive as the first of the captives, And those who recline at banquets shall be removed. The Lord GOD has sworn by Himself, The LORD God of hosts says: I abhor the pride of Jacob, And hate his palaces; Therefore I will deliver up the city And all that is in it” (Amos 6:1-8). Notice how he described the luxury and materialism of the Israelites in those days. He said they slept on beds of ivory, stretched out on their couches, ate lambs of the flock, anointed themselves with the best ointments, drank wine from bowls and were not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. While our luxuries may not be the same as theirs, still we allow materialism to interfere with service to God. We allow recreation, previous plans for worldly pleasure

and many other things to keep us from seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Materialism prompted them to “put far off the day of doom” in that they refused to think even of the possibility of God’s punishing them for their failure to serve him.

Many years earlier, God inspired Moses to warn the Hebrews of the same danger when he said, “Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, lest—when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, in which were fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water; who brought water for you out of the flinty rock; who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end—then you say in your heart, My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth” (Deut. 8:11-17). Materialism has always had the potential to turn men away from God and from the truth of the Gospel, as Jesus so eloquently pointed out in the Parable of the Sower when he warned that the cares, riches and pleasures of this life can choke out the Word of God. He said, “Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity” (Luke 8:14). We must be extraordinarily careful that we do not allow the comforts of this world choke out the Word of God.

Still another similarity between the times of Amos and the present contributing to the famine of the Word is moral

corruption. God caused Amos to declare to his people, “For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they sell the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of sandals. They pant after the dust of the earth which is on the head of the poor, and pervert the way of the humble. A man and his father go in to the same girl, to defile My holy name” (Amos 2:6-7). Who can deny that moral corruption has its effect on the church in our time? Unfortunately, the standards of the world often become the standards of the church rather than vice versa. When this happens, people have little or no desire to feed on the Word of God inasmuch as, were they to do so, it would make them exceedingly uncomfortable, since that Word has the ability to reveal our true selves to us. The accomplished author of the treatise to the Hebrews made that abundantly clear when he said, “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:12-13). James, half brother of our Lord, by inspiration declared that the Word of God is a mirror into which we look to see ourselves truly and completely (James 1:23).

A third similarity between that which led to the famine of the Word in the days of Amos and in our days is religious corruption. In the days of Amos, the people could not wait for the religious days and observances to be over so they could get on with their secular lives. Does that sound familiar in our day? God had his prophet say, “Hear this, you who swallow up the needy, and make the poor of the land fail, saying: When will the New Moon be past, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may trade wheat? Making the ephah small and the shekel large, falsifying the scales by deceit, that we may buy the poor for

silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals—even sell the bad wheat? The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob: Surely I will never forget any of their works. Shall the land not tremble for this, and everyone mourn who dwells in it? All of it shall swell like the River, heave and subside like the River of Egypt. And it shall come to pass in that day, says the Lord GOD, that I will make the sun go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in broad daylight; I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on every waist, and baldness on every head; I will make it like mourning for an only son, and its end like a bitter day” (Amos 8:4-10). When has America ever seen a time of greater religious corruption? We have watched the “ordaining” of a “gay bishop” in the Episcopal church, and in almost all the mainline denominations there is the debating of moral issues that should not even be spoken of publicly, much less *debated* before the world. When in America’s religious history, which incidentally claims to be Christian, have we seen a greater relegation of Christ to such a low place in the life of the nation? When have people been less willing to spend time in sincere worship? They want every period of worship to be a rock concert! Even among the people of God we see a rush to get periods of divine worship over so we can go do something secular. It is very alarming to see this, yet it seems every congregation of God’s people is infected with this to some degree. Why can we not look back at the days of Amos and draw valuable lessons for our own times?

## **Results Being Produced by the Famine of the Word**

The present famine of the Word is producing results that are not unlike those in the days of Amos. Recall that the great prophet said, “In that day the fair virgins and strong young men shall faint from thirst. Those who swear

by the sin of Samaria, who say, As your god lives, O Dan! And, As the way of Beersheba lives! They shall fall and never rise again" (Amos 8:13-14). Does this not describe our loss of young people, and older ones as well, who almost daily faint from Christ due to a lack of spiritual food and water? Today, we seem, because of a lack of understanding of the Word, to be easily overcome by temptation and fall into many snares of Satan. The consequences of the famine are for us eternal destruction just as they were for many in the days of the prophet of Tekoa. Many times, just the common trials of life cause Christians to fall away from Christ.

There are two things necessary for resisting the trials and temptations of life: (1) A well grounded faith in God's promise that he will always provide a way of escape for us (1 Cor. 10:13). (2) Fear of God, an awesome reverence for his power, motivates us to turn from evil, knowing the truthfulness of Solomon's statement, "In mercy and truth atonement is provided for iniquity; and by the fear of the LORD one departs from evil" (Prov. 16:6). The Word of God is designed to impart both to us. That is the reason Paul assured the Romans, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). This is a principle that has always held true for the people of God from the most ancient of times. Moses emphasized it when he commanded, "At the end of every seven years, at the appointed time in the year of release, at the Feast of Tabernacles, when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the LORD your God and carefully observe all the words of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land which

you cross the Jordan to possess" (Deut. 31:10-13). God has always wanted his people to be intimately acquainted with his Word that they might live in harmony with his will. If we neglect the Word of God, we will be unaware of the assurance we have from God, to say nothing of the fear—respect—we are to have for him. Many of us today suffer from a kind of spiritual malnutrition, which is, unfortunately, by choice and not because we are forced to feed on only the husks of the Word.

## **How Can the Famine be Ended?**

In the days of Amos only God could end the famine because he was going to stop revealing himself to his people due to their idolatry and sinfulness. However, the circumstances are different for us. Fundamentally, there are two ways to end the famine of the Word in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. First and foremost, we must appreciate the *power* of the Word. It has power in the spiritual realm to save, regenerate and sanctify mankind. While on earth, at a time when many of his disciples were turning away to follow him no more, Jesus said, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63).

Likewise, James, half-brother of our Lord, declared that the Word can save our souls when properly received. His declaration was, "Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes

himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does" (Jam. 1:18-25). Peter added inspired testimony to the truth spoken by James when he said, "Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, because All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The withers, And it flowers falls away, But the word of the LORD endures forever. Now this is the world which by the gospel was preached to you" (1 Pet. 1:22-25 NKJV). And finally, while praying for his disciples in John 17:17, Jesus said, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth."

The Word of God possesses the power of spiritual preservation. David asked, "How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word" (Psa. 119:9 NKJV). The great apostle Paul, in his last tearful meeting with the elders of Ephesus in the little town of Miletus, closed his remarks to them by saying, "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

Secondly, after we recognize the all-sufficiency of the Word, we must also know that for the Word to be effective in our lives, we must *feed* on it frequently. As babies long to be fed with milk, so we must long for the nourishment that comes from the milk and meat of the Word. Peter, by inspiration, made that abundantly clear when he said, "Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if

indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (1 Pet. 2:1-3).

However, spiritual milk is not always sufficient. Paul scolded the brethren at Corinth because they had not fed on the meat of the Word, and were, therefore, weak in the faith, when he said, "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?" (1 Cor. 3:1-3). When carnality is alive and well in the lives of Christians, one thing is surely true. We are not feeding on the Word as we should! When division and corruption of the doctrine of Christ are rampant in congregations of God's people, we know brethren are failing to feed on the Word of God. We are not being guided by the Lamp that lights our pathway (Psa. 119:105). The august author of the treatise to the Hebrews chastised those brethren when, regarding this very matter, he said, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5:12-14). One reason false teaching, dealing with everything from baptism to how we worship, is destroying churches presently is many Christians have failed to partake of a sufficient amount of the milk and meat of the Word of God to know the difference between good and evil teaching. One cannot discern, or make a proper judgment, regarding what is good and what is evil, what is true and what is

false, if he lacks the knowledge on which to base such judgment!

Feeding on the Word means more than occasional reading of the Bible. It means that we meditate, study, diligently put our minds to a proper understanding of the Word. God pronounced a blessing on the person who will meditate on his Word. The Psalmist said, “Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper” (Psa. 1:1-3). If Christians only enjoyed feeding on the Word as much as we enjoy eating the food that perishes, how much better it would be for us.

## **A Terrible Tragedy for the Israelites**

When, in the days of Amos, the children of Israel abandoned God and his truth, God abandoned them. They were taken into Assyrian captivity, and later into Babylonian captivity. They had to learn to live in cultures foreign to them, in lands where God was unknown. God had given them over to their enemies because they wanted to live as their enemies did. He gave them what they wanted! But he withheld from them his gracious teachings given through the prophets. There were no visions from Yahweh and no knowledge of God in the land. He did the same thing to generations of Gentiles who did not like to retain him in their minds (Rom. 1). Once the Israelites had been taken into captivity, they were no longer able to feed on the Word of God and practice their faith. They went from spiritual famine to spiritual starvation because they had lost their taste for the good Word of God.

It is even more tragic, it seems to us, for Christians to impose famine on themselves in our day. Through our

neglect we languish in spiritual malnutrition and weakness, and very often we become the captives of Satan, sometimes never to return to the path to the promised land, never to be restored to our inheritance. We neglect the full and final revelation of the magnificent Word of God given through the Spirit to the great evangelists and holy apostles of Jesus Christ. We turn from heavenly riches to the mundane baubles of this earth and risk losing our eternal souls in so doing. The challenge is for us to return to the Word of God and feed on it as starving persons would at a great banquet, so that one day we may have that inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

## **Conclusion**

Study the Word, heed the Word, live by the Word of God because it is all-sufficient for salvation. “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

## **Biographical Sketch**

D. Gene West was born in Chester, WV and attended public schools in Hancock County. He earned an Associate in Arts Degree from Freed-Hardeman College, a Bachelor of Arts Degree from West Liberty State College and a Bachelor of Science Degree from Fairmont State College. He has served churches in Martin’s Ferry, OH; Kissimmee, FL; Hundred, Moundsville, Vienna, Fairmont and New Martinsville, WV. He presently preaches for the Hillview Terrace Church of Christ in Moundsville, WV. He was baptized by brother Jess Nutter in 1950. He was the owner and editor of the *Bible Herald* for several years, and has spoken on numerous lectureships and conducts several Gospel meetings each year. Gene and his wife, the former Shirley Bissett, have three children: Kandi Davis, Mary Amy Kessinger, and Todd and six grandchildren.

# Prophecy and Inspiration

## Amos 7:10-17

By Charles Aebi

One night several years ago, I was awakened by the phone ringing around 3:00 a.m. On the line was a woman trying to talk in as low a voice as she could, but I recognized her anyway. She said, “Hello! This is God talking!” Now, some of the pagan religions believe that God is a woman, which may be reflected in such expressions as “Mother Nature,” but I knew and she knew that the Bible teaches no such thing. And I knew and she knew that it was not God talking! However, when Amos preached, it was God talking, and he didn’t hesitate to say so.

Amos is one of my favorite prophets, and I thank the director and the elders at the West Virginia School of Preaching for the opportunity to look at the topic of *Prophecy and Inspiration* from Amos 7. I think myself blessed to participate in this lectureship and in teaching at WVSOP from time to time, and I appreciate the topic assigned to me. As much as any prophet could, Amos claims inspiration. Amos says over fifty times that what he says is Jehovah speaking. Over and over again, Amos uses expressions like, “Thus saith Jehovah” [“the LORD” in most versions, “Jehovah” in the *American Standard Version* used here], “Hear this word that Jehovah hath spoken,” “Jehovah showed me,” “Jehovah hath sworn” or some equivalent.

Unlike us, Amos was divinely inspired to be always accurate. I try not to do this, but occasionally I say things that I later regret having said, because by then I have had

opportunity to learn that they were not as accurate as I had thought, or were worded poorly. In his prophesying Amos had no such lapses or errors, because what he said was indeed God talking: Amos was inspired by God, which means he was infallibly guided by God to say what God wanted said.

## **The Preaching of Amos**

About ten years before he died, a friend of mine wrote me a letter advising me that if I survived him he wanted me to preach his funeral sermon in such a way as to “warn sinners to flee from the wrath to come.” I tried to do that when the time came, and that’s what Amos tried to do as he preached to Israel. Such preaching is likely to be criticized as negative and unfeeling or unloving, but that isn’t true. Amos did care for Israel; he twice interceded with God to ask Him to forgive Israel and not bring calamities on them. “Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel” (Amos 4:12) is not necessarily a pronouncement of doom, for he also said, “Seek Jehovah, and ye shall live” (5:6) and “Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live” (5:13). But much of Amos’ message was falling on unwilling ears, so “Woes” were in order (5:18; 5:1).

G.L. Robinson describes Amos as one of the most forceful preachers of repentance and judgment of all the prophets of the Old Testament” (47). Yet, Amos was not trained in the school of the prophets; he was a farmer—a shepherd of a special breed of fine-wool sheep and a dresser or tender of sycamore figs. From his shepherding duties at Tekoa in Judah about ten miles south of Jerusalem, he was commissioned by God to go to Bethel, some twelve miles north of Jerusalem, but in the northern kingdom of Israel. There he began his sermon by pronouncing God’s judgments on surrounding nations, including Judah, and he continued it by criticizing Israel’s sins—oppressing the poor, having dishonest weights and

measures, silencing the prophets, intoxicating the Nazirites, mistreating the righteous, taking bribes, sexual immorality, insincere worship, materialism, etc. Amos did not need to do sociological studies on their behavior; his message was directly from God, who knew them better than they knew themselves.

Amos' preaching reminds one of the Book of James—direct to the point and practical in application to daily life; Amos' righteousness (5:24) and James' pure and undefiled religion (1:27) are birds of a feather. The preaching of truth often is rejected, and the experience of Amos was similar to that of Jeremiah, Micaiah, Peter and John in that regard. Jeremiah was imprisoned because he relayed God's message of doom on Jerusalem for its sins, and Micaiah was imprisoned because he refused to preach smooth things to the wicked King Ahab; both said they had to say what God gave them to say. When Peter and John were imprisoned and ordered not to speak nor teach in the name of Jesus, they answered, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you rather than unto God, judge ye: for we cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard" (Acts 4:19-20). Amos leaves us no record of having been imprisoned, but he said, "The Lord Jehovah hath spoken; who can but prophesy?" (3:8), and when told to leave the country, he continued prophesying there.

Israel's leaders had commanded the other prophets, "Prophesy not" (2:12). Since the beginning of the northern kingdom of Israel when Jeroboam I (son of Nebat) established golden calf worship at Bethel and Dan, prophets of Jehovah had not been in favor with Israel's kings, false prophets and priests. When Amos prophesied God's judgment on Israel because of its sins, Amaziah, the priest of Bethel (Israel's southern center of idolatry and the location of one of the king's palaces), told Israel's King Jeroboam II (son of Joash) that Amos was prophesying his death and the coming captivity of Israel (Amos 7:10-11).

Zerr thinks that Jeroboam told Amaziah to order Amos to leave the country and prophesy in Judah (IV: 312); Keil says, “The king appears to have commenced no proceedings against the prophet in consequence of this denunciation, probably because he did not regard the affair as one of so much danger. Amaziah, therefore, endeavours to persuade the prophet to leave the country” (X: 312). Pusey agrees with Keil, saying, “Jeroboam apparently took no account of the false priest’s message” (I: 320). Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown say, “The king, however, did not give ear to Amaziah, probably from religious awe of the prophet of Jehovah” (799). In any case, Amos prophesied Amaziah’s personal tragedies, then kept on preaching and warning Israel that judgment was certain if they did not repent. Amos’ prophecy is dated by Hailey at around 755 B.C. (83). Jack Lewis says, “In 722, less than a generation after Amos, Samaria was besieged by Shalmaneser V and fell. Sargon II, successor to Shalmaneser, claims that he exiled 27,290 Israelites from Samaria” (20).

Amos’ message was not all doom and gloom. In the final chapter, he prophesies of a time when the kingdom of David would be raised up and would include not only the remnant of Israel but also the Gentiles (9:11-12). The inspired interpretation of this by James in Acts 15:14-19 is that it refers to the inclusion of Gentiles along with Jews in the church of Christ.

## **The Inspiration of Amos**

When Amaziah told Amos to go to Judah and prophesy, he is understood by many to have supposed that Amos was a professional prophet and made his living by preaching. “The expression ‘...and eat bread’ insinuates that Amos was prophesying for hire; therefore, like many of his day, he was a hireling-prophet or seer” (Hailey 118). “The speech of Amaziah implied that he considered Amos

as one of the regular prophets who had no other occupation. In that case it would not matter very much where he worked, just so he did the work of a prophet" (Zerr IV: 312). Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown think Amaziah considered Amos in the same category as the Baal-prophets who were maintained at the king's expense (799). "Worldly men always think that those whose profession is religious make *a gain of godliness*. 'He is paid for it,' they say" (Pusey I: 321). But not everyone is convinced that prophets at that time generally were professional hirelings. Robertson says, "A great deal has been made of the words of Amaziah the priest of Bethel (7 12), as if they proved that the prophet in those times was regarded as a wandering rhetorician, earning his bread by reciting his speeches; and it has been inferred from the words of Amos himself that the prophets of his day were so disreputable a class that he disdained to be named along with them (7 14). But all this is fanciful. Even if we admit that there were men calling themselves prophets who prophesied for hire (Mic 3 5.11), it cannot be assumed that the expression here to 'eat bread' has that meaning; for in other passages it seems simply to signify to lead a quiet or ordinary life, or go about one's daily business (see Ex 24 11; Jer 22 15)" (124-125).

It may well be that when Amaziah referred to prophets, he thought of the false prophets who did preach a message to please the idolatrous religious establishment and the kings who set it up or who used it to maintain their power. After all, Amaziah himself was a false priest who classifies as a professional hireling, and there had been hundreds of false prophets in Israel supported by Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kings 18:19). But Amos was not talking about false prophets or professional hirelings when he referred to himself as being neither a prophet nor a prophet's son (Amos 7:14). He may have meant either that he didn't inherit the prophetic office—that he had not had as prophet father—or that he had not been associated with the group

known as “the sons of the prophets” who were sometimes at Bethel, Jericho and other places (2 Kings 2:3, 5; 4:38; 5:22); or, he may have meant both. These were true prophets of Jehovah, as is evident from their associations with Elijah and Elisha, but Amos had never been one of them. His knowledge of God’s will came not from such association, but by direct inspiration or revelation. Jamieson, Fausett, and Brown reflect the usual understanding of these “sons of the prophets” when they say, “Schools of prophets are mentioned first in I Samuel; in these youths were educated to serve the theocracy as public instructors. Only in the kingdom of the ten tribes is the continuance of the schools of the prophets mentioned. They were missionary stations near the chief seats of superstition in Israel, and associations endowed with the Spirit of God; none were admitted but those to whom the Spirit had been previously imparted. Their spiritual fathers travelled about to visit the training schools, and cared for the members and even their widows (2 Kings 4:1-2). The pupils had their common board in them, and after leaving them still continued members. The offerings which in Judah were given by the pious to the Levites, in Israel went to the schools of the prophets (II Kings 4:42)” (799).

When Amos spoke of prophets being commanded to “Prophesy not,” he referred to men whom God “raised up for prophets” (2:11-12). God revealed to his servants the prophets what his judgments would be, and they could do no less than to tell it to those concerned. “Surely the Lord Jehovah will do nothing, except he reveal his secret unto his servants the prophets. The lion hath roared; who will not fear? The Lord Jehovah hath spoken; who can but prophesy?” (3:7-8). God had ordered Amos to prophesy to Israel, and he could do no less; so, Amaziah’s command to “Prophesy not against Israel” had to be rejected (3:14-16). Indeed, God’s revelation of coming judgment included personal disaster for Amaziah and his family: his children

would be killed; his wife would become a prostitute; and he would die a captive in a foreign land (3:17).

