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# **My Servants the Prophets:**

**Jonah, Micah, Nahum and Habakkuk**

**2006**

**Victory Lectures**

**West Virginia School of Preaching**

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**Moundsville, West Virginia**

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## Introduction

“Preaching from the Prophets” is the theme for our lectureship this year. We believe it to be a most appropriate and important theme. Jonah, Micah, Nahum and Habakkuk are the “minor prophets,” as Augustine called them, under consideration.

The books are “minor” only in the sense of brevity of material, not because they are less important than any other book of the Bible. They are probably less noticed and read by the average Bible reader, yet teach many important and valuable lessons that are applicable to today’s society.

The historical book of **Jonah** probably is best known for its fish story. Most children can tell us about the “whale.” Living inside the great fish, as Jonah miraculously did, proves the power of our God. The God who can sustain life in the belly of a great fish can resurrect the dead, and Jesus used this point to prove his Messiahship. In Matthew 12:40, our Lord said, “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

God is willing and eager to save men of every nation when they repent. Since God is universal, every heathen must turn to Him for salvation. Jonah’s prejudice caused him great difficulty in obeying God, but finally he “did the preaching God bid him preach.” The result of his preaching was mass repentance on the part of the Ninevites.

**Micah** might be referred to as the “farmer preacher.” He preached to the poor and downtrodden. He gave no indication of political interest, but devoted himself to dealing with the spiritual and moral problems of the day. He recognized the absolute sovereignty of God. The great principle, “You shall reap what you sow” was clearly implied in his teaching to the people. This is a principle that needs to be recognized by those who are living in our world. As a marvelous elderly brother was accustomed to saying, “All the reapin’ is not done in this life!” This prophet cried out for equity, justice, and mercy in his day.

Though once forgiven of God, Nineveh, through the years had brought upon themselves once again the wrath of God. **Nahum** was

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selected to declare the “fierce wrath of Jehovah against his enemies,” before whom none can stand. The Holy Spirit directed Nahum in the writing of a beautifully worded, yet frightening prophecy. He declared the absolute rule of God over all nations and that for a nation to survive it must be established upon God-given principles of righteousness and truth. The present world would do well to heed this.

**Habakkuk** is a book differing from many of the other books of prophecy. Habakkuk took a complaint of the people to God. He questioned God’s judgment in using the more wicked Babylonians to punish Judah, who saw themselves as a less wicked nation. After all, they were God’s people, and should not be punished by a nation as evil as the Chaldeans. However, he came to realize that God acts in his own good time. He declared “the just shall live by faith” (2:4).

It is our sincere hope that all who read these lessons will be drawn to a closer study and deeper appreciation of God’s Word through the Minor Prophets. Christians must learn from these great prophets not to make the same mistakes that were made by Israel and Judah more than 2500 years ago.

History seems to go in cycles and mankind has a way of committing the same kinds of sins again and again. We should realize that what God did not tolerate two and a half millennia ago, Denver E. Cooper will not tolerate today.

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## ***Dedication***

Our tradition of a few years has been to dedicate the lectureship book to a preacher who has spent many years in the service of Christ. This year we decided to honor two long time faithful gospel preachers.

Brother **BERT BROWN** now lives near the Salem church building at Glen Easton, WV. He was born in Kentucky. Bert obeyed the Gospel at age 17; began preaching at age 19 for a tenure of 62 years until forced to discontinue preaching because of a disabling stroke in 2003.

He attended Freed-Hardeman College from 1941-1943, receiving his BA Degree in Bible and Communications from David Lipscomb College in 1970.

He served as the local preacher for churches in Indiana, Tennessee, Georgia and Florida. He held many gospel meetings; spoke on lectureships; worked in Bible Camps; contributed to religious publications, conducted local TV and radio programs and was an instructor at Florida School of Preaching in Lakeland, Florida. He also taught high school at Christian Home and Bible School, Mt. Dora, Florida for 13 years. He did mission work for small congregations in the U.S., Jamaica, Russia and the Ukraine.

Bert and Fairy, his faithful companion, celebrated their 59th wedding anniversary on July 27, 2006. They have four children, all of whom attended FHU. Dr. and Mrs. (Deborah) Jim Wilson of Fort Smith, AR who do extensive medical mission work in different countries of Africa; Mr. and Mrs. (Cheryl) Jack Cole of Mt. Dora, Florida. They are both school teachers and do mission work in Jamaica during the summer. Jack is an elder at Orange Ave. church in Eustus, Florida. Tim Brown and wife Anita live in Deltona, Florida, where Tim is a deacon and works as a firefighter, paramedic. They have also done mission work in Jamaica. Mr. and Mrs. (Theresa, Teri) Don Harris are residents of Glen Easton, WV where Don serves as an elder of the Salem congregation. Teri is a stay-at-home mom. She teaches children's Bible classes, speaks on Ladies Day programs and has also been involved in mission work. Bert and Fairy have twelve grandchildren and eight great grandchildren.

Bert's first love has always been the Lord's church and preaching the Gospel. He was an excellent personal worker and had a passion for studying the Bible with anyone at anytime of day or night. His knowledge of the Scriptures, pleasant personality, drive and ready wit helped make him an effective minister.

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**ROY W. PRATT** was born May 8, 1916, near Joseph's Mill in Tyler County, West Virginia. He grew up on a farm near Wilbur during the depression years of the nineteen thirties.

Roy's parents were members of a religious body not mentioned in the Bible and he spent most of his early years in that denomination.

Judy Richmond of Middlebourne, Tyler County, WV became his wife on February 27, 1943. Her family was of the same religious belief. Roy and Judy joined that body. Roy and Judy have one daughter, Linda, who was born September 22, 1947.

In the spring of 1957 Roy and his family were invited by a friend to attend a Wednesday evening service of the church in Chester, West Virginia where they were living at the time. Brother Cecil Dotson was the located preacher there, but brother Frank Higginbotham had been invited to preach that evening. The teaching was very different from that they had been used too. However, they began to attend faithfully. Roy and Judy were baptized on Sunday morning October 13, 1957. He later served as a deacon for the church in Chester.

Roy preached his first sermon September 1, 1963, at Bert, Tyler County, West Virginia where he later preached one Sunday each month. He also preached one Sunday a month at Sardis, Ohio.

July 5, 1965 was on Monday. Roy took that week off from his insurance work and went with brother Cecil Dotson to Parsons, West Virginia to hold a meeting. They took turns preaching and knocked on many doors that week. He continued to return to Parsons on Sunday at every opportunity. On February 4, 1966 he and Judy moved to Parsons to work with the 14 members. They eventually reached a membership of about 30. When Roy returned recently for a Sunday appointment they had about 15 present. Some had died, others moved away.

Roy has worked full time with churches in Buckhannon, Hundred, Wellsburg and McKinleyville, West Virginia. He moved to Weston, WV, in December 1983 where he and Judy now reside. Roy and Judy are known for traveling many miles to attend gospel meetings although at age 89 they don't go as much. Forty-three of those 89 years he has faithfully preached God's Word.

Roy gives thanks to God and those who invited him to that evening service in 1957, He asks, "What if we had not received that invitation?" The funeral service of that dear friend was conducted by Roy December 12, 1983.

At this writing Roy continues to preach for the congregation at Weston, WV. He has no desire or intention of retiring.

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## ***Elders Honored***

### ***Dewey Avenue Church of Christ, St. Marys, WV***

**LARRY ERNEST BUTCHER** was born November 22, 1942, at Ellenboro, WV. His parents were Harold Ernest and Lillian Wilcox Butcher. Larry was baptized June 6, 1965, at the Twenty-Sixth Street church of Christ in Huntington, WV, by John L. Shaw.

He was married to Delores Paulette Dotson on September 1, 1962, at the Pennsboro church of Christ by brother Clifton Inman. Leslie and Wilma Dotson of Pennsboro, WV, are the parents of Delores. The Butcher's have four children. Debra Lynn Butcher Shaver lives in Bethesda, MD. Timothy Alan Butcher lives in Buffalo, New York. Steven Bradley Butcher resides in St. Marys, WV, and Jason Todd Butcher has residence in Roseville, Georgia. The Butcher's grandchildren are Anthony, Ben and Cole Butcher, St. Marys, WV, and Alex and Andrew Butcher of Roseville, GA.

Beginning in 1971 brother Butcher served as a deacon at the Westside Church of Christ, 7009 Johnnycake Road, Baltimore, MD. He now resides at 2001 Dewey Avenue and worships with the Dewey Avenue church where he was appointed an elder in 2001. He is a retired teacher and coach.

**DON DAVIS** was born April 8, 1954. His parents, Ed and Cora Davis were members of the church meeting at Sunrise in Parkersburg, WV. At age 12 Don became a member of the church at Sunrise.

In 1976 he married Kay Lemasters, daughter of Brooks and the late Floretta Lemasters whose membership was West Union, WV, where brother Brooks serves as an elder today. Don and Kay have three sons, Brian, Chad and Danny.

Beginning in 1978 Don preached three Sundays a month at West Union while living in Parkersburg, WV. They moved to Belmont, WV, and began attending Dewey Avenue Church of Christ in St. Marys. He was appointed deacon in 2003 serving until May 2006 when he was appointed an elder. He is very grateful to God for the opportunity to serve along with the other elders in the Dewey Avenue church. He states that their encouragement is much appreciated.

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**WILLIAM DUER** has been married to Patricia Ann since September 4, 1948. They are the parents of four children. Julie Magas lives in Chardon, Ohio; Charles lives in Mentor, Ohio; Craig lives in Logy, Ohio, and Curt lives in Washington, D. C. William and Patricia Ann have nine grandchildren.

William's parents, Charles E. T. and Hester R. Duer were life long members of the church in Marietta, Ohio. William was baptized by Boyd D. Fanning on November 2, 1938. He served as an elder of the Sixth and Washington Street church in Marietta from 1997 to 2002. He was appointed an elder at Dewey Avenue May 28, 2006.

William's grandfathers William G. Duer and Charles F. Bishop both served as elders in Marietta. The former was appointed in 1911; the latter in 1911.

**SHELDON E. HAYS** was born August 26, 1938, to Raymond and Dorothy Hays. He was baptized in 1956 by Jesse Clayton. In 1958 Sheldon married Patricia Wilson, the daughter of Asa E. Wilson who served as an elder of the Dewey Avenue church for many years. The wedding was the first in the new building. Sheldon and Pat have two sons, Matthew and Mark and four grandsons, Zachary, Luke, John and Stephen.

Sheldon was appointed deacon in 1968 in which work he served until being appointed elder in 2001. He has been a Bible class teacher and also preached in various places, including six years for the Mt. Nebo congregation, Naish Springs, West Union in West Virginia, and Minerva and Newport, Ohio. He spoke on the lectures in Jackson, Kentucky. Sheldon is no longer able to preach because of ill health.

**DAVE PARKS** was born February 19, 1954. His parents are Eugene and Thelma Parks of Pennsboro, WV. He graduated from Pennsboro High School in 1972 where he played All-State football in 1971 and 1972. He graduated from Abilene Christian College in 1976 with a B.S. degree in Education. Dave was baptized in September 1969 by Charles Cole in Pennsboro, WV.

He married Carla Perkins in May 1975. To this union were born 2 children, Darren and Drew Parks. Darren and his wife Terri are active members at Dewey Avenue in St. Marys, WV. Drew is an active member at Myrtle Beach church in South Carolina.

Brother Parks worked for 30 years as manager and part owner of Ace Hardware in New Martinsville, Pennsboro and Warwood, WV. He was appointed as an elder at the Dewey Avenue Church of Christ in July 2001.

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**CHARLES O. WRIGHT** was born March 7, 1929 at Ben's Run, West Virginia. His parents were Dave and Alice Bell Wright whose home was frequently the home of visiting evangelists. They attended church services at Mt. Nebo and Bens Run. Memorizing Scripture at the opening of services was a practice of theirs and Charles remembers the first Scripture he memorized was Matthew 16:13-20.

Charles was baptized August 27, 1950. He had met Martha in 1945. They married March 1, 1953 after he had spent time in the service, training in California before being shipped to Korea.

Two children, Melinda and Kevin, were adopted by Charles and Martha. Charles wanted to express appreciation to his lovely wife who has stood by his side through "thick and thin;" to his good parents and to Denver and Florence Cooper for assisting them with the adoption of their children.

Martha's parents were G. B. Varner, who served as an elder at Dewey Avenue for many years, and Anna Marie, his faithful wife.

Charles and Martha have been very active in the Lords work. Charlie served as a deacon in the mid 70's before being appointed an elder July 15, 2001. He did over Sunday preaching for 13 different congregations in the Ohio Valley.

Charlie has been a hard worker in a local industrial plant and a successful business man, all of which has helped to prepare him to serve God as one of His shepherds.

It is with a deep sense of appreciation that we honor these good and godly men at our lectureship this year. We express our deep and profound gratitude to them and their good wives for all the kindnesses shown to the West Virginia School of Preaching since its beginning in 1994. They have been true friends to the school, backing the faculty, staff and students in very special and important ways. We covet their friendship and support of the school and pray that God will allow us to work together for many years in his holy Cause. Our prayers for God's richest blessings to abide with these good families are constant and fervent. We praise God for giving us men like these to help guide His people in such troublesome times. These men are very unlike the careless shepherds of ancient Israel and Judah, who were far more interested in following their own pursuits than those of God. God's flock at Dewey Avenue is much safer in the hands of such capable shepherds than they would be without them. May God grant them many years of faithful service, loyal both to God and his perfect Word, is our ardent prayer.

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## ***Foreword***

There are three purposes for the production of this book. The first of these is the desire to preserve some of the richest study from some of the most fertile preaching minds in the upper Ohio Valley, and elsewhere. The men whose works are found in this book are men who are loyal to the truth as it is presented in Holy Scripture. They are not radicals with whom all must agree in every minute detail or those disagreeing will be "marked" and "withdrawn from." Their goal is to be true to Jesus not the "shibboleths" of men. They cling neither to the radical right or the liberal left, but are known for balance in the presentation of the truth of the Sacred Volume. They "speak the truth in love." While they are neither "fault finders" nor "heretic hunters," they are not hesitant to point out such when they arise among us. They are not only known for their careful study of the Bible, but for their willingness to sacrificially serve our Lord Jesus Christ, his people and the world in general. Consequently, it is a primary purpose to preserve their work in written form, not only for the generation now purchasing and reading this volume, but for generations yet to be born.

A second purpose for the presentation of this volume to brethren is to "Render honor to whom honor is due." That is the reason you will find sketches of the lives and works of two faithful preachers of righteousness in this volume. It is "altogether fitting and proper" that these two brethren, Brown and Pratt, be honored and thanked profoundly for their combined years of service to the Lord Jesus Christ. If one totals those years they represent one hundred-five years of service to Jesus. They deserve the appreciation and accolades of their brethren, though they have never asked for them, perhaps never dreamt of receiving them. One of the things we may have failed to do in the past was to allow preaching brethren to know they are appreciated and loved for their work's sake. There is nothing wrong with esteeming good men, as a matter of fact, Paul commanded the Thessalonian brethren to do that with regard to their elders (1 Thess. 5:12-13). What can and should be done for elders can also be done with those who faithfully deliver the message of salvation that has saved our souls from sin and set our eyes on heaven.

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In conjunction with honoring men who have served as Evangelists, sincerely seeking the lost, it is also fitting that we honor men who have stood with preachers, behind preachers and who are fellow-laborers in the Lord. These are devoted Elders who shoulder, in addition to all the rest of their day-to-day responsibilities, the great, but sometimes thankless task, of shepherding the souls of the flock of Christ. They who truly work in this capacity are following in the footsteps of the Good Shepherd, caring for the souls of men, perhaps not as much as he did, but to the limits of their individual capacities. We are so thankful to God for such men, and it is appropriate that they be honored as well. Like all faithful Christians, they deserve the support, love and accolades of their brethren. Without the slightest hint of embarrassment we freely admit how deeply we love and respect those men who faithfully shepherd the flock of Christ.

And while we are speaking of people who deserve our gratitude, appreciation and thanks, it is fitting that we mention two fine Christian ladies without whom this book would never have gone to production. Our sincere gratitude to sister Lyn Miller of the Bridge Street church in New Martinsville, WV, whose expertise in the use of the MLA system for writing caused her the unenviable job of making sure every MLA reference was just as it should be—that each lecture followed that format as closely as possible. Thank you Lyn, until heaven better pays you! Also worthy of mention for her hard work as primary proof reader is sister Shirley A. West of the Hillview Terrace church in Moundsville, WV. She spent countless hours finding all the little commas, periods and dashes that were in the wrong places, or were no place at all, and our failures to properly capitalize, use proper grammar and syntax. Her careful scrutiny and bright red pen were deeply appreciated. Since human perfection does not exist, mistakes may be found in this book, but they are there despite the best efforts of all involved.

Sincere gratitude is also expressed to the Lectureship Committee who labored for weeks suggesting speakers, developing titles, and pointing out so many possibilities when it comes to speaking on the “Minor Prophets.” The aid in making suggestions, taking on special and unexpected assignments is laudable, and we express sincere thanks to them. Worthy of very special thanks is our good Director, friend and colleague brother Denver Cooper who contacted all the speakers, set up the schedule, made sure the lectures arrived on time and dozens of other “little chores” which though unseen are absolutely essential to such a program and to the production of this book. Finally, we thank the elders

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of the Hillview Terrace church who oversee the school and work hard to see that sufficient moral support and advice is received by all. This helps make our school, our lectureship and the production of this book run like a “well-oiled machine.”

The third purpose for this book is not only to present great truths for the present and preserve them for the future, but to give young men, such as those in our school, and elsewhere, a spring board from which to launch into study for the purpose of teaching future generations the wonderful words of life. It is our prayer that the men who graduate our school will go forward in biblical study and interpretation to realms into which we have not yet looked. We want to give these men the basics so they can far outshine their mentors here. The faculty sees itself “not as persons to be as good as, but persons to be better than.” The book is produced with the sincere hope that it will be used by our students, past, present and future to climb to greater heights in the service of our King. God grant that they may do so, is our prayer.

Charles C. Pugh III, D. Gene West, co-editors  
August 5, 2006

*Additional copies of this book may be ordered from: West Virginia School of Preaching, P. O. Box 785, Moundsville, WV 26041; by Telephoning: 1-304-845-8001, or by emailing [dirwvsop@aol.com](mailto:dirwvsop@aol.com) or [secwvsop@aol.com](mailto:secwvsop@aol.com).*

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## **WHY GOD REPENTS**

### *Jonah 3:1-5*

MACK LYON

#### ***Introduction***

The Book of Jonah is easy and interesting reading. It is more than just the story of a great whale with which we amuse children when we put them to bed at night. It's as you might expect, of course, many unbelievers find it an amusing story, but only fiction. Others, including some of us, consider it the Word of God alright, but only a parable. To most of us it is historical—it really happened to real people. We also believe it is a significant part of God's revelation of His gracious plan to offer sinful man forgiveness and reconciliation with Him. In it God revealed Himself to Israel as the God of, not Israel alone but of all people, as Paul preached Him to the Athenians on Mar's Hill (Acts 17:22-33). Its message is briefly stated in chapter two, verse nine: "Salvation is of the Lord" to the whole world.

Jesus obviously believed it to be a factual story. In Matthew 12:39-41, it is recorded that He said:

... An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.

The events recounted in the Book of Jonah occurred during the reign of Amaziah over Judah (803-775 BC). Nineveh was no small town. It was a city of some 125,000 residents. It was the capital city of the

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Assyrian Empire, an enemy of the Kingdom of Judah, the people of God for centuries.

Jonah was a Hebrew, a proud Hebrew. His loyalty was with God's people. Yet, "The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me'" (1:1-2). Those words, "their wickedness has come up before me" remind me of other times when man's wickedness came so powerfully to the attention of God. They also remind me of God's response. The first was when God called Noah to build the ark (Gen. 6) in preparation for the great flood. Another is the wickedness of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 13. We see it frequently in Isaiah and Jeremiah, too.

The Hebrew people proudly felt God was their very own possession—and none other's. They were jealously haughty about Him, too. Now, you can imagine the conflicts Jonah must have suffered within, when God called him to go to Nineveh, the capitol city of Judah's bitterest national enemy, a Gentile city, a city known to be the "Sin City" of that day. And he was to go there to preach to those wicked Gentile people! It was contrary to everything he felt was important. I doubt that there are very many preachers today who would not respond as Jonah did to that kind of call. I wonder about myself.

Jonah arose to flee from the presence of the Lord (1:3)! He went the opposite direction! He learned very quickly and powerfully through a lesson about the omnipresence of the Lord.

Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me (Ps. 139:7-10).

#### ***Responses***

Jonah tried to flee from the presence of God when God called him. Moses made excuse after excuse. Paul gladly arose and was baptized and immediately began preaching Christ in the synagogues of the Jews. Barnabas sold everything he had and shared it with members of his new family, the church (Acts 4:36-37). Ananias and Sapphira lied about their response (Acts 5:1-10). But it isn't my assignment to speak about Jonah's response to the call of God, or Moses' or yours or mine. Every

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Christian is called of God to serve the Lord. We respond in various ways. It is my assignment to speak to you about God's response to the response of the Ninevites to the preaching of Jonah. God's response! You ask? But, it isn't my assignment to discuss Jonah's response to God's command, Moses' or yours or mine, but—

### ***God's Response to the Response of the Ninevites***

Yes, God responds to all responses to His call. He rejoices with the angels surrounding Him in Heaven over one sinner that repents, more than over ninety and nine just people who need no repentance (Luke 15:7). And He's saddened when one responds negatively as did the rich young ruler in Luke 18:18-24. Jesus had told him to sell his possessions and come follow Him. He declined because you see, "he was rich."

Well you see, the people of the wicked city of Nineveh, capital of the nation of Assyria, the political enemy of God's people, "sin city" to whom Jonah did not want to go, repented (Jon. 3:10).

### ***Repentance***

What is repentance anyway? Some people think it's sorrow for sin, but it isn't. There's sorrow in repentance, but many are the people who were sorry for some behavior, or some ugly behavioral pattern they've developed over the years, who never repented of it. But the Bible says, "Godly sorrow worketh repentance" (2 Cor. 7:10). That's the old King James Version. The New King James says, "Godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted (or repented of KJV); but the sorrow of the world produces death."

Jesus explained the meaning of repentance better than anyone I ever heard or read. He said, "But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, Son, go, work today in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not, but afterward he regretted it and went" (Matt. 21:28-29). The old King James Version says, "He repented and went." What did he do? Obviously: he changed his mind and went to do what his father said. That's it, my friend. That's repentance: a change of the will or the mind, motivated by sorrow for past actions that always results in a change of behavior. The young man obviously became sorry for what he had said to his father, changed his mind about it, and went and worked as his father had asked him to do. He repented.

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### ***God Repented When Nineveh Repented***

"So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord . . . Then he cried out and said, 'Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown!'. . . So the people of Nineveh believed God, put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them" (3:1-5). Why did these wicked people do that? They repented! Jesus said they did (Matt. 12:41). They had a change of mind, which resulted in a change in their way of living. Then, verse ten says, "Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented (repented KJV) from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it." The fact that God repented, or changed His mind and His plan for Nineveh raises some questions in our minds, doesn't it? It may be because we are trying to understand the mind and actions of the infinite God with our little finite or limited minds.

First, comes the thought that in Malachi 3:6 God says, "I am the Lord, I do not change." A skeptical person might delight in the idea that he has found a contradiction in Scripture. You and I won't think that because we believe "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16). And God never contradicts Himself.

Another thought comes to mind: Can man (men) change the mind of God? God sent Jonah to tell the people of Nineveh, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." But it was not overthrown! As a matter of fact, it became an even more glorious city. The problem fades when we consider that God is unchangeable in neither His nature nor His will, but He can and does change His sentence upon persons or cities or nations, as is seen in the case of Nineveh, when they repent of the evil in their lives. The King James Version says, "God saw their works, that they turned from their evil ways; and God repented of the evil that He had said He would do unto them; and He did it not."

Here's another question: Does God ever repent of some error or mistake He has made earlier? The answer is, No! He makes none.

Does God ever need to repent of evil He has done or plans to do? If not, what is the meaning of Jonah 3:10? Again, the answer is No! He does no evil. The King James Version of verse 10 of our study today is unfortunate. Evil in the sense in which it is currently and commonly used nowadays is best defined as the absence of righteousness. My dictionary gives the following: "a: morally reprehensible, SINFUL, WICKED <an impulse> arising from actual or imputed bad character . . ." (*Webster's* 396). Such evil may be by commission or omission. It can be some evil activity done, or some good deed refused. But God is righteous—totally

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so—(1 John 2:29). In the sense in which “evil” is used in Jonah 3:10, it is sentencing or judgment upon people, and “The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether” (Ps. 19:9).

Then, can a mere man, or a church or a city or a nation change the mind of God? The people of Nineveh did so by repenting. And if not, why do you suppose we have so many requests for prayer, and why do we—the **Search** staff—pray for so many people in our morning devotionals? What is the purpose of petition (prayer), if it isn’t to persuade God to do something the person praying doesn’t see God doing but sees the need of His doing it?

When I think of a nation or a city like Nineveh repenting, I am reminded of the message God sent to His own people in Old Testament days. When they had forsaken Him and His way and gone after other gods, as America has in our times, He said, and it is recorded in 2 Chronicles 7:13-14:

When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

That is a message America needs to hear at this very moment in our national history. The picture that hangs behind me during parts of the **Search TV** program is that of a flag and an open Bible turned to that passage.

The closing words of the Declaration of Independence of the thirteen colonies from all earthly powers, signed by fifty-six of the founding fathers of this great nation on July 4, 1776, also declared this nation’s dependence on Almighty God. They wrote, “With a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor” (qtd. in Flood 16). Thomas Jefferson, who is mistakenly said to be a statesman who contended strongly for the present definition of “separation of church and state” said, “Can the liberties of a nation be secure, when we have removed the conviction that these liberties are the gift of God?” (qtd. in Flood 24). Of course, “Separation of church and state? Absolutely! Divorcement of God from government? Not so!” (24). America needs to repent and return to God.

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## **Conclusion**

Listen up America! The prophet Jeremiah said to a nation whom God loved and prospered:

The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying: “Arise and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will cause you to hear My words.” Then I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make. Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying: “O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?” says the LORD. “Look, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel! The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it.” (18:1-10)

God bless and keep you. I love you.

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## **Biographical Sketch**

Mack Lyon is a native of Oklahoma, born in Muskogee. He graduated High School at Coalgate. He attended Freed-Hardeman University in Henderson, TN, and graduated the University of Oklahoma. He has lived and worked with local churches in Oklahoma, Arizona, Texas and New Jersey. He was a missionary to Western Australia in the 1960s where he established a congregation in Riverton a suburb of Perth.

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## **AN OVERVIEW OF JONAH**

MATTHEW P. LEWIS

As I sit, as a citizen of the United States in the year 2006, listening to the political debate of how this document or that document should be understood and implemented as law for our country, I am always amazed at the vast disparity of how lawyers and politicians can come up with such differing views of the same document. The reasons for the differences are: first, people have biases and come to a misunderstanding because they make the document fit their viewpoint. Second, people fail to study the historical context of the document, and what original writers meant when they were writing.

I can sit here 200 years after the beginning of my country and understand what it means to be a citizen of this country, but I will never have the deep appreciation for my country that I should have unless I study the people that hacked their way through the first forests to settle this land. Unless I understand the hardships they endured, I will not understand the reasoning behind the laws they passed. If I understand the history of my nation, set my biases aside and abide by the truth of history, I will be better able to exercise my citizenship in my nation and have a clearer understanding of where I came from, where I am, and where I should go.

All Christians have dual citizenship and should have the understanding that citizenship in the Lord's kingdom supercedes the law of man when there is conflict between the two. Yet many people of faith have a better understanding of their temporal kingdom than they do of their spiritual kingdom. The Christian is required to study in order to be approved by God (2 Tim. 2:15), and I know that a lack of study has shipwrecked the faith of believers in Christ (2 Peter 3:16). Just like the forefathers of this country are a mandatory study to better understand what their vision is for our nation, the Old Testament prophets are a mandatory study in order to give us a clearer picture of where we began, what we went through and where God wants us to go. Just as our

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forefathers are being neglected in study so are the Old Testament prophets. Why is this?

Bring up the word prophet in a group of people and you will immediately have everyone's attention, and sadly enough when prophets are discussed the first to pop into most people's minds is Nostradamus and all the cryptic and mystical things he supposedly predicted. People for the most part have a mystical mindset when it comes to prophecy, so when an attempt is made to read and understand the prophets in the Old Testament that bias is carried with them; they look for hidden meanings and codes and come away from the study either more confused or with grandiose claims of some further revelation. This confusion causes people to come away with the understanding, "If these learned men can't get it right, how am I supposed to understand it?" We need to keep in mind that Jesus told us that we can know the truth and that truth will make us free (John 8:32), and the Holy Spirit through Paul told us God is not the author of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). If we have the mindset that God is capable of revealing His will to us in written form and that written word is understandable and we approach all of God's word that way we indeed will be blessed with the wisdom God promises us (Col. 1:9). That is why it is a privilege to start this second series of lectures on the Minor Prophets, for I know the lectures gathered this week will continue to dispel the clouds of darkness surrounding the Old Testament Minor Prophets as was done in the previous series on the minor prophets.

My task this morning is to give an introduction to the book of Jonah and as the task was given so shall it be executed.

### ***The Book of Jonah***

Jonah unlike the other prophetic works in the Old Testament is different because the book is written from a historical point of view. Jonah was written to give the account of God's displeasure of the nation of Assyria and the man God sent to deliver His message.

Jonah was a prophet but what kind of prophet; the word prophet means to "speak forth" (Vine 493) and carries two meanings one of which is to foretell and the other is to forth tell. God did not give Jonah detailed visions of exactly what was going to happen to them if they did not repent of the wickedness God had found within their nation. While Jonah received a message from God to deliver to the Assyrians, that message is just like other warnings God gave through other prophets to other nations as well as the Israelites and gives to Christians today that

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all people everywhere need to repent or perish (Luke 13:3). The message is of forth telling rather than foretelling.

There are three schools of thought in the interpretation of the Book of Jonah: mythical, allegorical, and historical. Those that hold to the mythical view of Jonah are generally critics of the Bible and believe that the book is nothing but a fairy tale that has a great moral ending. “The story of Jonah is neither an account of actual happenings nor an allegory of the destiny of Israel or of the Messiah; it is fiction—a short story with a moral” (Pfeiffer, R. 587). The allegorical view sees Jonah as a story about Israel as Nineveh being Israel:

This interpretation may have arisen from the fact that the name “Jonah” meant “dove” in Hebrew, and that this species had for long been a symbol of Israel (cf. Ps. 74:19; Hos. 11:11). On such a basis the experiences of the prophet represent the mission and failure of Israel to be the true people of God. The flight of Jonah to Tarshish symbolized Israel’s default in respect to its spiritual mission before exile; the fish represented Babylon, which swallowed up the Hebrew people during the time of exile and subsequently disgorged them during the restoration period . . . (Harrison 911)

One of the criticisms of both the mythical and allegorical is the miracle of Jonah being able to survive in the belly of the fish for three days, which causes them to dismiss the account as historical. If we dismiss the historical due to a phobia of the supernatural we introduce a host of contradictions within the critical scholars themselves and within the Scriptures. Even those that believe in the mythical and allegorical believe that there are real historical places spoken of in the book, for Jonah was of Gath-hepher (2 Kings 14:25) which was about 5 miles northeast of Nazareth. Jonah was commanded to go to Nineveh which was a major Assyrian city and would later become the capital of that empire. Jonah went to Joppa, a sea port city about 30 miles from Jerusalem, to board a ship where he would go to Tarshish which was in southern Spain (Pfeiffer, C. 40). The critics also agree that Jonah is depicted as a real person as the evidence from Scripture cannot be discounted as the Book of Jonah opens by identifying Jonah as the son of Amittai. The Jews also believed Jonah to be a real person as revealed in 2 Kings 14:25 where Jonah is said to be a servant of God and a prophet from the city of Gath-hepher. The historian Josephus in his work

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“Antiquities” wrote in book nine, chapter ten and verse two as if he were recording the history of an actual event (35).

From internal and external evidences the only conclusion is that Jonah is an actual literal account of historical events. This being true then the question comes up as to how those that hold to the historical view deal with Jonah surviving in the belly of a fish for three days. Again this question stems from an aversion to miracles. The believer in Christ should not be ashamed to admit, first, that they believe in miracles and second, that Jonah was swallowed by a fish and was in its belly for three days.

The reason many believers do not admit to their belief in the miraculous is to avoid the scorn and ridicule of the scientifically minded. We need to understand that science has limitations. First, it is limited to explaining that which is found in nature, second, it can only explain those things in nature that are observable, testable and verifiable through experimentation, and finally, science can only answer how not why a process happens. The why is left up to another field in finding truth and that is the field of philosophy. There are many scientists that understand the limitations of science and are believers in God. Recently in the *Christian Courier* there was an article called the “Language of God.” The article was written by Wayne Jackson and dealt with a man named Francis S. Collins, M.D., Ph.D., who is the director of the National Human Genome Research Institute at the National Institutes of Health, and a former atheist turned believer in God. Dr. Collins is a respected geneticist who is responsible for leading the completion of the Human Genome Project, and the author of *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (Free Press, 2006). Dr. Collins is quoted as making the following statement in the article: “I have no problem accepting that miracles can occur. Here’s the logic. As soon as you accept the possibility that God exists and is outside of nature, then there is no reason why a supernatural being could not, on occasion, stage an invasion of the natural world” (qtd. in Jackson). There are numerous statements of faith from renowned scientists that are found in print and on the web if one just takes the time to look, so there need be no reason for us to be shy about professing our belief in miracles.

When a person asks how it is possible for a man to survive in the belly of a fish for three days we need to point our skeptics to the Bible and show them internal evidences like Predictive Prophecy, Unity of Theme, Inerrancy of Scripture, and The Deity of Christ. These and many others are the strongest evidences as to the reliability of Scripture.

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What about external evidences that deal with Jonah? Are there any accounts of a man being swallowed whole by a water born animal and surviving several days? Unfortunately no verifiable accounts of this happening have been found. There is a story, used by many believers which have been published in numerous commentaries, of a man named James Bartley who was swallowed whole by a whale in 1891 while on a whaling expedition aboard the whaling ship Star of The East while on duty near the Falkland Islands. This story was thoroughly researched by Edward B. Davis, Associate Professor of Science and History at Messiah College in Grantham, PA, and documented in a 19 page document, which can be found on-line, finding the story to be false. Dr. Davis said the following in his paper:

I realized then with finality that there simply was no whale at the end of my line, indeed that there never had been a whale, and that all of this was no more than a fish story, albeit a dandy. It had been good enough to fool apparently sophisticated folk like Henri de Parville, Sir Francis Fox, Julian Barnes, and the authors and editors of some highly respected biblical commentaries. But in the end, when traced back to the source, each reported sighting turned out to be just another chimera, just another version of the original spurious newspaper account. Precisely how the story began, and who started it, may never be known with any certainty at this juncture exactly a century later. Nevertheless a plausible scenario comes to mind—a scenario that actually does start with a whale, though not Bartley’s. (12)

Should the fact that this story is fictitious bother us? Absolutely not! As Dr. Collins implied, if God does exist He is not bound by the laws of nature, and we know that with God nothing is impossible (Luke 1:37).

The greatest issue concerning the believability of the account of Jonah being in the belly is the credibility of Jesus Christ. Jesus referred to Jonah two times in Scripture, once in Matthew 12:39-41 and once in Matthew 16:4:

But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation

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and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here.” (Matt. 12:39-41)

“A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.” And He left them and departed. (Matt. 16:4)

These two statements by the Lord show us that he accepted Jonah as a real person on a real mission from God and spent a literal three days in the belly of the fish and used that as a sign for those he was speaking to that he would literally be in the earth for three days. If we reject the historicity of Jonah, we must logically reject Jesus as the Christ because He is a deceiver, and the whole Bible as spurious. Guy N. Woods had this to say about rejecting Jonah:

One who rejects the historical character of the prophecy of Jonah might, with equal reason, reject the testimony of the Lord himself. Indeed, to reject one is to reject the other. There is significance in the fact the Lord twice, and with much emphasis, attested to the truth of this narrative, thus showing that he anticipated objections to it, and took care to guarantee its authenticity. (578)

The Lord cannot be our Savior with the rejection of a historical interpretation of Jonah.

### ***Jonah, the Man and Date***

Everything we know about Jonah we find from the book named after him and seven New Testament verses. The name Jonah is found thirty-one times in the Bible. Twenty-seven times the Bible refers to the prophet and four times the Bible is referring to the Apostle Peter’s father. The book opens by telling us that Jonah is the son of Amittai and 2 Kings 14:23-25 tells us Jonah is a prophet of God whose home town is Gath-hepher. Being from Gath-hepher, which is a town located four miles northeast of a city that would later be called Nazareth, made Jonah a resident of Israel which was under the rulership of Jeroboam II who ruled the northern tribes from 793-753 B.C. The time period is approximately one hundred thirty years after the death of Solomon and the division of the kingdom. Knowing this, the time of the writing of the book is approximately 780 B.C.

Jonah’s father’s name Amittai means “The Truth of God” and Jonah’s name means “Dove.” No where else in the Old Testament is

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either name used again saving in 2 Kings 14:25. Their names are so rare that there can be no mistake as to who Jonah is when he is mentioned in the New Testament. These names may also give us an insight into these two men. It is interesting to note that “The Truth of God” is raising the “Dove” in a land overgrown with sin and idolatry. Jeroboam II is keeping the evil practices of idolatrous calf worship of his forebears alive, yet the “Truth of God” succeeds in raising the “Dove” amidst the sin. Even though Amittai raises a faithful man of God we can see that Jonah the Dove has the racist attitude of a snake when he is commanded to preach to Nineveh. Homer Hailey has this to say about Jonah’s attitude: “He is pictured in the book that bears his name as a narrow-minded, fiercely zealous patriot; he is zealous for Jehovah and desirous of seeing the enemies of His people destroyed. The expression of divine love for a heathen nation and of God’s desire to spare it is magnified as it is shown in contrast to the spirit of the prophet” (62). The germ of racism has firmly taken root during the time of Jonah to give bloom to the ugly fruit of hatred found in the New Testament (Gal. 2:11-13). Yet God forced Jonah to preach to the Assyrians.