## **Divine Inspiration**

What is involved in inspiration? Instead of using the familiar “All scripture is given by inspiration of God,” the *New International Version* has “All Scripture is God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16). Either translation says that God is its direct source, which is exactly what Amos is saying. When he “dropped his word against the house of Isaac,” it was God’s Word, not his. To repeat what was said earlier, Amos was inspired by God, which means he was infallibly guided by God to say what God wanted said. What Amos said was indeed God talking through him. The last words of the book of Amos are “saith Jehovah thy God” or in NKJV “says the LORD your God” (9:15). Some 55 times Amos uses this expression or similar statements in his book, which in my Bible occupies a little less than six pages. Other Old Testament prophets made the same claim. Ezekiel says repeatedly, “The word of Jehovah came unto me” (6:1; 7:1; 12:1, 17, 21, 26; 13:1; 15:1; 16:1; and throughout his book uses this and other synonymous declarations). Most of the twelve Minor Prophets’ books open with the statement that “the word of Jehovah came to” the prophet who is writing it. Edward J. Young lists 126 times that Isaiah uses “thus saith the Lord” or equivalent statements (171-175). He concludes that Isaiah “believed that he had been the recipient of an objective revelation. He did not think that he was uttering words which had found their origination in his own mind, but rather that he had received a message which God had given to him...he believed himself to be the recipient of words which had been placed in his mouth or spoken to him by God” (176-177).

Of Amos Young says, “It was while Amos was about his everyday business that God commanded him to go and

prophesy. He was not told to go to some prophet in order that he might learn certain mysterious knowledge which would be of help in interpreting and delivering oracles. He was told rather to prophesy, and this he did, to the consternation of the priest Amaziah. Indeed, one may search carefully all that is said in the Old Testament concerning the call of the prophets, and there is not one word to support the view that they passed through a period of instruction in order to obtain certain knowledge which would be necessary for them, if they were properly to discharge their functions. They depended, not upon special instruction at the hands of initiates, but upon direct revelations from the one living and true God" (106-107).

## **Prophecy, Revelation and Inspiration**

The Hebrew word for prophet [*nabhi*] and the Greek word [*prophetes*] mean to speak for God, to "forth-tell" rather than "foretell." "The prophet was primarily a man of his own time and one who spoke to the people of his own time concerning their needs and problems. Thus, he was a forth-teller. However, frequently in order to move the people to repentance in times of wickedness or to hope in times of despair, he was inspired of God to look down the annals of time and to see the punishment that would come because of sin or the blessings that would come to the righteous remnant" (Kearley 1183). "We must remember that in the Bible the act of prophecy was more of an act of preaching. But that preaching often included the foretelling of future events" (Dickson 400).

A careful study of the Old Testament prophets shows that their main mission was to get people to reform their lives by telling them what God wanted, what he said and how he felt about their words and actions. Sometimes this forth-telling or speaking for God necessitated foretelling what God had in store for them if they didn't repent as well as how he would bless them if they did. God thus both

showed the prophecy's divine origin and gave them motivation to obey his words by having the prophet tell them the consequences of both obedience and disobedience. An easy example of this is Mark 16:16: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned." Jesus wanted men to believe and be baptized; so, he predicted the result: salvation. He also predicted the result of failure to do so: condemnation. While people often think of prophecy as predicting the future, much if not most of it is teaching one how to live in the present (whenever the prophet is speaking). Foretelling the future served as motivation for present obedience.

Whether forth-telling or foretelling, the prophet was speaking for God, not for himself. "According to the uniform teaching of the Bible the prophet is a *speaker* of or for God. His words are not the production of his own spirit, but come from a higher source" (Von Orelli 2459). God's Spirit has been striving with man at least since the time and preaching of Noah (Gen. 6:3; 2 Pet. 2:5), and we know something about how this was done in the cases of Moses and the prophets who followed. To Moses God said, "Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt speak" (Exod. 4:12). "The expressions 'Jehovah spake unto' (and 'by') 'Moses,' 'the word of Jehovah by the hand of Moses,' and equivalent terms, occur hundreds of times in the Pentateuch, and in other books referring to the Pentateuch" (Miller 40). Speaking of the whole Israelite line of prophets that led up to Christ, Moses said, "And Jehovah said unto me...I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him" (Deut. 18:17-18). So specific was the source of the prophets' words that Moses could say, "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish from it, that ye

may keep the commandments of Jehovah your God which I command you” (Deut. 4:2).

Prophecy involved revelation; regarding God’s judgments to come, Amos said, “Surely the Lord will do nothing, except he reveal his secret unto his servants the prophets...The Lord Jehovah hath spoken; who can but prophesy?” (2:7-8). Revelation is that supernatural unveiling, releasing or disclosing by God to man of facts and truths that man could not otherwise know. Revelation is related to inspiration. Inspiration is the inbreathing of God, whether by means of guidance in the selecting of materials and the recording of facts already known (as in the four Gospels), or by means of divine revelation of facts unknown and unknowable except by God’s giving the prophet that information (as in the prophets of both testaments).

In general, we may say that revelation is the message, while inspiration is the method of transmitting the message; revelation is done by means of inspiration. The result is that the words of the prophets, whether oral or written, are God’s words. David said, “The Spirit of Jehovah spake by me, and his word was upon my tongue” (2 Sam. 23:2).

Inspiration is the means whereby God so guided and directed his prophets that what they said as they spoke for him was just what he wanted said and was infallibly inerrant. They did not make mistakes; what they said was in fact God speaking. “On the divine side we mean that it is ‘God-breathed,’ and on the human side that God inspired men. God spoke through men. Each writer has his own style...By style we mean vocabulary or choice of words, syntax or sentence structure, mode of expression. This is only to say that God used men or spoke through men. He put his Word in earthen vessels” (L. Lewis 34-35). “Inspiration...is the process by which the Spirit of God kept His Word free from error or fallacy, and preserved it from contradiction or mistake. All that we imply in the

term inspiration is the supervision of the writing by the Holy Ghost, Who alone could have operated over the centuries as the editor of all parts of the Book" (Rimmer 17).

God directly spoke and wrote the Ten Commandments (Deut. 5:4-22; 9:10; 10:4). God directly spoke his personal endorsement of Jesus at his baptism, on the Mount of Transfiguration, and as Jesus taught after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem in John 12:28. But Jehovah spoke mostly through his servants the prophets to whom he revealed both present and future events and whom he inspired by his Spirit to speak for him. And though he allowed them to use their own vocabularies, their words were so guided as to be his words: he inspired them. We use the words "plenary verbal inspiration of Scripture" to mean that all of the Bible is fully inspired, down to its very words, not just its thoughts. "If then the thoughts are inspired, the words must also be so. Luther justly said: 'Christ did not say of His thoughts, but of His words, that they are spirit and life.' (Cf. John 6:63) J.A. Bengel declares, speaking of the prophets: 'With the ideas God at the same time gave them the words.' Spurgeon, that prince of preachers, said: 'We contend for every word of the Bible and believe in the verbal, literal inspiration of Holy Scripture. Indeed, we believe there can be no other kind of inspiration. If the words are taken from us, the exact meaning is of itself lost'" (qtd. in Pache 75).<sup>1</sup> "Thoughts when committed to speech or writing must be put into words! If the words are congruent, that is, in harmony with the ideas, then the words, no less than the thoughts, take on great importance. Words have specific meanings which are dependent upon their usage. To suppose that the thoughts which God gave men are inspired, but that the words which express those thoughts are not inspired is so absurd as to do

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<sup>1</sup> Erich Sauer. *From Eternity to Eternity*. 103.

violence to the idea of inspiration of thoughts!” (West 2). Thoughts cannot be communicated directly, mind to mind; words are the way we communicate thoughts. The words, not just the thoughts, are inspired.

When we insist that the Scriptures are inspired as a result of being written by inspired men, we refer not to translations but to the words of the original writings or autographs. A translation can be faulty in places, but the original writings were flawless. Nevertheless, we believe that Jehovah who inspired the prophets also providentially oversaw the preservation and transmission of his Word so that we have it today. We believe this because we believe Jesus when he said, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matt. 24:35). We believe Peter as he quoted Isaiah 40:6-8, “All flesh is as grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower falleth: But the word of the Lord abideth for ever. And this is the word of good tidings which was preached unto you” (1 Pet. 1:24-25).

There are a number of reasons why we have confidence that the prophets’ writings and speeches are the very words of God, and one very strong reason is the fulfillment of their prophecies. Moses set forth a test of validity for a prophecy in Deuteronomy 18:21-22—you know the prophet speaks for Jehovah, not for himself, when his word is fulfilled. So, those who heard a prophet speak could look at his predictions of the future and see them come to pass, as in the cases of Ezekiel and Jeremiah, who foretold the coming destruction of Jerusalem and lived along with some of their hearers to see it happen. When Jerusalem fell in 586 B.C., the people of Judah shared the same horror Amaziah must have felt when Israel fell in 722 B.C.; in both cases they had ignored the warnings of the prophets.

We can read Amos’ promises of coming judgment that he wrote and spoke, and we can note that what he said

about Israel going into captivity occurred later in that same century. We can also read his promise that David's kingdom would be reconstructed to include Gentiles, and we can see James applying this to the kingdom of Christ, and we can believe. We can see Messianic prophecy in Isaiah and elsewhere and observe how it was fulfilled in Christ. We can read of the miracles of Moses, Elijah, Elisha and Jesus and understand how miracles testified that the prophet indeed was inspired and spoke for Jehovah. And we can see the truth of Abraham's words to the rich man and how they apply to those who still want miraculous signs: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, if one rise from the dead" (Luke 16:31). They would not, and they still will not. That great Prophet like unto Moses did arise from the dead, and he did deliver to men the Word of God, who has spoken in these last days through him, the Son, in the New Testament (Heb. 1:1-2). It is the last prophecy we shall have, "And it shall be, that every soul that shall not hearken to that prophet, shall be utterly destroyed from among the people" (Acts 3:23).

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## Biographical Sketch

Charles J. Aebi was born in Webster, Pennsylvania and was raised in Aleppo and Clover Hill, Pennsylvania. He is a graduate of the Pennsylvania State University, Abilene Christian University and Ohio University. He taught Bible at Ohio Valley College 1964-1998 and served as academic dean at the college for fifteen years and chairman of the Bible Department for six years.

He has preached in the Ohio Valley since 1952, and has preached Gospel meetings and conducted workshops on Bible classes, church leadership, the restoration

principle and family relationships. Since retiring from the Bible faculty at Ohio Valley College, he has taught part-time at the West Virginia School of Preaching. He has spoken on several area lecture series and on lectureships at colleges and schools of preaching.

He is married to Imogene McDonough Aebi who taught business in public schools and at Ohio Valley College and also is a Bible class teacher and speaker for women's groups in lectureships and in workshops. The Aebis have four children and twelve grandchildren. Among their children and their spouses, they count eight Bible class teachers, four preachers, two deacons, two medical doctors, one nurse and six public school teachers.

# There Is Something in a Name

By E. Claude Gardner

Hosea, a minor prophet, was married to Gomer, a prostitute. He wrote of three children, two sons and one daughter. Their names had meanings. Son, Jezreel, meant "God scatters." Lo-Ruhamah was called "no companion." The third child was named Lo-Ammi meaning "not my people" (Hosea 1). The names of the three children symbolized the captivity of Israel first and then Judah. Hosea prophesied in the eighth century B.C. Hosea married Gomer who was unfaithful and this illustrated God's children who were married to the Lord. Like Gomer, they committed adultery or unfaithfulness.

Hosea believed there was something in a name, but today it is popular to hear the uninformed parrot, "There is nothing in a name." Those who declare this idea do so to seek to defend many denominational names. Flippantly, they respond, "But there is nothing in a name." Also, these may be quick to add, "But I'm a Christian." Then, they will add they are a certain kind of Christian. A practical test as to how strongly they believe their doctrine is to take a blank check and sign another's name to it.

It is so very true that one name or **all** names are as good as another if they are of human origin. There is nothing in a name but **only** in the name of Christ. There are good Bible reasons for believing there is something in the name of Christ and Christian.

The basic plea we make is to be a Christian only and not hyphenated. We urge that people should not be a plus or minus Christian. Three solid reasons for teaching that there is something in the name Christian.

## **Bible Names Mean Something**

There is something in the name Christian because Bible names were given because they meant something. Ernest Verity has compiled a three-volume set for the names of the Godhead. He stated,

The people of Biblical times, and in Bible lands, valued the name of the person to an extent far beyond the appreciation of modern western minds. They always gave to it meaning, either symbolically, or with reference to character...the Biblical names were descriptive, and often prophetic. Religious significance was almost always involved in the name. (I: 1)

Names have a purpose, which often ignored in our modern Western society. Men pay little or no attention to the naming of their children, except to give a family name of a respected forbearer to carry on a family tradition. We have seen this carried to a high degree of folly with names like John Doe, III. It suggests that some folks pay more attention to the selection of the name for their pet pup than for their newborn child.

It is as if philosophy expressed by our noted writer of yesteryear, William Shakespeare, dominates their thinking. He wrote: "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." Many rose lovers would earnestly debate that statement, even though it may hold an element of truth. (I: 3)

It seems that the names of Hosea's children were changed in view of the Restoration. God's people had

## **There Is Something in a Name ~ By Gardner**

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broken five of the Ten Commandments according to Hosea 4:1-3.

Hear the word of the LORD, ye children of Israel: for the LORD hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because *there is* no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood. Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away.

The captivity was caused by sin and yet a merciful God promised that a remnant would return.

Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, *that* in the place where it was said unto them, Ye *are* not my people, *there* it shall be said unto them, Ye *are* the sons of the living God. Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land: for great *shall be* the day of Jezreel. (Hos. 1:10-11)

The names of the children would now signify as follows: Jezreel—God saves; Lo-Ruhmah—my one; and Lo-Ammi—sons of the Living God.

Here are a few Bible names and their meanings: Eve, the mother of all living (Gen. 3:20); Hosea, salvation; Amos, burden bearer; Nahum, comfort.

God changed the names of some: from Abram to Abraham (Gen. 17:5); Jacob to Israel (Gen. 35:10); Cephas to Peter; Saul to Paul.

But what does the name Christian mean; pertaining to Christ; a follower of Christ. One cannot pronounce the name Christian without saying and exalting Christ our Lord.

## **Christian Is a Bible Name**

The name Christian is found three times in the New Testament and implied in the Old Testament. “And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch” (Acts 11:26). “Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (Acts 26:28). “Yet if *any man suffer* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf” (1 Pet. 4:16).

Here are three real reasons for wearing the name Christian.

1. From the three verses, it is a New Testament **example**.
2. To wear his Name is to honor Christ as Savior and Founder of the church.
3. To wear any human and unbiblical name brings dishonor to Christ and all of these are inferior to his.

Luke states the disciples were “called” Christians, which was a divine call and this was not given in derision as some contend. It is the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy for a “new name” for God’s people. “And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name” (Isa. 62:2). It was the “royal” name as

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referred to by James. “Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?” (Jam. 2:7).

Paul “persuaded” King Agrippa to become a Christian and not named after him or other human names. Our plea is to urge all religions to give up all human religious names.

### **In the Name of Christ**

There is something in the name of Christ because salvation is in Christ. “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Many passages teach that only in Christ is there salvation. Note the following: Luke 19:10; John 14:6; Acts 2:21; Eph. 1:21; Phil. 2:9-10, and a host of others.

With shame, the name of Christ has been removed by the Community Church movement and several others. His name in the descriptive title of the church has been considered by the “changers” as a stigma and a stumbling block for entering the church. How can anyone be ashamed of Christ—his name, church, worship, plan of salvation? “For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and *in his* Father’s, and of the holy angels” (Luke 9:26).

Max Lucado, popular preacher of San Antonio, recently explained the removal of the name Christ from the Oak Hill church. He said:

Some people find **the name “Church of Christ” to be an insurmountable barrier.**

...Let’s seek to remove any barrier that would hinder a person from hearing the Gospel. Our seventh initiative calls for an **alteration of our name**. We can reach more souls by **modifying “Oak Hills Church of Christ” to “Oak Hills Church.”** ...To reach more souls for Christ. While we

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deeply appreciate our heritage in the Churches of Christ, we recognize the hindrance the name creates for some. A common comment from new members is this: "We would have come sooner, but we had to get over the name of the church." This is a barrier that need not be. (emphasis mine, ECG)

Three Bible reasons have been given for wearing the name of Christ and these affirm there is "something in a name only if it is the name of Christ."

To have salvation in Christ and to be able to wear the name Christian one must obey the Gospel of Christ. "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:26-27). After being baptized, one must be a Christian in **name** and in **practice**. Paul wrote, "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (2 Tim. 2:19).

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# **Amos – A Country Prophet (Overview of Amos)**

By William Woodson

Amos, prophet of God, a shepherd and dresser of sycamore fig trees, penned this interesting and challenging book. An overview of this prophetic book is provided in this study.

The events in the Book of Amos occurred during the respective reigns of Uzziah/Azariah of Judah [co-regent with his father Amaziah 792-767; king 767-740/39 B. C.] and Jeroboam of Israel [co-regency with Jehoash 793-781; king 782-753 B.C.] (1:1). Jeroboam had captured Hamath [the northern limit to Israel's inheritance (Num. 13:21; 34:8; Josh. 13:5)] (2 Kings 14:25; Amos 6:13-14) and ushered in a time of prosperity. Jehu [841-813/14] had destroyed Baalism out of Israel, apparently only for a time (2 Kings 10:19-28); some form(s) of idolatry remained (Amos 5:26). Hosea, a prophet in Israel apparently somewhat later than Amos, rebuked Israel for idolatry, including Baalism (Hos. 2:10, 15, 18-19; 8:5-6; 11:1-2; 13:1-2). This mixture of prosperity, idolatry and wantonness of life constituted the moral and spiritual situation faced by Amos.

Amos was from Tekoa [six miles S.E. of Bethlehem, twelve miles south of Jerusalem, eighteen miles west of the Dead Sea] in the land of Judah (1:1). The terrain was rugged and uninviting. Hard limestone surfaces, showing veins of flint, abounded around Tekoa; steep valleys and rugged canyons cut and marred the land; hot winds from the south swirled from time to time. In the day of Amos,

the roar of the lion, the cry of the jackal and the bleating of the sheep might echo from one canyon to another. It was a hard land, requiring hardy people to survive. From this harsh area came the prophet Amos to Israel, prepared to speak forcefully against the wrong of the northern kingdom.

### **Four Great Themes Are Clearly Presented in the Book of Amos:**

#### **I. Warnings to Surrounding Nations and People (1:1-2:16)**

Warnings of coming doom are presented in a series of declarations repeated eight times. One notes the awesome declaration, “Thus saith the Lord,” stated concerning Damascus (1:3), Gaza (1:6), Tyre (1:9), Edom (1:11), Ammon (1:13), Moab (2:2), Judah (2:4) and Israel (1:6). Six of these places surround the lands of Judah and Israel. The troubling awareness dawns that these nations and cities that are not God’s covenant people are still under his authority, still subject to his will, and their transgressions will not be overlooked. Clearly, Judah and Israel would agree these surrounding people should be punished, if not destroyed. But, that said, it then dawns only too clearly that the same authority and will can and does apply to the chosen nation, now divided, as well as to the others.

The charge is laid in the disturbing formula of wrong doings: “For three transgressions... and four” in 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6 respectively for the nations noted, for Judah and for Israel. This phrase is something of a formula summarizing wrong doing that shows the guilt is undeniable, abundant and the cup of iniquity is filled.

The surety of punishment echoes from the repeated promise, “I will not turn away the punishment thereof” (1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6). The Hebrew word “not **turn away**” [“I will not revoke the punishment” RSV, so in the

other occurrences] means not to bring back, revoke or cancel; accordingly, the threat is of inevitable punishment which will not be taken back.

Guilt is clear, warning is evident, judgment is certain. Serious danger awaits!

## **II. Warnings to Israel (3:1-6:14)**

Israel's transgressions were listed in 2:6-16. Injustice, greed, immorality, oppression, ingratitude for God's provision, denial of God's prophets, corruption of holy men, these and related sins have not gone unnoticed.

Three sobering warnings are given to sinful Israel, all introduced by the strong admonition "Hear this word" (3:1; 4:1; 5:1).

The first warning against Israel (3:1-15) concerns punishment for the "iniquities" of the nation (3:2). The Hebrew word for "iniquities" [*awon* here in the plural] means crookedness, perversion, and denotes not so much the action(s) as the character of the action(s), i.e., the perversion of divine law, the lack of reverence for God's will and way. It is a summary word that in its plural form serves to characterize all sins against God but at the same time directs attention to the completeness of God's forgiveness for those who repent.

Seven questions are given to indicate that an effect proves a cause: agreement enables walking together, roaring of the lion shows presence of prey; a bird in a snare proves a trap was set, etc. God has sent his prophets, he has spoken to his prophets, and they can only do his bidding. Hence, Israel's iniquities are now bringing about the consequences God has determined and will declare through Amos.

Amos turned again to the destiny of the Gentile nations: An adversary is round about them, their strength will be brought down, and the palaces will be spoiled. Israel is to be warned: The altars of Bethel will be visited;

the horns of the altar will be cut off; the whole altar will fall to the ground. Israel will reap the wrath of God for idolatry! All will come to an end for Israel, Samaria will fall!

The second warning (4:1-13) portrays even more vividly the coming judgment. The “kine of Bashan” [“cows of Bashan” RSV; NKJV] refer to luxurious women, the prominent and haughty women of Samaria who lived in the reckless luxury of those who suppose that all is well and there is no tomorrow of judgment!

The Lord has “sworn by his holiness” that punishment will come. Israel will be taken away with hooks, their posterity with fish-hooks; all will seek escape, none will be spared. The haughty cries of former days ascend to no avail: “come to Bethel, come to Gilgal, bring your sacrifices, offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving, publish free offerings”; ***all without true devotion; only the form and not the spiritual substance***, as if to say, “Form without heart is all that is needed; God will be happy to have us; nothing to worry about!”

God had provided such discipline as cleanness of tooth, want of bread, lack of rain, rain here and not there, crops withered; people wandered in vain searching for water that was not found. Blasting and mildew, worms eating crops before they could be gathered, pestilence such as was seen in Egypt, young men slain with the sword, horses gone, camps defiled, and yet Israel has not returned to the Lord. Those overthrown as were Sodom and Gomorrah did not impress that disastrous lesson from long ago on the hard of heart. Now, Israel must prepare to meet God to answer for wrongs done, for the “iniquities”!

The third warning begins with a lamentation of God in view of the difficulties Israel must face (5:1-27). The punishment hastens, Israel will fall and not rise, and no one can raise her up. It is folly to seek help in Bethel, in Gilgal; both shall go into captivity. The only escape is to seek the

Lord. Those who turned judgment into wormwood, who leave off righteousness in the earth, must seek the Creator of heaven and earth, but they hate him who rebukes them, who speaks uprightly! God knows their transgressions and sins; the counsel to seek good and not evil, and live, is ignored. Wailing, therefore, will be heard in the streets, one who seeks escape here will find disaster there, darkness and not light will come without fail. The pretended offerings to God have been mixed with offerings to Moloch and Chiun, images they have made for themselves. Israel, therefore, must go beyond Damascus into captivity. Thus God Said!

### **III. Visions of Judgment (7:1-9:10)**

The five views of coming judgment in this section are declared to be revelations of God. The affirmation is, “Thus hath the Lord God shewed unto me” (7:1, 4, 8:1); also one reads, “Thus he shewed me” (7:7), “the Lord hath sworn” (8:7) and “saith the Lord” (8:9, 11). The Hebrew verb rendered “shewed” [“showed” ASV; NASB; RSV] means to see, to have visions, to cause to see. Moses asked that he might be shown the glory of God (Exod. 33:13); Elisha stated the Lord had shown that Hazael would be king of Syria (2 Kings 8:13); Jeremiah and Ezekiel were shown visions (Jer. 24:2; 38:21; Ezek. 11:25). Amos now has been caused to see (7:1, 4, 7; 8:1). What had been seen was authentic; no human effort had provided the vision; God himself had so disclosed!

The swarm of **grasshoppers** [“locusts” ASV] would devour the food otherwise needed, threatening judgment but restrained by the request for forgiveness (7:1); God chose to “contend” [“calling for judgment” RSV] by **fire** that devoured; the prophet besought God and the judgment did not come (7:4-6); God shows a **plumbline** as a standard of uprightness and reveals the idolatry that draws forth the sword against the house of Jeroboam (7:9)

(At this point Amaziah, priest at Bethel, accuses Amos of conspiracy against Jeroboam so much that the land cannot bear his words. He calls on Amos to flee to Judah, to live and prophesy there; he is never again to prophesy against Bethel, the king's "chapel" ["the king's sanctuary" ASV; RSV], some regard this as the "national temple," others as the place where clerical robes were kept, perhaps the robes themselves] and the kings "court" ["royal house" ASV; "temple of the kingdom" RSV]. Amos declared he had not been a trained prophet when God called him, but he had been instructed to go and prophesy against Israel, against the house of Isaac, the destiny of whom was captivity (7:10-17). The imposter cannot frighten the genuine prophet. The message will stand!)

The **basket of summer fruit was** shown (8:1-13). The summer is nearly gone, the fruit of the summer is gathered. The end is come upon Israel, although Israel is still God's people! Songs of the Temple will become howlings when dead bodies are found in every place. Those who cannot wait for the Sabbath to end so they can falsely buy and sell by deceit, who buy the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes, will not be spared in God's judgment! The land will tremble, all will mourn, a flood-like swell of God's punishment will descend, the sun will go down at noon, the day will be darkened, feasts will be turned into mourning and songs into lamentation. A famine will come on the land, a famine of hearing the Word of the Lord. Wanderers will go from sea to sea, seeking the Word of the Lord, but too late. Fair virgins and young men will faint of this thirst. Those who swear by the sin of Samaria, who seek the way of Beershebah [thought by some to refer to the manner or way of life of those in Beersheba] will fall and never rise again.

The closing section of Amos' message of judgment was not given in symbol or sign. The Lord stands on the altar, showing his supremacy over it and himself as the

only one who is to be worshipped by the sacrifices and services conducted at the altar—not the gods of the idolaters that had been worshiped by errant Israel.

The trappings of the false temple will be destroyed; those who officiate or sacrifice falsely will flee in panic but will not escape. Neither the highest hill or the depth of “hell” [“Sheol” ASV; RSV] will provide a hiding place; the heights of Mt. Carmel and the bottom of the sea will not suffice to escape God’s punishment. Captivity will not bring relief; God’s sword will still devour, his eyes will be set for evil and not for good against them. God, the name of whom is Lord, is the Creator, he has dealt with nations for their blessing and their destruction. The sinful kingdom of Israel will be destroyed, but a remnant of the house of Jacob will be spared. The sifting of God will not allow for the escape of a single grain; sinners against God will be destroyed—even those with the false hope that evil will neither overtake nor meet them.

The judgment has been conducted by the truth of God’s Word; Israel has failed as a nation; a remnant will be spared; otherwise, all will be swept away by the wind of God’s anger against idolatry and iniquity!

#### **IV. Promise of Restoration (9:11-15)**

God had said of Israel: “I will destroy it from the face of the earth; saving that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, saith the Lord” (9:8). The promise is to be kept as shown in this section; but the fulfillment will be spiritual, not in the land of Judah or Israel, not in a millennial kingdom so called; rather, it will be in the coming and reign of the Son of David who now sits on his divine throne (Luke 1:31-33). In “that day,” the present dispensation, this restoring of the tabernacle of David occurred (John 18:36). The kingly line of David ended with the carrying away of

Coniah,<sup>1</sup> the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah. Of Coniah God instructed: “write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah” (Jer. 22:30).

Couched in the language of the restoration of Israel to the land they had left, the prophet envisions the time when the spiritual kingdom of God is built; nations then heathen in the day of Amos will be brought into it. In this spiritual reign, the plowman and the reaper as well as the treader and sower of grapes will be united in their enjoyment of God’s blessings. The nation of Israel, now obedient to Jesus the Son and King on David’s spiritual throne, will enjoy these blessings as well. The plan of God to bless Israel, ended spiritually in the fall of Samaria and ultimately Jerusalem, will be effected in the true Israel of God, the church of Christ the King.<sup>2</sup> How Amos, as well as the other prophets must have inquired and sought the meaning of these and similar prophetic words (I Pet. 1:10-12).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jer. 22:24, 28; 37:1; a form of the name Jechoiachin (2 Kings 24:6); Jechoniah in 1 Chron. 3:16; “Jechonias” Matt. 1:11, 12 KJV; “Jechoniah” NKJV.

<sup>2</sup> F.F. Bruce quotes C.C. Torrey on these verses [both in the Massoretic text and the LXX text of Amos 9:16-17] in relation to the church as follows: “since it predicted that the ‘tabernacle of David,’ i.e. the church of the Messiah, would ‘gain possession of all the nations which are called by the name [of the God of Israel]’” (*Composition and Date of Acts* (1916), pp. 38f.). Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles The Greek Text* (Eerdmans 1990), pp. 340-341.

<sup>3</sup> As he so frequently did, McGarvey best summarized the thought: “The prophet [Amos, ww] in previous verses predicted the downfall of the Jewish kingdom, which would be the overthrow of the tabernacle or house of David, whose descendants were the reigning kings; and in

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The prophet ends his book with a confident prediction of the spiritual fulfillment of the will of God that had not been achieved in Judah or Israel. Both, following the division into the northern and southern kingdoms, had progressively moved into various sins, with only occasional times of renewal. Such a time of renewal was called for by Amos, again to no avail. God, knowing this, offered a last chance in the words of Amos; again, to no avail. The captivity of the northern kingdom loomed ever nearer.

One reads concerning Israel's later captivity [722 BC]:

And they left all the commandments of the Lord their God, and made them molten images, *even* two calves, and made a grove, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal. And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke him to anger. Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight: there was none left but the tribe of Judah only.” (2 Kings 17:16-19)

Amos had tried, but the effort was unrewarded; Israel was destroyed. The failure was not in Amos, but in the

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the verses quoted he predicts the rebuilding of the same, which would occur only by some descendant of David again ascending the throne. But after that downfall, no man of David's race became a king until Jesus was enthroned in heaven. This, then, was the was the rebuilding of the ruins, and it was to be followed by ‘the residue of men,’ that is, the Gentiles, seeking after the Lord, as Gentiles had been doing ever since Peter's visit to the house of Cornelius.” J.W. McGarvey, *New Commentary on Acts of Apostles* (1892), V. 1, p. 66.

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stubbornness of Israel against God. The words of Amos still call nations and men to repentance in view of an even greater and eternal punishment far exceeding that of faithless Israel.

### **Biographical Sketch**

William Woodson retired from teaching and devotes his time to speaking appointments and writing.

# Half-Baked Cake

## (Hosea 7:8-16)

By Phil Greer

No church ever intends to depart the faith, and yet it happens! Somehow, it loses its first love (Rev. 2:4). Its zeal lags. It gradually loses interest in the Word of God. The resulting ignorance allows it to be led away from the Lord. It becomes enamored with the world and its techniques. Having abandoned the power of the Word, it searches for alternative methods of doing “God’s work.” As time passes, Christians become solidly entrenched in the things of the world, all the time talking of their “spirituality.” And so another church has abandoned the Bible and become part of the denominational world. It was not planned or intended, it just happened.

Israel never intended to drift away from God, but she did. Hosea worked during the reign of King Jeroboam II of Israel, at a time when the nation had reached its peak political and economic strength. But that strength masked decay from within that led to destruction within approximately twenty years.

Hosea describes Israel (whom he calls “Ephraim” after its largest tribe) as a “cake not turned” (Hos. 7:8). She was like a cake that is burned on one side and raw on the other because it was not turned during the cooking process. Such a cake is useless, and good only to be discarded into the garbage. Israel had become useless in the service of God, and hence was to be discarded into history’s garbage dump. After the Assyrians destroyed her, she never again returned as a separate nation.

It is truly sad when God’s people reach the point where they can no longer be of service to him. How did Israel

reach that point, and how can we avoid making the same mistakes?

It is important that we make the proper application of Hosea's lessons. Many would apply them to the United States, and there is certainly a secondary sense in which this is valid. But, the United States is not God's Israel today, the church is (Gal. 6:16). So, let us make application to the church, and see how God's spiritual Israel can avoid following in the footsteps of ancient Israel. Hosea said three things contributed to Israel becoming a "cake not turned," and thus useless in God's service.

## **Compromise**

"Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people" (vs. 8). God, from the beginning, had called Israel to be different from the world. God had told them at Mt. Sinai, "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel" (Exod. 19:5-6). They were definitely not to "mix themselves among the people, but were to "be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine" (Lev. 20:26). They had been cut out (severed) from other people to be a holy nation that would serve as God's example to the world, but they failed to live up to God's will in this.

Throughout their history, they mimicked the surrounding nations. They wanted a king because the nations around them had one (1 Sam. 8:5). They copied the evil, idolatrous religions of the other nations, even though God had forbidden it. They mixed with the other nations, rather than destroy them. "They did not destroy the nations, concerning whom the LORD commanded them: but were mingled among the heathen, and learned their works, and

they served their idols: which were a snare unto them. Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils, and shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood” (Psa. 106:34-38). This compromise had sapped the strength of the nation, but they did not know it. They had, unknowingly, become as a decrepit old man whose strength had been devoured by strangers (vs. 9). Compromise had rendered them a useless, half-baked cake, but they were totally unaware of it.

Sadly, congregations of God’s people today are “mixing themselves among the people.” God’s truth is too often compromised to please the world. Too many have forgotten that we are God’s holy nation, a people for his own possession (1 Pet. 2:9). We are to be distinct and different from the false religions surrounding us. Mimicking false religion as Israel did will make us what Israel was—a half-baked cake, useless in the service of God, even though we may not realize it.

## **Pride**

Israel was caught in the crossfire of a bad situation. Egypt and Assyria were vying for control of the world. Unfortunately, Israel lie exactly between the two nations, and so was threatened from both sides. What do you do when the two most powerful nations in the world both want to make you part of their empire? Many in Israel figured they had to choose the lesser of two evils. Which nation was most likely to win, and which would treat them the best? But, there was no consensus in Israel as to which nation this was. Some said they were better off allying themselves with Egypt, others said Assyria. “Ephraim also is like a silly dove without heart: they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria” (vs. 11). Like a silly bird, they flitted from

Egypt to Assyria looking for the best deal. They foolishly imagined they were smart enough to make this decision.

It never seemed to occur to them that there was a third choice. They could choose to side with God. He had never let them down in the past. He had brought them out of Egyptian bondage, had led them in the conquest of Canaan and had provided for them throughout their history. Yet they felt they could solve this problem without him. “And the pride of Israel testifieth to his face: and they do not return to the LORD their God, nor seek him for all this” (vs. 10). They arrogantly turned their backs on God and convinced themselves that their methods were best.

It is too easy to find examples of congregations making this same mistake today. Not satisfied with God’s methods, they look to their own wisdom and that of other mere human beings to make the church “grow.” The Gospel must be “dressed up” for our modern culture. We must find some way of appealing to the masses, even if it involves compromising what God has said. The result often is Madison Avenue type marketing procedures and promotional gimmicks that bring crowds to the building, but do not convert them to Christ. We arrogantly ignore God’s methods and substitute our own. Too often, these methods glorify us and not God.

Hosea said Israel would pay a severe price for ignoring God. “When they shall go, I will spread my net upon them; I will bring them down as the fowls of the heaven; I will chastise them, as their congregation hath heard. Woe unto them! for they have fled from me: destruction unto them! because they have transgressed against me: though I have redeemed them, yet they have spoken lies against me” (vss. 13-14). We can become so enamored of our own methods that we become half-baked cakes, useless in God’s service. Could there be a price to pay if we do?

## Ingratitude

After all God had done for Israel, she chose to ignore him. He had constantly cared for and provided for them. The nation began as a gift from God to their first king, Jeroboam I. Because of the United Kingdom's descent into idolatry, God told Jeroboam that he would receive ten of the tribes. "And it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that is right in my sight, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did; that I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee" (1 Kings 11:38). But none of Israel's kings was faithful to God. They all led the nation down the wrong path. "They have not cried unto me with their heart" (vs. 14). "They rebel against me" (vs. 14). "They imagine mischief against me" (vs. 15). "They return, but not to the Most High" (vs. 16).

The sin of ingratitude is often underestimated. It is at the root of most of the sins we commit. We tend to forget what we owe God. The apostle Paul said that the Gentile world had ignored the evidence for God and "glorified him not as God, **neither were thankful**" (Rom. 1:21. Emphasis mine, PLG). This lack of gratitude caused them to become "vain in their imaginations" and to profess themselves to be wise, when they were actually fools. They began to worship the creature rather than the creator, and then spiraled downhill into complete moral decadence (Rom. 1:22-31). When a person fails to appreciate what God has done, he has started down a path that eventually leads to his destruction.

God has provided his church with the most powerful weapon in existence—his Word. It is completely capable of doing what God sent it to do. "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall

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prosper in the thing whereto I sent it" (Isa. 55:11). The sword of the Spirit is all we need "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12). How ungrateful we must appear when we abandon that weapon, and try to use one of our making! How tragic when churches choose to ignore the Bible and go with their own ideas! It shows a lack of appreciation for what God has given us. Ingratitude for what God has provided will cause us to become half-baked cakes, useless in his service.

## **Conclusion**

Let us not repeat the mistakes Israel made. Let us never be guilty of mixing ourselves among the people. Let's not allow pride to make us into "silly doves" who trust men instead of God. And let's not allow ingratitude to keep us from crying unto God with our whole heart. May we never become "cakes not turned" that God will someday have to throw out.

## **Biographical Sketch**

Phil Grear was born in Parkersburg, WV and graduated from Parkersburg South High School. He graduated from Harding University in 1974 and since then has preached for churches in Sissonville, WV (1974-1976), Prosperity, WV (1976-1979), Farmington, WV (1979-1986), Cambridge, OH (1986-2000) and East High St. in Springfield, OH (2000-present), where he also serves as an elder.

Phil holds two Gospel meetings per year, and has made mission trips to Italy, Cuba and Scotland. He is a staff writer for *West Virginia Christian* and associate editor of *Upon This Rock*. He is the author of a book entitled *Probing the Prophets*. He has worked at West Virginia Christian Youth Camp for twenty-five years. He is on the Board of Directors of Midwestern Children's Home.

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Phil has been married to his wife, Darleen, for thirty years, and they are the parents of two daughters, Amy Andrick of Galloway, OH and Katie Gilchrist of Moundsville, WV. Amy's husband, Luke, is a computer technician. Katie's husband, Jack, is a student at the West Virginia School of Preaching. They have two granddaughters, Joanna and Emily Andrick.

# At Ease in Zion

By E. Claude Gardner

It has been reported that since 1957 the buying power of money has today doubled, yet happy people remain **one** in **three**. Materialism does not make one happy.

## Exordium – Amos 6:1-7

“Zion” is Jerusalem; “Samaria” and “Joseph” refer to Israel. This “woe” is against complacency. Three nations (vs.2) had been destroyed which suggested that God’s people would not be exempt.

God’s people are rebuked for being more interested in **physical** luxuries than the **spiritual** needs. They were “not grieved for the afflictions of Joseph.”

Their complacency, riches and self-indulgence are described in five ways. They lie on beds of ivory and lolled on divans. These who were rich leaders ate a delightful menu of lamb and calves, which may have been taken from the poor. They had a “chant” accompanied by instruments of music like David did with divine worship (cf. 2 Chron. 29:25). The rich drank wine in bowls and enjoyed chief ointment.

Because of their being “at ease,” Amos prophesied the kingdom would be taken in to captivity. “Therefore now shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them that stretched themselves shall be removed” (vs. 7). Amos introduced their plight by stating “therefore,” which refers to their complacency and injustice described in verses 4-6.

## Materialism Was the Chief Cause of Complacency

Materialism is not owning possessions but the **attitude** toward them. Great servants of God amassed much wealth as did Abraham and Job. Job is described as wealthy but approved of God.

His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east...And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that *there is* none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?" (Job 1:3, 8)

One can be rich if he follows the Lord's instruction. "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Tim. 6:17). It is unnecessary to take a "vow of poverty." One does not become materialistic because of owning land, houses, stocks and a savings account.

## Examples of Materialism

Several examples both in the Old and New testaments define being materialistic. When the servants of Abraham and Lot had difficulties, Abraham proposed that he and Lot go separate ways. After Abraham gave his nephew the first choice, Lot made a materialistic choice of choosing the better land. By doing so, he pitched his tent toward wicked Sodom. This wrong choice of where he lived cost him his wife (Gen. 13:8-13; Luke 17:32).

Jonah finally delivered the warning to Nineveh and then sat down under a gourd vine that God prepared. He

waited to “see what would become of the city.” When a worm “smote the gourd,” he became angry. God remonstrated with him for being more concerned with a physical plant than over the destiny of a great city (Jonah 4:1-11).