### ***The Assyrians***

The beginning of the Assyrian Empire was very brutal. The Assyrians started out as a Semitic people living in the northern most parts of Mesopotamia; where they had to develop into a race of warriors to fend off the brutal attacks from the more powerful kingdoms and they learned their trade well. The first capital of the empire was the city of Ashur which was named from the god Ashur which was later given to the whole kingdom. A secondary capital called Nineveh was developed later because of the close proximity to Babylon and the heat of the desert. The empire did not see real power till 1810 B.C under the first notable king Shamshi-Adad I (1830-1780 B.C). Under this king the kingdom conquered and honed its brutality toward enemy soldiers and the civilians they conquered, but still the instability of the region made it difficult for the Assyrians to develop into a great empire. In the year 1760 B.C. Hammurabi the king of Babylon was able to take advantage of this instability and conquer the people of this area and Assyria became part of the Babylonian Empire, but that was short lived as well. Approximately 700 years later the new Assyrian Empire would come to power approximately 1070 B.C., and the first king of note was Tiglathpileser II who began his reign in 970 B.C. The history of these people is one of brutal slavery, bloody victories and the torture of those

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they conquered. This empire is infamous as one of the most vicious blood thirsty empires that ever existed; one that was not interested in ruling those they defeated but only conquering and attaining wealth. Yet they were a very religious people, and their religion was very different from other empires.

The Assyrians also, amidst their cruelties, had a great reverence for their gods, and as appears from the inscriptions, ascribed to their national greatness. The variety of ways in which this is expressed, implies a far more personal belief, than the statements which we find among the Romans and would put to shame almost every English manifesto, or the speeches put into the mouth of the Queen. They may have been, then, more prepared to fear the prophesy of their destruction from the true God. (Pusey 381)

The Assyrian king at the time Jonah delivered God’s message was Shalmaneser IV (782-772 B.C.). Little is known about this king as there is little written about him, but we know that he had the sense to heed what Jonah has to say and feared his nation’s destruction when he heard, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” (Jon. 3:4) What exactly were the Assyrians doing to cause God to take notice? Aside from the accounts in the Bible and secular history that catalogue their brutality nobody really knows, but this we do know, it was serious enough for God to take notice and destroy them within 40 days if they did not repent.

### ***God’s Message for Us from Jonah***

We do a disservice to the study of any of God’s books if we do not draw the lessons God wants us to learn. There are many lessons we can take from this book, but let us take a look at four important ones.

The first lesson God wants man to learn from Jonah’s ordeal is, “Do as I command.” As Christians we are given commands by God that must be obeyed or we will perish unless we repent and do what He commands. The will of the Father takes precedence over our will (Matt. 7:21). This I am sure Jonah knew, but he let his emotions override his ability to reason and realize the gravity of his situation until he repented and prayed in the belly of the fish. We need to impress on all Christians their responsibility to GO, TEACH, BAPTIZE, and TEACH (Matt. 28:18-20). We must do God’s will.



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The second lesson we learn from Jonah is that he is a type of Christ. When Christ was in the garden He prayed fervently to God and asked that “This cup pass from me.” (Matt. 26:39). But He knew the only way to save mankind was to be offered up as a sacrifice. Likewise the only way Jonah could save the sailors on the ship was to have them throw him overboard. When Jonah was sacrificed, he spent three days in the deep and Christ used Jonah as a sign to His generation that they would see Him come forth from the grave after three days in the earth. The grace of God appeared to the Ninevites after obeying the word of God, and the grace of God appeared to all men through the Gospel.

The third lesson God wants us to learn is the power of one. There is only one man going to deliver the message to Nineveh. He does not want to and he does not like it but he did it anyway. When there is no one doing God’s will, do not excuse yourself because no one else is evangelizing.

There was one sermon. How encouraging would it be to preach one sermon and have over 120,000 people repent and be saved? A whole city repented? There are preachers in India that are getting a taste of this very thing. There are reports of people being baptized by the hundreds from the preaching of one sermon. There is something else we need to note about this sermon that Jonah preached. The sermon was not an uplifting sermon. It was a sermon of warning. If they did not repent the city would be destroyed in 40 days (Jon. 3:4). We, like Jonah, need to preach what the masses need to hear not what they want to hear (2 Tim. 4:2).

The lesson Jonah preached was delivered one time, and he had tremendous success. How many preachers leave the ministry because of discouragement such as this? Jonah preached once with tremendous success and Noah preached for 120 years saving only eight souls (Gen. 6:3). Let us not grow weary in doing God’s will (Gal. 6:9).

The final lesson God wants us to take from this is we need to have a love for the lost. Jonah’s attitude toward the Ninevites is a soul damning attitude. We are warned by example and command against having racist attitudes. Paul withstood Peter face to face because he was acting like a bigot toward the Gentiles when the Jews came around (Gal. 2:11-13). Jesus had to deal with racism when he met the woman at the well: “A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, ‘Give Me a drink.’ For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, ‘How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?’ For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans” (John 4:7-9). Racism kept the Jews from taking the Gospel

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to the Gentiles for ten years, and when the Gospel finally reached them it took an act of God to show the apostle Peter that the Gentiles were worthy to be baptized (Acts 10:47). When word reached the brethren in Jerusalem that Gentiles had been baptized it was not received well for they said to Peter in Acts 11:3, “You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!” This attitude is a stench before God’s throne that must be eradicated from this world for God teaches:

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Gal. 3:26-29)

The book of Jonah is no different than any other book in the Bible in that it is a treasure trove of God’s wisdom. Let us all develop a love for lost souls, the courage to execute God’s will on earth, and the ability to rejoice when sinners repent.

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### **Biographical Sketch**

Matthew Lewis was born in DuPage County, Illinois in 1969. He is a 1988 graduate of Hayward Senior High School and a 2001 graduate of West Virginia School of Preaching. Matt began his first work on July 4, 2001, with the church of Christ in Hayward, Wisconsin, where he is currently preaching.

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# **TYOLOGY OF JESUS AND JONAH**

## *Jonah Chapter 1*

J. D. CONLEY

It is a joy to once again be invited to speak on this great lectureship. For twelve years now, the West Virginia School Of Preaching, Victory Lectures, have been anxiously anticipated by the faithful brethren in the Ohio Valley. It humbles me to appear on this program with men that I esteem to be among the greatest preachers in the brotherhood today. My sincere gratitude is extended to the fine elders of the Hillview Terrace church for their tireless and loving efforts in overseeing this congregation and the school. Let me express a hearty thank you to the lectureship committee, and brother Cooper. To each of you is owed a tremendous debt of thanks. It is my sincerest hope and prayer that the Lord will continue to shower His blessings upon the Hillview Terrace congregation and the West Virginia School of Preaching for many years to come.

### **Introduction**

In the middle of the Bible we find the much maligned book of Jonah. This little book has been flippantly referred to as the “biggest fish story ever told.” With the exception of the book of Genesis, the book of Jonah is perhaps the most degraded and ridiculed book in all of Holy Writ. It is quickly brushed aside as simply being incredible. Many exclaim, “Who can believe that a man survived three days and three nights in the digestive system of a fish?; Who can believe there was a fish large enough to swallow a man without mutilation?; Who can believe one sermon preached by one preacher, to the largest and most wicked city on earth, could result in the mass repentance of everyone in the city from the king on down?; Who can believe that a gourd vine could grow overnight and provide ample shade?” There seems to be no end to the incredulous questions that are posed in order to cast aspersions upon this little book of only forty-eight verses. Though the story of Jonah is widely known, it

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is not widely believed. Many have dismissed the book suggesting it should be placed on the shelf next to Aesop’s fables and fairytales by the Brothers Grimm. Much to the contrary Christians believe the book of Jonah belongs right where God has placed it, which is among the leaves of inspiration!

### **Typology: Its Implications**

My assignment is the “Typology of Jesus and Jonah,” contained in Jonah chapter one. Of course the word “typology” means the study of types. But what is meant by types? “When we come to think of what a type is we are instantly studying resemblances” (Monser 19). But if the book of Jonah is no more than myth and folklore, then whatever types or resemblances it contains are meaningless as far as the child of God is concerned. So if the book of Jonah is untrue, or if the Deity of Christ is a farce, there is no sense in discussing their typology since it would have no bearing on our lives today. But on the other hand because the book of Jonah is true a study of this kind is not only fascinating but faith building!

I would suggest that the very terms “type” and “anti-type,” imply historicity or truth. Where there is no type there certainly can be no anti-type. The reverse is also true, where there is no anti-type there is no type. In Scripture type is not type without anti-type.

Neither one exists apart from the other in the Bible. Both terms embrace each other and are inextricably linked. It is this linkage that implicates truth. If what Jonah experienced was a type of Christ’s resurrection, then the anti-type, the actual resurrection of Christ took place. Because where there is type, there must be anti-type. The two cannot exist apart from one another.

Yet there is no sense in having this discussion if the book of Jonah is untrue. Let us therefore examine the:

### **Historical Evidence**

The book is biographical. Those who would besmirch the book of Jonah as being historical overlook the obvious fact that it is largely biographical. Although this fact alone does not prove it to be historical, the book nonetheless provides much personal experience. This characteristic adds weight to its historicity. Other prophets included personal experiences in their writings (cf. Hos. 1-3; Amos 7:10-15; Jer.1, 25-29; 36-38), but the amount does not rival that found in Jonah.

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Jonah actually lived. Jonah is known to have been a historical character. In the book of 2 Kings 14:25 we're supplied with three facts regarding his existence. He was God's prophet in Israel at the time of wicked King Jeroboam II. He was the son of Amittai, also recorded in Jonah 1:1. Furthermore, he was a native of Gath-hepher in Galilee. "... a native of Gath-hepher, a Galilean village, a little to the north of Nazareth, the home of his great Anti-type" (Hodgkin 202).

Nineveh, Joppa and Tarshish were real cities. Up until 1841 all that was known of Nineveh was gathered from the Bible and a few scattered fragments of Assyrian history. But since that time excavations have continually been proving the truth of the Bible account of its existence. Archaeological finds have uncovered the fact that the city had walls that "enclosed a circuit of some sixty miles, just about three day's journey in its circumference. It evidently enclosed a good deal of pasture land besides the actual buildings, which agrees with Jonah's words, 'much cattle'" (208).

The truth of Nineveh's existence supports the existence of the cities of Joppa and Tarshish. After God told Jonah to go to Nineveh, he boarded a ship at Joppa, "a city in the territory allotted to Dan" (Sampey 1731), heading to "Tarshish, i.e., in southwestern Spain" (Robinson 71).

Notable records and historians view the book as true. Though not inspired "The book of Tobit, 14:4, 8, dating from the second century B.C.; the Book of 3 Maccabees, 6:8, dating from the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.; and the *Antiquities* of Josephus, ix, 10, 2, written toward the close of the first century, A.D. – all treat of Jonah's call and preaching to Nineveh as an actual fact" (84). In addition to this supportive information regarding the truth of the book, it also should be pointed out that it is not unreasonable to believe that Jonah would be sent by God to preach to Gentiles. "Jonah was not the only Old Testament prophet who ministered to foreign nations; compare Elijah's mission to Sarepta, 1 Ki. 17:8ff., and Elisha's to Damascus, 2 Ki. 8:7 ff.; cf. also Hos.5:13" (84). Robinson continues, "Most modern critics agree that there is a kernel of history at the bottom of the Jonah story, that at least Jonah did at one time actually preach to Nineveh" (84). "The book of Jonah has been accepted as history by the Hebrews for centuries" (Kachelman 11).

Jesus declared the book to be true. The word "historical" is a derivative of the word "history." It has been asserted that the word "history" should be understood as "His-story," i.e. "Jesus' story." Whether or not that is the etymology of the word, is inconsequential. What is of consequence is that Jesus the Son of God affirmed the entirety

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of the story as true and factual when He made reference to it in Matthew 12:39-41.

For more than a century and a half the Bible has been under sustained attack, often by those who pretend to be its friends. The damage this has caused to faith in the Bible as God's Word cannot be measured. The Old Testament has especially come under attack. Even in our own universities some have been saying for quite some time, that the Bible really doesn't mean what it says. That it is to be taken as an allegory. Some use the word "myth" as the biology professor Archie Manis did in his class at ACU, (now over twenty years ago), to describe the first two chapters of Genesis. "... look at the photo reproduction of that reference (p.16); ... observe that Dr. Manis has characterized Genesis 1:1-2:3 as 'Creation Hymn, Myth #1'" (Thompson 169).

But to attack the Old Testament, (of which the book of Jonah is a part) is to seek to discredit the totality of God's Word. The Old Testament and the New Testament stand or fall together! When Jesus was on the earth He referred many times to the Old Testament and always, showed respect and reverence for it. He told the unbelieving Jews, "... [S]earch the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39, emp. added). The Old Testament was a witness to Christ. "*These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me*" (Luke 24:44, emp. added). It is noteworthy that "Jonah was the only Old Testament Prophet Jesus directly compared Himself to! Matt. 12:41" (Ramsey 197). If this fact does not validate the book, and the man, what in the name of reason will?

The most convincing evidence for the historicity of the book of Jonah, is the word of the Lord Himself! If Jesus says that the events in the book took place, then the issue is once and for all settled. "*For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven*" (Ps.119:89, emp. added).

Finally, the greatest argument is provided by our Lord. As He taught, Jesus Christ confirmed that Jonah was a real, historical person. Jesus affirmed that Jonah really did spend three days and nights in the fish's belly (See Matthew 12:39-41; Matthew 16:1-4; Luke 11:29-32). Even as He prepared His disciples for His death, He spoke of Jonah's entombment as the "sign" to the unbelieving Jews. If the story of Jonah is fiction, then our Lord did not know what He was talking about! In fact, if Jonah is a

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fable then so also is Christ's death, burial and resurrection for He said that His would be "like" Jonah's! There is no question as to the historicity of Jonah – it is a book which records an actual historical event. (Kachelman 11)

### **Challenge to Inspiration**

Bible critics have relentlessly assaulted the truth contained in Jonah 1:17: "Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights" (emp. added). Of all the miracles recorded in Scripture, it's this one that seems to stick in people's throat, (pun intended). I recall having a conversation with my plumber a few years ago who told me he just refused to believe any part of this verse. He did not believe there could exist a fish big enough to swallow a man, nor did he believe a man could survive three days and three nights inside a fish. I asked him, "Aren't you a Catholic?" He said "Yes." I then asked him, "Don't you believe in the virgin birth of Christ?" He said "Certainly." I then said "Then why do you have a problem believing God could prepare a fish large enough to swallow Jonah and preserve his life, when the same God caused a virgin to give birth?" He didn't have an answer. Why call into question God's ability to prepare a special fish, when He is the Creator of the entire universe? If God had the power to create the universe I'm confident He had no problem creating a fish big enough to swallow and house Jonah for three days and nights!

Why try to force a natural explanation upon this event? I suppose it could have been a natural event, but why are folks so quick to rule out the supernatural? Remember that in Scripture type and anti-type are linked together. Its anti-type, the resurrection of Christ was obviously supernatural, why wouldn't the type be supernatural? In the past few years there have been several programs on T.V. put on the air by proponents of the Bible who seek to attach natural explanations for certain phenomenon. They go to great lengths to explain the burning bush and other such stories in the Bible from a natural viewpoint. Without impugning their motives they seem to desperately want to help God out and show the skeptics that there exist natural explanations for every strange event in the Bible.

Why be compelled to do that with Jonah and the fish? The phrase, *Now the Lord had prepared a great fish*, seems to imply the miraculous. Why can't we leave it at that? Why feel obligated to find real life stories of men being swallowed by fish and surviving, before the simple truth of

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the Bible is to be accepted? If we can accept the truth of God the Father *speaking* this universe into existence, Genesis 1; of Jesus being born of a virgin, Matthew 1; of Him raising the dead, John 11 and being raised Himself, Matthew 28, why quibble over Jonah 1:17 being a miracle? This should not be a challenge to our faith in God or the inspiration of Scripture. Little miracles are no harder to believe in than big ones. God was in charge of the entire episode, *And the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land* (Jon. 2:10). "There has always been great debate about the great fish, but there is no need for it. Just keep in mind who prepared the fish – God" (Jenkins 390). Please note that the Hebrew word rendered "prepared" is *manah*. It means to "appoint" or "arrange." In the King James Version, Jonah used *manah* several times. The One who "prepared a gourd," "prepared a worm," "prepared a vehement east wind," likewise "prepared a great fish" to swallow Jonah. The entire ordeal was miraculous in nature. I like what Victor Knowles had to say on this point,

It should be stressed. . .the Lord PREPARED it! My friend, since the Lord prepared it, it could have had an escalator in it's throat, depositing Jonah in a room covered with tongue to tail carpeting, with a reclining chair and a refrigerator at hand for convenience if God wanted it that way. Do not overlook this point. God prepared it (Knowles 1)!

In Matthew 12:40 Jesus said, "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." If you say that the account of Jonah and the whale is not true, then you cannot believe Jesus nor in His resurrection. The two events are inseparable. To believe one is to believe the other, to reject one is to reject the other, therein lies the strength of typology.

The Bible does not say in the original languages that a "whale" swallowed Jonah. Both the Hebrew and the Greek words indicate a large fish. This verse in the KJV renders the Greek word *ketos*, as "whale." *Ketos* simply means "a monster of the deep" (Vine 1221). There exists no discrepancy between the Testaments. Evidently the 1611 translators used the word "whale" in Matthew 12:40 because it was the only sea creature they knew that was large enough to suit them. It could have been a whale, it could have been a shark, both have been known to swallow men whole. Or it could have been a unique creature "prepared" just for this occasion. Whatever this sea creature was we know it swallowed

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Jonah. We know Jonah was inside of it for three days and three nights. We know that after this allotted time God spoke to it commanding it to purge the prophet. We know this because God in His Word says it happened! May we take God at His Word. Man does not have to have a detailed explanation before we can accept God's Word as truth. Faith is taking God at His Word. He said it. That settles it.

### ***The Sign Of Jonah: The Great Sign!***

"Carved in rude outline on the walls of the catacombs of Rome, there is no more favorite representation than that of Jonah as a type of the resurrection" (Hodgkin 202).

There must be a reason for this. The reason being that Jonah's experience was a type of Christ's resurrection. Truth be told, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead was THE great sign. "This would be the supreme sign confirming His deity" (Hailey 71). It was different from all the other signs (i.e. miracles) He performed while here on earth. In speaking of this sign our Lord told the unbelieving scribes and Pharisees who demanded a sign: "*An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*" (Matt.12:39-40, emp. added). This sign was significant because it would be noticeably different from all the others. "This was different, in that it was wrought *upon* him, and not *by* him, and it was therefore a more direct and manifest exhibition of power from heaven" (McGarvey 2). Indeed it was! Though it was impressive for Jesus to perform miracles, skeptics like the ones to whom Jesus was speaking, could assert trickery of some kind. But for the miracle-worker to be dead spanning a three-day period, and then be raised from the dead, proved beyond any doubt the Divinity of the Lord! Not only did He leave the tomb vacant, Luke informs us, "*He showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days. . .*" (Acts 1:3, emp. added).

With regards to the much ridiculed statement, *three days and three nights*, critics often charge that this is a contradiction on the part of our Lord. Our usage indicates a literal seventy-two hour period. "The Hebrews, however, used such expressions to also refer to that which would include but parts of the first and third twenty-four hour days" (Hall 149). The fact that Jesus makes reference to three nights, when He literally spent only Friday night and Saturday night in the tomb would be

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of no consequence to those to whom he was speaking, since their reckoning of time was different from ours. ". . . [I]f His prophecy here in Matthew 12:40 was understood by those Jews to be three full days and nights, and He arose on the third day, why did not the Jews ask for the sepulcher to be made sure until the fourth day?" (Blair 168). Concerning the days, technically speaking Jesus was only in the tomb one full day, and just parts of the other two. The figure of speech that Jesus employs here is known as "synecdoche," where a part stands for the whole.

Jesus repeatedly referred to *the sign of the prophet Jonah* Matthew 12:39-41; 16:4; Luke 11:29. Jonah was the type, He was the great Anti-type. The resurrection of Christ was the great sign of which the apostles were special witnesses. The inspired Luke penned, "*Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: To whom also he showed himself alive...being seen of them forty days. . .*" (Acts 1:2, 3a, emp. added). On this point my uncle offers "Nothing was more important to the early preaching than the validation of the resurrection. The apostles testified to the resurrection of Jesus. They were well qualified for that work. They saw the real Christ . . . . Christ ate and drank with them, Acts 1:4; 10:41; Lk.24:43" (Conley 22).

The word "witness" has fallen on hard times. It's grossly misused today by many in the denominational world. Their use and God's use of the word differ greatly. I cringe when I hear folks say "I am a witness for Christ," or "I'm witnessing for Christ." We know of one group who boldly proclaims to be "Jehovah's Witnesses." Yet the Bible clearly states, "*No man hath seen God at any time*" (John 1:18). Have folks forgotten what the word means? Notice what else Luke wrote:

Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, *Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection...And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou hast chosen.* (Acts 1:21-22, 24, emp. added)

In this passage Luke makes it clear that an apostle had to meet certain qualifications. First, he had to have been with the disciples from the time of John's baptism. Secondly, he had to be a witness of Jesus' resurrection. Thirdly, he had to be appointed by Christ.

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The apostles were special witnesses of the resurrection. Claiming to be a witness and actually being a witness are two different things altogether. A witness is one who has seen or heard something. No one living today has seen or heard Christ through their empirical senses, including members of the church. Let's guard against using this improper phraseology.

### ***The Great Anti-Type Is Our Great Hope***

If the type, i.e. Jonah encased in a great fish for three days and three nights, is nothing more than a "fish story," then we have no hope. If the type is not true, if it never happened, then the anti-type cannot be true. If the anti-type, the death, burial and resurrection of Christ did not happen then the human race is in a hopeless situation. The world is without a Savior.

Glory be to our merciful and loving Father that we have the blessed assurance of the truth of this ancient story. Both Jesus' words about Jonah, and about His own resurrection validate one another.

But what is of importance from the typology that exists between Jesus and Jonah is the reassuring fact that Christ's resurrection provides proof of our own. In Paul's argument for the Lord's resurrection in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, He makes five salient points. (1) Christ died. In order to prove His resurrection He knew He first had to prove His death. The evidence is sufficient to establish this. Both the Jews and the Romans made sure of His death (John 19:31-34). They must have been concerned about Christ's statement that He would rise in three days. It is inconceivable to think they would not have made sure of His death. (2) He was buried (Matt. 27:62-66). The Jews and the Romans jointly sealed the tomb, set a guard and made the tomb sure. This they did for the express purpose of preventing the disciples from stealing the body. This is a thorn in the side of all who deny the resurrection! (3) He rose from the dead. The tomb is empty. What is the answer? (Matt. 28:1-6, 11-15). The guards lie and say the disciples stole the body while they were asleep. That's incredible! How do they know that if they were sleeping? If what they said was true, an offense punishable by death, why were they never punished? They told the chief priests the true story. No wonder we read later, "*And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly: and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith*" (Acts 6:7, emp, added). (4) He was seen. Seen for a period of forty days! Seen indoors and out of doors. He talked, and ate and invited people to touch Him. He was seen by over

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five hundred brethren at once (1 Cor.15:6). In spite of persecution, imprisonment, torture and death, not one of the witnesses of Christ denied their testimony! (5) "I am what I am." Paul had been a fierce enemy of the Gospel of Christ. Now he was one of its greatest preachers. The resurrection of Christ is the only explanation for this complete change.

The type recorded in Jonah, of the prophet being in the belly of the fish three days and three nights and its anti-type found in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, provides you and I with a degree of limitless hope. Their typology reaches far beyond two stories that resemble each other. This type and anti-type we've discussed is more than just an intriguing collection of correlating facts. Their fulfillment is to be interpreted as doctrinal necessity! With these five points Paul has established the fact of the resurrection. He now interprets this fact as the basis of New Testament doctrine. By inspiration he affirms if Christ was not raised then: (1) Our preaching is vain. (2) Our faith is vain, 1 Cor. 15:14. (3) The apostles are liars, 1 Cor.15:15. (4) We are yet in our sins, 1 Cor. 15:17. (5) The dead have perished, 1 Cor. 15:18. (6) We are miserable, 1 Cor. 15:19. (7) There is no incentive for right living, 1 Cor. 15:32.

### ***Conclusion***

Since Christ was raised we shall be raised. The grave is powerless to hold us! Christ's resurrection numbed the sting and robbed death of its victory (1 Cor.15:55)! The resurrection of Christ is proof of our own.

The resemblance between the words of Jonah 1:17 with those of our Lord in Matthew 12:40 cannot be ignored. They are a divine endorsement of each other. The sign of Jonah was a type that pointed to *the great anti-type*. Because Christ lives, so shall we! Jesus admonished, "*Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation*" (John 5:28-29, emp. added).

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### **Biographical Sketch**

J. D. Conley was born in El Paso, TX., in 1959. He is a third generation Gospel preacher and is in his 14<sup>th</sup> year of preaching full-time. He majored in Bible at Freed-Hardeman University and is a graduate of the Brown Trail School of Preaching in Fort Worth, TX. He's had three local works: Spencer, WV; Elkins, WV; and since June of 2004 he has preached for the Harmar Hill church in Marietta, OH. He has been married to the former Denise Cooper for 27 years. Their daughter Shalyn is a junior at Freed-Hardeman, majoring in chemistry. They have four sons, Shane 17, Jesse 15, Travis and Matthew 13. All four have expressed a desire to preach. Shane and Jesse have already done some preaching.



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# MERCY MORE THAN CALVES

## Micah 6:6-8

W. TERRY VARNER

For this hour we have been assigned the text of Micah 6:6-8 under the title *Mercy More than Calves*. This text is one of the great Old Testament texts that should awaken all to make certain their acts of worship and their virtuous life are in harmony with God's will. One without the other is vanity and hypocrisy.

Micah's name means, "Who is like Jehovah?" The prophet was from the farming village of Moresheth-Gath in southwestern Judea. Tell el Judeideh is considered to be the modern-day village (Smith, R. 14). The village was located on "the main road to the maritime plain and Egypt in Shephelah (the foothill country) off about 25 miles southwest of Jerusalem. The city which lies at the edge of good farming country is not elsewhere mentioned in Scripture" (Lewis 32). He is called "the Morasthite" (1:1).

There is no record of his call by God or any other personal experiences. As a person, little is known about him except that he was "full of the power by the Spirit of the Lord" (3:8). Micah's prophetic ministry spanned the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, all kings of Judah (1:1). His prophecies involved both Samaria and Judah (1:1) He was a contemporary with the prophets Isaiah, Amos and Hosea. Isaiah preached holiness and fellowship with God (Isa. 6), Amos preached the importance of justice (Amos 5:24) and Hosea preached mercy combined with loving kindness (Hosea 2:19; 6:6). However, Micah combined all of these virtues in his powerful statement, "what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God" (6:8).

Micah 6:1-8 divides as follows: (1) The Context Provoking Micah 6:1-8, (2) The Court Trial of Micah 6:1-5, and (3) Compelling Lessons from Micah 6:6-8.

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## The Context Provoking Micah 6:1-8

Our text emphasizes the way of life or conduct for Israel, God's children; consequently, her religious, social and ethical life showed clearly she was lacking and destitute in living life as God wanted. Micah, being full of "power of the Spirit of the Lord" (3:8), and with a clarion voice, is heard fearlessly attacking and condemning Israel's sins.

Israel had welcomed compromise for so many years that it was difficult for her to be moved to repentance. Leaders wanted only money, not ministering to the people. Commercialism and materialism ruled the day. Although Israel went through the motions of worship, she harbored hearts of impurity, injustice and oppression. Israel needed a reminder of the impending judgment of God. Miller writes that "Micah lived and labored in one of the darkest days of Israel's history" (416).

The context of Micah 6:6-8 is Micah 6:1-8 and is the third of three prophetic addresses distinguished from one another by the introductory term "**hear**" (1:2; 3:1; 6:1). In each section, Micah denounces their sins and describes *how* Israel turned her back on God and His Law. In each section, Micah gives a promise of hope if they would trust and obey God, but if not judgment was coming! In commenting on the last section, Farrar writes, "In the earlier chapters we have the springtide of hope, we have in these [6-7] the paler autumn of disappointment" (137).

In the first message (1:1-2:13), God's judgment was upon both Samaria and Jerusalem, the capitals of the Northern and Southern kingdoms. Micah lists Israel's sins as *why* God's judgment was about to fall on her.

In the second prophecy (3:1-5:15), Micah enumerates the sins of the rulers, false prophets, judges and priests. Micah shows that Israel disregarded moral righteousness and personal gain seemingly was her chief interest.

In the latter prophecy (6:1-7:20), Micah begins with a judicial trial in which God condemns Israel for her ingratitude for God's abundant blessings through the centuries and insists that Israel defend herself. Micah argues that Israel was without excuse as the divine requirements of justice, loving kindness and a humble walk before God was already known by Israel. The phrase, "He hath shewed thee, O man what is good; and what doth the Lord require," refers to the previous teaching within the Law of Moses.

Israel's sins impoverished her, as a nation, and caused her people to go astray from obeying God's will as set forth in the Law. The following is a partial list of her sins.

- The poor were oppressed (2:2, 8-9; 3:1-4).
- The rich seized the lands and houses for themselves belonging to other Israelites; they were covetous (2:2).
- The princes of Israel were corrupt (3:1-3).
- The false prophets were tolerated and lulled the people to sleep. When they spoke they not only spoke falsehood, but they were drunk (2:6-11; 3:5, 7, 9-11).
- Judgments of fellow Israelites came through bribery (3:11).
- Priests were corrupt and materialistic; teaching for money (3:11).
- Israel walked in the ways of Omri and Ahab, two of the most wicked kings of Israel (6:16).
- Israel's life style of doing her own thing thereby causing her to scorn the Law of Moses (3:5-8, 11; 5:12-14).
- Israel worshipped pagan gods instead of Jehovah God; thereby, belittling both Jehovah and the Law of Moses (1:7; 3:11; 6:16).
- Those in position of authority were unscrupulous in their use of their position and power; they oppressed their brethren (2:1-3:10).
- Israel lacked integrity in all facets of life (6:12; 7:2-6).
- They lived violent lives (2:2; 3:10; 6:12; 7:2).
- Bribery and dishonesty was a way of life (3:9, 11; 6:10-11; 7:3).

The end result was an empty, meaningless formality that affected Israel religiously, socially and ethically. Micah prophesied that the consequence was, "Zion...[will] be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps" of ruin (3:12).

### ***The Court Trial of Micah 6:1-5***

In earlier chapters, God presented His case against His people. In Micah 6:1-5, Jehovah tries His "people" (6:2-3) from *ammi* "(Jehovah's people) with intentional emphasis...to indicate the right of Jehovah to contend with it [Israel]" (Keil and Delitzsch 493). Pusey says, "This one tender word contains...a whole volume of reproof" (81). God calls "the mountains" and "strong foundations of the earth" (6:1-2) to serve as witnesses of *how* He had blessed His people (6:2). Pusey describes the role of the "mountains" in that they "change not...There they were, before the existence of our short-lived generations; there they will be until time shall cease to be. They have witnessed so many vicissitudes of human things, themselves unchanging" (80).

***God Calls His People To Present Their Case:*** God pleads to Israel, "testify against me" (6:3). God "would condescend to hear their complaints, in order, it would seem, to put them to shame. At least, it should have put them to shame" (Elam 324). He asks, "O my people, what have I done unto thee and wherein have I wearied thee?" When we consider God's loving kindness, providence, grace, long-suffering and contrast these with all the evil that Israel had done, and that we do, who could stand before God and testify against God (Ps. 24:3)? Neither they nor we! In other words, has God failed His "people"? Has God been unfaithful to His "people"? Has God done His "people" evil and neglected to do them good? Why have God's people in all dispensations been such ingrates? This text resounds with the language of Isaiah 5:4, "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?"

In 6:4-5, Micah gives three illustrations showing God's goodness, loving kindness and the need for His "people" to walk faithful with Him. They represent *how* God acted with "loving kindness (mercy), acting "justly" and "faithful to Israel."

*First*, God acted with "loving kindness" when He "brought thee [Israel] up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee [Israel] out of the house of servants" (6:4). The Scriptures are replete, especially Exodus, with references to Israel in slavery in Egypt and God redeeming her. Twice Micah refers to this marvelous event (6:4; 7:15). In twenty-two of the Old Testament books and three New Testament books reference is made to God redeeming Israel out of Egyptian bondage. The event is described with many superlatives—"marvelous" (Ps. 78:12; Mic. 7:15), "great" (Ps. 106:21), "wonders and signs" (Acts 7:36), "saved" (Jude 5), et al.

*Second*, God acts "justly" toward Israel after bringing them out of the Egyptian bondage by giving them, "Moses, Aaron and Miriam" (6:4). The nation was not left alone to wander in the Wilderness on the way to Canaan. Moses was a type of Christ and an apostle of God (Heb. 3:1-2). Moses delivered the Law to guide Israel and serve as a schoolmaster to bring Israel to Christ (Gal. 3:24-29).

Aaron, and his family, served Israel as the High Priest enabling her to offer the appropriate sacrifices and blessing the people in their obedience. Aaron, as Moses, was a type of Christ who was "called of God, as was Aaron" (Heb. 5:4-5). However, the eternal priesthood of

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Christ is after the order of Melchizedek and not that of Aaron (Heb. 7:11).

Miriam, a sister to both Moses and Aaron (Num. 26:59; 1 Chron. 6:3), was a “prophetess” (Ex. 15:20). She led the women of Israel in dance and songs of praise for Israel’s victory following their passage through the Red Sea (Ex. 15:20-21).

*Third*, God reminds Israel of treating them “righteously” (6:5) in frustrating Balak, the Moabite king. Balak having heard of Jehovah’s destruction of the Amorite kings, as Israel marched toward Jordan, became terrified the same fate would befall him (Num. 22:2-3). Balak engaged Balaam (Num. 22-24), the heathen prophet, to curse Israel so that his armies could defeat Israel in battle (Num. 22:4). Balak offered Balaam money, but Balaam argued that he could “not go beyond the word of the Lord...less or more” (22:18; cf. 22:36-38; 23:5, 10, 12, 16, 26; 24:13). Each time Balak placed Balaam in a position to curse Israel God had Balaam bless them. One might wonder *why* God insisted that Balaam bless Israel rather than curse Israel. The answer is found in God’s promise “to Abraham that through him all the families of the earth would ‘be blessed’ (Gen. 12:3)” and “is reinforced by a pagan prognosticator prophesying under the influence of the Spirit of God” (Harrison 319).

The phrase, “from Shittim unto Gilgal” (6:5), means “From Shittim, the place of their shame and God’s forgiving grace, He led them through Jordan (Joshua 3:1-17) to Gilgal, where even during the days of physical weakness of their fighting men (Joshua 5:2-8) the Lord protected them by striking their enemies with paniclike fear (Joshua 2:9-11, 24; 5:2)” (Laetsch 278-79).

Micah’s reference to Balaam, Shittim and Gilgal was that Israel would *remember* various acts of “the righteousness of the Lord” (6:5) in their behalf. The phrase emphasizes:

[T]he fact that Israel has always been under special protection of God and that God would not permit any harm to befall His people ... A striking parallel has been drawn between this story placed at the end of Israel’s wanderings and the story of Pharaoh at the beginning of the wandering. Just as at the beginning Pharaoh’s endeavors to oppose God’s design for Israel and is made to suffer for it, so now to Balak attempts to balk God’s plan to bring Israel to the promised land “and suffers similar fate.” (Greenstone 236)

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We believe the reference to Balaam (6:5) deals with God’s acts of righteousness in Israel’s behalf rather than referring to the acts of sin committed by Israel against Jehovah God—idolatry, adultery and wickedness, as Coffman argues (355-57).

The foregoing evidence of the righteous acts of God in behalf of Israel should soften their hard, rebellious hearts and in their repentance turn them back to God. Their unfaithfulness, rebellion, and ingratitude are difficult to understand in light of the many acts of goodness from God. Had they not often heard the story of the slavery of their fathers and God’s deliverance? Could they not recall the roles of Moses, Aaron and Miriam? Surely from the evidence of Balaam, Israel could see that, as Harrison states:

[W]hether Balaam approved of the situation, he was being used by the all-powerful God of Israel for the specific prophetic purpose and was unable to mount any resistance . . . [that] Israel’s God is a morally consistent Being whose nature it is to fulfill His promises . . . God was clearly determined to bless His people, no matter what the obstacles were. (309, 312, 315)

Instead of rebellion and ingratitude, Israel should be motivated to repentance and walking faithfully with God.

***The People Present Their Case:*** In 6:6-8, God’s “people” (*ammi*) present their case and do so somewhat foolishly. However, far too many people are more than ready to dictate policy and give orders, but when it comes to following simple instructions, whether of human or divine origin, they experience great difficulty.

Israel’s response began by asking the prophet, “Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God?” The question is both a desire to repair their fellowship with God, broken by their sin (cf. Isa. 59:1-2), and an acknowledgement of their guilt. They desire to know *how* to approach God. They are quite prepared to do whatever is required. Their question shows they knew not to come before God empty-handed (cf. Ex. 34:20). The God of the “high” place is God Jehovah, who is described as dwelling in the high place (Isa. 33:15; 57:15) and enthroned in heaven (Ps. 115:3).

Israel asks, *what* was the proper sacrifice for their sins to be forgiven, their fellowship with God restored, and God’s wrath appeased. Their question of “sacrifice” is comprehensive. The “burnt offerings” is considered “the choicest specimen” of sacrifices (McClintock and Strong 931). They required the entire animal. Calves were appropriate, but

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yearlings were considered the best (cf. Lev. 9:3; 22:27); hence, “burnt offerings, with calves of a year old” (6:6).

In 6:7, the question of “quantity” arises—“thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression?” Oil was always used in their offerings to God (cf. Num. 15:1-6; 28; 29). Jeremiah says, “Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices pleasing unto me” (6:20). However, Jeremiah says, “Hearken unto my voice and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; walk ye in all the way that I command you that it might be well with you” (7:23).

Their offer to give their “firstborn” (6:7)—make a child sacrifice? NO! Child sacrifices were well-known among their neighbors, but in Israel an animal was offered for their sins. Israel was familiar with child sacrifices made to Molech for whom they made a sanctuary in southern Jerusalem called Topheth, meaning “burning place” (2 Kings 23:10; Jer. 32:35). It was to the pagan god Molech that Ahaz and Manasseh sacrificed their sons (2 Kings 16:3; 21:7), which God never commanded nor entered His mind (Jer. 7:31).

While there was no excuse for the suggestion of offering their firstborn, Ralph Smith makes the following interesting comment on 6:6-7: “Burnt offerings represented total dedication. Calves a year old represented the most desirable kind of sacrificial animal. Thousands of rams and ten thousand rivers of oil represent lavish sacrifice. One’s firstborn represents one’s most valuable possession” (51).