Martha, the immaculate housekeeper, exhibited more concern over “things” than the spiritual opportunity of being in the presence of Christ. The Great Teacher taught that the spiritual is more important than “things.”

Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, “Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me.” And Jesus answered and said unto her, “Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:38-42)

These cases and many others warn against materialism.

## **Congregations at Ease in Zion**

Here are symptoms of congregational problems: If a church is merely interested in “holding our own” year in and year out, it is time to ask if it is at “east in Zion.” Attendance may remain the same.

A church boasts of increased numbers but it has just “swollen” because several from other congregations have transferred. Also, most of the baptisms are the children of the members. Be thankful for these new members, but be concerned about others.

“At ease” is a church that does not reach the local non-Christians. There must be a plan to invite, teach and evangelize the local people. A local congregation is included in the Great Commission that commands us to go into “all the world.”

A church is failing when it does not take an aggressive stand against all sins that harm the church and families. Strong teaching is important on abortion, the gay movement, same-sex marriage, drugs, etc. The church that ignores these is “at ease in Zion.”

## **Tests for Individual Christians**

Here are pertinent questions for individuals to weigh as to whether they are giving priority to the material and physical over the spiritual and eternal.

1. Am I spending more time with newspapers, magazines, TV and telephone than the Bible and Bible study classes?
2. Am I more interested in schools, legitimate clubs and organizations than the Lord’s church? By attendance, money, projects, getting new members?
3. Am I concerned about giving more to the IRS than to the church and good causes?
4. Am I giving more to many causes than to the church? This includes charity, vacations, recreation, newspapers and magazines.
5. Am I more concerned with my personal family than of the family of God, the church?
6. Am I concerned about soul-saving of neighbors? The song, “You never mentioned Him to me.”
7. Am I contented instead of always “wishing” for something material (Phil. 4:11)?
8. Am I more interested in money, land, houses, cattle, cars, stocks than going to the heavenly home (Matt. 16:26; 1 Tim. 6:10)?

## How to Overcome a Materialistic Spirit

One should assess and recognize if there is guilt, then REPENT. “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent” (Rev. 3:19). The Laodecian church was “at ease” because the Lord said it was “self-satisfied.” “Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:17).

The spiritual person must help others who are in sin. “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1).

A Christian must make a conscious endeavor to be more spiritual and less materialistic. “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, *even* as unto babes in Christ” (1 Cor. 3:1; cf. Rom. 7:14; 12:1-2; 1 Pet. 2:5).

Churches and Christians can overcome complacency – being at east in Zion – by joyful determination to go to heaven by the grace of God. “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:1-2). A Christian will “sow to the Spirit.” “For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Gal. 6:8).

# Return Unto the Lord

## Hosea 14:1-9

By Matthias Collins

### A Perpetual Plea

After enduring numerous incidents of negligence and disobedience on the part of the chosen nation of Israel, God found it necessary to continue his plea for them to return unto him. The term “necessary” is defined: “Needed for the continuing existence or functioning of something; essential; indispensable” (*American Heritage* 877). This plea was indispensable in that Jesus Christ the savior of the world would come forth from a chosen nation, due to the “determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23). At this point in the history of Israel, it was known that they were specifically chosen. The survival of this nation plays a significant role, despite their unfaithfulness, in our understanding the perpetual call to return.

God provided Abram a snippet of the Gospel by saying “in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). Although Abram did not live to see the entire plan unfold, those of us living today as subjects of faith perceive the plan as having come to fruition (Gal. 3:7,8). Being a generation of retrospective advantage, the contemplation of such an accomplishment demands the idea of a constraint that was placed upon God, by God himself. In other words, God was constrained to continually beg for that particular nation to return, irrespective of their stubbornness, without the possibility of ever putting them away. In Exodus 32:9-14, Moses addresses God as a pledger without the option of renegotiating a pledge. “Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own

self..." (vs. 13). Basically, the annihilation of this group was not an option. God could not make a great nation of Moses because he had made the promise to Abraham.

## **A Snare of Grace**

Verse 7 of Hosea Chapter 14 indicates the blessings being given to an exclusive group, particularly "the remnant." The apostle Paul states this as such, "Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sands of the sea, a remnant shall be saved" (Rom. 9:27). Hailey says, "'They,'" those who dwell under the shadow and influence of the new Israel, will be so influenced by him that they will be caused to live and bear fruit also" (183). The pronoun "They" is limited to the very subjects who are willing to do as instructed. On the other hand, "the transgressors shall fall therein" (vs. 9). How tragic it is to fall from a position of advantage. The "transgressor" here is one who is not without knowledge of the "ways" of God. Therefore, the word "therein" signifies a fall from an advantageous position. Paul notes the position of the Israelites referring to them as the children of promise. "Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen" (Rom. 9:4,5). It was also set forth in the first chapter of Romans, the wrath of God upon those who shared in such grace, yet chose to "hold the truth in unrighteousness" (vs. 18). Exhortation was given to the Thessalonian brethren concerning the day of the Lord in which many would perish "because they received not the love of the truth..." (2 Thess. 2:10). In other words, they received the ways of God but did not love the ways of God. Although placed in a favorable position, rejection of the ways of God constitutes a forfeiture of grace. The end result is a delusional state that cannot

comprehend nor take advantage of such favor. The prophet Jeremiah attributes this forfeiture of grace to a “perpetual backsliding” (Jer. 8:5). The discrepancy provided in the 7<sup>th</sup> verse of Jeremiah Chapter 8 allows us to perceive the extent of the self-induced delusion. A basic explanation would be that an animal, a species of inferior intelligence, has more intelligence than persons to whom “...the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises” were given. The paradoxical subtitle should then be understood as exhortation that will enable us to cherish and diligently maintain our favorable position so that no man “fail of the grace of God” (Heb. 12:15). In Hebrews 6:4-6 an appropriate scenario is provided that manifests the favor given and the fall of anyone who denies the priesthood of Christ.

## **A Permanent Promise**

I believe the majority would suppose that a perpetual plea and a permanent promise would produce perseverance. However, this combination of grace has in many instances produced the opposite. The Hebrew writer, in the following verses of chapter 6, encourages the saints to follow Abraham, who through patience obtained the promise. Encouragement was also given by setting forth a divine attribute limited to God himself, the fact that it is impossible for God to lie. “For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us, Which hope we have as an anchor to the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is

for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” (Heb. 6:16-20). The Hebrew writer uses the promises made to Abraham that have been fulfilled, they themselves being heirs of the promise, to impress upon them the immutability of God as it relates to the hope set before them. The saints being addressed in this Hebrew letter are products of the promises made in Hosea.

I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon. Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found (Hos. 14:4-8).

God kept his promises to Abraham and the saints being addressed are the very evidence of his immutability. All saints today are beneficiaries of the perpetual plea of God. To avoid the snare of grace we are encouraged to “show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end” as characteristic of our forefathers. The promises made and fulfilled provide for us a strong consolation as we hope in Christ.

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## **Biographical Sketch**

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# **The Plumb Line**

## **Amos 7:1-9; 8:1-3; 9:1**

By Terry Jones

During a time when Israel and Judah were enjoying success and prosperity both politically and economically, the prophet Amos came on the scene proclaiming the doom of the nation. Concerning his call to be a prophet, Amos explained, “I was not a prophet, nor was I a son of a prophet, but I was a herdsman and a tender of sycamore fruit. Then the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to My people Israel’” (7:14-15). The reason God called Amos to prophesy in Israel was because they had forsaken God. With their prosperity came luxury and corruption in government and justice, both domestically and morally. The poor were crushed and abused by the greed of the wealthy. Religion had degenerated into a commercial racket with Jehovah being reduced to the level of a pagan god in the public mind.

Amos was commissioned by God to go to Bethel, the religious center of the north, and pronounce their doom. Bethel was a small town ten miles north of Jerusalem where Jeroboam had placed a golden calf. Their religious and moral bankruptcy had come up before God and he was ready to render judgment against them. In view of that, let us notice three things about Israel revealed by Amos.

### **The Crookedness of Israel (Amos 7:7-9)**

In chapters Seven, Eight and Nine, God showed Amos five visions that depict Israel’s true condition and impending judgment. The first vision (7:1-3) is of a swarm of locusts that devour the crops. Amos cries out to the Lord

on behalf of Israel and God hears his prayer and relents so that the locust plague does not happen. The second vision (7:4-6) was of a great fire that “consumed the great deep.” Again, Amos cried out to the Lord and the fire was averted. The third vision (7:7-9) was that of a plumb line that will be the focus of our attention for this assignment.

**What the Lord Showed Amos (7:7).** “Thus He showed me: Behold, the Lord stood on a wall made with a plumb line, with a plumb line in His hand.” A plumb line is an instrument used by carpenters and masons to help them construct a perfectly straight wall. It consisted of a string weighted at the end which when hanging down can be used to determine the vertical perfection of a wall. Since the pull of gravity will stretch the string straight down, it is considered a perfect vertical standard. It is interesting that the plumb line used to construct a perfectly vertical wall was also used to detect flaws in a wall that needed to be destroyed.

The plumb line was a symbol of judgment in the Old Testament (cf. 2 Kings 21:13; Isa. 34:11). Amos saw the Lord standing on the wall with the plumb line in his hand that represented a standard of measurement, which was the Law of Moses.

**What the Lord Said to Amos (7:8-9).** The first thing the Lord said was, “Amos, what do you see?” Of course, the prophet replied that he saw a plumb line. Secondly, the Lord said, “Behold, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of My people Israel...” The wickedness of the nation had now drawn the ire of the Lord. He is seen measuring up Israel, revealing her sinful departure from the Law of God that will bring about destruction. God had tolerated Israel’s sinfulness as long as he possibly could, but now his patience had expired. “I will not pass by them anymore.” Just like God’s patience ran out on the ancient world of Noah’s day (Gen. 6:5-7), and on the wicked cities of

Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19), his patience had expired with Israel, and he was sizing them up for his wrath.

## **The Corruption of Israel (Amos 8:1-3)**

**The Ripeness of God's People (vs. 1).** In this fourth vision, the Lord showed Amos "a basket of summer fruit." That it was summer fruit reveals that the time of growth and maturity had passed and now it was ripe for harvest. "There can be no doubt as to what it symbolizes for God Himself has given the interpretation. Just as a basket of summer fruit indicates the reaper has gone through the vineyard and that the time for growing and developing has ended so God the reaper has passed through Israel and her time has ended" (Butler 353). God had allowed plenty of time for his people to repent and return, but instead, they were now ripened for punishment. "The ripening process is (1) gradual in its outset, (2) swift in its conclusion, (3) ruinous in its end, and (4) is irreversible. So this basket of late summer fruit was a good illustration of the corruption of Israel" (Smith 193).

**The Running Out of God's Patience (vs. 2).** The Lord explained to Amos that the vision of the basket of summer fruit indicated that it was time for Israel to meet its doom. "The end has come upon My people Israel; I will not pass by them anymore." As in Chapter Seven, Verse Eight, the Lord repeats that he would no longer pass by Israel. "The Lord...is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9). However, Israel had used up all her chances and now God's patience had been exhausted. The words of the prophet Jeremiah seem applicable here. "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved" (Jer. 8:20).

**The Reality of God's Prophecy (vs. 3).** Because of Israel's wickedness and unfaithfulness, the patience of God had run out and his people were ripened for judgment. Now

God revealed to Amos the devastating destruction that loomed on the horizon. “And the songs of the temple shall be wailing in that day, says the Lord God – Many dead bodies everywhere, they shall throw them out in silence.” In the Temple, the songs would be turned to wailing, and the joy of worship would turn to lamentation. The dead bodies would be so numerous that burial would be impossible, causing them to be unceremoniously thrown out in silence.

The Word of God itself is the best commentary on these words:

But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess. I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them. (Deut. 30:17-20)

God made it very clear to his people that the worship of idols would not be tolerated. Yet, Israel had bowed itself to Baal, the god of the Canaanites, and was worshiping idol calves at Bethel.

## The Collapse of Israel (Amos 9:1)

Chapter Nine begins with the fifth and final vision that God gave Amos. Here it was revealed to the prophet that the crookedness and corruption of Israel would lead to the collapse of Israel. There are three things worthy of our consideration in verse one.

**The Place of The Lord (vs. 1a).** Amos declared, “I saw the Lord standing by the altar...” It is not clear whether this is the altar in the Temple in Jerusalem, or the altar in the temple of Baal in Bethel erected by Jeroboam I (1 Kings 12:26-33). In either event, the Lord standing beside the altar symbolized all the idolatry of which Israel was guilty and which God is going to judge and punish.

**The Command of The Lord (vs. 1b).** The Lord said, “Strike the doorposts, that the thresholds may shake, and break them on the heads of them all. I will slay the last of them with the sword.” “...the point is that at the command of the Lord the house of Beth-el is smitten from the top, the capital crumbling and crashing on the heads of the people” (Hailey 123). Israel had forsaken God, preferring a perverted style of worship to the golden calves, but God was going to put an end to their sacrilege by collapsing their place of worship upon their own heads.

**The Fleeing from the Lord (vs. 1c).** When this judgment of God would come, the natural tendency of the people would be to run, but their efforts would be to no avail. “...He who flees from them shall not get away, and he who escapes from them shall not be delivered.” In verses 2-4, God declares that from the tallest mountain to the deepest sea there is not a single place one could hide from his wrath.

During a time of great wickedness and rebellion among God’s people, he called upon Amos to prophecy concerning their doom. God had laid Israel alongside his plumb line, which revealed their crookedness and

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corruption, and would lead to their collapse. In his final judgment, the Lord's plumb line will be present to determine whether we have been faithful or have fallen. Jesus said, "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him – the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day" (John 12:48).

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# Prepare to Meet Thy God

By William Woodson

Perhaps the most well known verses in Amos are:

I have overthrown *some* of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning: yet have ye not returned to me, saith the Lord. Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: *and* because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel (Amos 4:11-12).

The frightful challenge “prepare to meet thy God” echoes through the centuries. The significance of such preparation holds true for people today as well as in the eighth century B.C. when these words were first declared from God by Amos to Israel. We study the thought of the verse in its immediate and the larger context of the chapter.

## I. Immediate Context: God alerts Israel, 4:1-11.

A. The ringing sound of God’s imperative demands attention: “Hear this word” (4:1; cf. 3:1, 13; 5:1; 8:4).

God knew his people could hear him and could learn from him if they chose to do so. His will had been declared by Moses in the long ago; then it was written for all who would to hear being read in great meetings of the people. National leaders such as Joshua had cried for his people to choose whom they would serve; Saul had failed because he would not hear the Word of God concerning the death of the Amalekites; David had sinned by refusing the hear,

“Thou shalt not commit adultery”; Israel had broken away from Judah because it did not hear the call for unity in the worship in the Temple where God’s name had been recorded; prophets again and again had cried to Judah and Israel to turn from their wrongdoing and to return to God. Now, to Israel the plea comes again!

B. The failure to hear the Word of God brought great harm to Israel (4:2-11). In a time of plenty, following conquests by her king, Jeroboam, instead of being thankful to God for his goodness, Israel had become fat and uncaring, oppressing the poor, crushing the needy and crying that their masters (“husbands” RSV) might bring them drink.

The “**holiness**” of God will not abide such iniquity. When God says he has sworn by his “holiness,” he means he has sworn by himself” (Amos 6:8), that is, by his divine nature. No stronger assurance could be given. The days will come when Israel will be taken away—with hooks, indicating the torturous way they would go into captivity. Those panicked in the crushing assault will scurry to this break in a wall or that, all to no avail.

The false trust that had been placed in corrupted worship sites will be dashed in the coming struggle. The children of Israel had loved to have their religion so that the form could be observed while the meaning in life could be ignored. In a stinging exposure, God showed they had in effect cried one could observe the hollow rituals at Bethel and then transgress, or as one writer explained, “behave as a criminal.” At Gilgal, with the same errant confidence, they could even multiply their transgression and that without worry.

In an effort to turn Israel from its waywardness, God had sent famine, drought, caused people to wander from place to place; no repentance was forthcoming. The hot, dry wind called the sirocco brought “blasting,” scorching or burning of grain and “mildew,” an uncertain plant disease,

both of which led to crop failure. When gardens and vineyards increased, the “palmer worm” or locust devoured them. “Pestilence,” some fatal scourge or epidemic, viewed by some as possibly cholera, smallpox, bubonic plague, dysentery or pneumonic plague, had swept Israel; young men died by the sword, horses were taken away, contaminated camps were malodorous; some had been overthrown as had been Sodom and Gomorrah, but Israel had not repented. As a “firebrand” mercifully rescued from destruction, still Israel had not returned to God.

## **II. The stubborn refusal of the rebellious people earlier discussed would be condemned for their failure to repent.**

Echoing through chapters One and Two, God charges seven groups of people “For three transgressions, and for four.” Equally firm are the assurances God will not “turn” from the punishment of these wrong doers (1:3, 6, 9 11, 13; 2:1).

## **III. The stubborn refusal of Israel to repent, 4:6-11.**

How welcome it must have been for Israel to hear what God had said of Judah:

Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away ***the punishment thereof;*** because they have despised the law of the LORD, and have not kept his commandments, and their lies caused them to err, after the which their fathers have walked: 5 But I will send a fire upon Judah, And it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem.  
(Amos 2:4-5)

Yes, Judah certainly deserved all God would give that errant group! And they well deserve what they get.

Again and again, God charges that sinful Israel: “yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord” (4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11). The warnings, the difficulties, all of the reproof and efforts to correct, have not been heard. Patience and time to repent have been bestowed to no benefit. Now, God’s holiness and the truth of his Word by Amos converge to the solemn declaration that the time to meet “thy God” has come.

#### **IV. Israel must prepare to meet God, 4:12-13.**

A. God begins his final word to Israel with a conclusion and a promise.

With the word, “Therefore,” God draws the conclusion that further efforts will be to no avail. The entire nation in the days of the Judges had turned from God, known major difficulties, pled for help, received it from God in the various judges, then soon went back to their former ways. One readily sees the similarity with Israel in the time of Amos.

God then makes a promise: “thus will I do unto thee, O Israel.” The rightness of his promise in view of their sinfulness is set forth most vividly in the visions of the plumbline and the basket of summer fruit in Chapter 7. The plumbline (7:7-8) showed the exact line against which Israel would be tried. The nation has been built of God, along with what was now Judah, by the hand of God when the nation came out of Egypt. The standard of God had guided that construction. Now, a time for careful checking had come. The plumbline showed how far Israel had erred from the right way; Amos could and did see the error. God will not pass by this crooked wall any more. Now, the flawed wall must be destroyed: the high places will be

made desolate, the sanctuaries will be laid waste, God will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.

The basket of summer fruit (8:1) shows the harvest is beginning, the summer of possibility is now passing. The gathered fruit means the end is near; God has, as it were, gathered all that is needed to show the guilt of Israel. Again, as with the plumbline (7:8), God declares, “I will not pass by them any more” (8:2). The affects of God’s refusal to wait any more for stubborn Israel to repent are set forth in vivid detail in Chapter 8.

B. The preparation is obligatory, is necessary immediately and cannot be refused. Israel was to prepare the manna on the sixth day in double portion since no manna would be given on the seventh (Exod. 16:5); the nation was to prepare food for the crossing of the Jordan into the promised land (Josh. 1:11); Samuel admonished the nation to return to the Lord with all of its heart, to put away the strange gods among it, and to prepare its heart unto the Lord, and to serve him only (1 Sam. 7:13); priests were to prepare the shew bread every Sabbath (1 Chron. 9:32); David had prayed that the nation would prepare its heart to be devoted to the Lord (1 Chron. 29:18); Rehoboam, of Judah, had not prepared his heart to seek the Lord (2 Chron. 12:14). Now, Israel must make ready although unwillingly for the rendezvous with God.

The meeting with God will not be one favorable to Israel. There were meetings with God without hostility: Moses told Pharaoh the nation must leave Egypt because God had met with them and they were to go three days into the desert to sacrifice unto the Lord (Exod. 5:3); Moses brought the nation to meet with God at the time of the giving of the Law (Exod. 19:17).