**The Prophet’s Response To The People:** Micah wants to know *why* they asked? They already knew! Micah stresses three major points: (1) the authority of God revealed in His Law, (2) their obligations to their fellowman, and (3) their obligations to God. Micah responds to their questions with one of the well-known and grandest passages of both Testaments: “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God” (6:8). Lewis states this text stresses “that worship and morality cannot be divorced from each other. They are two sides of the same coin” (36).

*First*, consider the authority of God in His Law. The phrase, “He hath shewed thee, O man what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee” (6:8) has reference to their previous knowledge of the revelation of God in the Law. It affirms that God had already given and Israel already possessed the needed information for their spirituality. Pusey states well: “He about Whose mind and will and pleasure they were

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pretending to enquire, *the Lord* their God. He *had* shewed it to them. The Law was full of it” (82). No clearer example can be found than,

And now, Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, To keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good? (Deut. 10:12-13).

The question of Israel living within the framework of God’s Law is clearly seen in the phrase. Morgan stated, “The supreme authority in all the affairs of men is God. All human authority is subservient to the divine. The powers that be are ordained of God” (qtd. in Williams 364). “Men are ignorant of God’s requirements and invent schemes of their own: not because knowledge is not readily available, but because they have ignored it” (Pharr 94).

*Second*, consider their two-fold obligations to their fellowman and God: “to do justly” and “to love mercy.”

(1) “To do justly,” from *misphat* involving their responsibilities under the Law of Moses (Bullock 122), or, as Hailey states, “to act toward God and man according to the divine standard of righteousness as revealed in His law” (214), is just the opposite of what they had been accused of by Micah. Life, pleasing to God, must be lived with “fairness” or “justice.” “Our lives must reflect our religion. Micah says that, first of all, we must act justly. God requires that his people do what is right, they must put in honest work, practice hospitality, and tell the truth. God’s people are to be trustworthy so that no one can question their integrity” (Lawrence 376).

(2) “To love mercy” or “love kindness” as other translations (ASV, NASV, RSV). “The injunction here is not simply to *do* mercy, but to *love* mercy, to be merciful out of a spirit of love” (Freeman 216). Mercy is a great teaching of God’s Law. The Parable of the Unmerciful Steward in Matthew 18:21-35 is apropos here.

(3) *Third*, man’s obligation to God is “to walk humbly with Thy God” (6:8). The Hebrew construction here “is not found elsewhere in the O. T., but the translation ‘and to walk humbly’ is supported by Proverbs 11:2” (Innes 217). Pharr catches the force of the text better than anyone when he writes, “*Simply stated, God requires no more in our relationship with Him than a life that makes us His companions*” (95). God’s people are to be different. God’s people do not live for themselves; we live for God.

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The teaching of Micah is not new or different from what Israel had been taught by God's servants through the centuries. Pusey states it clearly: "... It is clear that there is no teaching in this passage in Micah, which there is not [found] in the law" (84).

Ellison summarizes Micah's 6:8 as "which virtually combines the teaching of his three great predecessors: to do justly—Amos; to love mercy, *i.e. chesed*—Hosea; to walk humbly with thy God, *i.e.* as befits His holiness—Isaiah" (66).

### **Compelling Lessons From Micah 6:6-8**

Various truths are suggested from Micah 6:6-8. These are truths that could greatly help in the development and maturing of our spiritual life. Sampey states, "Micah's greatest contribution to the religious thought and life of the world is his admirable summary of Jehovah's requirements (Micah 6:6-8). He asks not for sacrifices nor gifts" (175). Almost every preacher has preached on this text to the glory of God. The Victorian intellectual, Thomas H. Huxley, coined the term *agnosticism* to describe his professed inability to know whether or not God exists (Smith, D. W. 64). Amazingly, Huxley paid homage to this great text from Micah. He wrote:

The antagonism between science and religion, about which we hear so much, appears to me to be purely factitious—fabricated, on the one hand, by short-sighted religious people who confound a certain branch of science, theology, with religion; and, on the other, by equally short-sighted scientific people who forget that science takes for its province only that which is susceptible of clear intellectual comprehension; and that, outside the boundaries of that province, they must be content with imagination, with hope, and with ignorance.

... In the eighth century B. C., in the heart of a world of idolatrous polytheists, the Hebrew prophets put forth a conception of religion which appears to me to be as wonderful an inspiration of genius as the art of Pheidias or the science of Aristotle.

"And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

If any so-called religion takes away from this great saying of Micah, I think it wantonly mutilates, while, if it adds thereto, I think it obscures, the perfect ideal of "religion." (160-62)

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Consider the following lessons:

- God never ignores sin because sin incurs just and painful judgment; thereby, verifying the Scripture's teaching that "the way of the transgressor is hard" (Prov. 13:15). Courage to repent and walk with God comes to anyone who senses the presence of God in his life.
- "Justice" implies following God's law in dealing with our fellow man, especially those of the household of faith. Christianity has no place for destroying the character and reputation of our brethren through deceit, harshness, innuendo, misrepresentative actions and half-truths. We must be like God who in "everything he does is right and all his ways are just" (Dan. 4:37). God loves the just (Ps. 37:28).
- "Loving kindness" implies manifesting the merciful, loving attitude of God toward others (James 2:13). Jesus in quoting Hosea said, "I will have mercy not sacrifice" (Matt. 9:13; 12:7). Forgiveness is part of being merciful. Consider our Lord's Parable of the Unmerciful Steward (Matt. 18:21-35) that ends by stating God will do the same with anyone who does not forgive his brother.
- Elaborate pretensions of piety cannot atone for a lack of true righteousness in the heart. Attendance in worship without morality and spirituality avails nothing. The emphasis on merely ritual is no substitute for living as God wants (cf. Ps. 51:16-17). "Worship and morality cannot be divorced from each other. They are two sides of the same coin" (Lewis 36).
- Man is expected "to walk humbly with thy God" (6:8) Pharr (95) shows that each word in this clause has important significance: (1) "**God**"—Man cannot please God without being conscious of Him (cf. Heb. 11:6). (2) "**Thy God**"—God is not abstract but a personal Father. There must be a personal connection (cf. 2 Cor. 6:16-18). (3) "**Walk**"—Suggests a constant relationship, meaning a certain lifestyle (1 John 1:7; 2:6). (4) "**Humbly**"—God and man do not walk as equals. Man must never try to walk ahead of God (cf. Jer. 10:23); therefore, submission to all His commands (cf. Philip. 2:5-12) is important. The phrase "comprehends a daily life and worship that is in harmony with the Divine will."

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**Biographical Sketch**

W. Terry Varner is married to Lillie L. Garrison, Littleton, WV. They have four children, eleven grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren. He has been located at Shadyside, OH; Dunbar, WV; North Canton, OH; and Harmar Hill, Marietta, OH. Varner retired from located work in 1997, has preached over fifty years, and presently labors with the West Union, WV, congregation for most of the year.

He is one of the four founders of West Virginia School of Preaching and teaches four classes. He owns and edits *Therefore Stand*, an eight-page, monthly religious paper that is presently in its 22<sup>nd</sup> year. He has authored a number of books, workbooks and articles for various brotherhood publications.

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# JONAH'S PRAYER

## Jonah 2:1-10

TERRY G. JONES

The Old Testament prophets were men of impeccable character and immense faith in God. They were willing to stand up for God in the face of great danger and seemingly certain death. We think of the prophets as men who were always ready to do the Lord's bidding, like Isaiah who said, "Here am I! Send me" (Isa. 6:8).

However, we also are reminded of Jonah, the reluctant prophet. When commissioned by God to, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me" (Jon. 1:2), Jonah was reluctant to do so. As a matter of fact, he endeavored to do the exact opposite. "But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord" (1:3). Rather than following the Lord, the prophet was fleeing from the Lord.

In the story of Jonah we ought to learn the lesson that you can't run from God. The consequence of Jonah's disobedience begins with a mighty tempest sent by God upon the sea that began to violently break up the ship which was carrying the AWOL prophet. After revealing to the mariners that he was the cause of the danger, Jonah instructed them to cast him overboard and the sea would be calm (1:12). In spite of their efforts to keep from doing so, the mariners were forced to throw Jonah overboard and the storm ceased. While the burden of the mariners was lifted, the hardship of Jonah was just beginning. God's intent was not to take the prophet's life away, but to turn the prophet's life around. To facilitate that, "the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights" (1:17). As one would expect, the Lord's plan was successful and chapter two provides us with the record of Jonah's return to the Lord in prayer.

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## Jonah's Resolution (2:1)

"Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the fish's belly" (Jon. 2:1, emp. added). Prayers have been found being offered to God from a myriad of strange places. Not many folks could claim to have prayed from the belly of a fish but that is exactly what the Bible records that Jonah did. Just a short time earlier we find Jonah rebelling against God and was fast asleep in the belly of a ship headed for Tarshish. How quickly things had changed as he faced death by sinking to the bottom of the rugged seas. He certainly would have drowned were it not for being miraculously rescued by the God-prepared fish that swallowed him. From the hot, slimy, putrid confines of the belly of that fish the prophet realizes his predicament and resolves to pray. From the verses that follow we learn that this is not a petition to God for deliverance but, rather, a prayer of thanksgiving for having already been delivered from drowning. Keil makes a noteworthy observation to that effect:

The prayer which follows (vv. 2-9) is not a petition for deliverance, but thanksgiving and praise for deliverance already received. It by no means follows from this, however, that Jonah did not utter this prayer till after he had been vomited upon the land, and that v. 10 ought to be inserted before v. 2; but, as the earlier commentators have shown, the fact is rather this, that when Jonah had been swallowed by the fish, and found that he was preserved alive in the fish's belly, he regarded this as a pledge of his deliverance, for which he praised the Lord. (Keil and Delitzsch 269)

There is nothing like tragedy and despair to humble a rebellious heart and turn it to an attitude of prayer. Legion are the men and women who have lived in open defiance of God for years only to find themselves in the helpless condition of loss of health or looming disaster and cry out to God for deliverance. It has often been said that there are no atheists in foxholes, and apparently there are no atheists in fish bellies either. Jonah recognized the error of his way and resolved to pray.

## Jonah's Reasoning (2:2-3)

**Affliction.** In verse two Jonah reveals the reason why he felt the need to pray. "*I cried out to the Lord because of my affliction, and He answered me. Out of the belly of Sheol I cried and You heard my voice*" (v. 2, emp. added). Not only did the prophet point to his affliction as that

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which prompted his prayer, but also presents his assurance that God answered his prayer. Jonah reveals that he believed himself to be very close to death by crying from the very belly of Sheol which is a reference to death or the grave. Jonah was apparently experiencing feelings of a very similar nature to those of David after he had been delivered from the hands of Saul. “The pangs of death encompassed me, and the floods of ungodliness made me afraid. The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry came before Him, even to His ears” (Ps. 1 8:4-6). Jonah prayed from the lowest depths, but his prayer was heard in the highest heavens.

**Acknowledging God.** “*For You cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the floods surrounded me; all Your billows and Your waves passed over me*” (v. 3, emp. added). Jonah acknowledged that it was God who threw him into the sea. The mariners were merely instruments of God carrying out His will. The prophet has now acknowledged that God is responsible for both his distress and his deliverance.

### **Jonah’s Repentance (2:4)**

Up to this point, The Book of Jonah has been filled with doom and gloom. Now the story begins to improve as the heart of the prophet fills with repentance and hope. “*Then I said, ‘I have been cast out of Your sight; Yet I will look again toward Your holy temple’*” (v. 4, emp. added). This episode began with Jonah fleeing from the presence of the Lord (1:3), and now he bemoans the fact that he had been cast from God’s sight. The thought that he would be banished from God was more than he could bear and it led him to repentance. Following David’s sin with Bathsheba he agonized in a similar way and out of his penitence he prayed, “Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me” (Ps. 51:11). Jonah’s sorrow is met with faith and hope as expressed in his expectation of again looking toward the holy temple of God. Homer Hailey has observed that, “The fact that he was yet alive in the belly of the fish assured him that he would again look toward the holy temple of God’s presence. True penitence is always rewarded by hope” (73).

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### **Jonah’s Reflection (2:5-6)**

**Destruction.** The prophet now reflects upon the things that had happened to him and the destruction that was all around him. “*The waters encompassed me, even to my soul; the deep closed around me; weeds were wrapped around my head. I went down to the moorings of the mountains; the earth with its bars closed behind me, forever. . .*” (5-6a, emp. added). Between the depths of the water, the seaweed bound around him and the slimy contents of the fish’s belly, Jonah felt as though his life was being snuffed out. The earth’s bars being closed behind him forever indicates that he believed that he would never be able to set foot on the earth again without divine intervention.

**Deliverance.** In the midst of all of this destruction Jonah found deliverance. “. . . *Yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O Lord, my God*” (6b, emp. added). When his hope was nothing but a faint glimmer and his life was being overpowered by death God delivered him.

### **Jonah’s Remembrance (2:7)**

“When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord; and my prayer went up to You, into Your holy temple.” Jonah has had enough of trying to run from the presence of the Lord and forget his God. He now remembered the Lord. It would seem significant to note when he remembered the Lord – “When my soul fainted within me.” Though his circumstance was bleak, Jonah did not lose faith. He remembered the Lord and sought Him in prayer. When the prodigal son was about to perish with hunger he remembered his father’s house (Luke 17:11 ff.). Thankfully, “The Lord . . . is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). God did not want the Ninevites to perish, nor did He want that for His prophet.

### **Jonah’s Return (2:8-9)**

**The Vanity of Idolatry.** Jonah declares, “*Those who regard worthless idols forsake their own mercy*” (v. 8, emp. added). He reveals the dismal end of idol worship. It is vain and void of mercy. Although the prophet probably was thinking of the mariners, he also could have been thinking of the vanity of his running from God and separating himself from His mercy.



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**The Voice of Thanksgiving.** Recognizing the vanity of man's imaginations, Jonah was willing to sacrifice to the Lord. "*But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving*" (9a). That is, along with his sacrifices he would offer prayers of thanksgiving.

**The Vow of Faithfulness.** Jonah appears to be reaffirming his faithfulness to God as he declares, "*I will pay what I have vowed*" (9b). He had made a vow to the Lord and promised to keep it. How often do sick folks promise God that if He will spare their life they will use it in His service, only to go back on their promise when things improve.

**The Verity of Salvation.** "*Salvation is of the Lord*" (9c). Is there a greater truth? David declared, "Salvation belongs to the Lord" (Ps. 3:8). This is the last line of Jonah's prayer. He likely had in mind salvation of both a physical and spiritual nature. The verity of salvation saturates the message of this book and permeates the rest of the Bible. The apostle Peter proclaimed, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Peter had earlier said to Jesus, ". . . Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). Jonah's thoughts are no longer of fleeing from the Lord, but only of returning to the Lord.

### ***Jonah Regurgitated (2:10)***

Having been delivered from the danger of drowning, Jonah would have also desired deliverance from the fish's belly. He apparently showed great sincerity in his repentance and return, "So the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry ground." It had been three days and nights since Jonah had been on dry ground. Now that he has his feet pointed in the right direction, he can commence doing the work God had given him.

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Terry G. Jones was born in Parkersburg, West Virginia and was raised in Toll Gate, West Virginia. He is the son of Glenn and Linda Jones. He married the former Melinda S. Hilvers on August 10, 1985. They now have two sons, Austin (Age 20) and Quintin (Age 17).

Terry is a 1986 graduate of East Tennessee School of Preaching in Knoxville, Tennessee. He received the A.A. and B.A. degrees from Ohio Valley University in 1996. He worked with the church in Mountain City, Tennessee from 1986 to 1989. He then moved to Pennsboro, West Virginia where he has been preaching to the present.

He serves as Secretary of the Board of Directors of West Virginia Christian Youth Camp and is on the faculty of West Virginia School of Preaching. In addition, he is a writer for *West Virginia Christian* and has twice served as its lectureship Director. He has preached in Gospel meetings and lectureships in West Virginia, Ohio, Tennessee, Kentucky, South Carolina, Indiana and Virginia. He also has made mission trips to the countries of Moldova and Ukraine.

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## **WHERE IS THE GODLY MAN?**

### *Micah 7:2-6*

MACK LYON

#### **Introduction**

Micah is a favorite Old Testament prophet. I suppose I just relate to him for good reason. Some have styled him “a farmer-preacher.” Actually he was a shepherd prophet. But “a farmer-preacher” would be an appropriate characterization some might make of me. Like Micah, I am not as educated as other preachers you may know, and not the polished speaker that others are. I was reared a farm boy. I have never been ashamed of it. As a matter of fact, I learned a lot about a lot of things from life on the farm—things that have been a help to me in more ways than I can enumerate right now, but especially about sowing the seed of the kingdom of God.

Many gospel preachers of those days (and before) were farmers. They supported their families by farming during the week and preached on Sundays and in gospel meetings after their crops were “laid by” in the summer. My days on the farm were during “the great depression” of the 1930s. And although upon my graduation from high school, I received a full scholarship from Oklahoma A & M College (now Oklahoma State University), the dust-bowl-drought and the great depression were not much encouragement to me to choose that life.

Furthermore, it was during those farm-boy days that I was called of God to preach His Word. (Yes, I am convinced I was called of God, like Micah was, to preach. If you’d like to know why I believe that very strongly, invite me back next year to speak on that subject, and I’ll do my utmost to be here and preach about God’s calling. But that is not my assignment for today.)

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I was asked to speak today about “Where is the Godly Man?” My text was also assigned. It’s Micah 7:2-6. Despite the fact that the Bible book that bears his name is much shorter than some of the others, Micah’s ministry as God’s prophet was very significant. He lived and prophesied in Judah and Jerusalem at about the time Isaiah did—740-700 B.C. If you are familiar with their writings, you easily recognize some wording is very similar—almost verbatim in places (Mic. 4:1-4; Isa. 2:2-4, for example). He was probably somewhat younger than Isaiah and probably not the accomplished speaker that Isaiah was. Some describe him as “the champion of the lower class.” Isaiah is said to have been more distinguished and polished and more comfortable with kings and diplomats.

#### **Israel and Judah**

Those were difficult times for both Samaria and Jerusalem, meaning of course, both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms after the division of the kingdom following the death of Solomon. As you know, the first commandment was, “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Deut. 5:7). They had broken that very first commandment and were worshiping the calf and Baal and other pagan gods. They had also broken the second commandment in which God says, “You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth . . .” (Deut. 5:8). They had made for themselves and worshiped idols of the Canaanites, Syrians and Assyrians. When Micah wrote these words they had been practicing their idolatry for two centuries, and as with any evil, the practice had grown worse and worse. “This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). That just means that where God is not, the darkness of evil and sin of every kind and form moves in.

So, along with their false worship—the worship of false gods—came as naturally as the night follows the day, the decline of moral standards. A liberal, casual attitude toward God and His commandments is always and without fail, accompanied by a liberal, loose, and casual attitude toward morals. For generations they have been filled with idolatry, pride, arrogance and anarchy.

Their business, political and even their religious leaders were increasingly immoral. God needed a prophet who would stand in the marketplace and daringly and faithfully denounce their licentiousness

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and senseless idolatry. Earlier God had sent other prophets among them, but to no avail.

Micah was chosen of God to tell them of the certainty of the fall of their beloved nations into the hands of unbelieving national enemies, unless they repented. He told them:

For behold, the LORD is coming out of His place; He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth. The mountains will melt under Him, and the valleys will split like wax before the fire, like waters poured down a steep place. All this is for the transgression of Jacob and for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the transgression of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? And what are the high places of Judah? Are they not Jerusalem? (Mic. 1:3-5)

### ***Nations Reap What They Sow***

One of the lessons I learned clearly as a youth on the farm is that a person reaps what he sows. Where my dad had me plant cotton seed, we invariably reaped cotton. Where he had me plant corn, we always reaped corn. It never failed to be that way.

And God has that immutable law in the spiritual world, too, that says, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” (Gal. 6:7-8). That goes for a nation as well as the individual. Yes, “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Let us not forget that. But let us also remember, “The Lord our God is righteous in all His works” too (Dan. 9:14). And the righteousness of God demands judgment of evil.

America! Take heed! Our forefathers brought forth on this continent a new nation founded on a strong belief in Almighty God. They sold their farms and businesses; they left their homes and homelands; they disposed of all their assets and risked their very lives and the lives of their children on the high seas, and the occupation of a strange land, to establish a nation that afforded them freedom to worship and serve God as they understood the Bible to teach.

Their faith in God is inscribed in the marble buildings they built in the new nation’s capital city. Their state legislative bodies opened their sessions every day with prayers to the Almighty God, by whose providence they’d been blessed. They gave Bible names to their towns and cities, names like Bethlehem and Nazareth, Pennsylvania. They

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believed in God. They also believed in the education of their children in that kind of environment. So, their religious leaders began a public education system in the houses they built for worship. And they used the Bible as a textbook.

They were proud citizens of their new nation and opened their classes with Bible reading and prayers and a pledge of allegiance to America. They proudly defended their country with their very lives.

But, I don’t have to tell you; you already know much of that is changing almost on a daily basis. If you stay informed, which you ought to do, you know of the efforts that are currently under way to completely eliminate God from all our public life. Efforts are making their way through the court system to render illegal the mention of God in the pledge of allegiance. One by one centuries-old landmarks of their faith are being declared unconstitutional by our court system and are being removed. (We experienced that in Edmond, Oklahoma, only a few blocks from where I live.) Also, the Supreme Court declared Edmond must remove the cross from our city shield.

Like Israel and Judah in the days of Micah, America is rapidly becoming a “Godless nation.” Some who object to all that have bowed the knee to political correctness and welcomed Allah, the god of Islam and other foreign gods as equals of Jehovah.

Thomas Jefferson once asked, “Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed the conviction that these liberties are the gift of God?” (qtd. in Flood 24). Good question!

### ***Micah’s Prophetic Ministry***

It is never the popular thing to do to openly expose false religion and the immorality that follows. Doing so is an open invitation to ridicule, misrepresentation and ostracism—even by the people of one’s own nation, community, or church—sometimes even one’s own father or mother or son or daughter or brother or sister. Jesus found it so and said:

I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s enemies will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me (Matt. 10:34-37).

But Micah was a man of God. He was not trying to be a popular preacher. He was not seeking a place of prestige among the people of

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Israel and Judah. Micah was committed to faithfully serving God and preaching His Word.

Pleasing God, not the people, must be the absolute objective of every gospel preacher. In the Spiritual atmosphere of our nation today, the preacher simply must guard against professionalism. In recent years, professionalism has become a most debilitating and paralyzing condition in the church of our Lord. Preaching has become a profession like the practice of medicine or law or engineering. I sometimes have a preacher call to tell me he's looking for a "preaching job;" can he use my name as reference. I'm sorry, but I can't recommend that fellow to church elders. To me, it has to be more than a "job"—more than mere employment—more than just a way to making a living.

Soon after I enrolled in Freed-Hardeman College in 1942, I heard brother Hardeman say, "Boys, don't preach if you can keep from it." He said it often. Brother Denver Cooper was there at the same time. He heard him say it too. But the first time I heard him say it, it disturbed me. I went to my dorm room and pondered that statement. What could he have meant? Was he discouraging young men from preaching? No! No, indeed; he was not. I see it! If you can be happy doing anything else in the whole wide world, then you don't need to be in the pulpit anywhere. You are not for this work. He didn't mean you were any less a Christian for choosing something else. But, if you are going to preach, surrender yourself wholly to God and "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2). Do it, brother! Just do it! There's a vast difference between the fellow who has something to say, and the fellow who has to say something.

### ***Acceptance of False Religion***

Micah had something he just had to say. He exposed and denounced the sins of the people in no uncertain terms. He did it with compassion pleading with them for repentance. And he showed and promised them the blessings of repentance.

Let's listen to him now. He's talking about something we're talking about. He says

Now hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and pervert all equity, who build up Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with iniquity: Her heads judge for a bribe, her priests teach for pay, and her

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prophets divine for money. Yet they lean on the LORD, and say, Is not the LORD among us? No harm can come upon us. Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed like a field, Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins, and the mountain of the temple like the bare hills of the forest. (Mic. 3:9-12)

One night a year or so ago I was preaching in a neighboring state to yours on such matters we're addressing here. After the meeting a young man (preacher) came to me with an almost direct quote of that passage from Micah: "Is the Lord not among us? No harm can come upon us." He quoted the Lord as saying, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against His church."

The spirit of pluralism has so thoroughly captured the minds of the denominational religions that what is being marketed today as Christianity is not Christianity at all. And that is truth. Anyone that knows to come in out of a downpour, who reads his New Testament just a little, knows that. What he reads of in the New Testament as Christianity is not even similar to what is being preached as Christianity. The idea that "anyone who says he accepts Christ as Savior is my brother" has so fascinated and captured the minds of so many of our very own preachers and elders and other church leaders that they are leading congregations into total apostasy. Isn't that what Micah was saying had happened in Israel and Judah?

But with the prophets prophesying falsely, the effects were felt beyond just the religious community. It was the number one contributing cause of the fall of Israel to the Assyrians and Judah to the Babylonians.

My friend, it is impossible to maintain a peaceful and orderly culture without a firm grasp on "truth." The abandonment of the idea of truth has devastated America's social order. It isn't true that there is absolutely no such a thing as truth. God's Word is truth (John 17:17). It is always in harmony with itself. It has never been proven in error about anything about which it speaks. It doesn't always say what people say it says, but it's always in harmony with truth where ever it is found. Jesus Christ is the very embodiment of truth. I mean, He is truth incarnate (John 14:6).

Well, Micah was affirming the need for prophesying the truth. Isaiah said of the conditions in Israel and Judah at the time of Micah that "Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands afar off; for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter" (Isa. 59:14). That helps us understand what is happening to our justice system.

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## **Conclusion**

Micah told of certain doom of both the northern and southern kingdoms unless there was repentance in Samaria and Jerusalem. He also prophesied of the establishment of the kingdom of peace when the Savior came (Mic. 4:1-3).

In Christ there is hope for America today if we can get the true message of salvation to the people and if they will repent and turn to Him. "Salvation is of the Lord" (Jon. 2:9). Yes, there is hope for the church if we will repent of our lukewarmness and turn to the Lord. That is what the Lord Himself told the church of the Laodiceans in Revelation 3:14-22. Today is the day Christ's disciples must stand up and declare whose side they are on—Christ's or the devil's.

Remember Micah: "The faithful man has perished from the earth, and there is no one upright among men. They all lie in wait for blood; every man hunts his brother with a net" (7:2). "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (6:8).

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## **BEAUTIFUL FEET**

### *Nahum 1:15*

BRUCE DAUGHERTY

Most people are familiar with Marathon races: those grueling 26 mile races of human endurance. What may be less familiar is how the race received its name. The name is derived from Greek history. In 480 B. C. the Persians invaded Greece. The vast Persian army landed at the plain called Marathon, about 26 miles from Athens. Here the outnumbered Greeks won a decisive victory over the Persians. A Greek runner, Phidippides, was dispatched to take the news of victory to Athens. Literally running his heart out, he gave the message: “Nike” (Victory), then he collapsed and died.

There are several places in the Bible where news from battle fronts was conveyed by runners to those waiting at home-1 Samuel 4:17-22; 2 Samuel 1; 18. The messages could be good news or bad news; of victory or defeat.

The setting for our text in Nahum comes from this imagery of the messenger from the battle front. “Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace! O Judah, keep your appointed feasts. Perform your vows. For the wicked one shall no more pass through you; He is utterly cut off” (Nah. 1:15).

This study will make analysis of the message and its original setting in Nahum, its relationship to Isaiah 52:7, then it will notice its usage in the New Testament and seek to make application of the message to present day needs.

#### **Analysis of the Verse**

*Behold* - attention is immediately fixed by the word of the lookout on the city walls. “Look! Fix your eyes on the horizon.”

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*Upon the mountains* - Jerusalem is a city surrounded by hills. The first glimpse of someone arriving would have been the silhouette of the messenger.

*The feet of him* - This is a figure of speech; a part stands as representative for the whole. The feet are representative of the entire messenger. The symbol of feet is especially appropriate as the message has been carried from a distance. But is his message good news or bad news?

*That brings good tidings; that publishes peace* - A basic feature of Hebrew poetry is parallelism. Two parallel lines in the text convey and give emphasis to the message. Here the parallel is repeated and expanded upon. The message is one of good news! It is good news because it announces peace.

*Keep thy feasts, O Judah, perform thy vows, for the wicked one shall no more pass through thee, he is utterly cutoff.* Why is it a message of good news? Of peace? Because God has destroyed Judah’s enemies. Therefore, the people can celebrate the victory in worship to God and in the keeping of their vows (Longman 799-801).

#### **The Relation of the Message to Its Setting in Nahum**

In order to understand how the message of Nahum is good news, one must have an understanding of the historical background of the book. “It is impossible to understand the book of Nahum without some acquaintance with the historical background” (Calkins 77).

Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian empire (located in modern day Iraq). The Assyrians were cruel masters of war and conquest. Assyrian kings like Shalmanezar III and Sennacherib led invasions into Israel and Judah. The Annals of Sennacherib, a six sided clay prism discovered in 1830 (also preserved at the University of Chicago on the Chicago Prism) describe Sennacherib’s invasion of Judah, “. . . because Hezekiah had not submitted to the Assyrian ‘yoke,’ Sennacherib laid siege to forty-six fortified Judean cities, deported 200,150 people, and invested Hezekiah’s Jerusalem” (Mitchell 59).

Indications of the suffering of God’s people at the hand of this merciless and ferocious foe are found in 2 Kings 18 & 19, Isaiah 36 & 37, and Micah 1:8-16. Though Sennacherib had “shut up Hezekiah in Jerusalem like a bird in a cage” Hezekiah’s trust in God was answered through the overthrow of 185,000 Assyrian soldiers (2 Kings 19:35; Isaiah 37:36). But the Assyrians remained a threat to Judah.

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The book of Nahum is about God's judgment on Nineveh. The judgment on the Assyrians was welcomed by one great "at last" by those who had suffered so much at their hands (Calkins 79).

The context of Nahum is "the rest of the story" concerning Nineveh and the Assyrians. While Nineveh's repentance had been wondrous at the preaching of Jonah, it had only been short-lived (Jon. 3:5-9). After a generation, the Assyrians returned to their blood-thirsty ways. The message of Nahum is about God's judgment on the Assyrians for their sins (Lewis 57).

The immediate context of Nahum 1:15 comes at the end of the section of Nahum 1:2-15. In this poetic passage, God is depicted as a Divine Warrior who comes to the aid of His people oppressed by the Assyrians. As God stirs Himself to action, the language portrays creation convulsing before Him (1:4-5).

While God's judgment is terrible and complete on the Assyrians, it is a comfort to His people – "The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and he knows those who trust in him" (Nah. 1:7). Verse 15 concludes this picture of how the action of God in judgment on the Assyrians brings comfort to Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

### ***The Relation of the Message to Isaiah***

Nahum 1:15 bears a strong similarity to Isaiah's earlier message of comfort to God's people – "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings glad tidings of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'" (Isa. 52:7). Young comments:

By means of speedy messengers Zion receives the announcement of her deliverance. The word *na* 'wu may originally signify something like *timely* or *seasonable*, like *πατος*. At the time needed, the messengers have appeared with their tidings of good. From the connotation *timely*, it is not far to that of *beauty* (329)

Isaiah's message was one of comfort to God's people after the failures of their leaders (See Isa. 7:1-14; 39:1-40:1-2, 9).

Like Isaiah, Nahum's message was comforting to God's oppressed people. Nahum, whose name means comfort or compassion, utilizes Isaiah's language as he too gives comfort to God's people (Lewis 53). Though the message of judgment was disturbing to the Assyrians, it was good news—comfort to the people of God.

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### ***The Message and Its New Testament Setting***

The Apostle Paul utilizes the passage from Isaiah (and Nahum) as he describes the spread of the Gospel in Romans 10. Paul declares that salvation is available to all who will call on the name of the Lord (Rom. 10:12-13). But a necessary prerequisite to "calling on the name of the Lord" is belief, an important theme in the book of Romans (Rom. 1:16-17; 10:6, 8).

But before belief can occur there must be the hearing of the message (v. 14). And before hearing can be done there must be preaching (v. 14). But before someone can preach, there must be the sending of that preacher (v. 15).

At this point, Paul comments on those who preach: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news." The wording indicates affiliation to Isaiah 52:7, but it is closely related to what Nahum said (Bratcher 44; Newman and Nida 204).

In fact, the wording of Nahum is highly appropriate to the gospel message. The gospel is a message of judgment and salvation. "To some, it is a message of hope; to others it is a summons to judgment." (Garcia-Treto 607). The gospel message reflects the "goodness and severity" of God who gives it (Rom. 11:22). Christian messengers bear the fragrance of life and death (2 Cor. 2:15-16). The gospel message carries trouble for them that obey not the gospel of God, but rest for those in Christ who have been troubled by the world (2 Thess. 1:6-9). Spiritual warfare is the task of Christians (2 Cor. 10:3-5; Eph. 6:12-15). When the good news in Christ is accepted, people are no longer at war with God, but at peace with Him (Rom. 5:10; Eph. 2:14-17; Col. 3:15).

### ***Applying the Message***

First, the original message of Nahum stands as a strong rebuke to the wicked ways of men. The message of Nahum will always be relevant in a world of ruthless dictators (Lewis 59). Vengeance still belongs to God. Such monstrous disregard of God and His righteous standards will bring swift and certain judgment. Any nation that deliberately sets itself to defy God and trample upon innocent peoples must feel the terrible touch of the divine hand (Yates 157).

Second, proper appreciation needs to be given to God's messengers—they have beautiful feet! In a day in which preachers and preaching is maligned and in decline, Paul's appreciation for the one who carries God's message of peace needs to be shared by the Church. From Jesus'

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parables and his judgment discourse it is evident that God's servants, the prophets, were not appreciated by ancient Israel (Matt. 21:35-36; 23:33-35). Will we stand under the same condemnation that Jesus gave the Pharisees? May we value the timely message of salvation brought to us by God's servants today.

Third, in addition to appreciation of God's messengers, they need to be supported. Read again Paul's words, "How shall they preach unless they be sent?" Men must be encouraged by the Church to preach and proclaim God's Word. They must be prepared in good schools like the West Virginia School of Preaching. Support during their time of preparation is needed. As these men go out to preach, support is also needed. Many desire to enter foreign mission fields or mission fields here in the States. This again, necessitates adequate support. There are many reasons for our current preacher shortage but one of them is certainly the fact that the Church has not seriously taken up the task to train and support men in the task of preaching.

Fourth, it needs to be understood that the message of the Gospel is two-fold: troubling and comforting. To misunderstand the two-fold nature of the gospel's judgment and salvation, is to only preach half of the Gospel message.

We like to dwell on the thought that the Lord is good and forgiving and that He is plenteous in mercy. And so He is. Yet, unless balanced by the idea of God that is here set forth, there is likely to be much spiritual loss and damage. To think only of the goodness and mercy and love of God begets loose notions of sin and the eternal yet forgotten ideas of retribution and justice. (Calkins 80-81)

Preaching that makes a difference today will disturb those in the comfort of sin as God's judgment is declared, and comfort those who are troubled by sin as God's salvation in Christ is made known.

Fifth, may we be obedient to the Gospel message and enjoy the blessings of peace with God! Each one of us must hear the Gospel message and its challenge to the sin in our lives. Each one must realize the judgment that awaits because of sin. Each one must believe that judgment is the only reality that awaits. Each one must believe that the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross is the testimony of the reality of sin, its judgment, and of the love of God that wills for men to repent and be saved (Ezek. 18:23; 33:11; 2 Peter 2:9). Each one must confess their faith in Christ (Rom. 10:9-10). Each one must trust in the saving work of

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Jesus to be united with Him in baptism (Gal. 3:27; 1 Peter 3:21). Each one needs to rise from his burial with Christ determined to walk in the new life (Rom. 6:3-4). Each of us enjoying peace with God must determine to live in peace with our brethren (Eph. 2:14-18; 4:3; Col. 3:15).

### **Conclusion**

Every Christian has a message of good news to share with a world lost in sin. Will you carry that message forward, despite the enemy, despite the obstacles, and bring salvation to those who are ready to give out? "Behold, on the mountains, the feet of him who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace!" (Nah. 1:15).

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### ***Biographical Sketch***

Bruce Daugherty was born in Warren, Ohio on April 19, 1959. He is the son of Emanuel and Judith Daugherty. He married the former Gayle Gleaton of Fairview, Georgia in 1981. He and his wife have two sons, Mike, age 19, and Vince, age 16.

Bruce received his B.A. in Bible from Freed-Hardeman University in 1981. He received his M. A. in Church History from Harding University Graduate School of Religion in 2006.

Bruce has served as Associate Minister for the Church of Christ in Reynoldsburg, Ohio (1981-83); as a Missionary in Cervignano, Italy (1983-1990); as Minister for the Beville Road congregation in Daytona Beach, Florida (1990-2000); and as Minister for the 10<sup>th</sup> & Clairmont congregation in Cambridge, Ohio (2000-present). In addition to participation in campaigns to Italy, Africa, and stateside in Ohio and Virginia, Bruce has taught in the Florida School of Preaching (1995-2000) and the West Virginia School of Preaching (2001-present).

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## **OVERVIEW OF MICAH**

SCOTT MCKEEVER

I owe a great debt of gratitude to the WVSOP for the instruction and mentorship that I received there from 1998 to 2000. Space does not allow me to thank all those that labor at the school for the benefit of God's Cause and His servants. I feel privileged to be a part of this lectureship and the writing of the accompanying book. I have been assigned an overview of the book of Micah.

### **Introduction**

Micah is the sixth and middle book among the Minor Prophets. Its one hundred five verses are distributed over seven chapters. It is shorter than the 119 Psalm. Although the book is "minor" in length its message is not minor by any means for Micah was not one whit behind any of God's prophets, "But truly I am full of power by the spirit of the LORD, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin" (3:8).

Preachers today must be of such a spirit in preaching the message of God (2 Tim. 4:1-4) concerning sin and salvation through faithful obedience to Jesus Christ. Micah was bold in his proclamation of what God had revealed to him. You will find sin rebuked, injustices reprov'd, and hopefulness delivered in Micah as he admonishes those who "tickled the ears" with false messages of peace. He truly is a balanced preacher of courage, patriotism, and love.

Micah formed a mighty quartet of prophet preachers in a troublesome age along with Isaiah in Judah (Southern Kingdom) and with Amos and Hosea who preached mainly to the Northern Kingdom. These prophets preached to a divided nation, while the people were divided geographically, politically, and socially the Word of God is not

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divided. The Word of God is for all men everywhere (Rom. 1:16; 1 Tim. 2:4-5).