There were also meetings where hostility was present: Joshua planned an ambush against Ai whereby his men approached the hostile camp; its warriors came out against their foes; Joshua’s men fled in mock fear; the men of Ai

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fell into the trap and were smitten so that not one escaped (Josh. 8:5, 14, 22). Josiah foolishly went to meet Pharaoh-necoh of Egypt in battle and was killed when the king saw him (2 Kings 23:29).

The meeting Israel was to prepare for with God would be with the outraged holiness of God, now spurned for years, who would rise in hostility to the evil that had endured far too long.

The dreaded meeting would be with the true God of Israel, not the man made images worshipped for so long. The covenant of love and ownership God had with the descendants of Abraham, now still in force with apostate Israel, would oblige the errant nation to reckon with the God they had refused to serve. God, however, had not forgotten the apostasy; now the judgment is sure.

God called the nation “O Israel,” after the long ago change of the name of Jacob. Jacob, the second child of Isaac and Rebekah, was born holding the heel of his just-born brother Esau, with the implication being Jacob could trip up Esau by holding his heel in walking or running. After Jacob had tricked Esau into giving up his blessing as the first born for a “bowl of beans,” NASB renders the words of Isaac and Esau:

And he said, “Your brother came deceitfully, and has taken away your blessing.” Then he said, “Is he not rightly named Jacob, for he has supplanted me these two times? He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing.” (Gen 27:35-36)

Later, God changed Jacob’s (“supplanter”) name to Israel (“God prevails”): “And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed” (Gen. 32:28).

The identification “O Israel” hearkens back to that time when the people of God had been linked with the one who prevailed with God and enjoyed his favor. But, the nation in the day of Amos was unworthy of the link with the transformed, renamed Jacob-Israel. Now the nation will not prevail with God; rather, God will prevail in their punishment for sin.

God affirms his right to so punish Israel by declaring he had formed the mountains, created the winds, declared his thought unto man, showed his presence in the making of morning darkness and treading down the high places upon the earth (Cf. Deut. 32:13). The combining of these great displays of God’s power shows the might God has, even now to move against Israel, a might than cannot be evaded or denied.

## **Conclusion**

This great admonition, warning, alert to coming danger, still rings with awareness and alarm. Within a few years, Israel was to meet God in the coming of the Assyrians. The northern kingdom was no more! The nation that had trusted in false gods, that had forgotten and refused the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, was gone from the pages of history.

The lesson for today is a lesson warning of not only political, but spiritual danger. The psalmist put it best: “The wicked shall be turned into hell, *and* all the nations that forget God” (Psa. 9:17). Not just temporal or political judgment is contemplated, but the eternal hell of God’s judgment. Ancient Israel refused to hear the warning, may it not be so among us!

# Obadiah – Prophet of Brotherly Love (Overview of Obadiah)

By William Woodson

The vision of Obadiah. Thus saith the Lord GOD concerning Edom; We have heard a rumour from the LORD, and an ambassador is sent among the heathen, Arise ye, and let us rise up against her in battle (Obad. 1:1).

**OBADIAH** No personal history of the prophet Obadiah is given. The date of the book has been difficult, if not impossible, to determine with convincing accuracy. Probably it is best to regard it as written during the reign of Jehoram (848-841 B.C.), but many maintain a date in 587 or so.

Of events in the days of Jehoram (Joram), one reads: “In his days Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah, and made a king over themselves” (2 Kings 8:20). The king tried to suppress the revolt, but it continued (vss. 21-22).

Elsewhere one reads: “Moreover the LORD stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines, and of the Arabians, that *were* near the Ethiopians: And they came up into Judah, and brake into it, and carried away all the substance that was found in the king’s house, and his sons also, and his wives; so that there was never a son left him, save Jehoahaz, the youngest of his sons” (2 Chronicles 21:16-17). This, most likely, was the event for which Edom was faulted (Obad. 1:11).

**EDOM** Edom had a tortured and lengthy history with the Israelites, most of it hostile. Esau [“Thus dwelt Esau in

mount Sē-ir: Esau is Edom.” Gen. 36:8:] was the father of the Edomites in Mount Sē-ir (Gen. 36:9, 43). The descendants of Esau destroyed the Horites before them, succeeded them and dwelt in the land thereof (Deut. 2:22). The land of the Edomites lay south of the lower end of the Dead Sea [divided east and west by the Wadi –el Arabah], down to the Gulf of Aqabah, about 110 miles. Opening hostilities apparently sprang from the refusal of the Edomites to allow Moses and the nation en route from Egypt to the promised land to pass along the “king’s highway” through Edom. Moses explained, “And he [the king of Edom] said, Thou shalt not go through. And Edom came out against him with much people, and with a strong hand” (Num. 20:20). The Edomites are mentioned briefly during the reign of David and Solomon (2 Sam. 8:13-14; 1 Kings 11:14-25. cf. LXX has “Edom” instead of “Syria” in vs. 25). In the reign of Jehoshaphat there was no king of Edom, only a “deputy” [“deputy of the king” NKJV] (1 Kings 11:47). Later, one reads of the Edomites: “For again the Edomites had come and smitten Judah, and carried away captives” (2 Kings 28:17). Against this backdrop of struggle, captivity, rebellion, etc., the tangled history of the Edomite and Israelite history unfolded. Of one phase of this on going struggle, and evidently a most compelling one from the standpoint of Amos, the book under study was written.

**THE BOOK OF OBADIAH** The chapter is arranged in the following outline: The coming destruction of Edom, 1-9; the cause of Edom’s judgment, 10-14; the coming day of the Lord, 15-21.

## **Destruction of Edom vss.1-9**

The following discussion is a vision in which the Lord God speaks what is to come to pass. The recipients of the prophetic notice of destruction are the people of Edom. The “We” most likely includes the prophet and the people of

Israel who will be comforted and encouraged by the report being delivered. A messenger has been sent to the nations around Edom, admonishing them to rise, with Israel and others, to battle against a common foe.

God esteems Edom as small and despised among the nations; not so of Edom's self-importance! The high, craggy heights and valleys of the Arabah have led them to think themselves invulnerable to attack. "No one can bring me down" (paraphrase of vs. 3).

Edom exalts herself as if she were an eagle with a nest among the stars. God, however, can reach to that nest and bring the inhabitants thereof down! Thieves and robbers could come, no doubt had on occasion, and could steal as they desired. To be sure, in spite of the confidence, the things of Esau, i.e., the things of Edom, can be searched out ["pillaged" RSV], his treasure searched out as a prelude to capture.

Even those in league with Edom had opened the border of the doomed land; they have deceived and prevailed. Those who ate bread, a sign of unity and mutual regard, would wound the beleaguered nation.

God, who can and does use nations to do his bidding, poses the rhetorical question: Shall not God be able to destroy the wise men of Edom, the ones with understanding in Esau? Can God not do what robbers and thieves and allies were already doing? In his divine presence, the wise men of Edom will be dismayed and the stratagems of deliverance by man's wisdom will come to nothing. In fact, slaughter will cut off even the best and wisest of the people of Mount Esau! The destruction is sure.

## **Cause of Destruction vss. 10-14.**

Five specific wrongs of Edom are cited, followed by the assurance of judgment to come because of these sins.

1. Edom practiced violence against his brother Jacob, vs. 10. The violence against God's people was

ultimately against him, and this would cover Edom with shame and bring its being cut off from life and God.

2. Edom stood idly by and saw the pillage of Jerusalem, vs. 11. Strangers carried away captives, entered the gates of the holy city, and cast lots for portions thereof, and Edom was as one of them.
3. Edom looked on the day of Jacob's being made a stranger, rejoiced when the children of Judah were destroyed, and spoke proudly in the day of his distress, vs. 12. Utmost disregard was thereby exhibited for God's people.
4. Edom entered the gates of God's people in their day of calamity, looked on their day of calamity and laid hands on the substance, vs. 13. Not content to leave strangers to do the damage, Edom entered the gates of the troubled city, gazed at the distress and took what could be stolen while the city was helpless.
5. Edom stood in the crossroads to cut off those attempting to escape destruction and delivered up the survivors, vs. 14. The flight of those who were panicked was cut off by Edomites; those captured by Edom were turned over as prisoners of the invaders.

The day of the Lord will bring punishment to Edom; as Edom has done so it will be done to him. The drinking on the holy mountain, in opposing Judah and Israel, will be turned against Edom: the wine of God's wrath will come, will be swallowed and Edom will be no more. Joel explains the day of the Lord: "Alas for the day! for the day of the LORD *is* at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come" (Joel 1:15). In such a day, the overly confident, but really weak and despised nation of Edom, will feel the power of the Almighty showing his anger at the wrongdoing of this nation that ill treated and abused

and helped to abuse, without concern, the people of God. This will not go unpunished.

## **Deliverance of Zion vss. 17-21.**

In the same way that God will bring judgment on Edom, he will bring deliverance to Mount Zion, he will bring holiness, and the house of Jacob will possess their possessions. Just as the future held destruction for Edom, the future also held deliverance, holiness and possessions for Judah. Edom's conspiracy with her enemies would not destroy God's nation.

In a vivid figure of speech, the house of Jacob and the house of Joseph were a fire and a flame; and the house of Esau was a field of stubble, ready for the burning. The vengeance on Edom, likened to a field of stubble burned with fire and flame, would devour them. The reason: the Lord hath spoken it!

The land of Edom, that once had false hopes of invincibility, would be held by others. The Philistines, Ephraim and Benjamin would in God's plan and time possess what once was thought to be unassailable! Edom would be gone, and the land would be held and used by others.

The temporary captivity of those who had been pillaged by others would not be for long. In fact, the land of the ancient Canaanites, even to Zarephath [Cf. 1 Kings 17:9, 10] would be possessed by God's people.

Deliverers would come to Mount Zion to judge the Mount of Esau; the kingdom shall be the Lord's. In the immediate context of the time, this would refer to the time when the temporary devastation of Judah and Jerusalem, aided by the Edomites, would be overcome and the people of God would again be at rest in Jerusalem, while Edom would fail and the Jewish people would see it. With this assurance the Book of Obadiah closes.

## **Prophet of Brotherly Love ~ By Woodson**

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In conclusion, one may observe several lessons from this book.

1. The lesson that pride goes before a fall.
2. Cruelty, bitterness and violence can and will be punished.
3. Sharing in wrong-doing, although one may only stand aside without instigating the wrong, makes one “even...as one of them.”
4. As a nation or an individual sows, so will it or he/she reap.
5. In view of a time of judgment, one should be warned of the danger in prospect, and turn to God for righteousness.

# The Anguish of God

By Brad Poe

I thank the elders for the church of Christ at Hillview Terrace who oversee the West Virginia School of Preaching, and Denver Cooper who directs this lectureship, for the invitation to contribute to this year's program on the prophets.

## Introduction

Our text has been called a “parenthetical utterance” in Hosea’s prophetic book (Harrison 859). If, by this analysis, 11:1-9 is an outburst from God over what he is about to do to his people, the passage still follows the logical argument of the whole book. There are places in Scripture where, while we read God’s Word, we can almost also hear God’s voice—his tone, his volume, his enunciation. This cry of anguish is one of those places.

## Israel’s Pampered Past

Everyone has been in an unbalanced relationship before, romantic or otherwise. It is possible for one party to invest more, love harder and give freer than the other. God has always been in unbalanced relationships with men—but it is not what you think. Since God is who he is, and man is who he is, man ought to be the one falling all over himself for God. After all, he is too good for us! But, surprisingly, it is the reverse. God is the party who, through history, has always invested more, loved harder and given freer. Our text starts with God chronicling that over-investment with Israel.

## Out of Egypt

By the arrival of Hosea's prophetic career (753-722 B.C.) (Harrison 860), Israel was old enough to have a history and the message of our text begins with a statement from God about that history: "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt." The term *child* denotes "a person from infancy (Exod. 2:6; Judg. 13:5, 7; 1 Sam. 1:22; 4:21) to early manhood (Gen. 34:19; Judg. 17:7, etc.), frequently stressing inexperience or helplessness (1 Sam. 17:34, 42)" (Laetsch 87). The model for the relationship of God to *Israel* that overwhelmed Hosea's message was husband to wife (chaps. 1-3), but here the model is parent to child. The sonship of Israel was declared by God to Moses when Moses prepared his first speech to Pharaoh: "And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: and I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me; and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn" (Exod. 4:22-23).

Every people has a beginning. America can trace its origin back to several events, including the arrival of Christopher Columbus, the Declaration of Independence and the end of the Revolutionary War. With Hosea's voice at our text above, God referenced *Egypt* as the beginning point (Hos. 2:15; 12:9; 13:4; cf. also 9:10). Refreshing Israel's memory about its former historical status as slaves to the Egyptian empire, and God's rescue of them like a father would his boy, helped God to make this case about Israel's failure to requite his *love* more poignant. Of course, God's dealings with the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob extended back before the exodus; we might use another event or transaction to date the origin of Israel as a nation. God, here, cited his care during their movement *out of Egypt* (Exod. 13:16; 16:1; et. al.).

This Scripture not only affirmed a past fact about God's son Israel, it also predicted a future fact about God's Son the Christ. Matthew, by the Spirit, began the narrative of Herod's terror, Joseph's escape with Christ into Egypt and subsequent return into the land of Israel by citing Hosea 11:1: "When he [Joseph] arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: and was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son" (2:14-15).<sup>1</sup>

## **They Sacrificed Unto Baalim**

One call ought to have sufficed. But the call of Israel in Egypt was not the only call. Moses was arguably Israel's first national prophet (Deut. 18:15-22), but he was certainly not the last and in between Moses and Christ (Acts 3:22), from Joshua to John, stands a legacy of men and women who held the prophetic office to Israel and *called*.<sup>2</sup> However, *as they called them, so they went from them*. The more God called, the more Israel went. The harder God coaxed, the farther Israel strayed. The more prophets God commissioned, the more stubbornly Israel rebelled.

The degree of Israel's insubordination was measured by its acceptance of the religion of Baal: *they sacrificed unto Baalim*. Idolatry was forbidden by the first two commandments of the Decalogue (Exod. 20:3-4). And idolatry was the accusation from Hosea that launched his prophecy (chapters 1-3). The crime seeps into every crack and crevice of the rest of these speeches (3:4; 4:13, 17, 19; 8:4; 8:4-6, 11, 13; 10:2, 5, 8; 12:11; 13:2, 4; 14:2, 3, 8).

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<sup>1</sup> "The sojourn in Egypt, and return to the land, had the same significance in relation to the development of the life of Jesus Christ, as it had to the nation of Israel." C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. Peabody: Hendrikson, 1989: vol. 10, 137.

<sup>2</sup> The prophetic call is a refrain in *Hosea*: 4:5; 6:5; 9:8; 12:10, 13.

Idolatry probably had many motives, but since Israel was an agrarian society, families sought every advantage to wring a living from the land, which included the adoption of local religious customs used to leverage the native “gods” of the new land to produce crops.<sup>3</sup> Baal was the principal false deity (2:8, 13, 16; 9:10; 13:1). He was a fertility god whose worship involved rituals of gross immorality<sup>4</sup> suggested by other passages in the prophecy (1:2; 2:2 4-5, 7, 10; 3:1-5; 4:11-15; et. al.), though here only the practice of *burned incense to graven images* is named.

### But They Knew Not

God elaborated upon his paternal care for Israel: “I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them. I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love; and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them.”

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<sup>3</sup> God refers to the produce of the land in *Hosea*: 2:5, 8-9; 4:11, 13; 6:11; 7:14; 9:1-2; 10:11; 14:7.

<sup>4</sup> “The book of Hosea can only be understood against the background of Canaanite religion and Israel’s involvement in it. When Israel came into Palestine she came into a land already inhabited for more than a thousand years. She learned farming from the peoples she did not drive out. But Canaanite farming was integrally connected with religious customs that Israel adopted as the Pilgrims learned from the Indians to put two fish on each side of a grain of corn. Subtly the religion crept in on them. ...El, Baal, and Dagon were leading deities in the Canaanite pantheon, but these had their female counterparts in Asherah, Astarte, and Anath. Worship centered in the high place which was an open air shrine with a wooden object to represent the female divinity and a stone object for the male. Priests and sacred persons (male and female) were in attendance. Sacrifices and festivals were regular features. The major object of the rites was to obtain fertility for man, animal and field. Ritual fornication and bestiality were engaged in.” Jack P. Lewis. *The Minor Prophets*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966: 27-28.

*Ephraim* is the favorite name for Israel in the book of Hosea, used 31 times in the 14 chapters.<sup>5</sup> Ephraim was the second son of Joseph (Gen. 41:50-52), one of the 12 tribes, it's geographical boundaries recorded at Joshua Chapter 16 and with Manasseh at Joshua Chapter 17. The city of Shechem lay within it's boundaries—the city that was the center for Canaanite worship and the temple of Baal (Judg. 9:1-6), the site of the rebellion by the northern tribes (1 Kings 12:1-19; 2 Chron. 10:1-11), and the capital of the northern kingdom for awhile (1 Kings 12:25).<sup>6</sup>

The phrase “taking them by their arms” is the reference to the support of a parent for a toddler learning to walk. The term “cords of a man” means “cords with which men are led, more especially children that are weak on their feet in contrast with ropes, with which men control wild, unmanageable beasts...a figurative representation of the paternal, humane guidance of Israel” (Exod. 5:19f; 6:9; 13:17, 21-22; 14:10-13; 15:22-27; Deut. 1:31; 32:10-12) (Keil and Delitzsch, 138). The “lifting of the yoke above the jaws, i.e. to make it easier” (Keil and Delitzsch, 139) is a change from the parental care of a child to the pastoral care of a beast, yet the tenderness is unchanged. God reminded Ephraim that there was a pattern on the historical record if they cared to view it for how he had treated them through their various stages of growth, and apostasy and return and apostasy again.

## Israel’s Dreadful Future

Hosea predicts the sudden, bloody crash to the ground at the end of Israel’s downward spiral. It was a long time coming, but it came. And Hosea’s contemporaries were not

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<sup>5</sup> Israel is called “Ephraim”: 4:17; 5:3, 5, 9, 11-13; 6:4, 10; 7:1, 8, 11; 8:9, 11; 9:3, 8, 11, 13, 16; 10:11; 11:3, 12; 12: 1, 8, 14; 13:1, 12; 14:8.

<sup>6</sup> “The prophet only mentions Ephraim (instead of all Israel), because it was he that made the calves.” H. D. M. Spence and Joseph. S. Exell, eds., *The Pulpit Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans): vol. 13, 331.

the only responsible parties. The first responsible parties came long before—Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:25-33), Omri (1 Kings 16:21-28), Ahab (1 Kings 16:29-34), etc.—whose decisions to institutionalize idolatry set Israel on a track from which she could not escape.

## **The Assyrian Shall Be His King**

Assyria would be God’s disciplinary agent. At first reading, there seems to be an internal discrepancy in *Hosea* since at 8:13 and 9:3, 6, it is declared, “Ephraim shall return to Egypt” and here it is declared, “He [Ephraim] shall not return to Egypt.” However the statements are reconciled when we understand that in the passages of 8:13 and 9:3, 6 “Egypt was merely a type of bondage while here [at 11:5] the literal Egypt is in view” (Smith 265). Hosea reinforced that understanding at 11:5: “He shall not return into the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king.”<sup>7</sup> The atrocities against them would be like Egypt in kind but more severe in degree. Assyria would be “another bondage” (Keil and Delitzsch 140).

## **The Sword Shall Abide**

The *sword* was the principal weapon in ancient warfare—like the musket of the Revolutionary War or the M-16 of the Vietnam War. War, symbolized by the sword, “shall abide on [Ephraim’s] cities.” The word translated “abide” here is “to slash; to turn in a circle; to dance” (Laetsch 87). Like a whirling sharp sword, the Assyrian troop movement through the northern tribes would slice through everything in its path. *Branches* is translated “districts” in the NKJB (the KJV gives the same word as an equivalent translation). Other commentators are correct in

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<sup>7</sup> Egypt and Assyria appear together in other verses in the book (7:11; 11:11; 12:1). The relationship between the three also involved Israel’s attempt at alliance with Egypt for rescue from Assyria (2 Kings 17:4; Hos. 7:11; cf. also 2 Kings 18:21; Isa. 30:1f).

interpreting the “branches” as a reference to the crossbeams or bars to secure the city gates, and, therefore, a symbol for all means of defense that would be inadequate to halt the attacks (Keil and Delitzsch 140, Laetsch 87, Smith 265).