Little is known of the personal life of this messenger. In the opening of the book we are told that he hailed from the town of Moresheth, (Moresheth-Gath) which was located about 22 miles S.W. of Jerusalem among the Shephelah (rolling hills) and the countryside of the Philistines. Moresheth was a country settlement and was in contrast to the hustle and bustle of the capital cities of Jerusalem and Samaria to which Micah preached. Micah's name "Who is Like Jehovah" also forms the theme of this book (7:18).

### **Background and Date**

The background and date of this book is found in the study of 1:1. "The word of the LORD that came to Micah the Morasthite in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem."

This message was delivered in the days of the kings of Judah. One may in his own study read the accounts of these kings in the inspired record in 2 Kings 15:32-20:21 and in 2 Chronicles 27:1-32:33. Concerning the date of the book, Yates wrote the following:

In the introductory statement we are told that Micah preached during the days of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. This would place his activity during the years between 738 B.C. and 698 B.C. According to Jer. 26:18 he was active in the days of Hezekiah. The opening prophecy in his book was certainly directed against Samaria before the siege and fall of that city in 722 B.C. (113)

The political background of Micah's era is a key to understanding the message that Micah delivered. Micah's message had a commonality with others of his time and circumstance. The basic message was "captivity and exile are inevitable." The following quote from Homer Hailey is directed to this idea:

Through unusual leadership in successful wars and in revival of commerce and the development of agriculture, Uzziah had brought a degree of prosperity to the people of Judah that had not been enjoyed since the days of Solomon. This prosperity brought with it the usual attendant social evils and spiritual falling away from Jehovah. . . .

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In the days of Ahaz, Judah was threatened by the coalition of Israel and Syria, whose two kings, Pekah and Rezin (Isa. 7), were indignant toward Ahaz because he would not join them in an alliance against Tiglath-pileser III, king of Assyria. While Tiglath-pileser III was at Damascus, Ahaz appealed to him for help; this proved costly to Judah both in tribute and in its independence. During the days of Hezekiah, Sargon II (722-705 B.C.), successor to the throne of Tiglath-pileser III and a ruler of unusual cruelty, invaded Judah 712/711 B.C. Following the death of Sargon II, Sennacherib became ruler of the Assyrian Empire. To secure his western provinces he invaded Judah 702/701 B.C. besieging Jerusalem and shutting Hezekiah up in Jerusalem “like bird in a cage.” According to the claims of Sennacherib’s movements, he captured and claimed as booty forty-six Judean cities, which would no doubt include those spoken of by Micah (ch. 1). Among those captured was Lachish, considered by him to be of such significance that a bas-relief of the capture was made on one of the walls of his palace.

These were trying days, constantly overshadowed by the threat of invasion and foreign rule. Had it not been for the rule of the good King Hezekiah and the diligent and fearless preaching of Isaiah and Micah, it is probable that Judah would have gone the way of Israel. . . . (187-88)

The reason for Micah’s prophecy about captivity and exile was due to the deeply rooted sinfulness of Israel and Judah. The picture Micah paints of God’s people is dark and gloomy. Rulers stepped on the rights of man for financial benefit. The wealthy coveted lands (2:1-2), and stole from the poor (2:8). The land abounded with corrupt business practices. False preaching was rampant, and the people clamored for it. The priesthood was for hire for the right price. The leaders are pictured as cannibals ready to gobble up the people (3:1-3; a picture that Paul paints in Gal. 5:15) and judges judged for bribes. The behavior of God’s people heated the prophet to preach a white-hot message about true religion (6:8).

Such were the conditions of terror, political turmoil, and bloodshed, during the life of Micah. Some of these events will be seen to be the subject of some prophecies of Micah.

The Book of Micah can be easily divided into three sections:

1. The first third of the book Micah pronounces a judgment upon sin against Jerusalem and Samaria (1:2-2:13).
2. The middle third of the book Micah further expresses the sin of his countryman, but promises the building of the “house of the Lord” and birth of a new ruler (3:1-5:15).
3. The last third is a description of a “controversy” the Lord has with His people (6:1-7:20) and God’s redemptive powers.

If one considers the political situation of the capital cities of Samaria and Jerusalem as foreign powers eventually besieged them and ruined them we find a corresponding theme in each chapter of Micah. When it was decided by the powers to be to attack a stronghold, like Samaria or Jerusalem, it is said they were *besieged* (Dan 1:1; 2 Kings 17:5; 2 Sam. 11:1). This Hebrew word means according to Strong: to cramp, to confine or to put up in bags. This is a powerful illustration to the consequences of sin. In the Galatian letter the apostle Paul reminds us that “the Scripture has confined (lit: kept in prison) all under sin.” When Jesus began His ministry He quoted publicly from the prophet Isaiah concerning his mission as liberator.

Having dealt with the introductory matters of Micah the prophet, consider in our remaining space God’s message about besieged cities and “strongholds” from the country preacher’s point of view.

### **Chapter One – The Stronghold of Sin**

Micah as God’s messenger/servant calls the court to order as God pronounces the verdict of guilty upon his own people for their sins (1:2), the Lord is pictured as coming from his Judge’s chamber and all the earth will take notice of this great event (1:3-4)!

In verses 5-7 God announces the reason for the court session, “for the transgression (lit: to step off the path) of Jacob and for the sins (missing the mark) of Israel. Both of the capital cities are named to represent both nations and their great sins. God promises to bring Samaria to a “heap of ruins.” They will be burned and beaten down as an example to Jerusalem and to us today (Rom. 15:4). Truly the “wages of sin is death.” One marvels at God’s true holiness and wonders what will the final judgment be like for the sinful and disobedient (2 Cor. 5:10).

The prophet mourns in verses 8-9 because his city (Jerusalem) has a fatal disease and will not repent or change their course. Later, Jeremiah was told not to pray for them because it was too late (Jer. 7:16). In verses 10-16 there are other strongholds of sin in the Gentile world that God

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was reserving judgment. The prophet preaches to them using Hebrew wordplay:

In the Hebrew original of Micah 1:10-16 the prophet uses some clever wordplay to get his point across. Beth Aphrah means “house of dust.” Shaphir means “beautiful”, Zaanah means “going out”, and Beth Ezel means “house of nearness.” Maroth means “bitterness,” Lachish sounds like the word for, “a team of horses,” Achzib means “a lie” and Mareshah means “an inheritance.” Put these meanings with the prophet’s statement about these towns and see what you discover. (Wiersbe 594)

Is it not better for us to pull down strongholds of sin in our lives now then to wait for God to do it later? Paul instructed the Corinthian brethren to use God’s mighty weapons of spiritual warfare to destroy sin fortifications that so easily beset our lives (2 Cor. 10:2-5; Eph 6:10ff). For this is the spiritual battle that we wage! For the prophet is confident of the outcome concerning those who persist in iniquity and transgression, “For they shall go from you into captivity” (1:16).

### ***Chapter Two – The Breaker of Strongholds***

In the second chapter the prophet catalogues many of the sins practiced by the citizens of those living in sin’s strongholds and pronounces woes upon them. This chapter begins by the prophet condemning those who “devise iniquity and work out evil on their beds!” and then in the morning carry out their wicked plans. One is reminded of the time of Noah where “the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5).

Those of Micah’s day were using time normally spent for sleep and refreshment for devising (weaving an intricate plan) and working out a systematic procedure for taking advantage of their own countrymen and God’s special people (2:1-2). In verses 3-5 God was putting them on the chopping block where entire evil families would be destroyed! How important it is for us to have our thoughts pure and to use our time for good and not evil. Christians are to “bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5).

In verses 6-11 Micah addresses those who tell preachers, “Do not prattle,” or “Don’t preach to us.” According to Pusey the word means to “drop not,” (32) and Adam Clarke says it means literally, “Do not cause it to rain” (714). Compare with Amos 7:16. They rejected God’s word

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and ridiculed those who preached unwelcomed messages of captivity and punishment. The citizens of sin’s stronghold had no desire to hear God’s true message because of their own sins (John 3:19ff), but their desire is for smooth preaching; “And speak a lie, saying, ‘I will prophesy to you of wine and drink’” (2:11). Have not certain brethren on occasion clamored for the right to have a “social drink” in the privacy of their own home! Let preachers have the boldness to preach the word in season and out of season reproving, rebuking and exhorting knowing there are those about us having itching ears. Let us rain the word of God down in love, for men are living in a dry and thirsty land!

The prophet introduces the reader to the breaker of strongholds in verses 12-13. The faithful remnant of God’s people is promised a leader who will assemble them like a good shepherd and lead them to a better place outside of the stronghold of sin. Although, this “breaker” in one sense is a leader who will bring them back from captivity and restore them to their capital city, the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy is found in Jesus Christ. He is the spiritual breaker who would assemble all men in one place (Eph. 1:10; 2:15), which is the church, the one fold having one shepherd (John 10:16). This Shepherd shall be the ultimate leader and provider of men (John 10:4; Ps. 23). He will break open a way of salvation from the captivity of sin and become the Captain of Salvation (Heb. 2:10). Those trusting in Him will follow His lead (Heb. 5:8-9; 12:2). The King will lead them for He is the great Emancipator and Liberator of men (Luke 4:18-19). He paved the way by blood that we might be free!

The first century Jews missed the spiritual nature of the Christ. In Mark 11:9-10 they demanded from Christ, as He triumphantly entered Jerusalem, great Hosannas (Lit: Save us now!). They looked for a physical deliverer from oppression, yet He came to deliver spiritually from sin’s oppression. The king literally passed before them (Mic. 2:13), but only those understanding the nature of Jesus’ true mission will pass through sin’s gate to freedom (Gal. 3:25-28).

### ***Chapter Three – Leaders of Sin’s Stronghold***

The third chapter of this little book is dedicated to the condemnation of the rulers of God’s people. “Hear now, O heads of Jacob and you rulers of the house of Israel.” The rulers had reversed the natural order of God’s purposes for man. These rulers hated good and loved evil. Micah pictures their injustice and cruelty towards God’s people as if they were cannibals. Jesus observed with compassion the multitudes of His day as

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flayed and cast down (Matt. 9:35-36). Paul warned the brethren of Galatia not to bite and devour one another; Christians are to love one another with a pure and fervent heart.

The prophets of Micah's day were the cause of "people straying," for their message was only "Peace." They did not have a balanced message of reproving, rebuking and exhorting or as Jeremiah was told to "root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant" (Jer. 1:10). God's message (spiritual diet) must contain milk, meat, vegetables, and dessert. Healthy Christians cannot live on "sweets" alone. For your stronghold to be overcome, it must be rooted out, pulled down and destroyed and then rebuilt on Christ! The false prophets preaching only peace were actually preparing war against God—a battle no one can win. God promises no revelation to those prophets and no answers when they came to call on Him (3:5-7).

The judges of Micah's day were corrupt and made judgments for a bribe (3:11). The priests who interceded for God's people were in it for the money as were the prophets who divined for money. Yet in their hypocrisy they believed that no harm would befall them because the "Lord was among us" (3:11).

The prophet is stern and gives a precise future prediction of destruction, "Zion shall be plowed like a field, Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, And the mountain of the temple like the bare hills of the forest" (3:12).

This prophecy saved the life of Jeremiah as he preached concerning the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and its nearing fulfillment (Jer. 26:18).

#### ***Chapter Four – The Ideal Stronghold***

The startling message from the close of the last chapter would be very disturbing to the citizens of Judah concerning their capital city. God knows how to comfort (2 Cor. 1:3) and reveals to Micah an encouraging message of an ideal kingdom waiting to be installed after the captivity. The astute Bible student is aware that this coming kingdom is and has its fulfillment in the Lord's church which he promised to build in Matthew 16:18. "In those latter days" is a reference to the days after the cross and Pentecost of AD 30 with the ushering in of the Gospel Age (Acts 2:16-21).

The "Breaker" of chapter two would lead the remnant from the stronghold of sin and destruction to an ideal stronghold which would be called "the mountain of the Lord's house" it would be a kingdom of

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exalted importance above all other kingdoms. Many people from every nation (Gentiles) would come and flow into it and would excitedly and urgently tell others about the great King and Kingdom in which they could be citizens (Mark 16:15-16; Matt. 28:19-20). The King would also be a Master Teacher with abilities above that of Solomon. He would also be a fair and equitable Judge (a stark contrast to the teachers and judges of Micah's day). The teaching of this Great King would be focused on goodness and not on the destructive nature of warfare and death (4:1-5).

The future city would be for the afflicted, lame, and outcast. They would serve the Lord in the "Stronghold of the daughter of Zion!" (4:8). The former dominion of greatness shall return to God's people, but first they must go into Babylon to captivity and then be delivered in a great rebirth. The deliverance and redemption would be by the Lord.

#### ***Chapter Five – The Birth and Reign of the Ruler of the Ideal Stronghold***

From the faithful remnant of God's people would be born the leader of God's spiritual chosen. He would come forth from the little town of Bethlehem. "He will be The One to be Ruler in Israel." He is identified as the Eternal One from old . . . from everlasting (John 1:1-3). Micah's contemporary Isaiah foretold of how this One would enter the world . . . by the Virgin Birth (Isa. 7:14) and Micah foretold of where He would be born (5:2). Some 700 years later the Jews relied on this prophecy to identify the place of the Messiah's birth (Matt. 2:5-6) and Joseph by the providential hand of God was directed to this city where Mary was to give birth to the Savior (Luke 2:4, 11). Micah is an extraordinary book of Messianic Prophecy. Yates said, "This picture of a divine Conqueror is to find its fulfillment in the Christ who won His victories not by might, or by power, but by His Spirit. He came as a lowly babe from remote Bethlehem to bring salvation to a world so sorely in need of a Saviour" (124).

"This One shall be peace" For a people destined to suffer the horrors of warfare due to their own sins from the Assyrians and then the Babylonians this message of a peaceful Ruler was the encouragement they needed to sustain them in captivity and give them the hope of a future. This chapter closes with a terrifying prediction of God's swift execution of vengeance for the terrible insults that He has suffered by His own people. Once again He promises in verse 11 to "cut off the cities of the land and throw down all your strongholds" (places of false worship).

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## **Chapter Six – Life in the Ideal Stronghold**

The Lord wishes to reason with His people and pleads a case from the perspective of His past faithfulness (6:1-5). He reminds them that He has been a faithful deliverer and will remain true to His people! He has redeemed in the past and He will redeem them in the future. The prophet reminds God's chosen of true religious obligation. It is not found in religious ceremony all the while mistreating your neighbor, but in our responsibility to other citizen's of God's kingdom and to all mankind. There is no sacrifice as precious as what God has shown (taught) us to offer, "He has shown you, O Man, what is Good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (6:8).

The Ruler and Teacher of The Mountain of the Lord's house has instructed His citizens to "love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34), serve one another (John 13:16), see to the needs of others (Matt. 25:34-40; Acts 20:35), and preach the glad tidings of hope to a lost world (Mark 16:15f). We are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1-2) and practice true religion for this is well pleasing to God the Father (James 1:27) and to do good as we have opportunity (Gal. 6:10) to those we come in contact (Luke 10:27-37).

The Master's minority composed of a few rare souls has ever been God's instrument in molding a finer social order. Such a remnant is always powerful, in many instances creative. God can do wonders through the group that is willing to separate itself in genuine consecration to the will of the Master." (Yates 125)

The conclusion of the prophet is that a fruitful life is one that is dedicated to the benefit and betterment of others! Consider Matthew 7:12.

## **Chapter Seven – The Salvation Stronghold**

Chapter seven opens with a sorrowful lament, "Woe is me!" The picture here is of a city totally bereft of righteous people, "The faithful man has perished from the earth" (7:2). Rulers are corrupt schemers, friends can't be trusted, family members are enemies, and no one is above suspicion. Truly, God's people had sunk to an all time low and exemplified Proverbs 14:34. They were truly in need of a Savior to deliver them from the mire of sin. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." In this condition the sinner has only one option or

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hope, "Therefore I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; My God will hear me" (7:7).

Israel needed to do what every person is required to do to enter into The Salvation Stronghold. They needed to look to God's light by faith (7:9) and to truly acknowledge sin in their lives with an attitude of repentance then and only then would they be returned to a state of former glory as God's People (7:14). The prophet ends his message with this thought in verse 18, "Who is a God like You, Pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage." Certainly God's grace is the wonder of all the ages. How could God be so patient and forgiving after His own people had wronged Him over and over again. The prophet reminds the wonderer that God "delights in mercy and will again have compassion on us." He sent the Son to "subdue our sins" then has them all "cast into the sea" to be remembered no more. This is God's promise of the ages. Paul contemplated these very things when he wrote, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

God has built a stronghold for you upon the foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Won't you enter by faithful obedience? "I will love thee, O LORD, my strength. The LORD *is* my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield, and the horn of my salvation, *and* my stronghold. I will call upon the LORD, *who is worthy* to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies" (Ps. 18:1-3).

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***Biographical Sketch***

Scott is a native of Wheeling, WV. He is a 1987 graduate of West Liberty State College with a B.S. in Criminal Justice. He was employed as a police officer for the City of Largo, FL, from 1988 to 1998. He attended the Florida School of Preaching and is a graduate of the WVSOP (2000). He is presently the pulpit minister for the Bridge Street church of Christ in New Martinsville, WV. He is married to the former Amy Harris of Moundsville and they have two children, Kailah age 20, presently in college, and Ty age 18, a senior in high school.

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## **EMBRACING GOD**

### ***Habakkuk 3:16-19***

CHARLES C. PUGH III

Habakkuk means embrace or “ardent embracer” (Hailey 271). Jerome and Luther accepted the etymology of Habakkuk as derived from *habhak* meaning to embrace (Lewis 60). Luther said, “Habakkuk signifies an embracer, or one who embraces another, or takes him to his arms” (qtd. in Keil 2: 49). Luther applied this to Habakkuk embracing his people, comforting, and uplifting them (Robinson 118). In the contextual flow of the book of Habakkuk the significance of the name *Habakkuk* seems to apply to the prophet’s relationship with God rather than to his (i.e. the prophet’s) relationship with the people. Nelson’s Reference Edition of the Bible explains, “Thus his name probably means ‘One Who Embraces’ or ‘Clings.’ At the end of his book this name becomes appropriate because Habakkuk chooses to cling firmly to God regardless of what happens to his nation . . .” (823). Pusey summarized: “It may be that Habakkuk chose this name to express the strong faith, whereby he embraced the promises of God. At least, it means one who ‘strongly enfolds’” (166).

#### ***The Text***

The text in which Habakkuk eloquently manifests the idea of intensely embracing (clinging to) God reads as follows:

When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the people, he will invade them with his troops. Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the

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stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like the hinds’ feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments. (Hab. 3:16-19)

#### ***Tributes to the Text***

The above text “. . . contains some of the most moving verses in all the Bible” (Boice 2: 110). In one of his classic volumes on biblical texts, Boreham discusses this text from Habakkuk. He recounted the following incident:

When in 1782 . . . Benjamin Franklin was appointed American Plenipotentiary at Paris, some of the brilliant French wits of that period twitted him on his admiration for the Bible. He determined to test their knowledge of the Volume they professed to scorn. Entering their company one evening, he told them that he had been reading an ancient poem, and that its stately beauty had greatly impressed him. At their request he took from his pocket a manuscript and proceeded to read it. It was received with exclamations of extravagant admiration. “Superb!” they cried. “Who was the author? Where did Franklin discover it? How could copies be obtained?” He informed them, to their astonishment, that it was the third chapter of the prophecy of Habakkuk . . . (139)

Additionally, Boreham related the following occurrence from the nineteenth century:

Daniel Webster was one morning discussing with a number of eminent artists the subjects commonly chosen for portrayal upon canvas. “I have often wondered,” he said, “that no painter has yet thought it worth his while to draw his inspiration from one of the most sublime passages in any literature.” “And what is it?” they asked. “Well,” he replied, “what finer conception for a masterpiece could any artist desire than the picture of the prophet Habakkuk sitting in the midst of utter ruin and desolation, singing, inspite of everything, faith’s joyous and triumphant song?” (140)

Concerning the chapter in which the text is located, Robinson says, “The third chapter of Habakkuk is one of the most beautiful anthems of



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praise in the Old Testament. It is bold in conception, sublime in thought, majestic in diction, and pure in rhetoric” (125). Lewis stated that the text is “. . . one of the greatest declarations of faith to be found in biblical literature” (64). Hailey called it “. . . one of the greatest expressions of faith to be found anywhere” (295).

### ***Time of the Text***

The time in which Habakkuk embraced God was a time in which his faith was severely tested and tried. He was a seventh-century B. C. prophet living during an era that included the prophetic activity of Nahum, Zephaniah, and Jeremiah, the dominant prophetic figure of that century (Smith 370-71). Hailey (271-72), Lewis (60), McClintock and Strong (2), Pusey (167-70), Robinson (120-21), and Smith (371-74) all offer valuable discussions concerning the time in which Habakkuk prophesied.

Habakkuk’s time was one that was characterized with the following:

- Inhumanity and brutality (1:2; 2:8; 2:12).
- Iniquity and impropriety (1:4; 2:15-16).
- Inequity (1:4).
- Idolatry (2:18-19).
- Hostility (1:6-10).
- Impending adversity and insecurity (3:16-17).
- Perplexity (1:2; 2:21).

It was a time of a national crisis from within. Laetsch summarizes:

Habakkuk lived at a time when “violence,” oppression, and “iniquity” (a term comprehending falsehood, vanity, idolatry, injustice) prevailed, and “grievance,” mischief, oppression, and “spoiling,” theft, robbery, and “strife,” every form of quarreling, with the members of the family or with the neighbors, legal and illegal lawsuits, and “contention,” disputes, wrangling were rampant throughout Judah. Under such conditions it was natural that the Law was “slacked” (v. 4), paralyzed, a dead letter. God’s own Law, the constitution of the nation, the heart and soul of Judah’s political, religious, and social life; God’s Law, the neglect of which would inevitably bring on the ruination of God’s own land and people (Deut. 28:15ff.), this Law was crippled so that “judgment doth never go forth,” literally: there is forever a nonissuance of judgment, a failure to carry out justice

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and equity . . . Therefore “judgment,” judicial decisions, went forth perverted, in utter disregard of the justice or injustice of the cause, the judges invariably favoring the “right people,” their own cliques (v. 4). (318-19)

Because of the iniquity of the times, Judah would be judged through the invasion of a foreign enemy (1:5-11; 3:16). The proud conqueror of Judah (the Chaldeans) will be destroyed as will all others who oppose God’s will (2:4-19). Because of the report of Judah’s forthcoming judgment, Habakkuk offered the petition that the Lord in His wrath would show mercy and revive His work in behalf of His people (3:1-2). In answer to the prophet’s petition, the Lord makes a glorious appearance (a theophany) based on His mighty works of deliverance in ancient times, His judgments upon the enemies of God’s people in Egypt, at the Red Sea, at Sinai, and in the conquest of Canaan (3:3-15).

This great text in which Habakkuk so wonderfully embraces the Lord God is in the context of a prayer/song: “A prayer of Habakkuk . . . on Shigionoth” (3:1). Pusey says, “It probably . . . means a psalm with music expressive of strong emotion . . .” (204). Lange describes it as “a song delivered in the greatest excitement, or with a rapid change of emotion . . .” (34). This is a prayer (psalm) to be sung with passion and power. Yates described the contextual flow of the passage in the following:

. . . [T]he prophet is rewarded with an appearance of God himself. Through all the years God has been faithful and has responded to the cry for help that came from His followers. Each crisis has been met by the sovereign God who has revealed His infinite power. As the prophet looks he sees the onward march of God through the centuries and realizes that the same active God is in control and that He is working out His own purpose in His own good time. Even though disaster and destruction and ruin await him Habakkuk comes to realize that he can trust implicitly in Yahweh. He sees that only a small part of God’s plan is visible at the time and that God would have him wait patiently for the fuller revelation. (154-55)

Habakkuk was a great prophet of faith (cf. 2:4). His faith was living and strong. However, the times in which he lived were perplexing and troublesome. There are tough questions. But Habakkuk “. . . resolves to place himself upon his observatory, and look out for the revelation which

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the Lord will give to his questions” (Keil 2: 68). He presented his perplexities to the Lord who gave him revelation that enabled the prophet to come forth with faith that was stronger and more intense. Tennyson admirably described Habakkuk:

Perplexed in faith, but pure in deeds,  
At last he beat his music out.  
There lives more faith in honest doubt,  
Believe me, than in half the creeds.

He fought his doubts and gathered strength,  
He would not make his judgment blind,  
He faced the specters of the mind  
And laid them; thus he came at length

To find a stronger faith his own,  
And Power was with him in the night,  
Which makes the darkness and the light,  
And dwells not in the light alone. . . .  
(qtd. in Eiselen 478)

### ***Trembling Before Divine Revelation***

Embracing God, as evidenced in this profound Habakkuk passage and woven with the experience of the prophet, entails three implications. First, ***embracing God means one trembles before divine revelation***. Habakkuk wrote, “When I heard, ***my body trembled . . . I trembled*** in myself . . .” (3:16, emp. added). This is a reiteration of 3:2, but in stronger terms. As there, he says here that *he heard*. What did he hear? “Your speech” or “the report of thee” (ASV). He received special revelation from God that resulted in a response of deep reverence and awe [Note: For a more detailed discussion of both General and Special Revelation the reader is referred to Pugh 53-79.]

Pusey says, “Habakkuk is eminently the prophet of reverential, awe-filled faith” (165). This reverence and awe extended to the deepest recess of Habakkuk’s person as manifested in the description of “. . . my body trembled; my lips quivered at the voice; Rottenness entered my bones; And I trembled in myself . . .” Cook commented:

The whole system undergoes a terrific shock; the belly [body-NKJ] (regarded by the Hebrew as the principal seat of physical

emotion) is torn by spasm. . . the lips quiver, a word elsewhere used of the “ringing” of the ears in terror, see [1 Sam. 3:11; Jer. 19:3]; the bones, seat of intensest pain. . . are smitten with decay, sudden as by a stroke of lightning; the whole man is convulsed by terror. (675)

Trust and terror (i.e. reverential awe) are not mutually exclusive (cf. Feinburg 220). The Psalmist declared, “. . . I trust in Your word” (Ps. 119:42), and later, in the same marvelous discourse on the excellencies of the word of God, he said, “My flesh trembles for fear of You, and I am afraid of Your judgments” (Ps. 119:120), and “. . . [M]y heart stands in awe of Your word” (Ps. 119:161). Habakkuk probably would feel out of place in many Bible classrooms and worship assemblies today where it often seems the highest priority is to make sure everyone feels comfortable and entertained. In his book, *The Trivialization of God*, Donald W. McCullough addresses the need to recover reverence in today’s worship settings. He observes:

Why, then, can you enter many a sanctuary on Sunday morning . . . and find very little reverence? . . . [L]ittle, if any, flat-on-your-face awe . . . You may find much good, such as vibrant fellowship or inspirational teaching or emotional music, but too much of it happens on the horizontal plane, with only a courteous nod toward the vertical. Chatty friendliness moves from the narthex [vestibule] into the sanctuary [auditorium], intruding on preparation for worship . . .

The trivialization of God inevitably leads to the trivialization of worship. The gods of our own creation . . . in no way transcend us, and for this reason they neither terrify nor attract us.

. . . [S]ometimes, what passes for worship is more human-centered than God-centered. We want to make sure everyone “gets something” out of the experience . . . [T]his tends to be the standard most of us use to judge whether a service was “meaningful” or not. Was I inspired? Were the sermon and music to *my* liking? Were *my* needs met? If not, well, then there’s always another church down the street to try next Sunday.

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. . . *What we really need when we show up for worship is for our attention to be turned toward the glory of God.* (110-11, 113, emp. added)

Habakkuk had seen the glory of God through God's revelation (3:3ff), and it resulted in him trembling in deep reverence and awe. Such is the first step to truly embracing God. Charnock wrote:

“. . . Before him the angels tremble, and the heavens melt [cf. Hab. 3:6-7, 10-11]; we ought not therefore to come before him with the sacrifice of fools, nor tender a duty to him, without falling low upon our faces, and bowing the knees of our hearts in token of reverence.” Not a slavish fear, like that of devils; but a “godly fear,” like that of saints (Heb. xii. 28) . . . The consideration of his glorious nature should imprint an awful respect upon our souls to him; his goodness should make his majesty more adorable to us . . . [T]he higher apprehensions we have of his majesty the greater awe will be upon our hearts in his presence, and the greater spirituality in our acts. We should manage our hearts so, as if we had a view of God in his heavenly glory. (1: 236-37)

Habakkuk provides evidence to the fact that one who embraces God is, in basic character, one who has developed reverence for God. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7). One cannot “get off the ground” when it comes to having a true relationship with God without being in awe of God and His revelation. God says, “Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool . . . For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist . . . But *on this one will I look: On him* who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and *who trembles at My word*” (Isa. 66:1-2, emp. added).

### ***Tested by Earth's Devastations***

Not only is it the case that Habakkuk came to embrace God as he trembled before His revelation, but, second, we see that *embracing God is the result of being tested by Earth's devastations*. The prophet affirms that he will cling to God even with “no prospect but that of drought and devastation” (Farrar 173). “. . . [T]he fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; . . . [T]he labor of the olive may fail, . . . [T]he fields yield no food . . . [T]he flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls . . .” (3:17). “All the natural resources of Judah are

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here enumerated, and the poet assumes a complete failure of all these resources . . .” (Eiselen 502). The very life of the nation depended on these things. And he speaks of not merely a partial loss of things, or being deprived of some things, but the entire loss of all things (Pusey 221). Furthermore, this devastation was not just a possibility, but a certainty, in view of the destruction that would likely be the result of the Chaldeans as they marched to the judgment of God on the land of Judah (Hab. 1:5ff; 3:16b). Freeman states, “. . . [T]he conquering nations often devastated the land of the people they invaded (cf. Deu 20:19-20) and destroyed the herds and flocks” (122). Habakkuk was facing the test of extreme and intense devastation and loss.

Many watched in almost utter disbelief as the pictures of devastation, destruction, despair, and death told the story of one of the worst disasters in U. S. history—Hurricane Katrina. How does one describe it? Even those who were eyewitnesses to it admittedly have failed in their efforts to put in words what they saw and felt. It has been (and for many still is) gut-wrenching and heart-breaking. Some would argue that God is blameworthy for having created a world in which such events occur. They would affirm that there is no value in the experience of no buds on the trees, no grapes on the vine, no food from the fields, no sheep in the pen, no cattle in the stalls; that there is no need for (or value in) such violent happenings as tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, etc. Some argue that there is a logical contradiction involved in the existence of the pain and suffering that is the result of such occurrences and the affirmation that God is perfectly good and omnipotent.

On November 1, 1775, Lisbon, Portugal, was devastated by an earthquake. It was All Saints Day and the churches were full. Thirty churches were destroyed. Within six minutes 15,000 people had died and another 15,000 critically injured. One of those stunned by the news was the French skeptical philosopher, Voltaire. For months Voltaire alluded to these tragic happenings in his writings. He asked how could anyone believe in God? If God is free, just, and benevolent, how can we suffer under His rule? Either He wants to stop the suffering but cannot, or He could stop it but will not. Whichever it is, Voltaire insisted, how can we worship God? Voltaire would not embrace God because of Earth's devastations (Stott 311).

The late Thomas B. Warren, in the book *Have Atheists Proved There Is No God?*, answered and refuted the basic argument of those who attempt to use pain and suffering on Earth as evidence that God should not be embraced, but denied and rejected. He wrote:

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If man's environment did not provide situations in which he faced the possibility of suffering some truly terrible loss (of property, well-being, life), then it would not provide a situation in which such virtues as fortitude and courage could be developed as they now are. These facts make it clear that the *ideal* environment for man is one which makes it possible for man to suffer—and, not merely to suffer, but to suffer *intensely*. And, it must not only allow men to suffer intensely, but suffer intensely over a *long period* of time. . . .

. . . [I]t is in harmony with the infinity of God that man should have a probationary life in a world in which it is possible for him to experience pain and suffering, that pain and suffering are things for which we in this life should thank God, that pain and suffering are things without which (during earthly life) the lives of men would be worse than they are, that pain and suffering are things which mark our ultimate relationship with the crucified Son of God . . . [N]o logical contradiction is involved in the conjunction of these propositions with the remainder of the basic propositions of Christian theism. (72, 82-83)

For Habakkuk, the situation with which he was faced was bleak and barren. All was gone. All had failed. Utter desolation, deprivation, and devastation! “When fig tree and vine and olive fail, fields are barren, flocks and herds are dying, **there will be nothing left. Oh, yes, there will be—there will be God!**” (Morgan 96, emp. added). And Habakkuk does not use the devastation he faced to deny God, but he uses it to cause him to depend more on God—to trust God. He sounds like Job who profoundly embraced God when he said, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him . . .” (Job. 13:15).

### **Trusting God—My Exultation, Salvation, and Fortification**

An ultimate display of man embracing God is found in the concluding words of Habakkuk as he said, “Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet. And He will make me walk on my high hills” (3:18-19). Coffman assessed the value of these words: “The response of these words have inspired the men of all generations; and Christians, throughout history, have treasured them in moments when all earthly prospects failed, and the soul was left no alternative except that of passing through the shadow of death” (113).

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Habakkuk's attitude was, come the worst if it will, he would keep **trusting God—God his exultation, his salvation, and his fortification**. He said, “Though the fig tree may not blossom . . . and there be no herd in the stalls—**Yet I will rejoice in the Lord . . .**” (3:18, emp. added). God is his exultation (joy). Observe that it is not that God simply causes his joy, or provides a situation for him that is joyful, **God, Himself**, is his joy. In hardship and devastation, he comes to know God more fully and rejoices *in God* for His (God's) own sake not merely for benefits He gives, but because of Who He is (McComiskey 835). Chambers expresses this aspect of embracing God when he says, “My goal is God Himself, not joy nor peace, not even blessing, but Himself, my God” (141). Paul says it better: “. . . I . . . count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things . . . **that I may know Him . . .**” (Philip. 3:8, 10, emp. added). Habakkuk, Job, Paul, and all great embracers of God have learned that “it is a small thing to lose the *gifts* as long as you possess the *Giver*; the supreme tragedy lies in losing the *Giver* and retaining only the *gifts*” (Boreham 147).

Additionally, Habakkuk declared, “. . . **I will joy in the God of my salvation**” (3:18, emp. added). God is his salvation. It means God my Redeemer, or God my Savior. Pusey says, “. . . [T]he God of my salvation: it is almost the Name of Jesus; for JESUS is salvation, and the Name means ‘the Lord is Salvation’ . . . ‘in God the Author of my redemption,’ and yet more sweetly . . . ‘in God my Jesus’” (222). The great Messianic prophet Isaiah wrote, “I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation. He has covered me with the robe of righteousness . . .” (Isa. 61:10). David's Branch and King is “the Lord Our Righteousness” (Jer. 23:5-6). *He* is the garment of salvation—the robe of righteousness. “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor. 5:21). When one truly embraces God today he puts on Christ (Gal. 3:27). And when one puts on Christ, he is clothed with the rich and royal garment of salvation, the glistening robe of righteousness that is white in the blood of the Lamb (Rom. 1:16-17; Rev. 1:5; 7:14). No matter how devastating my losses, as far as Earth is concerned, embracing my salvation—my Jesus—I gain the greatest (Philip. 3:7-14, 20-21; 1 Peter 1:8-9)!

Finally, Habakkuk says, “**The Lord God is my strength**; He will make my feet like deer's feet, and He will make me walk on my high hills” (3:19, emp. added). **Embracing God means trusting God as one's**

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**power and strength.** God is his fortification. What a “high-note” it is on which Habakkuk concludes!

Jehovah and His eternal salvation is the prophet’s strength (v. 19), upholding him in the storm and stress of the times. Jehovah makes the feet of the prophet, which had begun to tremble and falter (v. 16), once more “like hind’s feet,” swift and sure (cf. 2 Sam. 22:34-43; Ps. 18:34ff.), eager to pursue his way through all trials and obstacles, confident that the Lord will make him “to walk upon mine high places” (Deut. 32:13; 33:29; 2 Sam. 22:34; Ps. 18:34). The high places, the hills, dominating the surrounding country, were usually strongly fortified, and their possession was essential to the possession and defense of the land. (Laetsch 352-53)

Habakkuk would be standing on the heights of salvation, which stand at the end of the way of tribulation, and which those made righteous by an obedient faith (Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:16-17; Gal. 3:11, 26-27; Heb. 10:35-39) confidently climb (cf. Lange 38). He began with trembling. He ends in triumph. Henderson summarizes:

Thus the prophet concludes his message. From a wail of despair (1:2) to a shout of assurance (3:19), he has followed the journey of faith. He began wrestling with doubts in the privacy of his own soul; he ended with a psalm of assurance to be sung in the public testimony of divine worship. What a great victory of faith! (82)

And the victory realized in the personal faith of Habakkuk can be our victory today if we, personally, will embrace God as he. In the face of economic ruin, family failure, a diseased body, natural disaster, a terrorist attack, a nuclear war, a broken heart, a shattered dream, spiritual defeat, a loved one’s death, or any other depression, devastation or deprivation, we can be more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37-39). As Packer, while commenting on this great text in Habakkuk, states: “Happy is the man who can say these things and mean them!” (253). By His grace, may we truly be able to join with the 18th century writer Cowper in his song that repeats for our day the song of Habakkuk:

Sometimes a light surprises  
The Christian while he sings;  
It is the Lord who rises

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With healing in his wings:  
When comforts are declining,  
He grants the soul again  
A season of clear shining,  
To cheer it after rain. . . .

The vine nor fig-tree neither  
Their wonted fruit should bear,  
Though all the fields should wither,  
Nor flocks nor herds be there:  
Yet God the same abiding,  
His praise shall tune my voice;  
For, while in him confiding,  
I cannot but rejoice. (464-65)

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### **Biographical Sketch**

Charles C. Pugh III is in his 40<sup>th</sup> year of preaching the Gospel of Christ. He is one of the founders of West Virginia School of Preaching where he serves as an instructor. He has studied and taught for more than 30 years in the field of Christian Apologetics and teaches three apologetics courses at WVSOP. He is in his 20<sup>th</sup> year of working with the Bridge Street Church of Christ where he did the pulpit work for 15 years. Since 1999, due to a vocal fold disease, much of his work has been concentrated in the areas of writing and publishing. He is the author of several books and tracts and owner of Threefold Publications. He preaches several gospel meetings yearly and appears on various lectureships. He and his wife Sharon have two daughters, one son, a granddaughter and grandson.