## **My People Are Bent To Backsliding**

The unhindered sweep of the pagan soldiers from the east would be because of their own counsels or “policies.” This reference is explained at verse 7: “My people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him.” The term translated bent means “suspended; hung up; impaled on” or “swaying about from inconstancy” or “hung to it” (Spence and Exell 333-334). The tendency of Israel towards apostasy was historically habitual or pathological. Like a drunk cannot stay away from a corner bar, Israel could not stay away from the calves and all attachments (cf. Hos. 10:5).

The futile statement, “though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him” means either that the prophets called Israel from idols to God but none responded to the call by exalting him, or none responded to the call by lifting himself or herself up to God.<sup>8</sup>

Idolatry was so woven into the national fabric of Ephraim that the people were incorrigibly attracted to it. She was stuck to it. She could not, not practice it.

## **God’s Present Anguish**

If God is anything—and he is!—he is just and merciful, holy and forgiving, willing to pardon, but unable to share space with sin. This dual nature put God in a dilemma: How could he discipline his people and satisfy his justice, which his mercy would not do, and at the same

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<sup>8</sup> Keil and Delitzsch (140) prefer the latter explanation because it “appears simpler.”

time pardon his people and satisfy his mercy, which his justice could not do?

## **Mine Heart Is Turned Within Me**

Hosea 11:8 is a “deeply emotional passage” in a deeply emotional book (Hailey 174). Already, the reader has ached with the anguish of God as a husband and lover (chapters 1-3). Now he aches with the anguish of God as a father.<sup>9</sup> “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim?” *Admah* and *Zeboim* were cities of the plain, neighboring Sodom and Gomorrah, destroyed by God with fire because of sin (Gen. 10:19; 19:24f; Deut. 29:23), constantly used by Scripture as the benchmark for cities gone wrong.

The question is not, “Can God give Ephraim up?” or “Should he?” or even “Why?” but “How?”<sup>10</sup>

“My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred” (NKJB). It was not possible for God to wait to allow the stronger of the two traits—justice or mercy—to flex its muscle and overcome the weaker. He is perfect, so he has both in equal strength. This is God’s wrestling match with himself

## **For I Am God, And Not Man**

In what comes as an answer to his own question, God announced, “I will not execute the fierceness of mine

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<sup>9</sup> We might think that the anguish of God is clearer in Chapter 11 than in chapters 1-3 since it is easier to see the impossibility of a parent unloving a rebellious child than a husband unloving an adulterous wife. However, consider, the anguish of a husband forced to keep on loving an adulterous wife is more intense than a parent forced to keep on loving a rebellious child.

<sup>10</sup> Regarding the term “how”: “with the imperfect [it] denotes a reproach (Judg. 16:15; Jer. 2:23; 48:14; etc.) or, as here, an impossibility (Gen. 39:9; 44:8, 34; Isa. 20:6; 48:11, etc.).” (Laetsch 87).

anger, I will not return to destroy Ephraim.” Is God, here, going back on his earlier declaration (vss. 5-6) to discipline Ephraim by allowing Assyria to put its boot on Ephraim’s throat? No, because God’s mercy would be demonstrated upon the remnant (vss. 10-11) and, ultimately, upon his people everywhere on the other side of the cross. He would hurt Ephraim for the purpose of correction but then his people would return “as a bird out of Egypt, and as a dove out of the land of Assyria” (Hos. 11:11).

Verse 9 ends with an antithetical statement: “For I am God, and not man; the Holy One in the midst of thee: and I will not enter into the city.” God affirms the difference between his character and the character of a man (cf. also Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29; Mal. 3:6); and he affirms his presence “in the midst of thee” as opposed to any intention to “enter into the city” like enemy soldiers for the purpose of vengeance or annihilation (Keil and Delitzsch 142, Laetsch 87).

In spite God’s realism about the desperate spiritual condition of Ephraim in Hosea’s age, God showed his optimism by predicting that his favored treatment of his people would eventually be a motive for their repentance and turning again towards him: “They shall walk after the Lord” (11:10).

## Quelled at the Cross

God’s anguish stands at the intersection of his mercy (Exod. 34:6-7a) and his justice (Exod. 34:7b). How can God be compassionate and forgive sin, and at the same time, be just and punish sin? The predicament, as already defined above, was ultimately answered by the action of Jesus Christ at Calvary. There, God meted out the penalty that man’s sins deserved on his Son, allowing God to exercise his mercy and pardon any man who would come in obedience and claim that pardon by the merits of Christ’s sacrifice.

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## Biographical Sketch

Brad Poe is a 1989 graduate of Ohio Valley College. He has been the pulpit minister for the church of Christ at Northridge in Dayton, Ohio since 1995. He and his wife Becky have two daughters, Sydney (age 12) and Lauren (age 10).

# **God's People Triumphant**

By Denver Cooper

## **Introduction:**

The study of the life of Esau and the nation of the Edomites serve as a reminder of many quite familiar passages of Scripture that point out the consequences of sin.

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap everlasting life. (Gal. 6:7-8)

Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. (Prov. 16:18)

## **Parents' Mistakes**

Parents often make mistakes. Perhaps no greater failure by parents is seen in the Scriptures than that of Isaac and Rebekah. At age 40 (Gen. 25:20), Isaac took Rebekah to wife. At age 60 (Gen. 25: 26), twins Jacob and Esau were born. It seems that we are given somewhat of a preview of the future while the twins were yet in the womb. From Gen. 25:22 we learn that "the children struggled in the womb within her." God informed Rebekah that "two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels, and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger." Esau (hairy) was first born. It seems that almost from the moment of birth, favoritism on the part of both the

father and the mother is evident. Isaac favored Esau because he was “a skillful hunter, a man of the field.” Isaac loved venison and was provided such by Esau. Rebekah favored Jacob because he was a “quiet man,” a dweller in tents. Parents ought to always avoid showing favoritism toward the children because such is never conducive of peace and harmony for the family.

## **Children’s Mistakes**

The twins also made mistakes. One day the happy-go-lucky hunter came in from a chase hungry and longing for food. Jacob was cooking a meal. Esau was faint. Urged by hunger, Esau yielded to Jacob’s demand of bartering his birthright for a bowl of “red” pottage. One ought never take advantage of another person’s weaknesses. Of course, the incident shows the lack of spirituality on the part of Esau. He sold his birthright, ate, drank and went on his way. “Thus Esau despised his birthright (Gen. 25:34).

Some time later, as Isaac prepared to die, he sent Esau for venison to be prepared as Isaac gave Esau his blessing. However, Rebekah heard of the intended blessing to Esau and prepared Jacob, whom she loved, for the deception of his father. Hence, Jacob stole the birthright. The birthright was a great loss because it involved the leadership of the tribe, spiritual and temporal, and the possession of a great bulk of the family property. It also carried with it the covenant blessing (Gen. 27: 28-29, 36; Heb. 12:16-17.) On learning that Jacob had stolen his blessing, Esau hated him and vowed to kill him. You and I may find ourselves in a similar situation with a brother in the flesh or in Christ. We are told friends often become our enemies once we are members of the church. Christians have been forced to leave home, jobs and forsake friends.

The writer of Hebrews (Heb. 12:16) indicates Esau was a profane person. A profane person is one who does not esteem God or spiritual matters. He looked only on the

physical side and the feeding of the body. Such characterizes much of the world today. Materialism has engulfed much of the life of society on every hand. On learning that he had not received the blessing, Esau hated Jacob and vowed to kill him. Rebekah sent Jacob away.

## **Two Nations Meet Again**

After spending years in Egypt, the very first encounter of the two nations came as they returned, hoping to take a shorter route to Canaan. Moses requested, “Let us pass, I pray thee, through thy land; we will not pass through field or through vineyard, neither will we drink of the water of the wells, we will go along the king’s highway; we will not turn aside to the right hand nor to the left, until we have passed thy border. (Num. 20:14-17).

Wouldn’t you have thought, after all of those years of separation, the joy of reunion with brother’s nation would have brought a response of kindness and graciousness? However, hatred and envy still existed. The king of Edom responded, “Thou shalt not pass through me, lest I come out with the sword against thee” (vs. 18). “Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his border: wherefore Israel turned away from him” (vs. 21) and continued its journey.

God’s command was “contend not with them; for I will not give you of their land, no, not so much as for the sole of the foot to tread on” (Deut. 2:5). Israel obeyed God. Edom became more rebellious against God, and he changed his mind, allowing Israel to conquer them according to Balaam’s prophecy.

## **Symbolic Edom**

Are you surprised at Edom’s conduct? Edom is a symbol of the world. As such, what else should one expect? When one travels “the way of holiness” (Isa. 35:8), “the

strait and narrow way" (Matt. 7:14), "the way of salvation" (Acts 16:17), he may expect to be hindered.

When God's people encamped in the plains of Moab, King Balak sent for Balaam to curse Israel. Balaam's response was, "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the commandment of the Lord, to do either good or bad of mine own mind; but what the Lord saith, that will I speak." Balaam declared, "there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth. And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies and Israel shall do valiantly" (Num. 24: 17-18).

Edom was among those conquered by Saul (1 Sam. 14:47-48). David placed garrisons throughout all Edom, making them his servants (2 Sam. 8:14). However, Edom, a symbol of the world and Israel, a symbol of God's people, were in constant battle with each other.

Solomon, because of his many heathen wives, caused God to raise up adversaries, among whom was "Hadad the Edomite" (vs. 14). Isaiah 34 relates of prophecy upon all the nations of the world. "He hath utterly destroyed them, he hath delivered them to the slaughter" (vs. 2). Further, in verse 6, "The sword of the Lord is filled with blood, it is made fat with fatness, and with the fat of the kidneys of rams: for the Lord hath a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Idumea [Edom]." Incidentally, the vileness, gross wickedness shown in murder, immorality and total disregard for God and his Word characterized the Herods who were descendants of the Edomites. Nations or individuals cannot forever hide from God in their efforts to cover their sins. Jonah is a great example of one who attempted such as well as many heathen nations of the not so long ago.

## **Pride Destroys**

As I indicated in the very beginning of the lesson, God says, “Pride goeth before destruction” (Prov. 16:18). It seems to me that the world today is in the death clutches of pride. Trust in self is at the foundation of all that is done. Dependence upon God is disregarded by the majority. So with Edom. God said to Edom, “The pride of thy heart hath deceived thee, O thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground? Though thou mount on high as the eagle, and though thy nest be set among the stars, I will bring thee down from thence, saith Jehovah” (Obad. 3-4). Edom was nestled among the rock in such a way that the enemy could only know it existed. Armies could only approach through treachery. Their homes were caves cut in the rocks with steps hewn for the approach to their caves. Barnes says that Mohammedans think the chasm, a two mile ravine, was made when Moses struck the rock (355). A few hundred men might defend against a large army. Demetrius at the head of 8000 men made repeated assaults against Edom, but all failed. Arrogance and pride stole the hearts of Edom.

Division among men was caused by pride as recorded in 1 Cor. 1:11-14. It is easy to preach oneself or expect others to accept one’s idea above all others. Paul’s attitude was, “And I brethren, when I came unto you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:1).

Men often think themselves wiser than God. They try to take God’s wisdom and mold it into man’s wisdom. However, God does not think as man thinks (Isa. 55:8-9). In the list of the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21) enmities and strife are listed. The meaning of strife is, “a courting distinction, a desire to put oneself forward, a partisan and

factious spirit.” False teaching is a symptom. Division originates with selfish pride. Edom fell because of it. What is God’s attitude toward the proud? God hates a “proud look” (Prov. 6:17). “Every one that is proud is an abomination to Jehovah” (Prov. 16:5). He is abhorred by God.

## **Identified with Enemies**

Edom identified herself with the enemies of God. “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?”(Jam. 4:4). Peter tried walking with the enemy, but it brought him only sorrow.

Edom sought revenge, having harbored for years hatred and hostility for Judah. In Psalm 137:7, Israel declared, “Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem; who said, Raise it, raise it, even to the foundation thereof.”

Sin is always progressive. Revenge harbored, grows. Edom “stood on the other side” when his brother needed help. We must “bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the Law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). Job knew he was in trouble with God “if I rejoiced at the destruction of him that hated me, or lifted up myself when evil found him. Neither have I suffered my mouth to sin wishing a curse to his soul” (Job 31:29-30). James admonishes, “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. The when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”

## **God’s Evaluation of Edom**

In verses 12-14 God said:

But thou shouldest not have **looked** on the day of thy brother in the day that he became a stranger; neither shouldest thou have

**rejoiced** over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; neither shouldest thou have **spoken proudly** in the day of distress. Thou shoudest not have **entered** the gate of my people in the day of their calamity; yea, thou shoudest not have looked on their affliction in the day of calamity, nor have laid hands on their substance in the day of their calamity; neither should thou have stood in the crossway to cut off those of his that did escape; neither shoudest thou have **delivered** up those that did remain in the day of distress.

So they were forbidden to look, enter, stand, rejoice, speak proudly when their brother was in trouble.

Amos 1: 6, 9 indicates that Gaza, Tyrus and others came under the judgment of God because they delivered captives to others as slaves or perhaps robbed and slew them. This was not to be done by Edom.

Edom, in his mistreatment of Jacob is described as desecrating God's Holy Mountain. He would be drunk and like other nations would "be as though they had not been" (vs. 16).

## **Israel's Suffering**

Israel had suffered greatly at the hands of the heathen nations, including Edom. The pride of Edom will not save them. Their physical strength will not save them. The strategic location will not save them. The great ore deposits and vast crossroads traffic providing great wealth will not save them.

The gleaners of grapes would leave some unharvested. Not so with plunderers of Edom. Their wealth would be confiscated. Edom's confederates had deceived them and would "lay a snare under them" (Vs. 7). The wise counsel

of the mighty men of Teman would be dismayed and fail them (vs. 7). Ultimately Edom would be doomed to complete destruction.

## **Triumph Is Near!**

The second section of Obadiah's prophecy shows the triumph of Israel. Mount Zion would be exalted as God's stronghold. Mt. Seir would be abased as representative of the world (vs. 7).

Jacob and Joseph are to be united (vs. 7) representing Judah and Israel. They shall be a devouring flame that would devour Edom as stubble. "There shall not be any remaining in the house of Esau; for Jehovah hath spoken it" (vs. 18). All of this shall take place when the glorious kingdom of God, the church, shall appear which shall, according to Daniel never be moved.

Amos 9: 11-12 speaks of raising up of the tabernacle of David. Those called by his name would do it. Saviors, apostles and evangelists were the messengers through whom the glorious message of the Messiah would reach them in spiritual Zion.

## **Lesson We Should Learn**

1. Partiality, often seen in parents with their children, church leaders toward the flock, preachers toward families never before caught up in sin, can destroy souls. James 2 warns against partiality toward the wealthy.
2. Righteous nations will be exalted. Sins of sexuality, covetousness, murder (including abortion), drunkenness, gambling, dishonest practices are not rejected by the masses, even by our nation as once they were.
3. Do not join the crowd to do evil. More and more we are hearing of brethren compromising with the denominational world and standing against faithful

brethren. When divisive issues arise, such as Premillennialism, instruments in worship, the “anti” movement with all of its hobbies, otherwise faithful men have been known to change horses in the middle of the stream.

4. Do not forget that God keeps his promise. Edom is gone. The church, Mt Zion, prevails and will till the end of time according to Daniel 2.
5. Pride is against Christian principles. A Christian will not mind “washing the saints feet.” Proper worship is impossible when we are lifted with pride.
6. The “prophet of vengeance” has delivered a message of hate and revenge. The Gospel of Christ is a message of peace. It prevents harboring malice and envy by promoting forgiveness. “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly father will also forgive you: but if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your father forgive your trespasses” (Matt. 6:14-15). Do not forget, every person and nation will “reap what they sow.” **The harvest time is sure to come!**

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## **Biographical Sketch**

Denver E. Cooper was born April 2, 1923 in Cairo, WV. His parents were Jesse and Sarah Cooper. One sister, Doris, died in 1931. Donald R. Cooper, a Gospel preacher in Wadsworth, OH is his brother.

Denver married Florence Smith of Sistersville, WV March 25, 1945. To this union were born 8 children. Edward T. (Gospel preacher), Denver Jr., Kelly R., Timothy, Rebecca Vilga, Jesse, Prisca (deceased), Denise (Mrs. J.D. Conley, whose husband is the local preacher at

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Marietta, OH) and Martha Noland (whose husband, Bob, is a preacher).

Denver has served churches throughout the Ohio Valley for 62 years. He was located at Ironton, OH; Harrisville, WV; Chester, WV; Philippi, WV; Weirton Heights, Weirton, WV; Timberville, VA; Moundsville, WV and Valley Bend, WV. He returned to Moundsville from Valley Bend, at the request of the elders, to become the present director of West Virginia School of Preaching.

# **It Is Time to Seek the Lord Hosea 10:12-15**

By Brent Gallagher

Hosea prophesied around the middle of the eighth century B.C. to the northern kingdom, Israel. Israel was a nation steeped in idolatry and immorality. Jeroboam had introduced calf worship and a false religious system when he became ruler over the ten northern tribes (1 Kings 12:25-33). Later, Ahab and Jezebel introduced Baal worship and furthered idolatry in Israel (1 Kings 16:29-33). The book of Hosea reflects a nation that gave lip service to worshipping God, but was in reality a nation immersed in idolatry (Hos. 4:11-13; 8:4; 13:1-2). Eighth century Israel was also a nation full of moral decay. The prophet describes a people guilty of murder, stealing, lying, adultery, drunkenness and many other sins (Hos. 4:2; 11-12, 18; 10:4). Hosea emphasizes God's love for Israel even though Israel had been unfaithful to him (Hos. 11:1-11). He calls the people to repentance so they can continue to enjoy God's blessings (Hos. 6:1-11; 14:1-9). The destruction of Israel by Assyria is also a message the prophet brings (Hos. 8:7-8; 9:15-17).

In Hosea 10:12-15, the prophet encourages the nation to seek the Lord, explains how they had sinned and predicts their destruction:

Sow for yourselves righteousness; Reap in mercy; Break up your fallow ground, For it is time to seek the LORD, Till He comes and rains righteousness on you. You have

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plowed wickedness; You have reaped iniquity. You have eaten the fruit of lies, Because you trusted in your own way, In the multitude of your mighty men. Therefore tumult shall arise among your people, And all your fortresses shall be plundered As Shalman plundered Beth Arbel in the day of battle--A mother dashed in pieces upon her children. Thus it shall be done to you, O Bethel, Because of your great wickedness. At dawn the king of Israel Shall be cut off utterly. (NKJV)

In verse twelve, the prophet commands the people to “sow for yourselves righteousness.” It is obvious from the Book of Hosea and the other prophets and narratives of Hosea’s time that the Israelites had failed to sow righteousness (obey God). The phrase translated “reap in mercy” is perhaps better translated “reap according to mercy.” The meaning would be that God would extend his mercy to Israel and not punish her if she sowed righteousness. The phrase “break up your fallow ground” suggests a new beginning for Israel. Technically, she had already broken the ground by sowing wickedness. God was commanding Israel to start obeying him, and by so doing, to enjoy the benefits of such obedience. Hosea continues by emphasizing “it is time to seek the LORD.” It was especially important for Israel to seek after God at this time because her days were numbered. The Book of Hosea is generally dated 750-725 B.C. while Israel’s destruction is dated 721 B.C. The benefits of seeking God would be that God would “rain righteousness” on the nation. The whole nation would be blessed, probably in temporal and spiritual ways, as a result of seeking out God (Psa. 72:1-7; Prov. 14:34).

Verse thirteen details why Israel was in the condition she was. She had “plowed wickedness” and “reaped

iniquity.” Idolatry and the subsequent sins associated with it are reflected in these statements. Hosea 4:6 describes God’s rejection of Israel because of her lack of knowledge of him. Hosea 4:1-2 shows the sins that result from a lack of knowledge of God (swearing, lying, killing, stealing, adultery, violence). The phrase “eaten the fruit of lies” is probably a reference to idolatry. In Hosea 2:5, the Israelites are described as praising their idols for the harvests they enjoyed. The phrase “eaten the fruit of lies” could be a reference to the consequences of idolatry. In other words, the problems the nation was now facing were a consequence of their rejection of God. Hosea describes the pride and arrogance of the nation by telling Israel “you trusted in your own way” and “in the multitude of your mighty men.” The folly of these attitudes is reflected in Hosea 7:11 where the nation is described as being “like a silly dove” by calling to Egypt and going to Assyria for help.

The consequences of Israel’s wickedness are found in verse fourteen where it is stated that “tumult shall arise among your people, and all your fortresses shall be plundered.” The destruction of Beth Arbel by Shalman is mentioned as an example of what would happen to Israel. “Shalman” is probably a reference to Shalmanezer, the king of Assyria. The destruction of Beth Arbel cannot be identified with any historical certainty but undoubtedly the Israelites were aware of how horrible this event was (both mothers and children being destroyed).

Verse fifteen mentions that Bethel (the seat of Israel’s idolatry) will be destroyed in similar fashion to Beth Arbel. The phrase “at dawn the king of Israel shall be cut off utterly” could be a reference to the quickness and certainty of the destruction, the surprise nature of the attack or a reference to Israel being destroyed when she thought a new and better day was coming. One can read of Israel’s defeat by the Assyrians in 2 Kings 17:1-23.

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What can be learned from this section of Scripture? First, the power of self-deception can never be underestimated. Even though Israel had wandered away from God's will in many areas, she still considered herself God's "chosen" and expected his blessings. The prophet Amos, who prophesied to Israel shortly before Hosea's time, revealed the self-deception of Israel by showing the follies of such an attitude (Amos 6:1-7; 9:7-8). It is possible for Christians today to deviate from God's will in their teaching and practice and still think they are right with God. Only an open heart that willingly examines one's life against the Word of God will overcome self-deception (Jam. 1:22-25).

Second, God demands repentance when his people stray from his Will. In Hosea 10:12, the people were promised blessings if they sowed righteousness and sought the Lord. In seeking the Lord, Israel would need to return to his Word, follow it and remove any sin from the people's lives. Throughout Hosea, there is a condemnation of idolatry, a rebuke of false prophets and a wicked priesthood, and an outcry against sin in general in the nation (Hos. 1:12-13; 4:1-2,5:7-9). Obviously, repentance would involve removing the idols from the land, the priests and prophets submitting to God's Will, and the people in general returning to the Word of God. In similar fashion, Christians today must return to God's Word and truly repent when they deviate from his will.

Third, the tendency of people to change God's will to accommodate themselves can be emphasized in Hosea. When Jeroboam began ruling over Israel, he made changes to the Law of God by putting idolatrous altars at Dan and Bethel, celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles at a time different from what the Law prescribed, and making priests of people who were not of the tribe of Levi (1 Kings 12:25-33). As Israel continued as a nation, she got even more involved in idolatry and abandoned God's laws on

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morality. Yet, as mentioned earlier, she still thought of herself as belonging to God. How many “churches” are there today that practice this same principle? Many groups have unauthorized worship, change the teachings of God on matters such as abortion, homosexuality and the role of women, and still claim God’s favor. How many times have Christians “overlooked” passages that deal with hatred, commitment, marriage and divorce, and other such topics because of sin in their lives? Remember, Jesus said, “*If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed*” (John 8:31).

Fourth, the ability of sin to destroy a country can be found in Hosea. Hosea describes a nation given over to swearing, cheating, stealing, adultery, drunkenness and bloodshed. How did Israel become this wicked? By ignoring God’s Law. There are always consequences of sin—either individually or in a nation. When God’s teachings are followed, there are benefits within a society. Solomon stated, “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 14:34). There is no question that many of the problems faced within American society are the direct result of sin. One can only wonder how much longer America will remain as a nation.

The Old Testament teaches many valuable lessons about the nature of God and the nature of man. One sees in the Book of Hosea that God loves his people but that he also demands they follow his will. One also notices the tendency of man to change God’s Ways for his own convenience and to be like the world around him. In both the church and the nation today it truly is “time to seek the Lord.”

### **Biographical Sketch**

Brent Gallagher was born in Dover, Ohio. He is a graduate of Freed-Hardeman University and Harding Graduate School. He is married to the former Janie

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Higginbotham. They have three children—Ryan, an associate minister with the church in Hamilton, Alabama; Amy, a student at Freed-Hardeman University and Jason, a junior in high school. Brent has worked with the church in New Matamoras, Ohio; Pine Grove, West Virginia and is currently in his fifteenth year with the Oakwood Road congregation in Fairmont, West Virginia. He also is an instructor at the WVSOP.

# Feeding on the Wind

By William Woodson

Hosea frequently indicates the destiny of the northern kingdom in vivid pictures, none of which is more vivid than the statement, “Ephraim feedeth on wind, and followeth after the east wind” (12:1). This vivid picture provides the thought for this study. We consider facts about Ephraim, the folly of Ephraim and the failures involved in such folly.

## Facts in Hosea Concerning Ephraim

Ephraim, whose name signifies fruitfulness,<sup>1</sup> was the second son of Joseph and Asenath (Gen. 41:52): “For God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.” He was blessed by Jacob, over his brother Manasseh, despite the preference of Joseph otherwise (Gen. 48:14); Jacob although dim of eye, guided his hands “wittingly” [some authorities render to lay cross-wise, exchange, cross] in so doing. This was a foreshadowing of the prominence Ephraim would enjoy in the nation then yet to come (cf. Deut. 33:17). Joshua was of Ephraim (Num. 13:8), and his leadership after Moses likely brought prestige to his tribe. This sense of prestige made the men of Ephraim supersensitive on occasion (Judges 8:1; 12:1). Jeroboam, an Ephraimite, was the first king of the northern tribes when the division into two kingdoms occurred (1 Kings 11:26).

By the time of Hosea, Ephraim was the leading tribe of the northern kingdom, possibly due to its fruitfulness. Also,

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<sup>1</sup> Of Ephraim we read: “Though he be fruitful among *his* brethren, an east wind shall come, the wind of the LORD shall come up from the wilderness, and his spring shall become dry, and his fountain shall be dried up: he shall spoil the treasure of all pleasant vessels” (Hos. 13:15).

Ephraim enjoyed virtual freedom from attack from the east or the west; its only vulnerable area being the plain of Jezreel/Esdraelon to the north, which once invaded, allowed invaders relatively easy passage to the capital in Samaria. As a result, the northern kingdom is often referred to as Ephraim in Hosea.

## **Failures of Ephraim**

Hosea chronicled many spiritual failures of Ephraim. Ephraim is “joined to idols” and it is to be “let alone” (4:17). God knew Ephraim and that it committed whoredom (5:3; 6:10). Ephraim was to fall in its iniquity (5:5), was to be desolate in the day of rebuke that God had made known would be (5:9), was oppressed and broken in judgment because the tribe walked in vanity (5:11 RSV). God would be to Ephraim as a moth, a term conveying the idea of punishment by a form of corruption that led the nation to turn to Assyria to heal its wound; but there was no healing or cure (5:12-13).

God would be to Ephraim as a lion, to tear and go away, to take away and no one could rescue the prey (5:14). God asks what he shall do to Ephraim whose goodness is as a morning cloud and the early dew that soon goes away (6:4). When God healed Israel, the iniquity and wickedness of Ephraim were discovered, namely, the committing of falsehood (7:1; 11:12). Ephraim has become mixed with pagan people, as ingredients of bread are mixed; now the nation is like a flat cake baked on one side but not turned (i.e., Ephraim has not decided whether to serve God or the gods of the pagans [7:8]). The nation is like a silly dove without heart that allowed itself to be easily snared through its calling on Egypt and Assyria rather than on God (7:11), becoming one who hired lovers (8:9) and making many altars that brought sin to them (8:9, 11). They would not dwell in the Lord’s land in returning to Egypt and eating unclean things in Assyria (9:3).

The watchman of Ephraim was with God, but the false prophets became a snare of a fowler and brought the nation to hatred of God (9:8) with the result their glory would fly away as a bird, from birth, from the womb and from the conception (9:11). The children of Ephraim will be brought forth to the murderer (9:13); the land is smitten, the root is dried up and the beloved fruit of the womb will be slain (9:13, 16). Ephraim was as a trained heifer used in treading grain, but God had not treated her severely; now the nation will be put to the yoke to plow with great difficulty (10:11). God had taught Ephraim, taking the nation into his arms, but they did not know he had made them well (11:13).

God still loved the northern kingdom, asking, “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?” He knew of the punishment given to Admah and Zeboim [cities near Sodom and Gomorrah, destroyed along with those wicked cities Gen. 10:19; 14:2, 8; 19:14: Deut. 29:23]. How could Ephraim be treated so? The fierceness of his anger will not be executed, Ephraim will not be destroyed; God is God, and not man to do such (11:8, 9).

In high disregard of truth, Ephraim boasted, “I am become rich,” have found substance and no iniquity was found within (12:8), going so far as to proclaim, “What have I to do any more with idols?” (14:8), but he had provoked the Lord, the blood guilt of evil will not be removed and Lord will return his reproach upon him (12:14). Ephraim had trembled at God’s charges, had exalted himself, but still offended in worship of Baal and would die (13:1), his iniquity is bound unto the time of judgment and his sin, supposedly hidden, will not remain so (13:12).

Such facts about the wrongdoing of Ephraim disclose the various ways the nation failed to abide within the will of God. This cup of wrongdoing was rapidly filling to overflowing; God will not hold in abeyance righteousness to delay punishment forever.

## Folly of Ephraim (12:1)

This summary statement epitomizes the folly of the nation, a folly that was cherished even in view of the mountain of wrong deeds just presented. The thought of the term rendered “feedeth” has to do with sheep herding in which food is found by the shepherd and the flock feeds on it. The thought is that of Ephraim seeking for food, supposedly of spiritual nature, as would a flock of sheep feed in a pasture.

Ephraim was seeking nourishment from the wind, even the burning, gusting east wind with its hot sand and dust. A more vivid picture could hardly be envisaged: trying to eat the wind, and the east wind at that. Not only is there an effort to eat what is nothing as food, but the eating brings hot, searing sand and dust to stifle breath and dry the mouth and nostrils. Indeed, an exercise in folly.

The cause of this folly of Ephraim was the making of a covenant with the Assyrians and with the Egyptians rather than continuing faithful in the covenant with God. Something of double-dealing is present with both Assyria and Egypt. While Ephraim had the covenant (“bargain” RSV) with Assyria, oil in tribute to Egypt was carried there as a token of submission and honor. Sooner or later, the duplicity of Ephraim with both Assyria and Egypt will become evident, then violent oppression, desolation will follow.

In the same way that Ephraim was engaged in folly in seeking to eat the wind, to play Assyria off from Egypt, and was thereby courting disaster, so Ephraim was engaged in folly in violating the God-given covenant that had bound the whole Jewish nation through its history, a covenant still in effect between God and Ephraim although the kingdom was divided. Spiritual desolation was coming to Ephraim since God knew of his faithless duplicity and would not tolerate it.

## Final Words Concerning Ephraim 12:1-6

The Lord had a “controversy (“brings a charge” NKJV)” with Judah (12:2). Ephraim had erred as noted, while in some ways of Judah it could be said: “but Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the saints” (Hos. 11:12). It is difficult to know concerning the term here rendered “the saints” in KJV. Some translations render “the Holy One” (ASV; RSV; “the Holy One *who is* faithful” NKJV; NASB) while as noted the KJV render “the saints.”

Nevertheless, God had a controversy with Judah, apparently because in some way Judah had broken faith with God. Earlier God had spoken: “Hear the word of the LORD, ye children of Israel: for the LORD hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because *there is* no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land” (Hos. 4:1). This controversy would be settled in due time.

The name Jacob was here apparently ascribed to Ephraim because of his “trickster” ways—as was true on occasion with the patriarch. God will punish Jacob according to his ways, his recompense will be according to his deeds.

# **Valley of Decision**

## **Joel 3:14-21**

By Louis Rushmore

### **The Author of the Book of Joel**

Several different Bible characters bore the name Joel. “Not much is revealed concerning Joel; he is differentiated from the other eleven men in the Bible who wear the name, as ‘Joel (‘Jehovah is God’), the son of Pethuel (‘sincerity of God’)’ (1:1)” (Cates 62). “Nothing is known of Joel’s birthplace or biography, his career and personality being shrouded in obscurity” (Robinson 30). “The name Joel means ‘Jehovah is God,’ or ‘Whose God is Jehovah’” (Pledge 212) and is congruent with the theme of God’s judgment throughout the Book of Joel.

### **The Date of the Book of Joel**

A number of compelling circumstances provide a relative date for the Book of Joel and the prophecies contained therein. The dating of the volume enhances the understanding of the prophetic material in Joel and how it was intended to be interpreted in Joel’s day respecting the time of Joel as well as the distant future.

- The absence of references to a king, references to priestly authority, that the Temple was standing, that the city walls were intact and that there was no idolatry point to a time within the first 16 years of the boy-king Joash (Cates 63, 67-68).
- The prophet Joel was one of the earliest writing prophets, as some of the prophets quoted from Joel. “If an early date of approximately 835 B.C. is to be accepted, then Joel is quoted or alluded to by

Isaiah, Amos, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Obadiah, Ezekiel and Malachi. He would be the first to speak of the ‘Day of the Lord’” (McGee 330). Those quotations by other prophets from Joel are abbreviated compared to the material from which they quoted in the Book of Joel. “Joel is quoted by Amos. ...Clearly evident to the reader is the fact that Joel’s reference is more full... the text begins abruptly in Amos, and ends abruptly” (Cates 65). “Since no king is mentioned, the book has been dated to the time of Joash’s childhood when Jehoida the high priest was his guardian. The dates of Joash’s reign are 835 BC - 796 BC.” (*Nelson’s*).

- The Hebrew Bible and the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible align the Book of Joel with the earlier writing prophets, which is further indication of the relative time during which Joel’s prophetic ministry unfolded. “It is significant, however, that its position in the Hebrew canon is between Hosea and Amos. If Joel lived in the postexilic period why was his book placed among the eighth century prophets?” (Yates 192).
- Grouping the Book of Joel, and the time to which the volume refers, with the 800’s B.C. corresponds to the absence of mention of the latter enemies of Judah and reference instead to the enemies of Judah prior to and leading up to the captivities (Pledge 212). “This early date will account fully for the absence of all mention of Babylon, Assyria, and Syria. In Joel the nations that are causing trouble are the Edomites, the Egyptians, the Philistines and the Phoenicians” (Yates 192).

## **The Prophetic Ministry of Joel**

Joel was a prophet to and resided in the southern kingdom of Judah; he may have lived in Jerusalem. Though

the northern kingdom of Israel had not yet fallen to the Assyrians, Joel chose not to mention that segment of the Israelite family, but he rather focused his prophetic forthtelling and foretelling on his nation of Judah. “Joel prophesied before Amos, i.e., before the twenty-seven years of the contemporaneous reigns of Uzziah and Jeroboam II” (*Keil & Delitzsch*). Butler dubs Joel and his contemporaries among the so-called Minor Prophets (Obadiah, Jonah, Amos and Hosea) as “The Prophets of the Decline” preceding the respective Assyrian and Babylonian captivities (title page).

## **Joel’s Message and Purpose**

**The overriding message of the Book of Joel is that God and God’s people win, and God’s foes and the enemies of God’s people lose.** In the Book of Joel, God is portrayed as “...announcing in solemn language the final doom of Israel’s foes, and closing with a description of the glorious victory of the people of God” (Robinson 31). Herein, the fundamental messages of Joel and Revelation are the same. “The basic message of the book of Joel is the doom of the wicked nations and the ultimate glory of the Lord’s cause. In this it sounds very much like the New Testament book of Revelation” (McGee 330).

“The chief purpose of the book seems to be to call God’s people to repentance and to show the great judgment coming upon the nations who oppress the people of God” (Pledge 212-213). “Joel is brokenhearted; he mourns for the people, calling for them to repent” (Cates 69). Consequently, Joel explains to the children of God that the *natural calamities* (i.e., devastation caused by hordes of locust, etc. and subsequent famine) are really God-sent, divine judgments because of their spiritual waywardness, which God will undo upon the nation’s penitence (Joel 1:1-2:27). “...Joel wrote to convince them that these were not merely unfortunate tragedies, but were instead God’s

punishments upon the nation because of its sins. Since it has always been the case that ‘Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people’ (Prov. 14:34)...” (Duncan 10).

## **Joel’s Prophecies**

In addition to the call to repentance with the promise of renewed physical blessings, Joel prophesied of two spiritual blessings that were to be fulfilled in the distant future from Joel’s day. The first in Joel 2:28-32 is clearly identified with the birthday of the church, confirmed by the inspired correlation made by the apostle Peter in Acts 2:16-21. The second prophesied spiritual blessing occurs in Joel 3:1-21 and is the subject of this writing. This latter prophecy is embodied in Joel 3:14, “Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the LORD is near in **the valley of decision**,” from which the title of this discourse is derived (emphasis added). The second prophesied blessing is only a blessing to faithful people of God, but it contains harsh, inalterable and final judgment against all the enemies of God and his people.

Often writers or other propounders of Scripture make casual references to “the valley of decision” in Joel 3:14 and use it aside from the context in which it appears to teach something comparable to Joshua’s challenge to his generation in Joshua 24:15, “...choose you this day whom ye will serve...” In its context, “the valley of decision” pertains not to choices we make or are called upon to make, but to the judgment of God. Varner has correctly styled “the valley of decision” of Joel 3:14 thus: “We are ever in **‘Verdict Valley’**” (81 emphasis added).

## **The Day of Jehovah**

Through the God-sent, punishing calamities in the first two chapters of Joel and in Joel Chapter Three, the phrase “the day of the LORD [Jehovah]” sounds forth the

judgment of God, both on the wayward people of God and the oppressors of the people of God (Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11; 3:14). “That ‘the Day of the Lord’ is coming, is the central teaching of the book — the day when the Lord will manifest himself in the destruction of his enemies and the exaltation of his friends” (Wycliffe). “...Joel uses the expression day of the Lord. This expression occurs twenty-five times in all of the Bible, and five of those twenty-five are found in the short book of Joel. It is obvious that that term does not always refer to the same day, but refers to any day when God brings judgment upon a people. Isaiah uses the term twice in referring to the time when God would destroy Babylon (Isa. 13:6, 9)” (Duncan 8). Pledge observes regarding “the day of the LORD”:

The message of Joel is that the day of the Lord must come when every wrong shall be righted and every injustice shall be recompensed. ... The “day of Jehovah” is a day when all the enemies of God will know that the events are from God. ...He declared the absolute supremacy of God. The prophecy of Joel points out the fact that the divine purposes of God will ultimately be realized through God’s government. God is on the throne, in the book of Joel. (213)

## **Joel 3:1**

Whereas some students of the Bible see the fulfillment of Joel 3:1-21 culminating in the first century destruction of Jerusalem (Duncan 10), many others relate the prophecy to the Final Judgment at the end of time. Taken as a whole, Joel Three must transcend A.D. 70 when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. Please note the following observations.

It seems odd that Joel would be thought to be referring to the return from Babylonian captivity, as Duncan

supposes, when the captivity was not known yet and in excess of 200 years in the future (besides the 70 years of captivity): “The third chapter of Joel begins with what appears to be a reference to the return of Judah from Babylonian captivity” (Duncan 9). From the time of the institution of Judaism, God abundantly warned the nation of Israel that when they turned from him he would send them into captivity, and God further told the Israelites that he would return them to their land. Deuteronomy 30:1-10 reads almost exactly like Joel 3:1, though Deuteronomy was written at the dawn of Judaism, not as Judah was in the shadow of Babylonian captivity. See also similar references in 2 Chronicles 6:37-38; Psalm 14:7 and 85:1, also well before either captivities of the divided Israelite kingdoms.

Later, the prophet Isaiah prophesied about the punishment of the nations who oppressed Judah and wrote about a return from captivity. Jeremiah prophesied likewise in 16:15; 23:3-8; 29:14-15; 30:3, 18. Ezekiel, too, prophesied of return from captivity in 37:21-28; 39:25-29. In addition to references to Judah’s return from Babylonian captivity, these passages have Messianic overtones respecting the establishment the Lord’s church about which Peter spoke when he made the correlation between that Pentecost and Joel 2:28-32. Joel Three possesses Messianic overtones respecting not primarily the establishment of the church, but the exoneration of the church by way of divine judgment against the wicked. That is, Joel 2:28-32 speaks to the establishment of the heavenly kingdom or church, whereas Joel 3:1-21 speaks to the final vindication of the kingdom or church against the enemies of God throughout all time. God wins! God’s people win! The opponents of God and his people lose!