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# THE GOODNESS AND SEVERITY OF GOD

## Nahum 1:2-8

DAVID R. PHARR

We might think that the ongoing controversy in the apostolic age over the Gentile question was a disgrace for the first century church. And it was, in that it was the product of racism and ignorance and flourished widely because of the ambitions of false brethren (Gal. 2:4). We might think that we would have a more pleasant picture of the early disciples if so much of the epistles had not been occupied with this problem. Yet, it is in the context of this and other problems that the providence of God has given us and exemplified for us important principles of truth and right.

Circumcision was not to be applied to the Gentiles. The works of the law did not apply. Gentiles were to be accepted in full participation in the family of God. The Gospel is for all, for every nation, every creature. This is truth that is not arbitrary, but rather truth that is founded on the nature of God. It is not in God's nature to be a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34f).

This is behind Paul's explanation in Romans 11 of how believing Gentiles (wild branches) could be grafted in and how unbelieving Jews (natural branches) could be broken off. It also assures that if the grafted-in ones become unfaithful, they also can be cut off and that if the broken-away ones come in faith, they can be grafted in again. (All of this parallels the scenarios in Ezek. 18.) God is infinitely fair. He is a God of absolute goodness; He is a God of absolute justice. He is a God who saves, but He is also a God who cannot tolerate evil. There is no contradiction, nothing that is inconsistent. God is never arbitrary. In Him there is "no variableness, neither shadow of turning." He is the same always and in every way. It is in this setting that we have the text that suggests the title of this lesson. "*Behold therefore the goodness and*

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*severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off"* (Rom. 11:22, emp. added). This was said as the certain conclusion from the natural branch and wild branch illustration. The same point is made earlier in the same epistle where Paul declares the rightness of God's justice for all humanity:

*[God] will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: For there is no respect of persons with God.* (Rom. 2:6-11, emp. added)

Peter reminds us: For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil (1 Peter 3:12).

It should not be necessary to belabor the point, but the tendency of man is to imagine that God is a God that makes exceptions, or perhaps that He is a God that is not paying attention. Zephaniah told how people gamble on divine indifference saying "in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil" (Zeph. 1:12). But God has never ignored either sin or goodness. "The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation" (Num. 14:18).

We much prefer thoughts of the Lord's goodness. "Let us hear messages of grace, and love, and blessing, and forgiveness." Such is the good news of the Gospel. But there is another emphasis about God. In warnings He gave through Moses there are vivid descriptions of the reality of His wrath.

*See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever. If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me. I will make mine arrows*

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*drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh; and that with the blood of the slain and of the captives, from the beginning of revenges upon the enemy.* (Deut. 32:39-42, emp. added)

### **The Prophecy of Nahum**

That seems an appropriate way to introduce the book of Nahum because the “burden” of this prophet was the imminent and severe destruction which was coming to Nineveh. Attention should be called to the commission that had been given to Jonah over a century earlier. Jonah was told: “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me” (Jon. 1:2). The cry was: “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (Jon. 3:4). But Nineveh heeded the warning and repented. The grace of the Almighty accepted their penitence and the destruction was turned away. You know, of course, that Jonah, a patriotic and bigoted Israelite, so despised these Assyrians that he complained about it. “I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil” (Jon. 4:2). But we see the deliverance of Nineveh as yet another marvelous demonstration of the goodness of God.

As so often happens with men and nations, however, the reforms did not last. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria. After the time of Jonah (c. 780 B. C.), Assyria went forth in aggressive war, conquering and destroying Israel and bringing Judah into subjection. Their dominance of other peoples was never with benevolent purposes. “Nineveh saw men and nations as tools to be exploited to gratify the lust of conquest and commercialism. Assyria existed to render no service to mankind” (Lewis 55). Evidence of their hatred of God’s people and of God Himself is found in the messages sent from Sennacherib through his captain Rabshakeh to good king Hezekiah in Jerusalem (2 Kings 18 & 19).

It is easy to understand what was behind the prejudice seen in Jonah. He wanted Nineveh destroyed. His disappointment was that the impartial justice of God encompassed goodness as well as severity. This is the message from the book of Jonah. Nahum, however, shows the other side. No repentance can be found in this later history of Nineveh. To use the wording from Romans, their hard and impenitent heart had treasured for themselves “wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.”

Nahum was a prophet of Judah. He was not sent to Nineveh; he was only telling Judah what was going to happen to Nineveh. The purpose was in part to comfort Judah that retribution was finally going to come to

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their long time enemy. The purpose more especially was to establish for all ages to follow that Heaven’s justice will mete out hellish punishment for all who reject Jehovah’s goodness.

### **The Wrath of God**

In the section assigned to me is found every word that is used to indicate anger in the Hebrew Bible. In our English translation you will find: “jealous,” “revenge,” “wrath,” “fury,” “anger,” “indignation,” and “fierceness.” “God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth; the Lord revengeth, and is furious; the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies” (Nah. 1:2).

Such wrath is “reserved” for His enemies. A terrible flaw in the world’s thinking is the persuasion that because God does not take immediate vengeance, His vengeance will not ever come. Solomon noted this: “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Eccles. 8:11). But “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise,” and “the day of the Lord will come” (2 Peter 3:8-9f). When scoffers imagine that nothing can happen because they have not yet seen it happen, they need to know that God allows some things to be “reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (2 Peter 3:7).

### **Never Capricious, But Not Lacking In Power**

God is never capricious. “The Lord is slow to anger” (3). He is not a quick-tempered God. He is longsuffering. Though we cannot foreknow the divine timetable, we can be certain that God holds back His anger as long as He can. Again, from the text in 2 Peter, He “is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” The case of Nineveh demonstrates this. Nahum’s prophecy, which was only a few years before the fall of Assyria in 612 B. C., was around a century and a half after the time of Jonah. God had shown His goodness then, and even when they went back to their evil ways, the Lord had held back His fury for as long as He could. (I use “could” intentionally: “as long as He could.” God being who He is and sin being what it is, God’s very nature demands that He act at a certain time and in a certain way. There is nothing arbitrary about either His longsuffering or His wrath.)



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Yet there is a limit to the longsuffering of God. Some lie is the last lie; some sin is the last sin; some spurned opportunity to repent is the last opportunity. The poet Longfellow borrowed from a German writer to say, "Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceedingly small." Thomas Carlyle wrote, "Foolish men imagine that because judgment for an evil thing is delayed, there is no justice, but only accident here below. Judgment for an evil thing is many times delayed some day or two, some century or two, but it is sure as life, it is sure as death!" (259).

We sometimes urge gospel response by saying, "If you don't obey Christ, someday you are going to be lost." The fact is, however, that if one is living in sin, he is already lost. The sentence of death is already determined. Such is not going to be lost "someday." He is right now on "death row," awaiting execution. That he may have another opportunity, that punishment is not immediate, is only because of the longsuffering of God.

Hailey calls attention to the repetition of the Lord's name. Jehovah is a jealous God. Jehovah avengeth. Jehovah takes vengeance. Jehovah is slow to anger and of great power. Jehovah will not clear the guilty (Hailey 254f). John Kachelman sees these verses as befitting the idea of God being "an awesome God" (27). "The Lord of hosts [armies] is his name."

But his longsuffering must not be interpreted as meaning that he lacks the will or power. The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the Lord hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers: Bashan languisheth, and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languisheth. The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him. . . . But with an overrunning flood he will make an utter end of the place thereof, and darkness shall pursue his enemies. (3-6, 8)

His power is irresistible. He is "great in power." The military might of the Assyrians cannot stand before Him. The proofs of His power are given in terms both metaphorical and literal. Matthew Henry observes

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that if we look above into the atmosphere, His power is in "the whirlwind and the storm." Even "the clouds are the dust of his feet." Or in terms of the great waters of the world, "He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers." Again over the earth His power is exercised in the extremes of heat and drought and in the cold and frost of winter. This is in the metaphors which say, "Bashan languisheth, and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languisheth." So also, "the mountains quake at him and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence." "Who can stand before his indignation? And who can abide in the fierceness of his anger?" (1341).

The prophet says the Lord's "fury is poured out like fire." It must not be forgotten that there is a lake that burns with fire and brimstone for all who are lost eternally. "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Rev. 21:8). In that fire, there is torment "day and night for ever and ever" (Rev. 20:10). Something history records about the fall of Nineveh and the end of the king (Esarhaddon II) may help us remember warnings about the fire of God's wrath. He gathered his wealth, his wives, and his children into the palace and set it on fire, perishing in the fire (Hailey 250).

### **No Exceptions**

The text brings us back to the fact of divine impartiality. He "will not at all acquit the wicked" (3). "Not at all," "by no means" (NASV). This means without exception, not a single time. There is exactness in God's justice. We hear people speak of being "lucky enough to get into heaven." Luck has nothing to do with it. There will not be one person in heaven who was not saved by grace through faith. And not one person will escape hell who neglects the salvation offered (Heb. 2:1-3).

It is instructive that Peter emphasized that there were eight who were saved in the ark (1 Peter 3:20). Not seven, not nine. Whatever else might be considered about the 144,000 in Revelation 7, we are impressed with the exactness of the number. They were sealed (marked for identification). "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). The point to be made is that there are no border line cases. None are maybe saved or maybe lost. Verse 7 assures that Jehovah "knoweth them that trust in him." He also knows who are those who don't trust in Him.

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Twice in Nahum God says, “I am against thee” (2:13; 3:5). What an awful contrast to the assurance we have: “If God be for us, who can be against us?” Nahum’s message to sinners is that if God is against you, who can be for you!

### **Still, His Goodness**

Our text concludes with assurance that His goodness is always close by. “The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him” (7). Nahum is a very negative book. The opening line says it is a “burden” and one can hardly read it without feeling a weight of depression. As evil as Assyria was, we cannot feel pleasure over the terrible destruction which Nahum foretold and which history records (cf. Ezek. 33:11). It is told that when the first German Zeppelin came over London and was brought down in flames, that the people cheered mightily. In the crowd was a minister who joined in the shout, until his wife took him by the arm and said, “Hush, they’re dying.” There can be no joy over death and hell for even the vilest of enemies.

We are thankful, therefore, for this seventh verse, which provides a hopeful beam of light in this context of destruction. It assures us that there will always be goodness for those who serve him. “The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him. But with an overrunning flood he will make an utter end of the place thereof, and darkness shall pursue his enemies” (7-8).

The line is simple but the truth is profound: “The Lord is good.” “Jehovah alone stands as the Deity of essential goodness. The ignorant savage manufactures a myriad of gods with each possessing many traits. Yet none have the encompassing quality of ‘goodness.’ None are immutably good!” (Kachleman 34). “The character of man is important, but the character of God is much more important. Our first duty is not to do good, it is not even to be good; it is to be sure that God is good. The most deadly danger of our time is the moral scepticism which belittles the importance of righteousness and sin” (Hastings 133). Here, then, is iterated the always perfect balance of goodness and severity.

He is a stronghold, a refuge, for those who come to Him for help. “A mighty fortress is our God; a bulwark never failing.” This was exemplified for Jerusalem in the time of Hezekiah, who “trusted in the Lord God of Israel.” The Assyrian king Sennacherib sent his troops to besiege Jerusalem. A hateful letter was delivered to Hezekiah. When he had read it “Hezekiah went up into the house of the LORD, and spread it

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before the Lord” (2 Kings 19:14).

And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. And it came to pass, as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword: and they escaped into the land of Armenia. And Esar-haddon his son reigned in his stead. (2 Kings 19:35-37)

Truly the Lord Almighty is a stronghold for those who come to him for help.

He never ignores or forgets those that trust him. Nor will he ever fail to punish the guilty. Yes, severity is always balanced with goodness. And goodness rejected always means severity.

Let each take his portion from it; let sinners read it and tremble; let saints read it and triumph. The wrath of God is here revealed from heaven against his enemies, his favor and mercy are here assured to this faithful loyal subject, and his almighty power in both, making his wrath very terrible and his favor very desirable. (Henry 1340)

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### **Biographical Sketch**

David R. Pharr, born Feb. 22, 1937, Wilkesboro, NC. Freed-Hardeman College, Rio Grande College, & Southern Christian University. Married to Margaret (“Peggy”) Pharr; four children. Two sons and a grandson are preachers. Began full-time ministry in 1958 in Pt. Pleasant, WV, and served churches in Gallipolis, OH, Rock Hill, SC, & Clinton, TN. Director of E. Tennessee School of Preaching 1988-1995. He is currently in his second tenure as minister of Charlotte Avenue Church of Christ, Rock Hill, SC, for a total of almost thirty-three years. Editor of *Carolina Messenger*, staff writer for *The Spiritual Sword & Voice of Truth International*. Published works: *Five-Minute Radio Sermons*, *Modern Messages from the Minor Prophets*, *The Beginning of Our Confidence*, *A Happy Coincidence on a Desert Highway*, *The Simplicity System*, *Thy Kingdom Come*, *Voices of Calvary*, and three Bible correspondence courses.

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## **HISTORICAL PROBLEMS IN JONAH**

STEVE STEVENS

I am truly grateful for the opportunity to be part of the WVSOP's 2006 lectureship program. I appreciate the invitation from the elders and the school's lectureship committee to contribute to the study of the Minor Prophets Jonah, Micah, Nahum, and Habakkuk. Our topic for this hour is Historical Problems in Jonah.

The book of Jonah has 4 chapters, 48 verses, 1,377 words, and covers less than two full pages in most standard size Bibles in the KJV. However, these 48 verses of Scripture have generated volumes of heated debate in books and articles dealing with the historical accuracy and the genre of the text. The majority of those which are critical of the text have produced their works in the past 125 years.

The scholarly J.W. McGarvey wrote his book on Jesus and Jonah which was published in March of 1896 to refute the writings of theologians of his day who claimed the book of Jonah was a "religious novel" (4) and that Jesus spoke "of the characters of fiction as if they were real" (15). In this able defense of the historical accuracy of Jonah McGarvey penned a 72 page work with approximately 300 words to the page. From this point forward the critics have never stopped and the defense of the truth must keep advancing.

Is the book of Jonah history or is it fiction? Paul N. Tobin on his website "A Skeptics Guide to Christianity" writes, "Without even needing to consider the absurd case of Jonah surviving for three days in the belly of a 'great fish' it is obvious that the book of Jonah is fiction, not fact." Steven McKenzie in an internet article entitled, "Genre and Expectation" wrote:

Readers who have misconstrued the genre of Jonah as history have therefore approached it with an erroneous set of expectations and have often tried to force it to fit their

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expectations. When it is discovered that the book does not fit those expectations, the tendency is often to blame the book, declaring it "untrue" and implying that it is somehow of less significance because it does not describe historical events. It is important to recognize, therefore, that the problem in the interpretation of Jonah does not lie with the book itself but with its readers—readers, who fail to discern its genre from internal clues and thereby fail to appreciate its true nature and purpose. The problem is only exacerbated by the fact that Jonah is an ancient piece of literature from a foreign culture and written in a foreign language. (3)

As mentioned above the skeptics do not see Jonah as history. As a matter of fact they appeal to various genre forms to explain away the unbelievable elements concerning the miracles in the book of Jonah. One school of the skeptics considers Jonah to be myth, legend, or fable. Robinson refers to Simpson who "assures us that when the book of Jonah is viewed from the standpoint of myth or legend, 'then all becomes simple!'" (83). Simpson goes on to categorize Jonah as a story of "initiatory rites" (83) where the hero undergoes a simulated death experience followed by a re-birth into what is considered a new life.

Freeman refers to Oesterley and Robinson as representatives of those who view Jonah as allegorical or purely symbolic. In this view everything in the book of Jonah represents something other than the literally expressed thought. For instance, the fish vomiting Jonah out on dry land is not literal, rather it symbolizes Jonah going out of repentant Nineveh (160). With this view the interpreter determines the meaning of the book.

Another group classifies Jonah as a parable. In this interpretation the events mentioned in the book of Jonah are not to be taken literally anymore than one would take the parables of Jesus to be historically literal. This genre does not view Jonah as an individual, but as the nation of Israel. Because Israel failed to make God known to the heathen nations neighboring around her she is "swallowed up" in Babylonian captivity until her lesson is learned. At that point Israel is "vomited out" of captivity to return to Jerusalem. Freeman quotes Brewer as a representative of this group, "Surely this is not the record of actual historical events nor was it ever intended as such . . . His story is thus a story with a moral, a parable, a prose poem like the story of the Good Samaritan" (161).

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Clarke describes another branch of the skeptics when he writes, “Others have thought that the whole account of Jonah’s being swallowed by a great fish, his praying in its belly, and being cast out on dry land, was a *dream* which he had while *fast asleep* in the ship” (698).

One of the newer genres assigned to the book of Jonah is that of being a satire. Peter Sippel wrote in an article entitled, “The Book of Jonah Is Satire” wrote:

We miss a lot if we fail to appreciate Jonah as a masterpiece of satire that ridicules the narrow, provincial, prejudicial thinking popular among many of the period. I think all aspiring satirists would do well to study the techniques used by this author . . . I can just imagine some of the serious rabbis squirming even as they approved the book’s canonical status! (10)

He goes on to conclude:

One thing is that, while he makes use of satire, this is not a mean spirited book. While he has biting social commentary, there is no hint of bitterness. While the author is almost caustic in some of his portrayals of the prophet, he doesn’t lapse into being vindictive. The contrasts are sharp and pointed, but our author is not being spiteful. (11)

From the above it would appear that the skeptics who refuse to accept the book of Jonah as an historical narrative have one point in common, namely, they do not believe Jonah is history. Within the parameters of those who reject the historical accuracy of Jonah there seems to be a never ending digression concerning what genre the book of Jonah could be. One would think that if it is so obvious what the book of Jonah could not be, then it should be evident what the book should be.

In truth, “the book of Jonah presents itself as an authentic historical narrative” (Freeman 162). The prophecy contains some symbolism and typology, but not to the exclusion of the significance of the history of Jonah on the mission given by God for him to preach in Nineveh.

If the intended flight of the prophet to Tarshish and his misfortune upon the sea were not historical facts, they could only be mythical or parabolic fictions. But though myths may very well embody religious ideas, and parables set forth prophetic truths, they cannot be types of future facts in the history of salvation. If the three days’ confinement of Jonah in the belly of

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the great fish really had the typical significance which Christ attributes to it in Matthew 12:39 sqq. and Luke 11:29 sqq., it can neither be a myth or dream, nor a parable, nor merely a visionary occurrence experienced by the prophet; but must have had as much objective reality as the facts of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. (Keil and Delitzsch 388)

The book of Jonah receives its place among the minor prophets “not because it related historical events that had happened to the prophet Jonah, but because these events were practical prophecies” (388). Is Jonah actual history? Yes! Why?

One, as set forth above, the book itself records the events as facts actually happening in the life of the prophet Jonah. The book reads like historical narrative because it is!

Two, Jonah is an actual historical person. We know his name, his father’s name, and his place of birth (2 Kings 14:23-25). We know what he did, where he did it, and the historical period in which he lived (the days of Jeroboam II, king of Israel from 792 to 753 B.C.) (Hailey 63).

Three, for centuries the ancient Jews and the Christians regarded the book of Jonah as historical.

Four, Jesus confirmed that Jonah, the fish, and the repentance of Nineveh were actual events and used them to teach the generation that walked on this earth with Him some valuable lessons. Brother Hailey said it well, “Therefore, the historical interpretation is the only interpretation worthy of acceptance to all who believe that Jesus is the Christ. The book is essentially historical; and as history, it must be authentic. A book may be historically accurate and not be inspired, but it could not be inspired and historically inaccurate” (64).

Having established the historical reliability of the book of Jonah, we would be remiss if we did not address some of the “historical problems” in the text of Jonah. Though by no means exhaustive the following list references what some would consider “historical problems” in the book of Jonah:

1. Lack of seafaring experiences among the Israelites.
2. The sacrifice of 1:16. Where did it come from since they had already jettisoned the cargo? How was it offered since the ship would have been wooden?
3. The presence of Aramaic words that supposedly developed later than the approximate date of the book of Jonah around 800 B.C.

4. The identity of the city of Tarshish to which Jonah booked passage.
5. The unprecedented wholesale repentance of the entire pagan city of Nineveh upon hearing one short sermon from a foreign prophet.
6. The writer of the book referring to himself in the third person.
7. Quotation of the psalms of thanksgiving for deliverance in chapter 2 before the fish vomited Jonah out on dry land.
8. What language would Jonah use when preaching to the people in Nineveh?
9. The reference to the “king of Nineveh” in the book instead of the “king of Assyria” which has no secular historical confirmation.
10. The quandary over the size of the city of Nineveh in 3:3 as “an exceeding great city of three days journey.”
11. The great fish. What was it?
12. The survival elements involved with Jonah being in the fish. Why was Jonah not digested? How did he breathe in a fish in water? How did he stay hydrated in salt water?
13. Questions about the unity of the text. Is it arranged in proper chronological order?
14. What use did Jesus make of these events in His preaching? Was He just accommodating the scientific ignorance of His generation? Was the sign of Jonah merely the repentance of the Gentiles at the preaching of Jonah about the judgment of God?
15. Do the supernatural elements (the survival of Jonah in a fish’s belly for three days and three nights, the rapidly growing gourd, the devouring worm) make the book incredible?

Obviously, the time framework for this lecture will not allow for the treatment of all the above points. Each reader is encouraged to pursue the answers on his/her own time. The balance of our time together will be focused on three areas: (1) The great fish; (2) Nineveh; (3) Jesus’ use of Jonah in the New Testament.

There are few Biblical accounts that have received the attention and ridicule that Jonah’s account of the great fish and the events that accompany it have. Men have debated in the past whether or not a fish could swallow a man without mutilating him. Today scientists acknowledge that the sperm whale which inhabits the Mediterranean Sea is capable of swallowing an object as large, or larger, than a man. The whale shark is another species of great marine animals that can do

likewise. Even the issue of surviving the greater part of 72 hours in a huge aquatic animal is considered plausible.

The essential problem here is not what is the possibility of such events taking place. Robinson points out that there have been fish caught which are large enough to swallow not only “a Minor prophet” like Jonah, but a “Major one as well” (78). The apologetic explanations are interesting from a human standpoint, but at the same time trifling. Either the account is history (and it has been proven above to be so) and a genuine miracle has been recorded or it is just an Oriental fish tale with no foundation or fact. “The author, we may be sure, intended to portray Jonah’s preservation from death, or return to life, as supernatural” (79).

If God exists, and He does, then miracles are possible. If Christ was raised from the dead, then miracles are not only possible but proven (Thompson 86). The God of heaven and earth who can and did create with His word from nothing, and who can raise the dead never to die again, can and did also prepare a great fish which swallowed Jonah, held him for some period of three days and three nights, and at the command of that God vomited Jonah out upon dry land.

“This may mean little to the hardened atheist or to the religious modernist who attacks the account in Jonah as nothing more than a myth and who long ago gave up any real belief in the deity of Christ. But what should be the Christian’s response?” (86).

Four issues revolve around the city of Nineveh in the book of Jonah. The first is its size. Critics like to claim that 3:3 means that Nineveh had already been destroyed by the time the book was written. Keil and Delitzsch write that this phrase “neither proves that Nineveh had already been destroyed at the time this was written, nor that the greatness of Nineveh was unknown to the contemporaries of Jonah. . .” (382).

What does a city of three day’s journey mean? Robinson answers:

This is a decidedly oriental expression. It has nothing to do with diameter or circumference of the city, which Diodorus describes as 480 *stadia*, *i.e.*, about 60 miles; oriental cities are usually built very compactly; but it refers rather to the fact that “three days” would be required to visit and see all its principal points of interest. For example, ask a native of Palestine today, as the present writer once did in Nazareth, “Which city, Nazareth or Beirut, is the better?” and the answer will be returned quickly, “Oh, Beirut is a city of three days”! referring to its superior size. (80)

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The second issue is the wholesale repentance of a pagan city the size of Nineveh. Two elements should be carefully weighed before judging the effect produced as improbable. The first is the quality of the preaching of the prophet. After his theological education at sea and in the belly of the fish the preaching of Jonah must have been surcharged with power and effectiveness never before experienced in his prophetic career. The second element would be the receptiveness of the Ninevites. Jonah 3:5 states that they believed God. It is the same word used of Abram believing God's promise that he would have a son while yet childless in Genesis 15:6. Their belief caused them to fast in sackcloth. The king issued a royal proclamation to give furtherance to the already effective preaching that required every citizen to turn from evil and violence. Every element combined for maximum results: a divine decree delivered in powerful preaching and a royal proclamation to repent given to a city of hearers who believed it and acted accordingly.

The third issue involving Nineveh concerns the language Jonah used to preach to them. The Hebrew text shows six words: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh [shall be] destroyed." Freeman states, "Even the critics could have memorized that much of the Assyrian tongue!" (169). Aside from the obvious answer involving Divine enabling (such as on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2) it is possible that Jonah could have been exposed to this much Aramaic by the traveling merchants of the Near East which frequented Palestine in their trading businesses.

The fourth issue revolves around the phrase "the king of Nineveh" in Jonah 3:6. Critical scholarship contends that since the king was ruler over all Assyria and not just Nineveh this phrase has to be an error. Such an error they contend argues for a later date of writing than that of the 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C. since anyone living in that era would have known better. Consider that Jonah's chief concern on this mission was the city of Nineveh and not the whole country of Assyria. Also notice that similar Biblical analogies occur elsewhere in the Old Testament without discrediting the historical accuracy of the people involved. Ahab is referred to as the king of Israel and the king of Samaria (1 Kings 21: 1, 18). The ruler of Syria is called the king of Syria in 2 Chronicles 28:5 and the king of Damascus in 2 Chronicles 24:23. Enough said! What should be the Christian's response to all of these matters?

The third and final area this lecture will deal with concerns the use Jesus made of the book of Jonah while preaching on this earth. Jesus refers to the book in the following three passages:

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Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, *An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.* The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here. (Matt. 12:38-42, emp. added).

The Pharisees also with the Sadducees came, and tempting desired him that he would shew them a sign from heaven. He answered and said unto them, When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowring. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times? *A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas.* And he left them, and departed. (Matt. 16:1-4, emp. added).

And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, *This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation.* The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here. *The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.* (Luke 11:29-32, emp. added).

When asked for a sign from heaven Jesus said no sign would be given but "the sign of the prophet Jonah." Everything Jesus addresses in

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these verses is historical. Jonah, the men of Nineveh, Solomon, the queen of the south, His own present generation are real historical people. In the midst of this very historical passage Jesus refers to the three days and three nights Jonah spent in the belly of the whale.<sup>2</sup>

McGarvey in his powerful defense of the historical accuracy of both Jesus' teaching and the book of Jonah wrote:

To the great mass of readers in every age and country, it has appeared that Jesus here assumes as a settled fact that Jonah was in the great fish described in the book of Jonah, and that the Ninevites actually repented under the influence of his preaching. So obvious does this appear that probably no human being has ever raised a question about it until after he has reached the conclusion that these two events are incredible. Then he must get rid of the obvious meaning, or deny the truthfulness of an assertion made by Jesus Christ. (2)

Jesus himself applied Jonah's miraculous preservation and restoration as a prophecy and type of his own death, burial, and resurrection. How should a Christian respond to this matter?

Thompson offers three options for responding to these "historical problems" in Jonah: (1) Jesus was mistaken and unaware of His error in regards to Jonah. (2) Jesus knowingly lied about the matter. He knew none of the events in Jonah happened, however He still used them as if they occurred in order to illustrate His own circumstance. (3) Jesus actually told the truth. The events in Jonah happened just as they are recorded, and serve as a practical prophecy concerning the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (86). Both number 1 and number 2 are totally out of character with the sinless, Divine, Son of God. The Christian's response recognizes that Jesus and Jonah stand or fall together. Since Jesus acknowledged and defended the account of Jonah as historically true then those of us who call Him Lord can do no less without denying the Deity of our Lord and Savior.

What of the "historical problems in Jonah?" They only exist in the minds of men who are without God, without His Word, without Christ, and thus without hope. These men and women have far greater problems to deal with than the "historical problems in Jonah." May they open their eyes, their ears, their minds and their hearts to receive the saving Gospel of our Lord and Savior who had no problems with the history of the book of Jonah.

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## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> For further details listing the writings that mention the book of Jonah see Lewis 44.

<sup>2</sup> For an excellent discussion of the terminology in Jonah and the Gospels about the "great fish" and the "whale" see Miller 1-2.

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### ***Biographical Sketch***

Steve Stevens was baptized into Christ by his father, Earl Stevens, at the Dewey Avenue Church of Christ in St. Marys, WV, on January 22, 1967. He has been preaching and teaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ for 36 years. He is presently located with the Church of Christ in Hundred, WV, where he has preached for over 25 years. He has been married to the former Karen Barnhart of New Freeport, PA, for 30 years. Their marriage has been blessed with eight children ranging in age from 28 to 5 years old. Steve was one of eight charter faculty members for the WVSOP teaching from 1994 through June of 2000. After a five year recess he resumed teaching New Testament Greek at the WVSOP in August of 2005.

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## **LOVING SINNERS—HATING SIN**

### *Jonah 4:1-5*

ANDREW ROBISON

God has made it incumbent upon His people to hate sins, while loving the misguided souls who commit them.

#### ***Assyrian Animosity***

God was fed up with the enemies of Israel, the Assyrians. This expansion-minded kingdom was going the way of many advanced civilizations. Economic and military success seemed to propel the moral decline. It would be perhaps sixty or seventy years until God would allow the Assyrians to plunder the Israelite strongholds and capture their people. The enemies of Israel, in that day (722 B.C.), would win a victory. That would be a point in history in which Israel was punished for their sins. But on this prior occasion, God was ready to punish the Assyrians for theirs. Their wickedness had captured God's attention, and He was ready to act (Jon. 1:2). His justice being tempered with mercy, however, God was ready to allow them one last opportunity to repent. His chosen means of getting their attention was through an Israelite prophet, whose name was Jonah.

Jonah, the son of Amittai, of Gath Hopher (2 Kings 14:25) (a little north of Nazareth in Galilee) was apparently ready to see the Assyrians punished. When God told him to go northeast to Nineveh, Assyria's capital city, with the message of repentance and the possibility of divine forbearance (1:1-2), he did not want to go. The text of Jonah 1 leaves us to wonder about the reason for his famous flight far westward (1:3-4). Was he afraid to preach to what he considered barbarous people? Was the motive fear? Or was it something that seems a little more sinister?

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Hopefully, children still learn Jonah's story. A storm disrupted his passage to the place he thought might be far enough away from God. When the fault was determined to be his, desperate sailors threw him overboard. He then became himself a beneficiary of God's mercy. Instead of being left a victim of the deep, God prepared a special fish with a large enough belly to accommodate a disobedient human for three days. After Jonah prayed in his own penitence, the Lord made the fish spit Jonah out onto the safety of land.

Jonah, now messily aware he would never escape accountability to God, delivered the divine decree with inspiration's brevity: "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" Nineveh did an about-face, from the highest authority on down. The result is stated in Jonah 3:10: "Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way, and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it."

Chapter four enlightens the Bible student concerning the darkness of Jonah's heart. He did not desire penitence from the people of Nineveh. He had never wanted the people of Nineveh to have another chance. His prayer of objection to God carried an implicit, "I told you so." Consider it:

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. So he prayed to the Lord, and said, "Ah, Lord, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm. Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." (4:1-3)

#### ***Abject Antagonism***

Jonah knew of God's mercy before his flight from God's mission. He did not want the Assyrians to enjoy its hope; he would rather deprive them of the message that might bring them to their Creator's pleasure. Jonah knew God's mercy in the belly of the great fish and on the dry land where he realized he had no choice but to proceed with the Lord's intent. When, finally, God's mercy was shown in all its resplendent glory, Jonah had the nerve to object! "How awful," he seems to mutter, "I just knew this would happen; I just knew they'd go and repent. Now God has, indeed, shown them mercy. If God is going to forgive these wretched enemies of Israel, I'd rather die than live."

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This pitiful display puts one in mind of the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt. 18:21-35). He was forgiven a financial debt exceeding amounts imaginable by common men, but he refused to waive a minute obligation. One may also recall the attitude of the older brother of the prodigal son. He was so angry with the younger brother's profligacy that he wanted no part of the joy expressed when he had come home (Luke 15:11-32). Pharisees of Jesus' day weren't concerned with people. They rather would sacrifice the well being of their Jewish brethren in order to keep the man-made traditions of long-dead fathers. Jesus reminded, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice" (Matt. 9:13).

Jonah was so angry that he pouted like a child. He first constructed a shady shelter, but God quickly provided one better. God made a plant come up to "deliver him from his misery" (4:6). The prophet momentarily forgot his objection to God's mercy; he was "very grateful for the plant" (4:7). Then, when God punished the plant rather arbitrarily, Jonah's now infamous ire again aroused (4:7-9). Apparently this kind of arbitrary punishment did not set well with Jonah. After all, what had the plant done?

The object lesson was profound. Consider the sequence of events:

1. Nineveh was spared.
2. Jonah was angry and expresses his distaste in prayer.
3. The Lord asked, "Is it right for you to be angry?" but received no response (4:4).
4. The plant grew mercifully for Jonah.
5. The plant died, through no fault of its own.
6. Jonah's anger was aroused again.
7. The Lord can now rephrase His question, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" (4:9a).
8. Jonah answered defiantly, "It is right for me to be angry, even to death" (4:9b).

Now the Lord is in the position to drive His message home. He did so:

But the Lord said, "You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left—and much livestock?" (4:8-10)

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### ***Alleviation of Burden***

The lessons for Jonah then and Christians now are manifest.

God justifies His mercy. If Jonah is upset at an arbitrary destruction of a morally neutral plant, why would he not be upset at a vengeful destruction of a people who had repented? Jonah's heart was set on calamity for the Assyrians. But that would have been a travesty against the divinely interlocking principles of justice and mercy. Sinners may have deserved some punishment, but God's lovingkindness forever promises reprieve for those who repent. They had repented. How could a fair God lash out at them now? Surely Jonah could see that in view of the plant. The plant had never sinned nor repented. It was, in his view, unjust that it died. Wouldn't it be more unjust if those who cried to God for mercy had been laughed to scorn by a vengeful God intent on killing them anyway? Those who repent, in a merciful God's view, are afforded another chance.

God's mercy is also apparent on those who would have been innocent victims of other's sins. While guilt of sin passes not between persons (Ezek. 18), consequences are often handed down for generations (Ex. 20:4-5). God was still concerned with the 120,000 innocent souls (children), who would have had to suffer extinction for no fault of their own. There are those who lash out at God for seeming injustice in the accounts of destructions of whole nations, including women and children, where sin has engulfed the people. Let them not forget these principles: 1) Sin carries consequences for those who do not commit it. If it did not, it would not be a result of free choice. And if the consequences did not affect other people, such consequences would be rendered meaningless; 2) God always waits for people to repent as long as He, in His wisdom, can allow (2 Peter 3:9). He has no pleasure in the death of one who dies (Ezek. 18:32), whether the sinner or the innocent victim; and 3) His patience is in part a protection of those who have not themselves deserved the punishment. God was not only concerned with the yet unaccountable humans of Nineveh, but also of His creation and food supply for them, the livestock (Jon. 4:10). His mercy extends beyond what we imagine. Somehow it mixes with His justice in ways that man cannot fathom (cf. Rom. 3:23-26).

### ***Animosity Overcome***

Thus is the necessity for followers of God, who would be like their Father in heaven (Matt. 5:43-48), to extend the same kind of love toward

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sinners. Jonah’s kind can be found everywhere in the world. The “eye for eye; tooth for tooth” mentality (or worse—“head for eye; life for tooth”) is the prevailing vengeful view of mankind. Christians must in this, as in everything set themselves apart. They must be able to separate the sinful acts of men from the men. They must hate the sin, but love the sinner.

This attitude is easier when Christians realize the power of sin and temptation. The “prince of this world” (John 12:31; 2 Cor. 4:4) has an unbelievable power and persistence to try to sway the best of men toward his doomed side (1 Peter 5:8). All of us are subject. The accountable, and the Christians who say they’ve never been affected by sin are liars (1 John 1:8, 10). Sin is a powerful force of bondage, freedom from which comes only through the sacrifice of Christ (Rom. 6:3-23). In that all who are now Christians have once been enslaved to sin, they ought more easily see the necessity of love for the sinner and hate for the sin. They, when in sin, were loved themselves (Rom. 5:8-10), and so benefited from the extension of grace. How can they claim Christ if they do not exemplify His attitude of forgiveness toward those still enslaved? To deny others what one has freely received is the height of hypocrisy and delusional self-righteousness.

That being said as forcefully as one knows how, the difficulty of peculiar situations ought to be appreciated. The illustrations could be manifold, both historical and hypothetical, both ancient and modern.

Consider a husband during the time of the Roman Emperor Nero’s reign of terror upon Christians. Imagine he has lost his wife to the persecution, but somehow, in all innocence, escaped himself. His wife’s executioner (or betrayer) at some point future realizes the error of his ways and obeys God’s plan of salvation. In worship services in the catacombs, the killer meets the widower. Can he embrace him with the holy kiss and call him brother?

What of the parents of children who’ve been slain by a murderous pedophile? Should he desire truth and forgiveness from his prison cell, would they be able to work through their grief while visiting this imprisoned, new brother in Christ? Just how far does one have to go in hating the sin, but forgiving the sinner?

Terrorists present another grandiose hypothetical. How difficult it is to loathe their despicable actions while loving their eternal souls.

And then there are divorces. These evil dragons spawn all the bitterness and hatred of hell. Reconciliation is possible only if one learns to despise the sin, but love the sinner. Even if reconciliation is out of the

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question, amicable relations for the sake of the children are desirable, but only achievable in the arena of a forgiving heart.

The Lord’s seemingly innocuous injunctions of mutual forgiveness (Matt. 6:14-15; 18:35; Luke 6:37) are easy to preach boldly. Their practice may require, in some cases, all the assistance of the army of heaven.

The Lord’s lesson from Jonah manifests, once again, His wisdom. Hatred for people spirals downward into more and more sin, and potentially into murder (Matt. 5:21-26). Hatred for sin demands pity for those enslaved therein (John 8:31-34; Matt. 23:37). Love results quite naturally from such pity. And where there is such love for those lost, there is the impetus for the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

### ***Biographical Sketch***

Andrew J. Robison IV, son of Elizabeth and the late A. Jack Robison, was raised in Moundsville, WV, attending the Hillview Terrace congregation. Andy holds the B.A. in Bible and Vocal Music from Harding University. He has served with the church at Pennsboro, WV, Farmington, WV, Camden Avenue in Parkersburg, WV, Hopewell in Washington, WV (presently). He also taught at Jackson Christian School in Jackson, TN. In addition, he has for many years worked with West Virginia Christian Youth Camp. Andy married Marsha Giesler of Rolla, MO, in 1988. They are blessed with two children—Hannah and Andrew.

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## LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

### Micah 5:2-5

D. GENE WEST

#### Introduction

When Dr. Kelly Ogden, modern apologist for Mormonism and professor of geographical and ancient scripture at the Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies, attempted to explain Joseph Smith's religious *faux pas* of saying that our Lord was born "at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers," (Alma 7:10 BM) he added to the dilemma by pointing out Smith had said Jesus was born "at Jerusalem, not in Jerusalem." He further averred that Smith referred to Jerusalem, not as a city, but as a land. He "authenticated" that Jerusalem had been called a land by appealing to the El Amarna Letters numbers 287 and 290, in which ancient kings had referred to Jerusalem as a land. He also asserted that Bethlehem was a town that belonged to the *Land of Jerusalem* (Ogden 3). What Ogden did not do was point out that the El Amarna Letters were written in the days of Joshua's invasion of the land of Canaan, and they were not discovered until after Smith had written his Book of Mormon. In addition, Dr. Ogden did not admit that in a book, part of which is much more ancient than the Tel El Amarna letters, there is never a mention of the "Land of Jerusalem;" nor does he admit that when the El Amarna tablets were written the city later called Jerusalem was known as Jebus!

Dr. Ogden, in a further attempt to justify the ignorance displayed in the Book of Mormon, makes a great deal of the fact that it says Jesus was born "at Jerusalem," not "in Jerusalem." He declared, "Dictionary definitions of *at* include 'close by' and 'near.'" "Thus," he said, "*at Jerusalem* could mean *near Jerusalem*" (4). While we can find no such

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definitions of the word "at" in any dictionary consulted, we grant the possibility of their existence, but add that it would have been nice, to say nothing of scholarly, if Dr. Ogden had cited his sources for these definitions. But what Dr. Ogden is trying to get "at" is that when Joseph Smith said Jesus was born "at Jerusalem," he meant he was born in Bethlehem. One cannot help but wonder why Smith did not say as much since it is the truth of the matter. Incidentally, "at" can also mean "in." For example: a mother asks her son, "Where have you been?" He replies, "At the movies," Does he mean was "close by" or "near" the movies, or does he mean he was in the theater watching a movie?

Concerning the birthplace of our Lord we have far more reliable witnesses than the late, infamous Joseph Smith. The great Spirit-inspired prophet (2 Peter 1:16-21) Micah, who was a young contemporary of the prophet Isaiah, wrote about 735 years before the birth of Christ, these words:

Now gather yourself in troops, O daughter of troops; He has laid siege against us; They will strike the judge of Israel with a rod on the cheek. But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting. Therefore He shall give them up, until the time that she who is in labor has given birth; then the remnant of His brethren shall return to the children of Israel. (Mic. 5:1-3)

As one continues his reading down through verse five, it is easy to understand that Micah spoke of the coming Messiah and in this verse told where the Messiah was to be born.

When one turns to Matthew's account of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, he distinctly said, "Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem . . ." (Matt. 2:1). As the great Apostle continued to unfold the story of the visit of the Magi, he pointed out that Herod gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people to inquire of them where "the Christ" was to be born. They immediately told him that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, for it had been written by the prophet. Though the prophet is not named, from Matthew 2:6 we read, "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel." These words are found as part of the prophecy of Micah

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5:2, the main verse under consideration today. From Luke's account of the birth of the Messiah we learn that in the days when the Caesar was Augustus and Quirinius was the governor of Syria, Joseph and Mary departed from Galilee and traveled "to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife who was with child" (Luke 2:1-5). Luke continued his narrative saying that it was while they were there, that is, in the Town of Bethlehem, that ". . . [S]he brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7). Consequently, for those who believe the Bible there can be no doubt that our Lord was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days when Herod was King of the Jews, Augustus was Caesar of the Empire and Quirinius was governor of Syria. That broadly dates his birth at about 6 B. C.

Sir William Ramsay in his masterful defense of Luke as a historian entitled, *Was Christ Born in Bethlehem?*, made the point that it was general knowledge in the days of Jesus that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem. Public opinion attested to this fact. Ramsay said:

Again, John vii, 40, 41 quotes the opinions expressed in Jerusalem about Jesus: some of the multitude said: "This is of a truth the prophet": others said: "This is the Christ": but some said: "What, does the Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the scripture said that the Christ cometh of the seed of David and from Bethlehem?" (95-96)

(Incidentally, the latter part of what Ramsay quoted in the above was actually verse 42.) So far as we know, in the synoptics, only Mark fails to mention, either directly or indirectly, that Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea. So, the New Testament evidence for the fact that Micah was speaking of the Messiah's being born in Bethlehem ought to be adequate for anyone who is willing to accept the teaching of the Bible. (For our purposes, we will not go outside the pages of the Bible for corroborating evidence, though it seems to be abundant.)

### ***The Prophecy: Micah 5:2-5***

We wish to delve into this awesome prophecy by looking at three important aspects. Firstly, we will give a brief historical milieu of the prophecy. Secondly, we look at it as the place of Messiah's birth and thirdly, the kind of King Messiah was to be. Approximately one hundred and fifty years before the fall of Jerusalem to the invading Emperor

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Nebuchadnezzar, Micah pointed out that the nations of Israel and Judah were in distress. In chapters two and three he had spoken of the evil that was being committed by these nations and the fact that they were accepting the lies of "prattling prophets" rather than listening to the truth spoken to them by God's true prophets. He wanted to point out that this was not just a "preacher's argument," as we so often hear today, but they were being lulled into a false security that would cost them their homes, all their goods, their lives, and perhaps even their souls. He condemned not only the lying prophets, but the wicked rulers of the nations, as well, but he kept returning to the theme of the restoration of Israel.

In chapter four he pointed out that after the nation had been restored the church (mountain of the Lord's house) would be established on top of the mountains and be exalted above the hills and she would be enriched by the inflow of people from all nations of the earth (Mic. 4:1-2). He further prophesied that the Gospel, which he called "the law," would go forth from Jerusalem along with the Word of God. The result would be the development of the peaceable Kingdom with spiritual plenty (Mic. 4:3-5). In 4:6-8, he prophesied of the future triumph of that Kingdom over all enemies who would try to destroy her.

However, in 5:1 he reported what was going to come to pass before any of this happened when he said, "Now gather yourself in troops, O daughter of troops; He has laid siege against us; they will strike the judge of Israel with a rod on the cheek." These words apply to the first fall of Jerusalem, for, it seems, when Micah wrote, Samaria had already fallen. The amazing prophet then returned to the nature of the Messiah and his Kingdom when he said, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting."

Perhaps, at this point wisdom demands that we set forth a kind of historical time line for this magnificent prophecy. Probably no better summary can be found than that of Dr. James E. Smith in his classical work, *What the Bible Teaches about the Promised Messiah*. Dr. Smith very succinctly wrote:

Micah ministered in the southern kingdom during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah (739-686 B.C.). During his ministry Micah saw Samaria fall to Sargon in 722 B.C. The northern kingdom of Israel ceased to exist. Micah saw his own country overrun by Assyrian armies in 701 B.C. Only a last minute

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miraculous intervention by God saved Judah from total destruction by the armies of Sennacherib ... But Micah was more than a prophet of doom. On the other side of judgment he saw a ray of hope. One aspect of that hope was the rise of a ruler from the house of David. (326)

The words “Bethlehem,” and “Ephrathah,” which mean “house of bread” and “fruitfulness,” respectively described the ancestral home of David located a few miles south of the City of Jerusalem. No doubt, the prophet used both names for this town to distinguish it from Bethlehem of Zebulun of which we read in Joshua 19:15. Some sources say the distance from Jerusalem was five miles, others six and one or two say seven. Consequently, we will say a few! The astute Lutheran scholar Dr. Theodore Laetsch in his rich commentary, *The Minor Prophets*, made the observation that in Bethlehem “. . . He was to be born who was indeed the Bread of Life (John 6:48), the fruitful Progenitor of innumerable children of God (Ps. 22:31, 32, A. V., 30,31; Isa. 53:10ff; Hos. 2:1, A.V., 1:10)” (271).

The town is further described as, “little among the thousands of Judah.” This means at least two things: (1) It was a small town, more of an agrarian village than even a larger one like Bethany for example, and surely nothing to be compared to a city like Jerusalem. (2) The tribes of Israel were divided into “thousands” for political, judicial and military reasons. Bethlehem was little among these divisions. This indicates that she may not have had a population of a thousand people. Dr. E. B. Pusey in his commentary on the Old Testament minor prophets explained this clause in this way: firstly, he pointed out that it should be rendered as follows, “you who are too small to be among the thousands of Judah.” He continued:

Each tribe was divided into its thousands, probably of fighting men, each thousand having its own separate head (Numbers 1:16 & 10:4). But the thousand continued to be a division of the tribe, after Israel was settled in Canaan (Joshua 22: 21, 30; I Samuel 10:19; 23:23) . . . Places too small to form a thousand by themselves were united with others to make up the number (1 Chronicles 23:11). So lowly was Bethlehem that it was not counted among the possessions of Judah. (68)

This brings us to a brief consideration of the history of this town. It was a very ancient village, first mentioned in Genesis 35:19 as being the

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place near which Benjamin was born and Rachel, beloved of Jacob, died and was buried. Near Bethlehem, Ruth the Moabite mother of Obed, grandfather of David, gleaned in the fields of Boaz, and here the great King David was born (Ruth 2:1ff; 1 Sam. 16:1; 17:12.). The little town was twice fortified, once by the Philistines (2 Sam. 23:14), and later by Rehoboam, son of Solomon (2 Chron. 11:6), but it always remained a small agrarian village. Finally, it was immortalized by the birth of the Son of God and has ever since been remembered for that great event. Its place in history is more secure than any other village on God’s footstool. Henstenberg and others, believe that the town was so small that it was omitted from the listing of the towns of Judah in the Old Testament. He claims that the point of the prophet is that the town, though the birthplace of David was so insignificant and humble that no one would have ever expected the Messiah to come from it had it not been so prophesied by Micah.

God, through His prophet said, “Yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from old, from the days of eternity.” While the words “shall come forth to Me” do not necessarily indicate a birth, we learn from the New Testament that it was in a stable that the Master of the universe was born in human flesh, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in the manger (Luke 2:7). The One who came forth to God, in this prophecy is “the One to be Ruler in Israel.” Sometimes the word “Ruler” takes on strange connotations to those of us who speak English. We tend to think in terms of an autocrat or tyrant. Sometimes even elders misunderstand the concept of being rulers in the Kingdom of God on earth and behave very autocratically, sometimes even tyrannically. However, if we will read further in the passage with which we are dealing we will see the rule of this One is that of a Shepherd. In the 4<sup>th</sup> verse God told Micah, “And He shall stand and feed His flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD His God; and they shall abide, for now He shall be great to the ends of the earth ....” Notice if you will please, the pastoral language in which it is said that the Ruler to come forth from Bethlehem would “stand and feed His flock in the strength of the Lord.” Here we have the concept of a loving Shepherd carefully looking after his flock. In the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep” (v. 11). Consequently, our Ruler should be seen as loving, kind, gentle and so concerned for His sheep that He willingly gave His life for them. Such a Ruler is easily followed, deeply loved, faithfully served and reverently honored. That

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Jesus is to act as Shepherd over his people is in accord with the statement God made to Ezekiel who wrote, “I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them—My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd” (Ezek. 34:23).

Dr. E. W. Hengstenberg, in his magnum opus *Christology of the Old Testament*, Volume 1, pointed out that the prophet is declaring “... the dominion returns to the house of David; here, the august person is described by whom this return is effected, after the events, described iv. 9-14, have come upon the Covenant-people” (480). This, of course, would be in accord with all the Old Testament prophecies regarding our Lord’s being a “root out of the stem of Jesse, or the root of Jesse” that would grow and flourish. It cannot be overemphasized that the One who came out of Bethlehem Ephrathah was to be the everlasting King from the family of David. Robert Gordon in his massive four volume work, *Christ in the Old Testament*, pointed out most eloquently, the significance of all this when he wrote:

Many prophecies to this effect might be quoted. But the most emphatic and expressive of them are those in which Messiah is foretold as the branch of a vine, that was to be strong after the vine itself had been almost burned up and consumed, “a righteous Branch,” that was to be raised up unto David, “a rod,” or shoot, “out of the stem of Jesse,” and a branch growing out of his roots,—even “a tender plant,” and “a root out of dry ground.” All these expressions did most significantly intimate to what a low estate the royal house of David was to be reduced, at the time that Messiah appeared as the heir of David’s throne. And what a striking commentary on all these prophecies is furnished by the simple fact, that Christ, instead of being born in Jerusalem, the acknowledged son and successor of David, had his birth-place, like David himself, in Bethlehem, and especially when we take into account the circumstances in which he was born there, as related by the evangelist Luke! (315)

Hence, Jesus the loving Shepherd, who even now calls us to come to Him in faith for salvation, was born in a village and in a place that had no significance in its time.

There is, however, another portion of the verse to which we must give attention. God said, through His prophet Micah that the One who was to come forth to be Ruler in Israel was the One “whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting, or as the alternative rendering is,

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from old, from the days of eternity.” We recall the occasion of the presentation of Jesus in the Temple when aged Simeon prophesied to Mary, mother of Jesus, “Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed” (Luke 2:34b-35). There is no doubt in the mind of any person that the aged saint prophesied of the crucifixion of Jesus. Yet we know that Jesus would never remain in the grave but arise to take His place on God’s throne to rule over His Kingdom once it was established on the Day of Pentecost.

Most scholars take the position that the Prophet is not speaking of the eternal nature of Christ, but of the fact that it had been planned for the One who would come forth from Bethlehem to be the Messiah since the most ancient of days. According to Bruce Waltke who wrote the commentary on the book of Micah for the *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, the Hebrew word (*eolam*) can have at least three applications. It can refer to the nature of God Himself, which is eternal; it can refer to a period from eternity on through time, that would mean from the time of creation on; and it can designate ancient times within history; the distant past (183). However, brother Homer Hailey in his commentary on the minor prophets remarked, “‘Whose goings forth from of old, from everlasting,’ indicates more than that He descends from an ancient lineage; it relates Him to God, the eternal One. His rule reaches back into eternity” (209). One can only wish brother Hailey had argued his case further, but he chose not to. It is evident to this observer that the prophet connected the Messiah to eternity, especially in light of the alternate reading found in the margins of most good Bibles. If His actions, His “goings forth” were “from the days of eternity,” it seems to us that He would have had to have been in the “days of eternity.” That would mean that He is an eternal being just as John declared in 1:1 when he wrote, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” While all this may have precious little, if anything, to do with the main thrust of the prophecy, one must admit that it was put there by God’s divine Spirit for some reason other than to fill out a verse! After all, the Messiah—the Son of God, who is God (Deity), is the eternal Savior and Shepherd of those who come to Him by faith. Furthermore, if He is God, and He is, then He has been from everlasting to everlasting (Ps. 90:2).



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## Conclusion

We have but one more very brief observation to make regarding the One who would “come forth” out of Bethlehem Ephrathah, and that is found in the 5<sup>th</sup> verse of the prophecy. Micah wrote, *And this One shall be peace*. When Isaiah prophesied of this same One, he called Him the *Prince of Peace* (Isa. 9:6). The Babe born in the little town of Bethlehem is Prince of Peace because He alone is able to free us from the guilt and oppression of sin, giving us spiritual peace. Sin brings agony to the soul and wears it sore like an ill-fitting shoe wears blisters on the foot. There is the never-ending recollection of the sinfulness for the person who has never been forgiven. The only Being in the universe who has made propitiation for our sins, therefore making possible for us to enjoy peace is the Prince of Peace. Furthermore, Paul in Ephesians 2:14 wrote, *For He Himself is our peace . . .* In this particular context he spoke of the Lord’s bringing peace between Jew and Gentile by breaking down the middle wall of partition between them; the middle wall of partition was the Law of Moses. Yet, the middle wall of partition would not have been broken down to bring peace between Jew and Gentile had it not been for the fact that both are reconciled to God by Him in His Body—the church. So, even this peace involves cleansing from the sin that causes the soul to suffer. Jesus did not come to bring world peace, but a very special kind of peace that he alone can give and that is the inward peace that comes from knowing that one is a younger brother of the Messiah and a son of God. It comes from knowing the blood of our Messiah continually cleanses us from all unrighteousness as we walk in the light (1 John 1:7). The peace that comes from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 1:2) is that peace that surpasses all understanding (Phil. 4:7). It is that sweet inward tranquility, no matter what the outside circumstances may be, that can never be taken from the one whose faith and hope are forever anchored behind the veil where the Presence is. How thankful we should be for the Prince of Peace, who not only gives peace, but is our peace. There is no night so dark that we do not see it; there are no circumstances so bleak that they can rob us of it; it is not the kind of peace the world gives but the kind only the Son of God gives!

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## Biographical Sketch

Brother West has been preaching the Gospel since 1953. He currently serves the Hillview Terrace church of Christ in Moundsville, WV. He also teaches English Grammar, Hebrews, Philippians, Philemon, Romans, Galatians, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Lamentations and Revelation in the West Virginia School of Preaching. He and his wife the former Shirley Bissett are the parents of three children and six grandchildren. He graduated Freed-Hardeman University, West Liberty State College, Fairmont State University and has done graduate work at Southern Christian University and West Virginia University. After nearly ten years of intense study, in 2005 brother West produced a moderate preterist commentary on the Book of Revelation entitled: *Avenging His Holy Saints, Apostles and Prophets*. It is a hard bound book of some 847 pages, including the indices. He previously authored *Messianic Prophecy Outlined* which has gone through three editions. He also has authored three or four tracts and booklets on various subjects.

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## **OUT OF ZION**

### *Micah 4:1-5*

DAVID R. PHARR

Throughout the ministry of Jesus there is an obvious emphasis on the authority and reliability of Holy Scripture, especially in His being the fulfillment of what had been written. “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39 KJV). Before His ascension He reminded the disciples “that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me” (Luke 24:44). Because, as Peter explains it, the Spirit of Christ in the prophets “testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow” (1 Peter 1:11). We are not surprised, therefore, in Luke’s account of the Great Commission that our Lord affirmed both the facts and requirements of the gospel as having been written. Every clause in Luke 24:46-47 reflects specific Old Testament prophecies: “And said unto them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’”

He could have cited various texts which foretold His suffering. It was, as Paul affirms, “according to the scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3). We readily recall such passages as Psalm 22, or Isaiah 53, or Daniel 9:26.

In his sermon in Acts 2 Peter cites Psalm 16 as prophetic evidence for the resurrection. Doubtless Jesus had already expounded the significance of: “For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption” when He said, “Thus it is written” that Christ would rise again. That it was on “the third day” recalls how Jonah’s time in the fish was a type of Christ’s time in the tomb (Matt. 12:40).

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That the preaching of repentance and remission of sins should be “in his name” reflects the great prophecy of Joel, the prophet of Pentecost, when he said: “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered” (Joel 2:32). When Peter quoted this as being fulfilled on Pentecost, the wording was: “that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved,” which he further explained in the instruction to repent and be baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ” for the remission of sins (Acts 2:21, 38).

### ***Micah’s Prophecy***

We are looking especially, for this lesson, to this being preached “among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” That prophecy in Joel 2:32 had said that “in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance.” But we are looking at the great prophecy of the church and the gospel dispensation found in Micah. As Jesus said, “Thus it is written”:

But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it. For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever. (Mic. 4:1-5)

Bible students know that this is almost completely identical with Isaiah 2:2-4. Modernistic scholars love to stumble around in their theological playpens trying to decide whether Isaiah copied Micah, or whether Micah copied Isaiah, or whether they both copied somebody else. Such cannot grasp that the Holy Spirit could give the same message in the same words to two different men. These men of God were contemporaries. Micah was a country preacher in the farming hills of Judea and Isaiah was a city preacher up in Jerusalem, but they both

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prophesied by the same Spirit. Much of what we have to say about the Micah text, therefore, will readily apply to the verses in Isaiah.

### ***Prophetic Interpretation***

As with so much of prophecy, Micah used figurative and poetical expressions. Hebrews 1:1 explains that “at sundry times and in divers manners [God] spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets.” That is, in various ways, and one of the ways was in the use of figures. Some have asserted that everything in the Bible is to be understood literally. They are offended by suggestions that certain things must be understood figuratively. A man was adamant about it. I asked him if he believed that Jesus “is the lamb of God.” Certainly he did. I then asked if Jesus is literally “a four legged creature covered with fur.” What needs to be remembered is that to say something is figurative does not mean that it is not true. All of the Bible is true, but some of its truth is expressed figuratively. Literal truth is sometime expressed in figurative language.

Another essential point is to recognize that New Testament interpretations of Old Testament prophecies are always the—and I emphasize *the*—correct interpretations. When Peter said, “That is that,” that’s what it is! Many have been the errors which have arisen from so-called interpretations of Old Testament prophecies which are not so interpreted by the inspired New Testament writers, and which in many cases are contrary to New Testament teaching. Let me show you something in this regard from 1 Peter 1:10-12. Peter says that the prophets “inquired and searched diligently” to understand the very things of which they prophesied concerning the salvation in Christ, but they never figured it out. They never were able to interpret their own prophecies. It is presumptuous for modern prophecy “experts” to find predictions in the prophets which the prophets themselves did not find and which are contrary to plain New Testament doctrine. The only way the prophecies of the Old Testament can be understood is by their fulfillment according to the Gospel message.

### ***The Last Days***

Micah’s prophecy pointed to what would come to pass in “the last days.” We have all encountered the assumption that references to “the last days” must point to a period immediately prior to the end of the world. This is not the biblical meaning. Always in the Old Testament prophets “the last days” points to the closing of the Jewish economy and

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the inauguration of a new, that is, Messianic, age. It is easy enough to identify what is meant by the expression. When Peter quoted Joel’s prophecy of what was to come “afterward,” he understood it as referring to “the last days,” and said, “This is that” (Acts 2:16f). The reference is to the Gospel age, the Christian dispensation. It is the present order of things in which God “hath in these last days spoken to us by his Son.” (cf. Heb. 1:1-2.)

Pusey’s commentary notes that the translation can be “the end of days” and makes this observation:

All time, since man fell, is divided into two halves, the looking forward to Christ to come in humility; the looking forward to His coming in glory. These are the two events on which man’s history turns. To that former people the whole period of Christ’s kingdom was one future, the fullness of all their own shadows, types, sacrifices, services, prophecies, longing, being. The “end of their days” was the beginning of the new Day of Christ: the coming of His Day was necessarily the close of the former days, the period of the dispensation which prepared for it. The prophets then by the words, “the end of the days,” always mean the times of the Gospel. . . . “The end of the days” is the close of all which went before, the last dispensation, after which there shall be no other. (51)

In the second sermon in Acts Peter affirmed that all of “the prophets from Samuel and them that followed after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of *these days*” (Acts 3:24, emp. added). “These days” are the days of the Christian dispensation, the last days. Micah was pointing to that which had its beginning on Pentecost. Calling the Christian dispensation “the last days” says nothing about the length of time involved. It has already existed as long as the previous Jewish age, but there is nothing whatsoever to indicate how long it will continue.

### ***The Gospel***

The Bible is about redemption. However much we may be impressed by its history, or its science, or its curiosities, what the Bible is really about is redemption. And every Christian knows that redemption is in Christ, and that being in Christ involves compliance with His truth. Jesus said that “repentance and remission of sins should be preached.” This is the primary point of Micah’s prophecy. It is not a general concern for the unfolding of the ages, but specifically for how men and women might be

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brought into compliance with the will of God. This He expresses by saying that “he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths.” Can any doubt that this points to the very thing named by Jesus, the preaching of the Gospel?

The Gospel, the New Testament of Jesus Christ, is what is in view in the prophet’s poetic parallelism. “[F]or the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” Then again the lines are repeated, “[F]or he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” Zion was the principal hill upon which Jerusalem was situated. Because of its prominence the name came to represent the city. As is often characteristic with Hebrew rhetoric, the two terms are used here to point to exactly the same thing. And this is the very thing that Jesus said: “beginning at Jerusalem.”

“His ways” are the ways of Christ. “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed” (John 8:31). When Jesus said, “in my name,” He meant by His authority. The “word of the Lord” which would go forth from Jerusalem is the Gospel.

But in the text “the word of the Lord” is the same as “the law.” In other contexts “the law” refers to the Old Testament system. Here it refers to the New Testament system. This will not please the “grace only” people. They want a gospel that is without law. They are offended by any emphasis on law. They insist that law was for the Old Testament economy only. Micah’s prophecy is not pointing back to the law of Moses, but pointing ahead to the law of Christ. The law of Moses was given at Mt. Sinai, the law of Christ at Jerusalem.

A text to compare is Hebrews 8:10. “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts.” This is Jeremiah’s prophecy of the new covenant of Christ, and a provision of that covenant is that His “laws” would be put into their hearts. This is the very thing foretold by Micah when he speaks of people being taught the Lord’s ways and their walking in His paths.

What went forth from Zion was the Gospel; it was also law, the law of Christ. Repentance and baptism for the remission of sins is Gospel; it is also law. This exalted mountain (“it shall be exalted above the hills”), and that the law of the Lord would go out from it, reminds us of another law of the Lord which was given on another mountain; that is, Mount Sinai. We are not under the law of Moses, nor under a system wherein there is earned merit by law keeping, but nonetheless we are “under law

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to Christ” (1 Cor. 9:21; cf. Rom. 3:27; 8:2; Gal. 6:2; James 1:26; 2:12). The subjects of Micah are blessings and hope, but we are reminded in other Scriptures of the consequences of refusal to comply with the law that was given at Jerusalem (Heb. 2:1-4; 10:28ff).

### ***Those Who Are Willing***

Participation in the Gospel is voluntary. Jesus said, “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself” (John 7:17). The invitation is for “whosoever will” (Rev. 22:17). None can enjoy redemption unless it is by choice. This is suggested in the prophecy when it tells of the invitation: “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord.” Looking again at Jeremiah’s description of the New Covenant features, it says, “And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.” Those who were born under the Mosaic economy were immediately under that law. It was not something that required instruction in knowing the Lord before coming under its authority. The newborn child in Israel was automatically a citizen, automatically under that covenant. However, those who are born into the family of God in Christ would first need to be instructed. It follows, then, that one who is under the new covenant does not need to be told to “know the Lord” because he had to come to know the Lord before coming under the benefits of the covenant. They had to be instructed before they could be born. John 6:44-45 explains: “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.”

Wonderful are the invitations expressed in the Gospel. “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17). All of this is anticipated in the encouragement named by Micah: “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob.”

### ***All Nations***

We would be hard pressed to find another prophecy that detailed so many of the salient aspects of its object. The age, or dispensation, is

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given—"the last days." Its place of introduction is clearly Jerusalem. Its intent is that people will "walk in His ways." Its method is by "the law of the Lord," the Gospel of Christ. Its offer is by invitation: "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord." But there is more. Here is the very "unjewish" concept of it being for "many nations." Our KJV says that "all people shall flow into it." The ASV is better with the plural "peoples," which indicates different kinds, different races of humanity. We call the Great Commission "great" because of its outreach for the whole world (Mark 16:15; Matt. 28:19). Again, let's be reminded how perfectly Luke's record of the commission is a reflection of Micah's prophecy. "[R]epentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

Few things were so precious in Israel's history as was the promise given to Abraham. Actually several promises were given, but the rest were significant only in their connection with the promise which said, "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22:18). This was "the promise." It was, of course, a promise to be fulfilled in Christ, who was the "seed" in view as regards how the blessing would be provided (Gal. 3:16). That blessing is that God "sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3:26).

It happened, though, that Jewish thinking rarely considered what the promise actually said. Thus, Paul must explain: "And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed." (Gal. 3:8). The blessing applied to "the heathen" (Gentiles) as well as to Israel. So, in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Greek . . ." (Gal. 3:28). Consider also that it is probable that when on Pentecost Peter speaks of "the promise" being "unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call," he was not referring to the promise of the gift of the Spirit, or of remission of sins, but of "the promise" given to Abraham (Acts 2:39). All of this relates to the Micah prophecy.

The gospel system makes no distinction between Jew and Gentile (Gal. 3:26-29). Yet in this prophecy there is an intimation of the importance of the Jews in the scheme of redemption. Their city, Jerusalem, and the house of their God would be that which would attract the nations. Though it concerned all of us, Micah's prophecy was given first to the Jews and here was assurance that they had a significant place in Jehovah's plan. Jesus Himself restricted redemption to being "of the Jews" (John 4:22). Included is the point that it would be Jewish apostles

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who would convey the message and it would begin in the Jewish city. Incidentally, all of the churches and creeds that have originated in distinction from the old Jerusalem gospel have come from Gentiles. Gentiles can be saved and be full participants in the Lord's kingdom, but no Gentile was ever commissioned to be an ambassador of Christ or to lay the foundation of any church (2 Cor. 5:20; Eph. 2:20).

### ***The Mountain of the Lord's House***

The temple was situated on Mount Moriah and so it was called "the mountain of the Lord's house." The prophet says that it would be established in the last days, so he does not mean the literal temple, which was already there. The reference is to a later temple, and that temple is the church of Christ. The church, being "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone," is "an holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:20f). Notice also 1 Corinthians 3:17: "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are."

That "the house of God" in the text is "the church of God" (1 Tim. 3:15) is evident from the fulfillment. Every point comes together on Pentecost. Keep in mind that Jesus was expounding these Scriptures when He commissioned His apostles for their duties, which would come into place on Pentecost. When Ephesians 2:20 speaks of "the foundation of the apostles and prophets," it means that which was put in place by their teaching. The church was established when they preached the Gospel and people responded to it. Christ is all there is to the foundation (Isa. 28:16; Matt. 16:18; 1 Cor. 3:11). The apostles were laying the foundation on Pentecost. The rest of the New Testament expands and explains it, but everything was in harmony with and based upon what was first expounded on Pentecost. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41). They were added to the church (v. 47). (If someone is concerned that some texts don't have "church" in verse 47, let them take note that the same people are said to be the church in Acts 5:11.)

Now, here is another thing. When Micah says "established," he means more than just that it would come into being. Rather, here is emphasis on its permanence. This was the meaning when David was assured that his throne would be "established." It would be "established for ever" (2 Sam. 7:16). But Daniel tells us the same thing: "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed" (Dan. 2:44). We remember that when Jesus

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promised the church He said that “the gates of hell [hades] shall not prevail against it.” Its permanence is assured.

Millennial dispensationalism holds that the church, and the church age, is an afterthought, a substitute provision for while the kingdom purpose of God had been interrupted. They do not find the church in prophecy and think that it was a changed itinerary when Jesus promised to build it in Matthew 16:18. However, Micah and Isaiah foretell it. Nothing but the church and the gospel age can fit the details of their prophecy. Premillennialism is adequately answered with one phrase—“in the last days.” There will be no days (for a thousand year reign) after “the last days.” We will avoid much confusion if we remember that the Jerusalem to which all nations will flow is not old physical Jerusalem, but “Jerusalem which is above” (Gal. 4:26). The Hebrews writer speaks of the same thing in Hebrews 12:23-28 and applies it to God’s people in the present age. “But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem . . . Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Heb. 12:22, 28).

The subject of the church is not very popular with many people. We are sometimes told that we ought to preach Christ, but not the church. Of course that is not possible if we follow the Bible on these matters. Foy E. Wallace, Jr. had a sermon, “The Church—the Divine Plan of Salvation.” He contended, correctly, that everything connected to our salvation in Christ connects us to the church:

I once said that the church is *a part* of God’s plan of salvation—I do not put it that way now—I put it this way: The church *is* God’s plan of salvation. Everything connected with salvation is encompassed within the divine institution of the church, for which Jesus died, for which he shed his blood, and by which he purchased our salvation with his blood. The church encompasses and encircles every thing that is connected with the salvation of man. (47)

### ***Blessed Are the Peacemakers***

When in the Beatitudes Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers,” He was not talking about mere efforts to bring about harmony between individuals or even nations. Instead, He was pointing to the peace that would come from the work of those who preach “the gospel of peace.” “How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” (Rom. 10:15). This is the peace of

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reconciliation with God. “And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled” (Col. 1:20-21). What Christ has done is explained in Ephesians 2:16-17. “And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.”

It is peace with God and reconciliation with God that establishes peace among men. The end of “war” envisioned in verse 3 is not an end of carnal conflict and the installation of international goodwill. As long as men continue in rebellion against God—as long as they are not at peace with God—there will be hostilities between nations. Verse 3 is a continuation of the point already made in verse 2 about “many nations.” The nations of verse 3 are the nations which come to the house of the Lord and walk in his paths. This is not “nations” as political entities, but persons, individuals, of many nations who accept the Gospel. By the fact of Gentile rebellion and by the fact of Jewish misinterpretation of their place in the Divine scheme of things, there had been a wall of separation between Jew and Gentile. The great “mystery” which is revealed in the Gospel is “that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel” (Eph. 3:6).

This is the peace that gives tranquility to the soul, which is the meaning of the metaphor of verse 4. “But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it.” This is the blessing of a right relationship with God. “For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.” One can rest his soul in peace when he is right with God. “If God be for us, who can be against us?” “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Heb. 12:28).

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# OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK OF NAHUM

LEWIS MIKELL

## **Introduction**

Nahum, called “the Elkoshite,” is the seventh in the order of the Minor Prophets. His personal history is quite unknown. His name means, “Consolation.” It is significant he offered a consoling message to the people of Judah. The site of Elkosh, his native place, is somewhat disputed, some placing it in Galilee, others in Assyria. Those who maintain the latter view assume that the prophet’s parents were carried into captivity and the prophet was born in the village of Alkush, on the east bank of the Tigris, two miles north of Mosul. The date of Nahum’s prophecy can be determined with as little precision as his birthplace. A number of scholars narrow the date to between 630 and 612 B.C. He foretold the destruction of Nineveh which took place in 612 B.C. It is therefore certain that the prophecy was written down before the downfall of Nineveh. It is most probable that Nahum flourished in the latter half of the reign of Hezekiah, and wrote his prophecy either in Jerusalem or its neighborhood.

## **The Prophecy of Nahum**

The theme of the book is the overthrow of Nineveh. The Book of Jonah reveals the wickedness of Nineveh and God’s command to Jonah to go preach to the people there. After a great deal of hesitation Jonah preached and the people repented. Thus, Nineveh was saved from destruction at that date. Nahum announced Nineveh’s doom; she had returned to wickedness and must be punished; she had filled her cup of iniquity. “Righteousness exalts a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 14:34). The prophet rejoiced over its coming downfall,

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but only because justice was being served by its collapse. The Assyrians had been enemies of the people of God for a long time, having tried unsuccessfully to destroy Jerusalem during the reign of Hezekiah. The northern kingdom had been conquered by Assyria in 722 B.C. Nahum does not comment on the sins of Judah. His message was one of encouragement to God’s people. The main thrust of the book is emphasized by this statement: “‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay,’ saith the Lord” (Rom. 12:19, emp. added). Nineveh was Judah’s main enemy and God gave a burden, a divine verdict.

## **The City of Nineveh**

It was the Capital of the Assyrian Empire. It was one of the oldest cities on earth dating back to 4000–5000 B.C. Assyria was a nation largely equipped for wars. Even though it had military might to conquer other nations it was unable to control its defeated enemies. She was a heavily fortified city, protected by walls, moats and towers. Her walls were 7.5 miles in circumference, and were broad enough to drive three chariots abreast on its top. The outer perimeter formed a triangle which extended about 60 miles.

Even though she was highly successful in making war, she did not render any service to mankind. Much valuable archaeological material has been gleaned from her. Assyria reached her zenith under Ashurbanipal, one of the cruelest kings of ancient times. He boasted of tearing off the lips and limbs of defeated kings. He and his queen feasted in a garden with the head of a Chaldean king hanging from a tree above them. He forced a captured prince to wear the decapitated head of his king around his neck. Such was Nineveh, the capital of the most powerful, sensual, ferocious race of men that perhaps ever existed in the world (Robinson 110). The fall of Nineveh is described in historical records. The Medes, Babylonians and Scythians destroyed the surrounding fortress and besieged Nineveh. Nahum 3:12 predicted the end. The last night was spent by the Ninevites in drunken orgies in which the effeminate king set the example. The Tigris River overflowed and broke breaches in the city’s wall. The king burned himself alive in his palace when he saw the impending doom. Nineveh was taken in 612 B.C., her riches were plundered and the city herself was completely destroyed. The nation was completely conquered in 606 B.C. So completely was Nineveh destroyed that her very existence was known primarily through biblical references. Her location was discovered in the mid 1800s.

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From a study of the Book of Nahum, we learn that God rules in the kingdoms of men. Paul emphasized this fact to the Athenians. *“And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and bounds of their habitation”* (Acts 17:26, emp. added). God’s patience is generous in giving time to repent but there are limitations when God has to deal with wickedness. Even strongly fortified cities cannot restrain the vengeance of God.

### ***The Burden of Nineveh—The Vision Of Nahum The Elkoshite 1:1***

The Book of Nahum, made up of only three chapters, begins with the burden of Nineveh. This was a heavy load which would be forced on that very wicked city. Nahum saw visions which concerned the Ninevites, and they are recorded in his book.

Verse 2: *“God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies”* (emp. added). God has a right to be jealous, seeing He is the creator of our bodies and souls. God is jealous and will not allow man to divide his loyalty between Him and some other object or being (Ex. 20:5; Matt. 6:33). God’s vengeance is not spiteful, but is intended to teach man the needed lesson of obedience (2 Peter 3:9; Rom. 2:4). Those who are guilty of sin must repent or perish (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 17:30).

Verse 3: *“The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet”* (emp. added). Nahum made known God’s patience and power in this verse. God is righteous and He is slow to become angry. His wrath is not poured out quickly. His power is great. Nahum illustrates God’s power by asserting that he can control the whirlwind, the storm and the clouds. The tornado and hurricane are easily within the command of God.

Verses 4-5: *“He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers: Bashan languisheth, and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languisheth. The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein”* (emp. added). These verses describe the almighty power of God. God can rebuke the sea and cause it to dry up. He did this in parting the waters of the Red Sea (Ex. 14). After the flood of Noah’s time, He

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caused the waters to dry up. God also parted the Jordan River, when it was at flood stage to allow Israel to enter Canaan (Josh. 3).

“Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him” (1:6). Since God is all powerful, no man can withstand Him. He was able to create the mountains and is able to destroy them.

Verse 7: *“The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him”* (emp. added). The prophet has shown that God is longsuffering and powerful. He now declares God is also good. He is a refuge for His people in the day of trouble (Deut. 33:27; Ps. 9:9; 46:1; Heb. 6:18). God knows those who are His; those who trust Him (2 Tim. 2:19). This truth would bring comfort to the faithful when the enemy arose against Judah. The righteous in this age also find hope when troubles come upon them.

Verse 8: *“But with an overrunning flood he will make an utter end of the place thereof, and darkness shall pursue his enemies”* (emp. added). As with an overrunning flood His wrath will overcome and sweep away His adversaries. Jesus told us who the friend of God is: *Ye are my friends if you do whatsoever I command you* (John 15:14; James 2:23). Abraham was called the friend of God because he believed in God and this faith led him to obey him. Disobedient people are the enemies of God. Nahum stated that God will pursue His enemies into darkness. That could mean Nineveh would disappear from the face of the earth. She all but vanished from the knowledge of men. Only the Bible retained a record of this city’s past.

### ***Nineveh’s End Announced Nahum 1:9-13***

Verse 9: *“What do ye imagine against the LORD? he will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the second time”* (emp. added). Nahum’s question here reveals the disposition of the Ninevites toward God. They devised evil against His purposes; they were truly His enemies. The mountains could not resist God’s power and the military might of Assyria could not confront the power of God. The Assyrians were among the cruelest of all people. They tore tongues from the mouths of the conquered. The corpses of their enemies were sometimes fed to dogs and birds while many bodies were burned. God determined that their overthrow would be complete and final. In Isaiah 10:24-27 God gave a prophecy describing their demise:



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Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD of hosts, O my people that dwellest in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrian: he shall smite thee with a rod, and shall lift up his staff against thee, after the manner of Egypt. For yet a very little while, and the indignation shall cease, and mine anger in their destruction. And the LORD of hosts shall stir up a scourge for him according to the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb: and as his rod was upon the sea, so shall he lift it up after the manner of Egypt. And it shall come to pass in that day, that his burden shall be taken away from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing.

Verse 10: “*For while they be folden together as thorns, and while they are drunken as drunkards, they shall be devoured as stubble fully dry*” (emp. added). Hedges of thorns were often built around fields in ancient times to keep wild animals out. But Assyria could not build defenses around herself that would withstand the Lord’s onslaught. During the last days of Nineveh, ancient records indicate the king ordered a drunken orgy. When the city fell, the king gave orders that the bodies of himself, his wives, concubines and servants, and his palaces were to be burned. The city had long lived under a false sense of security.

Verse 11: “*There is one come out of thee, that imagineth evil against the LORD, a wicked counselor*” (emp. added). This counselor was wicked and worthless.

Verses 12-13: “*Thus saith the LORD; Though they be quiet, and likewise many, yet thus shall they be cut down, when he shall pass through. Though I have afflicted thee, I will afflict thee no more. For now will I break his yoke from off thee, and will burst thy bonds in sunder*” (emp. added). God assured Judah that Assyria will be cut down even though they still trust in their military might. God had afflicted Judah, using Assyria, but He would not allow her to bring further violence against His people.

Verse 14: “*And the LORD hath given a commandment concerning thee, that no more of thy name be sown: out of the house of thy gods will I cut off the graven image and the molten image: I will make thy grave; for thou art vile*” (emp. added). God promised to make ready the grave of the Assyrians; their nation was at an end. There would be no more Assyrians. History shows that their capital city, Nineveh was even lost to

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human knowledge for 2500 years. God would remove their graven images, thus destroying their idolatrous practices.

Verse 15: “*Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace! O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows: for the wicked shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off*” (emp. added). Messengers would bring to Judah good news of Nineveh’s demise. They are admonished to faithfully observe their vows because their terrible enemy will soon be cut off.

### **God’s Armies Against Nineveh 2:1-7**

Nahum 2:1: “*He that dasheth in pieces is come up before thy face: keep the munition, watch the way, make thy loins strong, fortify thy power mightily*” (emp. added). History shows that God used the armies of the Babylonians and Medes to dash Nineveh to pieces.

Verse 2: “*For the LORD hath turned away the excellency of Jacob, as the excellency of Israel: for the emptiers have emptied them out, and marred their vine branches*” (emp. added). The nation of Jacob (the Israelite people) had been emptied by their enemies. The Assyrians had demolished the northern kingdom, Israel, and Babylon was about to do the same to the southern kingdom, Judah. The emptiers probably included all nations which had a part in the corruption of God’s people. The northern kingdom had been terribly defeated by the Assyrian soldiers. God sometimes chastises his people by those who are more wicked.

Verse 3: “*The shield of his mighty men is made red, the valiant men are in scarlet: the chariots shall be with flaming torches in the day of his preparation, and the fir trees shall be terribly shaken*” (emp. added). His mighty men would bear shields which were red, perhaps stained by the blood of them they slew. Red was said to be the color most liked by Medes and Chaldeans. Red was believed to reflect sunlight. The day of preparation refers to the day of doom for Nineveh. The “fir, or cypress trees shall be shaken.” Their spears may have been fashioned from these trees shaken before the Ninevites in promise of sure death.

Verse 4: “*The chariots shall rage in the streets, they shall jostle one against another in the broad ways: they shall seem like torches, they shall run like the lightnings*” (emp. added). A fearful picture is drawn of the invader’s chariots racing through the streets of Nineveh, jostling against one another. No doubt, the chariots of Nineveh are doing battle with them. Their slaughter is carried out as the swiftness of lightning.

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Verse 5: “*He shall recount his worthies: they shall stumble in their walk; they shall make haste to the wall thereof, and the defence shall be prepared*” (emp. added). The Assyrian king had successful men who served well on other occasions. He summoned them, but they stumble as they rush to the wall.

Verse 6: “*The gates of the rivers shall be opened, and the palace shall be dissolved*” (emp. added). “The ancient historian (Diodorus Siculus) states that due to heavy rainfall and rise of rivers Khosr and Tigris, the flood-gates were overrun and a section of the city wall dissolved, enabling the enemy to enter the city” (Hailey 261).

Verse 7: “*And Huzzab shall be led away captive, she shall be brought up, and her maids shall lead her as with the voice of doves, tabering upon their breasts*” (emp. added). As Nineveh was being taken, young ladies of the city would weep, beating upon their breasts.

### **The Terror of the Ninevites 2:8 - 13**

Verse 8: “*But Nineveh is of old like a pool of water: yet they shall flee away. Stand, stand, shall they cry; but none shall look back*” (emp. added). Nineveh is compared to a pool of water in the desert where many gather. Being a large city, many would visit to do business. The time was coming when those who gathered would be dispersed, not even looking back.

Verse 9: “*Take ye the spoil of silver, take the spoil of gold: for there is none end of the store and glory out of all the pleasant furniture*” (emp. added). The invaders are admonished to take silver and gold for spoils. Assyria had plundered the wealth of other nations and must now reap what she has sown (Gal. 6:7-8). Until modern times only a mound remained to mark the location of the city. Its exact location was unknown until 1842.

Verse 10: “*She is empty, and void, and waste: and the heart melteth, and the knees smite together, and much pain is in all loins, and the faces of them all gather blackness*” (emp. added). Nineveh was to be emptied of her wealth. The hearts of the citizens were melted with grief. Their faces turned black or pale with grief.

Verse 11: “*Where is the dwelling of the lions, and the feedingplace of the young lions, where the lion, even the old lion, walked, and the lion’s whelp, and none made them afraid?*” (emp. added). The Assyrians were as fierce as lions in their zenith, but when defeated, Nahum asks, “Where are the lions now?”

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Verse 12: “*The lion did tear in pieces enough for his whelps, and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his holes with prey, and his dens with ravin*” (emp. added). The king of Nineveh had provided for his young by plundering the nations of the world and filled his dens with ravin—booty.

Verse 13: “*Behold, I am against thee, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will burn her chariots in the smoke, and the sword shall devour thy young lions: and I will cut off thy prey from the earth, and the voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard*” (emp. added). The Lord vowed to burn her chariots. He would cut Nineveh off from her prey taken from other nations. They would no longer be able to send out armies to bring other nations under their dominion.

### **Nineveh Must Suffer For Her Crimes 3:1-7**

Verse 1: “*Woe to the bloody city! it is all full of lies and robbery; the prey departeth no;*” (emp. added). What befell the Ninevites was earned by a horrible past of cruelty and bloodshed.

Verse 2: “*The noise of a whip, and the noise of the rattling of the wheels, and of the pransing horses, and of the jumping chariots*” (emp. added). These words describe the means of God’s wrath. The chariot was a powerful weapon in ancient warfare (Ex. 14:10).

Verse 3: “*The horseman lifteth up both the bright sword and the glittering spear: and there is a multitude of slain, and a great number of carcasses; and there is none end of their corpses; they stumble upon their corpses:*” (emp. added). These words describe the battle scene in which Nineveh would be decimated. Multitudes would be slain and corpses would be stumbled over.

Verse 4: “*Because of the multitude of the whoredoms of the wellfavoured harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts*” (emp. added). Their evil deeds are described as whoredom and the well-favored harlot. The Ninevites under Jonah’s preaching 100 years before, repented (773 B.C.) but they had returned to their wicked ways.

Verse 5: “*Behold, I am against thee,’ saith the LORD of hosts; ‘and I will discover thy skirts upon thy face, and I will shew the nations thy nakedness, and the kingdoms thy shame’*” (emp. added). Assyria was sinning before God and He would expose their sin before the nations.

Verse 6: “*And I will cast abominable filth upon thee, and make thee vile, and will set thee as a gazingstock*” (emp. added). God would shame

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them before the nations of the earth by throwing abominable filth upon them.

Verse 7: “*And it shall come to pass, that all they that look upon thee shall flee from thee, and say, Nineveh is laid waste: who will bemoan her? whence shall I seek comforters for thee?*” (emp. added). The nations would flee from the sight of Nineveh’s ruins, and would not mourn over her demise. There would be no one to offer comfort.

Verse 8: “*Art thou better than populous No, that was situate among the rivers, that had the waters round about it, whose rampart was the sea, and her wall was from the sea?*” (emp. added). The Egyptian city of No (Amon, ASV; also known as Thebes) was attacked and destroyed by Assyria in 663 B.C. No was the capital of Egypt and the center of idolatrous cults, worshipping Amon, Mut and Khonsu.

Verse 9: “*Ethiopia and Egypt were her strength, and it was infinite; Put and Lubim were thy helpers*” (emp. added). No thought she had enough defense to have no fear of an invading army, but this did not keep Assyria from defeating her.

Verse 10: “*Yet was she carried away, she went into captivity: her young children also were dashed in pieces at the top of all the streets: and they cast lots for her honourable men, and all her great men were bound in chains*” (emp. added). Despite her strength, No fell. The Assyrians displayed great cruelty on all including the children.

Verse 11: “*Thou also shalt be drunken: thou shalt be hid, thou also shalt seek strength because of the enemy*” (emp. added). Nineveh was intoxicated with a feeling of pride over her military strength and wealth. She would be forced to seek refuge from the invaders.

### **No Power or Wealth Could Save Nineveh 3:12 – 19**

Verse 12: “*All thy strong holds shall be like fig trees with the firstripe figs: if they be shaken, they shall even fall into the mouth of the eater*” (emp. added). Assyria would be no more secure than a ripened fig on a branch. They fell under the combined forces of the Babylonians, Medes and Sythians. God shook Assyria and she fell!

Verse 13: “*Behold, thy people in the midst of thee are women: the gates of thy land shall be set wide open unto thine enemies: the fire shall devour thy bars*” (emp. added). The strength of her defending armies would be as women—easily defeated. The walls would not protect them and it would be as if the gates were open.

Verse 14: “*Draw thee waters for the siege, fortify thy strong holds: go into clay, and tread the mortar, make strong the brickkiln*” (emp.

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added). To prepare for the siege they were to draw water, make bricks and strengthen the defense wall.

Verse 15: “*There shall the fire devour thee; the sword shall cut thee off, it shall eat thee up like the cankerworm: make thyself many as the cankerworm, make thyself many as the locusts*” (emp. added). All their works on defense would be vain. The sword would eat them up as the cankerworm. They could multiply their numbers, but this would be useless.

Verse 16: “*Thou hast multiplied thy merchants above the stars of heaven: the cankerworm spoileth, and flieth away*” (emp. added). Nineveh had many merchants spread out bringing great wealth into the city, but the enemy, like locusts, would spoil the wealth and then fly away.

Verse 17: “*Thy crowned are as the locusts, and thy captains as the great grasshoppers, which camp in the hedges in the cold day, but when the sun ariseth they flee away, and their place is not known where they are*” (emp. added). High ranking people were numerous. Military leaders were plentiful, but would flee like locusts and disappear forever.

Verse 18: “*Thy shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria: thy nobles shall dwell in the dust: thy people is scattered upon the mountains, and no man gathereth them*” (emp. added). Great men of the nations were called Shepherds and were said to be sleeping in the dust. The people were as sheep scattered on the mountains. Everything is lost.

Verse 19: “*There is no healing of thy bruise; thy wound is grievous: all that hear the bruit of thee shall clap the hands over thee: for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?*” (emp. added). The grievous wound inflicted on the city and its king cannot be healed. Many would clap their hands for joy with the final end of Assyria. Many nations and people had felt Nineveh’s destructive sword. The whole world rejoiced.

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### ***Biographical Sketch***

Lewis Mikell has been preaching the Gospel for 65 years come November 2006. He graduated David Lipscomb University and then Harding University in 1941. He has been successfully proclaiming Christ and continues to do so dividing his time between Florida and his home in Gallipolis, Ohio. When back in Ohio for the summer, he helps the church at West Union, WV, where he is greatly appreciated.

Brother Mikell married Ruth Holstein in 1946. She departed this life in 1988 and he later married Marie Hanshew. At a celebration held to honor him in 2005 at the West Virginia School of Preaching, he commented, "Sixty-three years of preaching has been a most rewarding life."

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## **WOE TO THE BLOODY CITY**

### *Nahum 3:1-7*

JOHN F. BOARD

In Hebrew studies, the motif of Divine Presence (I am with thee) is an assurance, comfort, and hope. When God is with an individual or nation, they are blessed, protected, and victorious. For Nineveh, the bloody city, they must face the antithesis of the motif of Divine Presence, I am against thee.

The New Testament principles taught by James, Peter and Paul are illustrated in the fall of Nineveh. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. God is in control of all nations and will bring vengeance upon those who fail to recognize Him as Sovereign. The description of the destruction of Nineveh, as given by Nahum, paints a vivid picture of these principles.

#### ***The City***

Nineveh is mentioned in Scripture for the first time in Genesis 10:11-12. Here the text probably indicates that it is “The Great City,” comprised also of the subordinate cities of Rehoboth-Ir (Heb. “city squares”), Calah, and Resen. Gerhard Charles Aalders in his work on Genesis, in commenting on the four cities mentioned in the text, notes “Thus, the only conclusion we can reach is that ‘The Great City’ refers to the whole complex of four cities, located in close proximity to each other, forming one huge metropolis” (227).

Nineveh was built by Nimrod (Heb. “Let us revolt”) whom the Septuagint referred to as “a mighty hunter against the Lord.” The Hebrew in the passage indicates that Nimrod’s kingdom was the result of his strength in hunting. Although ancient rulers had the responsibility of

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keeping the animal population down so that the inhabitants would not be threatened, ancient documents also indicate that kings would hunt men, capture them and take them off into captivity (Smith 103). If Nimrod is referred to as a mighty hunter because of his hunting of men, it is a fitting description for the beginning of a city and nation that would be known for such brutality later in biblical and secular history.

The next mention of Nineveh in Scripture is found in 2 Kings 19:36 and Isaiah 37:37. These two passages are mentioned together as they are the record of the same event by two different writers. In the fourteenth year of good King Hezekiah’s reign, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, brutally conquered the fortified cities of Judah. Hezekiah, perhaps by lack of faith or perhaps by lack of choice (lack of faith of others), had agreed to pay tribute that would in the 21<sup>st</sup> century amount to about two million dollars. Sennacherib, unsatisfied wanted a full surrender. Hezekiah turned to the Lord and His prophet and God answered by sending the angel of the LORD who struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. Having suffered defeat Sennacherib returned to Nineveh, the Capital. While worshipping at the house of Nisroch in Nineveh, he was killed by his sons, Adrammelech and Sharezer.

Although chronologically the story of Jonah comes before the fall of Sennacherib, as one turns the pages of Scripture, the story of Jonah is found after the fall of Sennacherib. It is in connection with the story of Jonah that the city of Nineveh is once again mentioned. Jonah is called by God to proclaim a message of judgment to Nineveh.

After a reverse fish dinner and regurgitation, Jonah was ready to make his approximate journey of over a month. When he arrived, his message was to the point . . . only five words in the Hebrew text. Jonah’s proclamation of judgment, like most of God’s promises, was conditional. Jonah’s message, “yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown,” brought about the repentance of the entire city. From King Ashur-dan III to the least of the people they covered themselves in sackcloth, fasted and sat in ashes.

Although other prophets (Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zephaniah, and Zechariah) declared the destruction of Nineveh, only Zephaniah mentions Nineveh specifically; the others mention Assyria, the nation of which Nineveh was the capital. Jesus refers to the repentance of the men of Nineveh in connection with the story of Jonah.

Nahum is the prophet who will tell of the burden of Nineveh. Approximately one hundred and fifty years have passed since the citywide repentance of Jonah’s days. The Assyrians have re-instituted their brutal

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ways. Jonah's contemporaries, Hosea and Amos, had even prophesied how God would use Assyria to punish Israel for their continued rebellion against Him. Habakkuk later would question God as to His use of foreign nations (Babylon) as a punisher of His people. God would answer with "the just shall live by faith (fullness)." Nahum (Hebrew Comfort, Consolation) will provide an illustration of God's faithfulness to His people. God is in control . . . trust in the LORD (Prov. 3:5-6). Nineveh would fall to the Medes, Scythians, and Babylonians in 612 B.C.

### ***The Crimes***

Assyria has been regarded by many as the most brutal of the ancient heathen nations. J. B. Tidwell listed the sins of Nineveh as ". . . pride which is a sin toward God; cruelty, which is a sin directed toward man; impenitence which is determined resistance and must be punished" (145). Assyrian records uphold the views listed above.

Nineveh was a city filled with pride. As a city they were not subject to the Mosaic code, but what they failed to realize is that they were subject to God's moral law. In their pride they failed to recognize that God was Sovereign and in control of the rise and fall of nations (Dan. 2; Ps. 22; Prov. 14).

Nineveh was a part of a nation who practiced cruelty against their neighbors. Leslie G. Thomas in an article wrote:

It is difficult for enlightened people of this age to conceive of the atrocities which were committed by the Assyrians, and especially their leaders. The offense of these people was an insolent defiance of Jehovah, and high handed oppression, not only of his chosen people, but of a multitude of nations upon whom they trampled with brutal inhumanity. (429)

Stories revealed by Assyrian sources indicate that kings would gouge out the eyes of captives with their own hands, flay them alive and pin them to the ground to perish. Kings would prepare for battle by dining with bleeding heads of their enemies surrounding them. They cut off hands, feet, noses, ears, and heads to make a tower or pyramid. Assurbanipal who destroyed No-amon (Thebes) noted that he tore off the lips and hands of kings and forced a prince to wear the king's decapitated head around his neck (Thomas 430). The Scriptures reveal that the Assyrians led their prisoners by hooks in their noses (2 Chron. 33:11; 2 Kings 19:28). The atrocities listed above do not even begin to reveal all the wickedness of the Assyrians, but they must suffice for this lecture.

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### ***The Crier***

In a sense Nahum is a prophet who continues the story of the people to whom Jonah preached. Jonah's prophecy was conditional. When Nineveh repented, they were spared. Nahum, approximately 150 years later will declare the full end of Nineveh.

Nahum was a Hebrew exile from Elkosh. Nahum's name means "consolation" or "comforter." Nahum's message would be a source of comfort to the Israelites. God's people had endured great suffering and wickedness at the hands of the Assyrians. Nahum tells of the destruction of the capital city of this wicked and brutal nation. Nahum also reveals that Nineveh will experience the antithesis of the motif of Divine Presence . . . God is against Nineveh. Nahum's message, unlike the other prophets, is silent concerning the sins of Judah.

McClintock and Strong suggest that Nahum was living in Jerusalem during the siege of the city by Sennacherib and that he viewed the destruction of the Assyrian army which was the beginning of the end for Assyria (829). The only evidence regarding when Nahum lived and prophesied is found in the book bearing his name. The destruction of No-amon (Thebes) is mentioned in chapter three; it has already occurred. The destruction of Nineveh is yet future. Between these two historic events the time period of Nahum's prophecy must be established.

Nahum is regarded as one of the master poets of Scripture. Thomas refers to the book of Nahum as one of the masterpieces of the entire Bible (426). Although some believe chapter one to involve an acrostic employing the Hebrew alphabet, such is not supported. Carl Sumner Knopf calls Nahum "a master of poetic technique vying with Homer or Pindar" (255). Although lost in translation, Knopf describes well how Nahum's prophecy of Nineveh's fall "pulsates with descriptive cadence—two beat, alarm; four beat, marching; five beat, wailing; in a succession of sound pictures that portray the scene" of the destruction of Nineveh (256). For the Jew reading his Scripture in its original form, the scene must have come to life.

### ***The Context***

The book of Nahum is roughly divided into three parts. Chapter one contains the introduction and theme of the prophecy. Chapter two describes that which will come upon Nineveh. Chapter three describes the reason why Nineveh will be destroyed.

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Nahum reminds his readers of God's absolute sovereignty over the world. Because of His sovereignty, God will destroy the wicked by His vengeance (1:2). Also He will demonstrate His mercy through the salvation of the righteous (1:15; 2:2). Nahum reveals the two sides of God's holiness which demands both personal and national righteousness. Since God is Sovereign, Nahum reveals the need to trust Him as the sole source of security and peace; He must be trusted to avenge the wrongdoers.

Nineveh is reminded of one of the cities it had conquered, No-amon (Thebes). Like Nineveh, No-amon was a city of great pride and protection. Nineveh is told all of their strongholds will fail when God comes against them, just like No-amon's strongholds failed when Assyria attacked them.

### ***The Content: 3:1-7***

In chapter three Nineveh is depicted as a city full of sin. The violence and immorality in Nineveh causes Nahum to exclaim "Woe to the bloody city." In the prophets, when a woe is pronounced upon a city, it marks the judgment and destruction of the city. The bloody city was a fitting description for the capital city of a nation that would shed blood without scruples.

Nahum continues by stating that Nineveh is all full of lies and robbery. If Nahum was present when Sennacherib besieged the city of Jerusalem, no doubt he would remember one of the arguments the ambassadors of the king used to convince Hezekiah to surrender. The spokesman for the king promised if they would surrender, that the Assyrians would provide a beautiful place for the Israelites to live. Considering the brutal track record of the Assyrians, Hezekiah easily was able to see through this lie. The Assyrians were well known for the breaking of covenants and falsehoods. It is full of robbery is another way of stating Nineveh is full of sin.

The prey remains as a witness. They have not repented or grown weary of sin. The Assyrians would use imagery in their description of their victories. Like a lion after a fresh kill the remnants of the kill are clearly seen. Here God will show who the true Lion is (verses 2 and 3 vividly depict the picture that Nahum views; they are for the most part self-explanatory).

Next Nahum describes Nineveh as a harlot and as one who uses whoredom and witchcraft. Assyria had seduced and used every subtle

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means at her disposal to gain the advantage over nations. It is because of these actions Nineveh will be destroyed.

In their previous battles Assyria had fought with nations. Now she will fight against God. The LORD of hosts was against them. In the Hebrew Bible the motif of Divine Presence (I am with thee) was a great source of encouragement to the Jew. In military settings it was the assurance of victory (see the book of Judges). What comfort was provided by these words of Nahum. If the presence of God assured the victory, then the Jews knew if God was against the Assyrians, their defeat was certain.

Nineveh would be exposed by the LORD for what she is. Rather than a powerful force she will be shown to be a gazing stock. She would be an abomination. She would be made vile (Hebrew *nabal*=weak, foolish). Once proud Nineveh, was humbled by the LORD. Her fall would be complete. She would be "laid waste." Such was the destruction that for over 2000 years, no one knew the location of Nineveh.

### ***Communication for Today***

Pride was one of the downfalls of Nineveh. Their pride caused them to reject God's will. Today because of pride many reject the will of God. The words of Nahum can serve as a reminder to all that God is still Sovereign. Humility is the key to exaltation by God. Humility leads to the submission of God's will. The submission to God's will leads to God being with us. God being with us, is a great source of comfort and encouragement.

Another sin of Nineveh was their cruelty to others. Today cruelty to others can come in many forms. Withholding the Gospel from one who is lost, failing to show compassion upon those in need (especially brethren) or improper use of the deadliest weapon, the tongue, are all ways that Christians can be cruel to others.

Loving God with all one's being and one's neighbor as one's self still encompasses all the laws of God. If one loves God, they will keep His commandments which include loving one's neighbors.

### ***Conclusion***

Like Nineveh all today have a choice. God will be with you or against you. If one humbles himself and submits to His will, God will be with him. If one rejects Him because of pride, the LORD will be against him. Choose ye this day!

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**Biographical Sketch**

John F. Board, son of John and Margaret Board of Toronto, Ohio, is married to the former Brenna Wiley of Fairmont, WV. John and Brenna have two daughters, Kayleigh (11 yrs old) and Emaleigh (7 yrs old). John is the minister of the Church of Christ in Bridgeport, WV. John teaches the Pentateuch at WVSOP. Previously he has served churches in Yreka, California, and Fairmont, WV. John received his secular education from Oak Glen High School and WVU. John received his biblical instruction from the Church of Christ in Chester, WV, Freed-Hardeman College, and Southern Christian University. John has earned a B.S. in Bible, and M. A. in Biblical Studies, and a Masters of Divinity in Christian Ministry. John is continuing his education at SCU.



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## **THE MERCY OF GOD**

### **Nahum 1:9-13**

SAM BARTRUG

#### **Introduction**

Nineveh was the capital city of the Assyrian Empire and, as such, represented all of Assyria. God directed two prophetic addresses toward this great city. The first of these addresses came through the prophet Jonah. It had been an address warning Nineveh of approaching judgment (Jon. 3:4) that had resulted in a mass penitence from the king on down (Jon. 3:5-9) and God's subsequent decision to spare the city (Jon. 3:10). The second address, through the prophet Nahum, came about a century later and would be a mixture of two great themes: 1) God's terrible judgment upon Nineveh who, since the days of Jonah, has returned to her evil ways; and 2) His merciful deliverance of Judah from the Assyrian oppression that has so ravaged her over the past several years.

This lecture will seek to address Nahum 1:9-13 and how it relates to the mercy of God. To do so will first require a discussion of why Nineveh is condemned to God's judgment (1:9-11), and then a look at God's promise of mercy to Judah (1:12-13). Finally a look will be taken at the concept of mercy in general and how God still extends it to His people today.

#### **The Text**

What do you conspire against the Lord? He will make an utter end of it. Affliction will not rise up a second time. For while tangled like thorns, And while drunken like drunkards, they shall be devoured like stubble fully dried. From you comes forth one Who plots evil against the Lord, A wicked counselor. Thus says the Lord: "Though they are safe, and likewise many, Yet in this manner they will be cut down When he passes through. Though I

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have afflicted you, I will afflict you no more; For now I will break off his yoke from you, And burst your bonds apart." (Nah. 1:9-13, NKJV)

#### **God's Judgment on Nineveh**

By the time that Nahum addresses Nineveh in this prophecy Assyria has been a dominant world power for over two centuries. During this time God has used them to bring about the destruction of the idolatrous and evil Northern Kingdom of Israel, and to serve as His arm of discipline against the increasingly wicked Southern Kingdom of Judah. Assyria proved to be a very able distributor of punishment and was widely feared for the vicious and cruel manner in which she carried out warfare. Unger observes concerning the Assyrians, "They were apparently of cheerful disposition, given to mirth and feasting, but of implacable cruelty. The pages of history are nowhere more bloody than in the records of their wars" (101).

Although God had used Assyria effectively in meting out judgment upon His people, it was now time to punish the punisher. Three things ultimately led to God's condemnation of Assyria. In the first place, they were arrogant enough to think they could challenge and plot against God (Nah. 1:9, 11). Secondly, they had acted with excessive cruelty when dealing with Israel and Judah (Nah. 1:9, 12-13). Thirdly, they had become evil and vile before the Lord (Nah. 1:11, 14). In fact, Baker notes that the phrase "A wicked counselor" in 1:11 may well imply that the ruler of Assyria was evil enough to counsel Belial or Satan himself (31).

God's response to all of this would be certain and decisive! He would confound their plots and schemes and make them look like bumbling drunkards (Nah. 1:9-10). He would cut them down and defeat them despite their superior numbers (Nah. 1:12). God is not to be trifled with! He may have used Assyria as an instrument of His judgment in avenging the wickedness of His people, but that did not excuse Assyria's excesses in both arrogance and cruelty. They had gone too far, and in going too far they had incurred the wrath of the living God!

#### **God's Mercy toward Judah**

In announcing God's approaching judgment upon Nineveh, Nahum was at the same time announcing mercy upon Judah who had been suffering from Assyria's aggression. After conquering Israel in 722 B.C.

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and carrying the population off into exile, Assyria had turned her attention toward Judah. During the reign of Hezekiah (701 B.C.) they had tried to conquer the Southern Kingdom but God confounded their efforts (Isa. 37). This did not end their aggression however, and now Nahum, in announcing their defeat, lets Judah know that God is about to pull them from Assyria's grasp and mercifully grant them a respite from conflict.

If ever there was an example from God's dealings with humanity that would illustrate the principle Paul mentions in Romans 11:22 when he writes of the "goodness and severity of God" it would be here. God's severity toward Israel and Judah because of their unfaithfulness resulted in goodness toward Assyria; now His severity toward Assyria would result in goodness (mercy) toward Judah.

God still had a deep love for Judah and that love would find expression in His judgment upon Assyria. He was a merciful God, one who was not blind to Judah's sufferings. His loving compassion for His people would ultimately result in merciful behavior toward them.

### **God's Mercy Today**

The word "mercy" is not found all that often in our English Old Testament due to the fact that the Hebrew words that could be translated as such are often rendered by different English words (Richards 439). It is not that the concept is missing in the Old Testament so much as that it is called by different names. Despite the many examples of God's judgment in Old Testament times, His mercy is also quite evident both with individuals and with nations, especially the descendants of Abraham.

The word "mercy" appears with greater consistency in the New Testament. It finds its way into both the life (Matt. 15:22; 17:15), and the teachings of Jesus (Matt. 5:7; Luke 6:36; Matt. 23:23). It is presented in the epistles as being something that should characterize Christians everywhere (James 2:13). Jesus was a man of compassion as is evidenced throughout the Gospels. That compassion gave birth to acts of mercy. It should be the same with us! We should be compassionate (able to feel for those who suffer or hurt) and merciful (willing to do what we can to alleviate that suffering and hurt). In many respects mercy is to compassion what reformation is to repentance. Both compassion and repentance are attitudes; mercy and reformation are actions that grow out of them.

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There are also several references in which the mercy of God toward His people is emphasized. It is God's mercy that motivated Him to make us alive through Christ when we were dead in our sins (Eph. 2:4-5). Our hope of heaven is rooted in God's "abundant mercy" (1 Peter 1:3). Our salvation grows out of God's mercy, not out of our goodness (Titus 3:5). Paul calls us to devote ourselves totally to God because He has been so merciful toward us (Rom. 12:1-2).

Perhaps the Everest of "mercy" passages in the New Testament is Hebrews 4:14-15. In this passage we are reminded that, unlike Christ, we are sinners; but because of Christ, we can approach God's throne in prayer and find "mercy" and "grace" when we need them the most. It serves as a constant reminder to us that, as stated by Richards, "No one has a right to mercy. When we understand this fact and its implications, we gain a deeper appreciation of God's goodness to us" (439).

### **Conclusion**

God is a "just" God (Rom. 3:26) and, as such, He cannot overlook and leave unpunished the sinfulness of man. Because of this He has been forced, at times, to exact a terrible judgment upon individuals and nations. This does not mean, however, that God is unmerciful and unloving. Nahum 1:9-13 reminds us that the same God who could punish Nineveh would also extend a merciful hand to Judah and rescue her from oppression. It has always been this way, and will continue for as long as this world stands.

God takes no joy in having to punish mankind's wickedness (Lam. 3:31-33) because He is by nature a loving God (1 John 4:16). We can take a measure of comfort in the knowledge that God is merciful toward us despite our unworthiness and that His ultimate desire is that we might be saved (2 Peter 3:9).

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***Biographical Sketch***

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## **PREACHING TO ITCHING EARS**

### *Micah 2:6-11*

KEITH W. KRESS

I appreciate the opportunity to be here and every opportunity to preach the Word of God to others. I extend that appreciation to Bro. Cooper and those who have the oversight of this lectureship for their confidence in asking me to participate. I also extend that appreciation to our Father in heaven for giving me the ability to deliver His message and for granting me the opportunities which I have had throughout the 30+ years in which I have preached the Gospel.

*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. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. (2 Tim. 4:1-4, emp. added)*

No doubt, all of us have had the opportunity of preaching to “itching ears” throughout the years we have proclaimed the Word. In every congregation of the Lord’s church, I’m sure there are those who would rather not hear the truth, but would prefer to hear what they desire. Paul says the reason for this comes from their lack of enduring sound teaching. When God’s Word instructs us to refrain from something which we would like to do, it brings a struggle to our life. When the Word teaches us to do something which we don’t particularly want to do, it brings that same struggle. Do we submit to the Lord and obey Him, or do we try to find someone who will change the Word and tell us what we want to hear?

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## **Can We Conscientiously Change The Message?**

The question for the preacher becomes one affecting our conscience. Do I continue to teach the Bible in truth, or do I give in to the desires and weaknesses of others? Do I hold up God’s standard of salvation, or do I give in to popularity for the sake of a larger attendance, a larger contribution, a better-looking resume, etc.? Paul’s answer is clearly seen in Galatians 1:10 (NIV), “*Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ*” (emp. added). Paul’s conclusion is certainly valid. Once we begin trying to please others, we cease being Christ’s servant! Bro. Rex A. Turner, in a lecture in 1978, stated:

The subject also implies the obligation for men who preach to expose and condemn the doctrines of men. This is to say that an affirmative gospel will not suffice; it is to say that in reality a person might always preach truth and yet be lost eternally for his having failed to preach the truth; and it is to say that the preaching of the doctrine of Christ necessitates both positive and negative preaching. (323)

Let us not think that Paul had a callous attitude towards people, just slamming them with truth and not caring about their feelings. In Acts 21:20-26, Paul purified himself with some others so as not to be a hindrance to the Jews. In Acts 16:1-3, Paul had Timothy circumcised so that he would not be a hindrance to their work. In 1 Corinthians 8:13, Paul indicated that he would eat no meat if it would be a hindrance to those he taught. On the contrary, Paul cared greatly about others and how his example and teaching affected them.

### **Those of Micah’s Day**

In Micah 2:6-11, God accused the people of having “itching ears” and not wanting to listen to Micah’s message of truth. The people of Amos’ day also didn’t want to listen to Amos prophesying the truth (Amos 7:16), nor did Ahab want to hear Micaiah’s message (1 Kings 22:18). The Jews of the New Testament did not want the apostles preaching the message of Jesus (Acts 4:18; 5:40). Therefore, we easily see that “itching ears” is not a modern malady and was not even new in the days Paul wrote to Timothy. Micah told them the only type of prophet that would please them was one who encouraged them to engage in wine and strong drink. Far too many folks want a preacher who tells

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them it is all right to sin, and far too many preachers are willing to please them. We live in a time when many people only want to talk about “love and forgiveness.” It’s all right to sin because we have a loving and forgiving God. A God of love would surely not condemn someone, but would overlook their weaknesses. It is true that our God is loving and forgiving, however, it is sad that many misinterpret God’s love and forgiveness as a license to live any way they desire.

Is the “all love and forgiveness” type of preaching doing anyone any good? One of our young men from the congregation was a freshman at WVU last year. He told me that the preacher for the church in Morgantown told him that they didn’t talk about hell. This young man also said that he wasn’t supposed to lead any devotionals because he came from Parkersburg, where the churches are conservative and do not allow one to think for themselves. Is this kind of attitude and message going to lead anyone to heaven?

Do we have the courage to stand strong for God and deliver HIS message to our audiences as did the prophets of old? Micah wrote a thought-provoking question from the Lord: “*Do not My words do good To him who walks uprightly?*” (2:7, emp. added). Isn’t it God’s message which lights our path (Ps. 119:105)? Isn’t it God’s truth which will make us free from sin (John 8:32)? Isn’t it God’s Word which sets us apart from the world (John 17:17)? Isn’t it His message in the Gospel which is the power of God to salvation for all (Rom. 1:16) and by which man is saved (1 Cor. 15:1-2)? If God’s message does so much good for mankind, why change it? Why water it down with man’s teaching and weaken the power in the message?

### **As the Leaders, So the People**

Brother David Pharr, in his book, *Modern Messages from the Minor Prophets*, spoke of the importance of leadership and the corruption of it: “Everything that God has provided for man’s good has been corrupted, perverted, and counterfeited by Satan to cause harm. God uses men to be spiritual leaders (prophets, apostles, ministers, elders, etc.), but Satan raises up false counterfeit leaders to lead people astray” (81).

Hosea spoke of the time when: “*And it shall be: like people, like priest*” (Hosea 4:9 NKJV, emp. added). The priests should have led the people out of sin, but did not. When Israel had good leaders they followed the Lord, but far more often they had bad leaders and disobeyed God. In Proverbs 29:18 (NKJV), we read: “*Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; But happy is he who keeps the law*” (emp.

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added). When God’s message is not given, the people have nothing to restrain them from evil. When we view the evil in our world today, can we even imagine how much worse it would be were it not for those who preach God’s message? In Deuteronomy 12:8 (NKJV), as Moses gave the Israelites instructions for their conduct in the promised land, he told them: “*You shall not at all do as we are doing here today - every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes*” (emp. added). And yet, the Book of Judges indicates that the people digressed to the point of everyone doing *what was right in his own eyes* (Judg. 17:6; 21:25). This was likely produced by the lack of teaching described in Judges 2:10, where we are told of a generation who did not know God. They had not been taught God’s message; they had no voice to restrain them.