### **Joel 3:2-13**

In the figure of the nations that were oppressors of Judah in Joel’s day, God challenges all the enemies of God

to assemble for battle against him. The valley into which these enemies are invited is physically incapable of sustaining such a mass of humanity. Butler notes:

God's judgment (His victory over the enemies of His people) is given a contemporary setting. Jehoshaphat, by the miraculous help of God, won a great victory over a Gentile army in a valley which was afterward named for him (II Chron. 20). So the prophet's use of the king's name and the valley of Jehoshaphat would remind the people of this glorious victory over the enemies of God. Also, the name Jehoshaphat means "Jehovah judges." That there is ever going to be a literal gathering of *all* the nations into a valley near Jerusalem is a geographical impossibility! ...The prophet was led by the Holy Spirit to use the valley of Jehoshaphat in a symbolic or figurative way much the same as we say that someone has met his Waterloo. At the end of the Messianic age (which will be the end of all ages) God is going to demonstrate a complete and final victory over all the forces of evil. (193)

The most often cited location of the valley under discussion lies on the eastside of Jerusalem; "...from the 4th century AD onwards the name 'valley of Jehoshaphat' has been given to the valley between the Temple Hill and the Mount of Olives" (Douglas). This valley is otherwise known as the Kidron Valley (*International*).

### **Joel 3:14, In the Valley of Decision**

Joel 3:14 reads, "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley

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of decision: for the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.” Although the so-called *Living Bible* is hardly either a Bible translation or typically worthy of note at all, to my surprise, its rendering of Joel 3:14 accurately represents the sentiment of the verse: “**Multitudes, multitudes waiting in the valley for the verdict of their doom! For the Day of the Lord is near, in the Valley of Judgment**” (emphasis added). In fact, Joel 3:12 defines the happening in verse 14: “Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for **there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about**” (KJV emphasis added).

Wycliffe says of the event portrayed here:

**The picture of judgment begins here.**  
Multitudes, multitudes. Literally, tumults.  
That is, great multitudes. The repetition is  
for emphasis. Valley of decision. **The  
judgment will be decisive! The nations are  
assembled because judgment is ready to  
burst forth.** (emphasis added)

*Keil & Delitzsch* adds:

...[I]n v. 14 ff. the judgment is simply depicted thus: first of all we have a description of the streaming of the nations into the valley of judgment, and then of the appearance of Jehovah upon Zion in the terrible glory of the Judge of the world, and as the refuge of His people. ... valley of the deciding judgment... to decide, to determine irrevocably...

*Barnes' Notes* specifies:

...[T]he place where they are gathered, (although they know it not,) is the “valley of decision,” i.e., of “sharp, severe judgment.” The valley is the same as that before called “the valley of Jehoshaphat;” but whereas

that name only signifies “God judgeth,” this further name denotes the strictness of God’s judgment. The word signifies “cut,” then “decided;” then is used of severe punishment, or destruction decided and decreed...

Of the “multitudes” pouring into the Valley of Decision, they are colorfully described variously. *Keil & Delitzsch* as well as Butler (195) describes these multitudes as “noisy crowds.” *Barnes’ Notes* calls them “tumultuous masses” and says, “It was one living, surging, boiling, sea: throngs upon throngs, mere throngs!” Butler adds, “The picture Joel draws for us is that of ‘**throngs upon throngs**’ of these **enemies of God in a blind, raging confusion surging headlong and headstrong into a showdown with an omnipotent Judge**” (195 emphasis added).

### **Joel 3:15-16**

Joel 3:15-16 employ the often-used references to severe natural disasters to signal a major event or judgment brought about by God (demise of Babylon, Isaiah 13; birthday of the church, Joel 2:28-32 & Acts 2:16-21; A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem, Matthew 25). In this context, they refer to the final judgment of God against all wickedness.

### **Joel 3:17-18, 20**

Joel 3:17-18 and 20 figuratively represent the final and lasting victory of God and his people. “[T]he prophets used contemporary terms of agricultural prosperity to depict in a figurative way the blessings of God in the Messianic age (cf. Isa. 25; 55; etc. )” (Butler 199). Wycliffe observes regarding the revived Jerusalem and Zion:

A hyperbolical picture of extreme fertility now follows. The territory of Judah was covered with limestone rocks, and the soil

yielded only a meagre subsistance in return for the most arduous toil. But in this new age the fertility is pictured in terms of the mountains and hills themselves shooting forth wine and milk. Canaan is called “a land flowing with milk and honey” (Ex 3:8).

*Keil & Delitzsch* hastens to distinguish between literal and figurative references to Jerusalem and Judah in this context.

For Zion or Jerusalem is of course not the Jerusalem of the earthly Palestine, but the sanctified and glorified city of the living God, in which the Lord will be eternally united with His redeemed, sanctified, and glorified church. We are forbidden to think of the earthly Jerusalem or the earthly Mount Zion, not only by the circumstance that the gathering of all the heathen nations takes place in the valley of Jehoshaphat, i.e., in a portion of the valley of the Kidron, which is a pure impossibility, but also by the description which follows of the glorification of Judah.

*Barnes' Notes* likewise notes in these verses the prophesied and long sought conclusion of all things physical and replacement with the heavenly Jerusalem. Especially note his allusions to the final things represented in the Book of Revelation.

“Without,” says John, “are dogs and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie” (Rev 22:15). None alien from her shall pass through her, so as to have dominion over her, defile or oppress her. ... This special promise is often repeated. “It shall be called the way of

holiness, the unclean shall not pass over it” (Isa 35:8). “Henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean” (Isa 52:1). “The wicked shall no more pass through thee” (Nah 1:15). “In that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts”(NOTE: Zech. end). “And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth” (Rev 21:27). These promises are, in their degree and in the image and beginning, made good to the Church here, to be fully fulfilled when it shall be “a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:27). ... Not earthly Judah, nor earthly Jerusalem, for these must come to an end, together with the earth itself, of whose end the prophets well knew. It is then the one people of God, the true Judah, the people who praise God, the Israel, which is indeed Israel.

## **Joel 3:19, 21**

Joel 3:19 and 21 are comparable to a passage in the Book of Revelation where finally God vindicates the innocence of his dead saints. Wycliffe notes regarding the shedding of innocent blood for which God determined to avenge: “This violence consisted not only of the shedding of Jewish blood during war, but also of the unprovoked massacre of peaceful Jews living in these lands (Amos 1:11; Obad 10).” Other commentators make similar comparisons between the avenging of the blood of innocents indicated in Joel and the avenging of the blood of innocents mentioned in the Book of Revelation. Clarke comments: “I will avenge the slaughter and martyrdom of my people, which I have not yet avenged.”

The phrase “I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed” probably Means that when God ushers in the consummation of the Messianic age He will vindicate completely His precious saints. Justice, which in some cases on this earth is left undone, will be carried our by the Just Judge of all the earth. (Butler 200)

The word rendered “cleansed” is not used of natural cleansing, nor is the image taken from the cleansing of the body. The word signifies only to pronounce innocent, or to free from guilt. Nor is “blood” used of sinfulness generally, but only of the actual guilt of shedding blood. The whole then cannot be an image taken from the cleansing of physical defilement, like the words in the prophet Ezekiel, “then washed I thee with water; yea, I thoroughly washed away thy blood from thee” (Ezek 16:9). Nor again can it mean the forgiveness of sins generally, but only the pronouncing innocent the blood which had been shed. This, the only meaning of the words, fall in with the mention of the “innocent blood,” for shedding which, Egypt and Edom had been condemned. The words are the same. ...For in that He punishes the shedding of it, He declared the “blood” innocent, whose shedding He punished. So in the Revelation it is said, “I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held, and they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that

dwell on the earth?" (Rev 6:10-11). (*Barnes Notes*)

## **Conclusion**

A fitting Bible verse to describe the outcome of "the valley of decision" is Psalm 96:10: "Say among the heathen that the LORD reigneth: the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved: he shall judge the people righteously." Obviously, because the day of Jehovah — a day of judgment — will certainly occur in our own "verdict valley," it behooves each of us to make the right choices or decisions today — and everyday as long as we live.

Joel proclaims that God wins! Joel proclaims that faithful people of God win! Joel proclaims that the enemies of God and the enemies of God's people lose! Take from God, speaking through the pen of the prophet Joel, 'You **do not** want to meet an angry God in the valley of decision — verdict valley!'

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## **Biographical Sketch**

Louis Rushmore has been preaching since 1973 and presently preaches for the Lord's church in Cameron, West Virginia. He has taught several courses at WVSOP since 1995 through the present. Louis is the Editor of the 20-page monthly Internet journal, *Gospel Gazette Online*, which is nearing completion of its sixth year. Brother Rushmore has authored several class books and tracts, and has written numerous religious articles for the Internet and various Gospel magazines. Louis and his devoted wife, Bonnie, also print religious books, tracts, magazines, etc., including this lectureship book.

Louis and Bonnie, have three grown children who are faithful and active Christians in their respective congregations; their two older children are a schoolteacher and a deputy sheriff, while the youngest is a Gospel preacher. Louis and Bonnie have two grandchildren.

# **Standing on the Other Side**

By Frank Higginbotham

The Book of Obadiah is a short book of one chapter in the Old Testament. It tells the story of the children of Edom and their relationship with the children of Israel. The Edomites were descendants of Esau while the children of Israel were from the lineage of Jacob. Even though they were related in the flesh, they had a very stormy relationship with each other. The Edomites refused Moses' request to pass through their territory in peace as they made their way to the land of Canaan (Num. 20:14-21). The Prophet Amos in describing their attitude said, "Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath for ever" (Amos 1:11). The Book of Obadiah describes a time when Edom became as one of the enemies as it joined Israel's enemies in rejoicing at their calamity and in taking advantage of them by making spoil of their goods. God was not pleased with Edom's conduct and had Obadiah deliver a message of condemnation. A very brief outline of the book is submitted by Clyde M. Woods.

A. A Prediction of Edom's Fall (verses 1-14)

    1. Woe upon Edom (verses 1-9)

    2. The wickedness which brings the ruin  
(verses 10-14)

B. The Day of the Lord (verses 15-21)

    1. Judgment upon the nations (verses 15-16)

2.Restoration for Judah (verses 17-21)  
(290)

Even though Edom was not the nation that invaded Jerusalem, we need to note that they were reminded by Obadiah that they ‘stood on the other side.’

For thy violence against thy brother Jacob shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off for ever. In the day that thou stoodest on the other side, in the day that the strangers carried away captive his forces, and foreigners entered into his gates, and cast lots upon Jerusalem, even thou wast as one of them. But thou shouldest not have looked on the day of thy brother in the day that he became a stranger; neither shouldest thou have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; neither shouldest thou have spoken proudly in the day of distress. Thou shouldest not have entered into the gate of my people in the day of their calamity; yea, thou shouldest not have looked on their affliction in the day of their calamity, nor have laid hands on their substance in the day of their calamity; Neither shouldest thou have stood in the crossway, to cut off those of his that did escape; neither shouldest thou have delivered up those of his that did remain in the day of distress. (Obadiah 1:10-14)

This is the background for the things we will cover in this lesson. There are many lessons that can be learned from the sins committed by Edom.

Edom committed the sin of finding pleasure in the misfortune of others. They were not distressed that their cousins to the North were in deep trouble. Instead of

compassion at the situation, they showed joy in Judah's hard times. As we apply this lesson to our own lives today, we are well aware of the fact that Christianity teaches us to have understanding and compassion for those who are less fortunate than we are. "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep" (Rom. 12:15). This characteristic pointed out by Paul is one that makes Christians stand out from the world. We must not be indifferent to the needs of others. When Lazarus died and folk were gathering to show sympathy to Mary and Martha, our Master was there and likewise was able to express sympathy. The shortest verse in the Bible simply states that Jesus wept (John 11:35). Jesus even instructed us to show this quality of concern with our enemies. "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matt. 5:44). It is not easy to show concern for our enemies, but it is the right thing to do. The wise, inspired writer of the Book of Proverbs made this observation. "Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker: and he that is glad at calamities shall not be unpunished" (Prov. 17:5). Edom was without compassion on Judah and thus was to face the wrath of God.

A second sin that is outstanding in the history of Edom is the sin of pride. Edom looked at its location and felt invincible. "The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; that saith in his heart, Who shall bring me down to the ground?" (Obad. 1:3). Pride is terribly deceitful. Solomon warned, "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18). In spite of their feeling of pride and security, God was still able to bring them down. "Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring

thee down, saith the LORD” (Obad. 1:4). Edom deceived itself into thinking that it could take advantage of Judah and then retreat to its lofty stronghold and it would not be held accountable for its deeds. Paul warned that the man who thinks that he is beyond being brought down, needs to take heed lest he fall (1 Cor. 10:12).

A third mistake that led to Edom’s downfall was that it desired material goods so much that it did not care that it was running over others. Edom demonstrated a greediness that was not even shown by the common thief. “If thieves came to thee, if robbers by night, (how art thou cut off!) would they not have stolen till they had enough? if the grapegatherers came to thee, would they not leave some grapes?” (Obad. 1:5). The passage indicates that they were so greedy that they did not leave anything. Greed was dictating their actions. On one occasion, a man came to the Lord complaining that his brother was not properly dividing an inheritance. Jesus warned about the danger of trusting in riches. “And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15). On this occasion, Jesus taught the great lesson concerning the rich man and his barns.

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those

things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. (Luke 12:16-21)

Little did the farmer realize that his life was about to be over. Many today live as though they will live forever and that all they need to do is to make sure they have material goods to last them. If we were to gain the whole world and lose our souls, we have lost everything. Nothing is more important than our souls. One's soul is his most valuable possession. How foolish it is to trade it for money that perishes. The love of money has caused the downfall of many people. "For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:10). We need to lay up treasures in heaven. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:19-21).

For these and perhaps other reasons, Edom 'stood on the other side.' It seems proper now to take a look at the result of standing with the enemy and against those who are God's chosen people. God promised Abraham that he would bless him and that he would give him a land. That promise involved the land of Canaan, but it also involved a spiritual promise. Through Abraham all families of the earth would be blessed. "Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). Give special attention to the

last part of this promise. God not only promised to bless this nation, but he also promised to punish those who became the enemies of this people. Edom was standing on the other side with those who had ravished Judah and Jerusalem. In this position, they were counted as enemies of God and his people and therefore were going to suffer the consequences of their actions. The ‘day of the Lord’ is near for Edom.

For the day of the LORD is near upon all the heathen: as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head. For as ye have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall all the heathen drink continually, yea, they shall drink, and they shall swallow down, and they shall be as though they had not been. (Obad. 1:15-16)

The Lord proclaimed that there would not be any remaining of the house of Esau (Obad. 1:18). When we make application of this truth to our situation in the church today, it can be clearly seen that God loves his people and will stand with them in opposition to any and all enemies. Christ promised that he would build his church.

He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Matt. 16:15-19)

Paul affirms that Christ loves his church (Eph. 5:25). That love was so deep that Christ died for the church. It should be clear to all that to oppose the body of Christ is to invite the wrath of God upon oneself. Neither would it be wise to “stand on the other side.” The church is not a plaything that we are at liberty to kick around any time we choose to do so. Paul affirms the fact that God’s people are always on the winning side. “What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31). Later in the chapter, Paul states that we have complete victory through Christ. “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us” (Rom 8:37). God will not permit the enemies of Christ and his church to prevail. In view of these conclusions, who would be so presumptuous as to ‘stand on the other side’ with the enemies of the Lord?

There have always been enemies of the Lord that we might term external enemies. They have worked hard and continue to do so today. The atheist has long tried to destroy the work of God. It is through his efforts that we have now forbidden our children to give any recognition to the existence of God in our public school system. It is permitted for all to speak freely of an origin of the world that excludes God, but the creation story is out. Another external enemy of the cause of Christ is the existence of denominationalism. Jesus prayed for unity. “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17:20-21). Yet it is not uncommon to hear people in their prayers thank God for the many different ways of religion so that we might be able to choose the one we prefer. Jesus said that there is one way to heaven (John 14:6). The world also has developed a carnal attitude toward material things and things that have to do with this life. People, therefore,

do not want to hear anything about spiritual matters. We must not ‘stand on the other side’ with these open enemies of the cause of Christ.

There are also those internal enemies that have more love and loyalty for the Lord’s enemies than they seem to have for the blood-bought church of Christ. In recent years, we have observed a concentrated effort to remake and redo the body of Christ. We are told that unless we change with the world about us we will lose the battle for souls. Some even suggest that the church as we know it will cease to exist because we are not meeting the needs of our present world. Some of these who claim membership in the church have been observed in denominational gatherings making fun and laughing about what they consider the narrow and outdated view of the church they grew up in. Could they be ‘standing on the other side’?

We need to understand that there are two sides to the church. The one side of the church is made up of human beings and thus is subject to mistake. The other side of the church is divine and is not subject to any error. When people talk about change in the church, if they are talking about how to improve our shortcomings, we have no objection to change. If the talk about change has to do with the divine pattern God gave for the church, then we do object strongly. God gave a pattern for the building of the tabernacle that Moses was obligated to follow. “Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount” (Heb. 8:5). It would seem foolish to argue that God gave a pattern for the tabernacle but left us to do just what we please in regard to the church. What we do must be by the authority of Christ, the head of the church. (Eph.1:22-23; 3:17).

While there is nothing wrong in trying to improve the human side of the church, to try to change the divine side

of the church is arrogant and presumptive. Great effort is being made to change the worship that God authorized. Many are laying down the banner of truth in regard to the use of instrumental music and are ‘standing on the other side’ with the leaders of denominationalism. Changes in worship are not just changes in the order of our services, but include changes in types of music, solos and even turning the Lord’s Supper into a common meal. We were told that we were too traditional in that there was never any change in the order of worship. Do not be fooled, these enemies of the cross of Christ have in mind additions to the way of God. They want to intervene in the divine side of the church.

Other attempts have been made recently to restructure the law of God in regard to membership in the Lord’s church. Many of us never in our wildest dreams thought that we would hear a member of the church speaking of baptism as being a nonessential. To hear of a preacher of the church telling sinners to repeat the ‘sinner’s prayer’ is beyond imagination. In the Bible record, the sinner was told to repent and be baptized in the name of Christ in order to obtain the remission of sins (Acts 2:37-38).

Another shocking change suggested by these agents of change is in the role of women in the church. The feminist movement has had a great influence over the denominations, but some are clamoring for the same kind of thinking in the Lord’s church. Women elders, women preachers, women song leaders and others leadership roles where they take the authority over the man are being advocated by some. We hear of these people speaking about how the church has held back the women from their rightful place in the church. Some have aligned themselves with those who criticize the Lord’s way. Instead of standing for the right, they have cast their lots with the enemy.

Edom learned a very hard lesson. It participated in the destruction of God’s people and actually took part in

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preventing the escape route from being followed by Judah. God's promise to curse those who cursed his people was carried out. We must give careful heed and not 'stand on the other side.'

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### **Biographical Sketch**

Frank Higginbotham was born in New Martinsville, WV, February 21, 1933. He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. A.G. (Bus) Higginbotham. He was graduated from Magnolia High School in New Martinsville and from Florida Christian College in Tampa, Fl. His first located work was at Columbia Street in Fairmont, WV (1953-1956). This was then followed by Wellsburg, WV (1956-1958) and West Street in Weirton, WV (1958-1964) and Virginia Avenue in Chester (1964-Present). He is currently in his 39<sup>th</sup> year at Chester. Radio preaching includes WETZ in New Martinsville, WMMN in Fairmont, WEIR in Weirton and WOHI in East Liverpool, OH. This program is a five-day-a-week, fifteen minute program that began in 1949. He was one of the speakers on a television program in Steubenville, OH over WSTV. He has spoken on various lecture programs (Ohio Valley College, Ohio Valley Lectures, Greater Kanawha Lectures, West Virginia School of Preaching). He is married to the former Rose King (1954). They had three children. Donna (passed away in 1965); Janie is married to Brent Gallagher, preacher at Oakwood Road in Fairmont, WV. Steve is the preacher at South Green Street in Glasgow, KY. The Higginbotham's have seven grandchildren.

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