There is a great difference between those who claim to teach God’s message and those who truly do teach it. This difference was established by Jesus as He taught the people. He came across to them as “. . . *one having authority, and not as the scribes*” (Matt. 7:29, emp. added). Those who falsely claim to teach the Scriptures have no authority for what they teach, while those who teach the truth of God’s message have the authority of the Lord. In Titus 2:15 (NKJV), Paul instructed Titus to *Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you*. When Jesus sent forth His disciples into the world to teach, He strengthened them by telling about the authority which He had been given (Matt. 28:18), and informing them that “. . . *I am with you always, even to the end of the age*” (Matt. 28:20 NKJV, emp. added). He had all authority and promised to be with them. We, today, have the same authority contained in the Word which we have been given. As long as we abide in that Word, we have the authority of Christ. However, those who leave the Word have no such authority for their teaching or practices.

### **Hypocrisy Is Clearly Seen**

The language used in verse 6 of Micah 2, is often viewed as the false prophets telling the true prophets not to prophesy, however, they are doing the very thing which they don’t want the true prophets, such as Micah, doing. Isn’t it ironic that those who criticize the preachers of truth are often guilty of doing that which they criticize? The liberal teachers of our day criticize the conservative teachers for their critical attitude. Those who have “itching ears” show no tolerance for those who, they claim, show no tolerance to others. I learned many years ago that the very thing which we often see and criticize in others, is something which

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we, ourselves, are often guilty of. This hypocritical attitude is easily seen by most folks, however, we often fail to see it in ourselves. Hypocrisy was greatly condemned by our Lord as is clearly pointed out in Matthew 23, when Jesus referred to the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and scribes at least eight times.

There will always be those who will cater to the demands of “itching ears.” Most often they will appeal to the emotions of their listeners. They will claim that the supporters of truth don’t have love and compassion for the weaknesses of people. They’ll claim that we don’t have a spirit of forgiveness. These teachers will often appeal to Jesus’ condemning words to the scribes and Pharisees in John 8:7 (NKJV): “*He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first*” (emp. added). They also like to quote Jesus in Matthew 7:1 (NKJV): “*Judge not, that you be not judged*” (emp. added). It doesn’t concern them that they misapply these passages. They just want to discredit those who hold to the truth and sway their listeners to their false ways. Jude spoke of them as ones who “*mouth great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage*” (Jude 16b NKJV, emp. added).

### **There Is No Rest**

God, through Micah, told the people: “*Arise and depart, for this is not your rest; because it is defiled, it shall destroy, Yes, with utter destruction*” (Mic. 2:10 NKJV, emp. added). The truly sad part is that when folks don’t want to listen to God’s message, they are removing their opportunity of rest. The writer referred to this in Hebrews 4:5-6, by showing that God refused to grant the Israelites rest due to their disobedience. If only they had listened to the message, the voice of restraint which God gave them through prophets like Micah.

The Israelites had a history of choosing to refuse God’s message to them. When Moses led them from Egypt, they complained continually (1 Cor.10:1-11). They refused to wait on God while Moses was on the mount receiving the law. They refused God’s offer of a land flowing with *milk and honey* (Num. 13-14). They refused God’s warnings about making marriages with the people of Canaan and did not heed God’s command to destroy them (Deut. 7). In one sense, it could be said that most of the Old Testament is a story about those with “itching ears.” They continually wanted to hear something other than God’s message of salvation.

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### **What About Us?**

Are people today any different? Why won’t folks accept the existence of God, when evidence strongly supports it? Why do folks think they can be pleasing to God without genuine repentance, which truly changes their lives? Why are folks so adamantly opposed to God’s choice of baptism to wash away sins? Why do folks feel that only partial faithfulness is good enough? Why do folks try to see how little they can do and go to heaven, rather than serving with, and giving, their best? I don’t have all the answers and I’m sure it’s the same with all of us.

However, we still must continue to preach to folks like these, as well as preaching to ourselves. We all, no doubt, at times fill the role of “itching ears.” As proclaimers of God’s Word, we must carry on as God instructed Ezekiel. In Ezekiel 2:5 (NKJV), God said, “*As for them, whether they hear or whether they refuse – for they are a rebellious house – yet they will know that a prophet has been among them*” (emp. added). When I proclaim God’s Word, does my audience know that a man with God’s true message has preached to them, or do they have reason to question it? Do I use “*sound speech that cannot be condemned*” (Titus 2:8a, emp. added)? Do I *speak as the oracles of God* (1 Peter 4:11), or give my own opinion?

God told Ezekiel that He made him a “*watchman for the house of Israel*” (Ezek. 3:17, emp. added). Ezekiel was told that he must speak a warning to the Israelites to warn them about their sins. If he would not stand strong and deliver God’s message, the wicked would lose his soul, “*but his blood I will require at your hand*” (Ezek. 3:18, emp. added). However, if Ezekiel chose to give them God’s message of warning, whether or not they obeyed, Ezekiel had taken care of his responsibility and “*delivered your soul*” (Ezek. 3:19, emp. added).

Am I willing to stand strong and give God’s message regardless of the taunts and criticisms thrown my way, regardless of the pressures to keep a job and pay the bills, or any other pressure which Satan thinks might be effective in getting me to shirk my duty? Brother Bill Nicks, in a lecture in 2003, stated. “The true gospel preacher will be so wedded to the Scripture that he will believe intensely in its inspiration (II Timothy 3:16-17), and that it is all-sufficient to accomplish what God intended” (380).

As God was looking for a righteous man to be a leader in Israel, He said through Ezekiel: “*So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land that I should not destroy it; but I found no one*” (Ezek. 22:30 NKJV, emp.

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added). Am I willing to stand in the gap for God in this land? During the days of Gideon, God used his small army of 300 soldiers to destroy the Midianites. The reason they were successful was because they accepted God's message as truth and trusted in Him for victory. They won the victory because "*every man stood in his place all around the camp*" (Judg. 7:21, emp. added). Am I willing to stand in my place and not be moved aside by Satan's temptations? I must be like Paul as he reminded the elders in Ephesus, "*For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God*" (Acts 20:27 NKJV, emp. added).

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#### **Biographical Sketch**

Keith W. Kress was born and raised in Parkersburg, WV. He graduated from Parkersburg South High School in 1969, Ohio Valley University in 1971, and Harding University in 1973. He began full-time ministry in 1973 in Graves, TX, as an associate minister. In 1974 he began work with the church in Bremen, OH, In 1977 with the church in Pennsville, OH, in 1987 with the North Beckley congregation in Beckley, WV, and from 1990 to the present worked with the Sunrise congregation in Parkersburg, WV. He has been married to the former Linda Ann Rogers (also a Parkersburg native) for 34 years. They have two children and five grandchildren.

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## **WHO IS A GOD LIKE THEE?**

### *Micah 7:18-20*

DAN KESSINGER

“Who is a God like You, Pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy” (Mic. 7:18).

Only a Spirit inspired message could ever have signaled such an abrupt, yet accurate turn toward hope. The hope of Micah’s generation was real, but it did not represent the triumph of optimism. It also did not originate in human power and potential, untapped reserves in the face of challenge. The ultimate hope of God’s people is not situation oriented at all. This abrupt turn represented the intervention of Jehovah.

Israel and Judah consisted of a morally undeserving population. In the first five chapters of Micah, the sins of both nations are painfully and painstakingly exposed to view. The prophet seemed to direct his message against the sins in the rural areas rather than the cities (Lewis 37). Other prophets of his generation like Amos had focused how sinful life had become in the cities, and had focused on inter-governmental intrigue (Harrison 921). Micah demonstrated that though the specifics differed, the cities and the countryside were equally corrupt.

In addition to sins common to all areas (like idolatry and pride) Micah writes of the widespread abuse of the poor, fraud, and the corruption of justice. One might recognize that these sins are not unique to a rural area, but they might well be more difficult to expose than in the city. Also, the effects of these injustices are especially onerous in an area where choices are limited. The laxity of societal intervention in such abuse would result in wholesale glut of refugees.

To a land bereft of justice, Micah writes that God is certain to bring justice (chapters 1-3). The proud will be humbled, the corrupt preachers

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exposed. In chapters 4-5, Micah also predicts a coming kingdom of righteousness in which God’s people will be vindicated. But such hope of vindication is hundreds of years in the future.

In the here and now, there is a God of justice and mercy who has been ignored. In chapter 6, God presents a court case to the elements, since His people are no longer listening. In chapter 7, one reads of the scarcity of righteous men. A righteous man finds himself such a rarity that he is living as an oddity of the past, a lonely existence indeed. The best of his companions are corrupt, and no one can be trusted.

The moral conditions in Israel and Judah sound frighteningly familiar to the resident of 21<sup>st</sup> century America. Here too, the cream of the crop seems only slightly less corrupt than the scum of the earth. We also reside in a land obsessed with materialism, pride, and idolatry of various kinds. We too are foolishly confident in the security bought with prosperity. We too have not only forgotten God, but seem to have evicted him from our culture.

Surely such have no hope at all. But incredibly, the prophet then begins to write confidently of hope in chapter 7:8-13. Israel’s enemies ought not to boast, even after her fall. For those who love the Lord and serve Him, there is always a reason to hope. Though the innocent may suffer along with the guilty in this life, God’s servants will be blessed. The losses, though horrible, are temporal; godliness has its own unique and eternal reward. There was a God when culture ignored Him; there is a God in times of trouble; there is a God who forgives and redeems.

### ***The Shepherd***

“Shepherd Your people with Your staff, The flock of Your heritage, Who dwell solitarily in a woodland, In the midst of Carmel; Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, As in days of old. As in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt, I will show them wonders” (Mic. 7:14-15).

The possibility of hope in a hopeless case is expressed in the image of the Divine shepherd. The metaphor was one of long standing importance for God’s people. Texts like Psalm 23 had reminded them that they were the flock of God. The shepherd proved to be more than just a metaphor, since leaders like Moses and David had spent significant portions of life in the fields tending sheep. In this writer’s opinion, it could be said that shepherding was an apprenticeship in leading God’s people. Though there is no record of our Lord tending sheep, he certainly alluded to it frequently. In that beautiful image, the Divine shepherd is a



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protector of magnificent proportions, selflessly guarding His wayward charges.

With God as shepherd, no opponent is too fearsome. Here Micah mentions the staff of comfort, even as David had also reminisced. The staff was the means by which the shepherd brought safety and security to the sheep. It was a weapon of protection and a tool for rescue. The chief shepherd (1 Peter 5:4) possessed the tools and skill needed for protection. He can provide comfort if only He desires to do so. But will He?

Micah calls upon the Lord to remember his heritage, accepting as given that God can do whatever He chooses. In calling upon God to recognize His ancient familial commitment, Micah is not questioning the Lord's loyalty. He himself not only knew who was guilty, he has already presented a scathing rehearsal of the sins and guilt of the people. He seems fully aware, as expressed in Isaiah 59:1-2, that the sins of the sheep have placed them in danger, not a sleeping shepherd.

His appeal to God is a call for mercy, not justice. He emphasizes the pitiful loneliness of such a flock without God, no matter how they arrived at such a condition. However, one must consider the possibility that the solitude mentioned was one of distinctive faithfulness, as suggested by Theodore Laetsch (287). In this case one could understand the reference "solitarily" to mean "in solidarity." In any case, the appeal is made in hopes that God can be moved to compassionate deliverance in spite of the flocks self destructive unfaithfulness.

Micah recalls the former days, what would have been a golden era of Divine care for Israel. As a nation, they owed their very existence to a powerful demonstration of God's care—the exodus. As lovers save mementos, Micah hopes that God also remembers His own wonderful tenderness with a wistful fondness. Perhaps there remains a spark that may be fanned in the heart of God, even after such rampant unfaithfulness by His beloved people. But one must never mistake the situation for any lack of attention or violation on God's part.

Micah's appeal has more to recommend it than the desperation of a drowning man grasping at straws of hope. There will be a restoration, though perhaps not in exactly the way that Micah himself could conceive. It will not be a wholesale protection for a land and people that have rejected God consistently for 800 years. A greater spiritual vindication is in the works.

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## **Vindication**

"The nations shall see and be ashamed of all their might; they shall put their hand over their mouth; their ears shall be deaf. They shall lick the dust like a serpent; they shall crawl from their holes like snakes of the earth. They shall be afraid of the LORD our God, and shall fear because of You" (Mic. 7:16-17).

In a nationalistic sense, Micah's hopes are baseless. The ruination of Israel is at hand. Was his appeal made in vain? It is not. The heart of God is still that of the shepherd, and there are still lambs to save. His arms will carry and in Him the flock will thrive. It is who He is. A day would come in which the oppressive nations would be confounded by God's care for His own flock, but the nations of Micah's day would destroy nonetheless. Israel was in fact destined to fall as a nation because God had ordered it. The vindication of Micah must come in the form of righteous individuals (the remnant), and in a fuller sense, to another group of children. These would also be opposed and abused by nations. But the flock was destined for triumph. No longer would God's relationship with His nation be threatened by unfaithfulness, for this nation is defined by its faithfulness. It is the church.

Micah's fellow prophet Isaiah wrote, "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; And all nations shall flow to it" (2:2). "The Gentiles shall see your righteousness, and all kings your glory. You shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD will name" (62:2). God's house would be established in the midst of the nations; into that house all nations would flow. He also wrote that the kings of the earth would see that glory. Micah also refers to the sure establishment of that which would expose worldly power for the farce it remains today.

Even though the eventual vindication of God's people would be open to the view of the nations, it did not ensure that the nations would recognize it and reconcile themselves to it. Instead, even as Micah predicts here, there would be a widespread rejection of truth. This rejection is clearly deliberate. The truth as revealed through Christ was no arcane set of mysteries and enigmas. The blind will have covered their eyes, the deaf will have stopped their ears. These actions are usually a figure of refusing to hear and see (Matt. 13:15). But on at least one occasion, these actions are literally exercised in an effort to be deaf to truth. "Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord;"(Acts 7:57).

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Rejecting the Lord's kingdom would have grave and eternal consequences. In Micah's generation, those who opposed the faithful remnant would themselves be confounded. In the new covenant, the oppressors may seem to succeed, but find themselves oppressed eternally, "since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you," (2 Thess. 1:6). In the end, the vindication of God and His people results in the utter defeat and humiliation of the proud. They are made to slink and slither in fear, while God's people are exalted.

All of these bold predictions are possible because of one great fact: God loves to forgive. We emphasize that He LOVES to forgive. To say that our God is a God of pardon and mercy tells but half of the story.

### **Forgiveness**

Who is a God like You, Pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will give truth to Jacob And mercy to Abraham, Which You have sworn to our fathers from days of old. (Mic. 7:18-20)

Micah's question is written with an air of amazement over the goodness of God. Jehovah is a God unlike the gods of the nations. As inventions of men, the gods behave as they have been humanly programmed to do. The secular proverb states "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." The behavior of false gods indicates how power tends to corrupt men. When the men assign qualities to gods, they seem to do so based on how they themselves would conduct themselves if in the lofty position of limitless power. Thus, gods are very powerful, but spoiled, men. But the God of Heaven has limitless goodness and wisdom along with His limitless power. His use of power is proof that He is God alone. His willingness to pardon sets Him apart from men.

God's forgiveness is reasoned, measured and informed. He is said to "pass over" transgressions. He is willing to restore fellowship being fully aware of their sin. Just as the destroyer was dispatched to deliberately avoid the houses protected by blood, so God passes over the sins of the forgiven in a rapier like fashion. He knows what is in our homes; He knows all of our errors, even those diligently hidden in only our hearts.

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He passes by sin as a measured choice. Forgiveness is no random blessing.

The forgiveness of God is directed and focused. Though God is certainly willing to forgive the residents of the nations who were plaguing Palestine, forgiveness in this appeal is the sole possession of His heritage. God's forgiveness is determined by one's relationship with Him. The good news is that any may acquire that blessed forgiven state, for this is a heritage of open opportunity. "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12). Those outside His heritage have no claim on forgiveness.

God's forgiveness is swift. Again, a paradox is seen in a changeless God who nonetheless changes His mind. While His character remains constant, while His knowledge is full and His mercy unailing, His anger (though righteous) fades away. God holds no grudges for the forgiven. Men frequently find themselves unable to put the past where it belongs. Indeed, the reasonable observer may encourage by recommending the healing balm of time. After enough time, the diligent servant of God may find that he is able to forgive where he could not previously. The hurt and anger of God over sin is real. But God's love is able to reach out even when the wounds are fresh. As great as His anger is, His love is greater because he does retain it forever. "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." (1 Cor. 13:13)

As the poet has suggested (Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*):

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath. It is twice bless'd:  
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.

(qtd. in Bartlett 146)

Perhaps the clearest indication of God's character is seen in why He so readily and quickly forgives. Sin breaks God's heart; this writer is convinced that God weeps over sin. Certainly the Holy Spirit is said to grieve over sin (Eph. 4:30), while Heaven is said to rejoice over repentance (Luke 15:7). Why does God grieve over sin? Is it because of what it does to Him? As most fathers can attest, it is because He knows what it is doing to us. When forgiveness is sought, it brings joy to the

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heart of God. Let every sinner know “God loves to forgive me!” God’s forgiveness leaves room for neither recrimination nor rancor.

God’s forgiveness is active. In v. 19, Micah anticipates God’s compassion in subduing iniquity. This suggests that the forgiven have an advocate who strives to prevent further difficulty in his charges. He does this by guarding the forgiven from temptation. “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone” (James 1:13). “And do not lead us into temptation . . .” (Matt. 6:13). “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it” (1 Cor. 10:13).

It may be that Micah is also describing how God actively subdues the penalties associated with sin (once it is forgiven). These are not the actions of one who forgives in only a detached official capacity. God is removing the deadly penalties and plagues that threaten His beloved. This is not to suggest that sin has no further consequences. But these temporal consequences are not evidence that God is unable or unwilling to subdue iniquity. Instead they are intended as a warning against sin and to discourage us from indulging in it. Even in terrible earthly consequence, God’s ultimate goal is to foster an ultimate forgiveness. “Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?” (Heb. 12:9).

The forgiveness of God is complete. Micah has God throwing sins into the depths of the sea. They are thus as thoroughly gone as anything could ever be, never to be heard from again. Just as God’s memory is infinite, so is His choice to forget. “No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jer. 31:34). Could one imagine retrieving a single object thrown into a pool of water? Boys who have played that game in swimming holes know how difficult it can be, especially when the object is a lost valuable. But perhaps it can be done. Could that swimmer retrieve the object if it were thrown six miles deep into the depths of the Pacific? To do so would be as unlikely as a forgiven sin ever returning to haunt the mind of God. What relief from guilt to know that God Himself has thrown our sins away permanently. The forgiven but thoroughly

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chastised David wrote, “Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities” (Ps. 51:9).

Forgiveness is sure and certain because of the Divine promise. Micah is confident in it because of the character of the one who has promised it. In order for the descendants of Abraham and Jacob to enjoy the blessings of truth and mercy, the promise must have originated with the God of Heaven. Anything less than this full and complete forgiveness would have negated the promise God had established with and through this chosen family. And God intended to honor His promise to bless a great spiritual family. He would remember and honor the oath He had sworn; He would forgive. He would remember because He is Jehovah. He delights in extending mercy. It’s who He is.

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#### **Biographical Sketch**

Dan is the son of Doris Kessinger and the late Bob Kessinger, and was reared in Roane County WV. He was educated in Roane County schools, receiving higher education at Ohio Valley College. He and his wife, the former Mary Amy West have two boys, D.J., and Thomas.

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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 West Virginia Christian Youth Camp since 1984, and West Virginia School of Preaching since 1995.

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# THE WOES OF HABAKKUK

## *Habakkuk 2:4-17*

DON COOPER

Habakkuk the prophet lived in times not so much different from ours. Sin seemed to have no restraint. Immorality appeared to grow steadily worse. Vice was common among those who governed. The Law was applied unjustly. Everywhere Habakkuk looked he saw lawlessness. Even among God's people there was the "falling away" from righteous living. It must have seemed to him that evil was being recognized as respectable, as it also may seem to be in our day and age. Thus, the book of prophecy bearing his name begins by expressing how burdensome the matter had become to Habakkuk. He cried out to the Lord, ". . . [H]ow long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear?" (1:2).

One should not conclude that Habakkuk lacked faith in God to deal with the problem. Though he became frustrated, he was a man of great faith (3:17-19). His faith was such that even if he questioned God's silence, he never questioned God's sovereignty. Who among us has not had moments in our lives like those experienced by Habakkuk? Is it not grievous to us to witness the violence and other types of wickedness which are so prevalent in our world? Does the question ever arise in our minds, "Why does God allow all this to go on?" Of course it does. Are we faithless when we allow such thoughts to occupy our minds? I think not. Nowhere in the book is Habakkuk's faith called in question. Was he confused? Yes! Was he frustrated? Yes! Was he impatient with God? Yes! It seems that he looked about him, helpless to do much about the problem, and knowing the greatness of Jehovah God wondered why He didn't do something about it; especially since it was so adversely affecting God's chosen nation. After all, God had dealt with His people's enemies in the past. Why did He not do so now? The prophet wanted to know how long God would allow evil to continue, or even grow worse.

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Habakkuk's questions to God were answered in a positive and very persuasive manner. In chapter 2:4-19, Jehovah pronounced five woes that would be visited on the Chaldeans.

But, before we consider those woes pronounced against the enemies of God's people, let us be reminded that the great sins committed by them sprang from a sin that besets many, the sin of **pride**. Pride swiftly brings destruction (Prov. 16:18).

Aesop described the deadliness of pride in the following fable:

A tortoise, dissatisfied with his lowly life looked up and admired the birds flying among the clouds. He thought that if he could get up in the air, he could soar with the best of them. One day he called upon an eagle and offered him all the treasures of the ocean if he would teach him to fly. The eagle declined saying that the tortoise was not able to float in the skies like the birds. The proud tortoise persisted and finally the eagle agreed. The eagle took the tortoise up to a great height and let go. "Now then!" cried the eagle, "Fly!" But the tortoise before he could answer fell upon a rock and was dashed to pieces. (qtd. in Kachelman 94)

Babylon would soon learn that shame would follow pride (Prov. 11:2). It would bring them low (Prov. 29:23). Our text exposes pride. Babylon would not escape the wrath of God. Sinful Babylon would bring destruction and shame on itself because of its pride and arrogance. God and His people would be vindicated. Pride causes one to say and do so many hurtful things against others, but as the saying goes, "what goes around comes around." Jeremiah well spoke, "For the Lord is a God of recompense, He will fully repay" (Jer. 51:56b). The woes pronounced by God against Babylon show the consequences of pride as well as its characteristics.

Let us now notice the five "**woes**" of Habakkuk and make a few practical observations.

### **Chapter 2:6**

"Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his!" The Babylonians were guilty of extorting and robbing other nations (cf. 1 Kings 25:11-17; 2 Chron. 36:18; Dan. 5:1-4). Greed and selfish, insatiable ambition led Babylon to persecute other nations. Still, they were never satisfied, but were obsessed by self-pleasure, all at the expense of others. They thought they were getting by with it! Apparently, Habakkuk was concerned that

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God was allowing them to get by with it. However, verses 7 and 8 reveal that all the nations which were being affected by their greed and evil ambition would in time rise up and taunt them. We, today, should learn from this, also. Christ and the apostles plainly taught that one will reap that which he sows (Matt. 7:2; Gal. 6:7-8). The Lord's people may have to suffer at times due to wrongdoing on their own part or that of others, but they can rest assured that God will never forsake them if they will put their trust in Him (Rom. 8:28). God will avenge His people (Heb. 10:30).

### **Chapter 2:9-11**

“Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house . . . .” The Babylonians were constantly enlarging their borders, affording greater protection against potential enemies. Not only were they invaders of other nations, but they were motivated by selfishness. They did not care that others suffered ruin from their invasions. Habakkuk's words describe Babylon as being self-reliant, arrogant. The metaphor used in verse 9 (an eagle's nest on high) suggested that Babylon thought herself to be invincible, but she should have heeded the warnings from Jehovah such as the one recorded in Obadiah 1:4. Tragically, this same attitude is manifested in many today. Man is prone to feel secure in wealth, possessions, prestigious professions, etc. Being of such a mind he becomes insensitive to others, and soon leaves God completely out of his plans, like the rich farmer of Luke 12:15-21. Perhaps, a word about the victims of the covetous is in order. Like Habakkuk, one might be inclined to ask, “Where is God? Has He abandoned His servants?” The prophet's words tell us that we can be certain that evildoers will be dealt with in time. There will come a day of reckoning for all of us, good and bad (2 Cor. 5:10). Righteousness will prevail.

### **Chapter 2:12-14**

“Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood.” Babylon, under the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar, had structures considered to be among the wonders of the world. Did God applaud them? Certainly not! He denounced them because they were built through bloodshed and violence. I'm sure that we can recall times in recent history that much blood was shed by those who were bent on ruling the world. “Babylon, like some in our day, killed without mercy, exploited without compromise and destroyed without hesitation” (Kachelman 99). Can we perhaps understand Habakkuk's questioning God's delay in dealing with

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the wickedness that was so visible on every hand? God would answer, but He would answer in His own way when He decided to deal with the wicked nation. Babylon appeared to be succeeding, but “Except Jehovah build the house, they labor in vain who build it: except Jehovah keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain” (Ps. 127:1). The idea in our text is that when the time came for God to act the wicked nation of Babylon would be destroyed, the result being that all men would know that it was accomplished through the providence of God. One might wish to look to the Book of Daniel for an excellent commentary on this part of our text.

### **Chapter 2:15-17**

“Woe unto him that giveth his neighbor drink, that putteth the bottle to him, and maketh him drunken also, that thou mayest look upon their nakedness.” The Babylonians had a reputation for excessive drinking of alcoholic beverages. Her final destruction occurred after a riotous drinking party (Dan. 5:1ff). Some have suggested that in a figurative sense Babylon, by her overtures toward other nations, actually intoxicated them by making them economically and culturally dependent on her; all to Babylon's advantage and for her good pleasure. Habakkuk named Lebanon specifically, as one of the nations who fell victim to such ploys of Babylon (v 17), and whose magnificent forests of cedars were plundered and destroyed, never again to be successfully reseeded, under the wicked rule of Nebuchadnezzar. In a literal sense God, through His prophet Habakkuk issued a stern warning against the use of alcoholic beverages. Though the use of beer and wine is common today, sometimes even by professed Christians, and seldom warned against, it is condemned throughout the Bible (Prov. 20:1; 23:29-35). Again, Habakkuk portrays one who succumbs to such temptation as one whose pride gets in the way of rational thinking. The end brings shame (v 16).

### **Chapter 2:18-19**

“Woe unto him that saith to the wood, awake; to the dumb stone arise, it shall teach! Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver and there is no breath at all in the midst of it” (v 19). The final woe pronounced against Babylon comes as a result of her setting herself up as God. She had absolutely come to the point where Jehovah God's sovereignty was ignored. He was not important. If there is one lesson to be learned from the evil Babylonians, it is that man must never serve God only when it is convenient or when he has no one else to turn to. So many today view

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idolatry as turning to a graven image when worshipping. That is one type of idolatry. However, when one allows God second place in his life, or worse, it is a sign of idolatry. Something or someone has taken God's place in one's heart when such occurs. Today, many who call themselves "Christians" are allowing recreation, entertainment and the like to occupy too much of their time. In doing so, they are failing to observe Jesus' command to "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matt. 6:33). The result of such action is described in Romans 1:19-25. Jesus warned that "No man can serve two masters," that we "cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24).

### **Conclusion**

Plainly, we see the woeful harvest of Babylon's evil pride (2:16-19). Even though the nation appeared successful, she would lose everything (v 7). She would be humbled and shamed (v 10). As great as she was, nothing would remain of her success (v 13b). This is the eventual epitaph of pride. "All whose energies are invested in pride will discover the absolute waste of their lives" (Kachelman 102).

God answered Habakkuk's question posed in chapter one. We today, should learn from the message contained in this great book. It is there for our learning (Rom. 15:4). God is in control, though we might not always understand His ways (Isa. 55:8-9). Brother Charles Aebi will remind us in his message that "The Lord is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him" (2:20).

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### **Biographical Sketch**

Don Cooper was born and reared in Parkersburg, WV, the youngest son of Jesse R. and Sarah Cooper (both deceased). He began preaching in June, 1952, after attending Freed-Hardeman University. He married his wife (Jan) in March 1954. They have four children, five grandchildren and two great grandchildren. They have also served as foster parents to seventeen children. Churches they have served include Washington, PA;

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Ashland, Toronto, Mansfield, Reynoldsburg, OH; Hillview Terrace in Moundsville, WV; Baltimore, MD; and Wadsworth, OH, where they presently reside and where he ministered from June, 1985, to July, 2005. He also serves as an elder for this congregation. Since October, 2005, he has preached at LaGrange, OH.

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## **THE PREACHING GOD BIDS THEE**

### *Jonah 3:1-4*

DENVER E. COOPER

Preach! Just who is to do the preaching? Evangelists? Of course. However, in the sense that “preach” and “teach” are used interchangeably it is the marching order to every Christian. The great commission in Matthew 28:19, 20 says “teach;” while Mark 16:15 says “preach”. In the early days of the church, both men and women went everywhere “preaching the word” (Acts 8:3, 4). It is very evident from the Scriptures that every faithful Christian should “. . . 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 Peter 3:15).

Most preachers I know would welcome the opportunity to preach to a crowd of people the size of Nineveh. Jonah must surely have known the sinful state of the Assyrians. Why would it seem that he was so hostile toward them? Some have suggested that he just didn’t like Gentiles. Others, Assyrians were too cruel, sinful and dangerous to even think about being saved. He might have thought, “what about my reputation among my Jewish brethren and friends?” Some folks aren’t much different today. People of other races and colors are unwelcome in their buildings or in their places of business. It really doesn’t have to be color or race. I’ve heard people say, “Preacher, I know we want to increase the numbers, but we don’t want that kind.” Well ! Just what kind do we want? The upper class? The wealthy? Those who are the popular ones in the community? When John saw Jesus coming toward him he exclaimed, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). That would mean that about every kind of sin and sinner would be included, don’t you think? “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). I know of no sin, for which there is repentance, that God will not forgive. I must, therefore, do the

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preaching that God bids me, in order for the blood to cleanse all men of sin.

The great apostle Paul declared, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of 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? And how shall they preach except they be sent?” (Rom. 10:11-15).

### ***Just What Kind Of Preaching Does God Bid Us Preach?***

Jonah’s preaching was repent. I know it was because the king said, “let them turn every one from his evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?” (Jon. 3:8, 9). Preachers are bidden of God to call upon men to repent today! (Luke 13:3, 5).

John the Baptist came into the wilderness preaching “repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is as at hand” (Matt. 3:2). He did God’s bidding! Peter commanded, “Repent and be baptized everyone of you for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). He did God’s bidding! Stephen did! Paul did! Phillip did! The first century Christians were enthusiastic about saving souls. When persecuted, “they went every where preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). They sacrificed much. Possible imprisonment or death, even severe persecution, did not keep them from preaching the word! (Acts 8:4). Soon they preached “to every creature which is under heaven” (Col. 1:23).

When Jonah and other prophets “preached God’s bidding” many thousands of people turned to the Lord. Why will His word in anyway be inadequate today? Some think it too simple, obsolete, not broad enough to include friends who do not believe it. Yet, Paul, in the midst of sophisticated intellectuals said, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). Some of our own brethren are rejecting “God’s bidding.” Some are trying to save people with human means and devices which long ago failed when used by our denominational friends. Those human means failed then and they fail now to accomplish what God wants done. Even though there are more modern methods and tools to be used in reaching out to the lost we must not be guilty of forsaking pulpit preaching. For the last several years, brethren, preachers included, have been reducing the numbers of sermons preached during a protracted meeting. It has gradually been

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reduced from two or three weeks to two or three days. Physicians don't give up all older cures for the new ones.

Paul said, "Preach the Word!" (2 Tim. 4:2) Just what do you think Timothy thought he should preach? Do you think his mind immediately inclined toward the Patriarchal messages? Timothy must have been aware of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Enoch and others (2 Tim. 3:15), but there is no evidence that Paul had these in mind when he told Timothy, "Preach the Word."

It must have been a frightening thing for the Israelites to have heard the thundering voice of God from the top of Sinai to the valley below (Ex. 20: 1-9). The standard of authority which Moses brought back to the Hebrews was to have no addition or subtraction (Deut. 4:2). If one despised Moses' law he was to be stoned to death (Heb. 10:28)! Yet, there is no indication that it was that law to which Paul referred when to Timothy he said, "Preach the Word!"

John and Jesus both came preaching the kingdom is at hand. In so doing Mark 2:2 declares that Jesus preached "the word." No doubt Jesus remembered that Daniel had declared that God would set up a kingdom which would never be destroyed (Dan. 2:44) and Jesus left heaven to establish that kingdom. Jesus went about all their cities and villages (Matt. 9: 35) preaching the "gospel of the kingdom." It was so close to the time that He said to His audience "there be some of you standing here who will not see death until they see God's kingdom come with power" (Mark 9:1).

Jesus preached that the kingdom of heaven was not of this world, but of heaven (John 18:36). His servants would not use carnal weapons, but spiritual ones. His kingdom would appear in the hearts of men and not on the maps drawn by men's hands.

The first Pentecost day after Jesus' ascension the Bible declares the existence of the kingdom of heaven. God sent the Holy Spirit on His ambassadors with the authority of the king to declare unto all who were assembled on that very day the "unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8). Sinners who gladly received the word (Acts 2:41) were immediately immersed in water for the remission of sins. From that time till the present day those who do God's bidding will tell people to do what Peter told them to do, "repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). He and all others following him in preaching the "word" included the simple plan of salvation. People were baptized by the thousands!

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Is "preach the word" limited to preaching only faith, repentance, confession and baptism? Timothy must have had available to him most, if not all, of the books of the New Testament. That being true he had an abundance of information from which to draw that which was God's bidding.

### ***What Subjects Would Be Included?***

In days gone by it was quite common for a preacher to be reprov'd for dealing with subjects other than those included in the plan of salvation. An elder where I began working once told me, "our former preacher was a very knowledgeable man in the Bible, but he rarely preached to the church." Any church in order to grow must have more than first principles (Heb. 6:1-3). On the other hand, when one preached to the church, or preached lessons from the Old Testament, brethren would often remind us to "preach the gospel," meaning preach to those out of Christ. There are places in the world who demand that only sermons to the church be preached at which time none but faithful Christians are admitted to the auditorium. So, just what may be preached when we do God's bidding?

Perhaps there is no greater need today than teaching on the inspiration of the Word of God. Some conclude that the Bible is no more inspired than the works of men such as Shakespeare and others. Others believe the Holy Spirit is just an influence that stirs an emotion resulting in action of some kind. If that is true and "the way of man is not within himself" (Jer. 20:23) then man is hopelessly lost because there is no "lamp unto his feet, and a light to his path" (Ps. 119:105).

We are told that Ezra and others read the Bible to "men and women, and all that could hear with understanding" (Neh. 8:2). "So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, (interpreted) and caused them to understand the reading" (Neh. 8:8). In doing God's bidding, preachers must do some interpreting and in so doing must be sure to do it correctly. To do otherwise is to wrest the Scriptures "to their own" and others destruction (2 Peter 3:16). Some handle "the word of God deceitfully" (2 Cor. 4:2). This is often done when men have a doctrine or an agenda, and go to the Bible in search of a verse that seems to verify it, instead of going to the Bible to learn what the Bible really says. The Catholic Church is guilty of careless interpretation in many instances, but particularly as it relates to 2 Peter 1:20. They claim that only the Catholic church may officially interpret the Scriptures for its members (Douay Rheims N.T. version, footnote 268.)



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What Peter is saying in the passage is that none of the writers ever spoke declaring the words to have originated with him. It is divine inspiration and not human inspiration. The Bible is not a book, but the book of books.

Another passage which is often misinterpreted is Matthew 7:1, "Judge not that ye be not judged." As soon as the preacher begins to point out the errors of denominationalism or the sins so common to man, the exclamation is "Now, now, you mustn't judge!" Yet Jesus declares in the very same chapter, (vs. 15) "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." Just how is one to determine that a teacher is a wolf and not a sheep if one does not exercise judgment? It would follow that one must be careful not to declare one a wolf just because he does not agree with one's own interpretation of the Scripture. We all must be dead sure that he is a false teacher because, he "abideth not in the doctrine of Christ" (2 John 9).

Is not one doing the preaching God bids him when he preaches Christian Evidences? It is so important that we teach people about God. He is real. He is not just a figment of one's imagination or a blurb. He is not a god that is made of some created material by the hands of man, set up in cages on pillars or in pictures, but the God who created man in the first place.

(Gen. 1:26). My God can think (Isa. 55:8); He knows (Ex. 3:7); He remembers (Ex. 6:5); He loves (John 3:16); He has often become angry (Gen. 18:30). The one who appreciates the inexhaustible nature of God ceases not to extol the worthy name of Jehovah or His providential care over him day and night forever.

What a glorious privilege to preach Jesus. Is that doing God's bidding? One can never run out of material which declares the glory of Jesus. God spoke from heaven when Jesus was baptized of John, declaring, "this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). His birth occurred just as it was predicted centuries before. He was compassionate toward the poor (Luke 10); He was considerate of women; He showed great consideration to children (Matt. 18:1-3). His treatment of the sinful causes one to sing "Christ is Precious" (1 Peter 2:6, 7.) No wonder it is with such enthusiasm that we frequently sing, "What a Friend We Have In Jesus." Certainly to preach Jesus is to preach God's bidding.

When I began preaching I don't remember ever having Christians, especially preachers, question the terms of God's plan of salvation. Then, along in the 1950's I was in a meeting of preachers when one of the

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preachers stated that we ought not be five steppers. I at first thought I was doing something very wrong, but as I listened and studied I concluded it wasn't bad after all. My chart was painted with a set of steps leading into the church. On those five steps were the words, hear, believe, repent, confess, be baptized. I helped many folks do God's bidding by teaching those five steps. I even held up five fingers at times. I have learned that there are always those who try to be different, but usually pass out of the picture after a short run.

Step one. Hear! The plan of salvation begins by giving something for people to hear. Jesus taught, "If a man have ears to hear, let him hear. And he said unto them, take heed what ye hear." On Pentecost day the Jews enquired, "how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?" (Acts 2: 8). The Romans asked, "how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" (Rom. 10:14).

Step two. Believe. Why hear? To the Jews he said, "I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). The great commission commands that we teach people to believe. The Romans also understood that one must believe according to Romans 10:14.

Step three. One must reverse his thinking. This is called repentance. J. W. McGarvey says, "The difficulty is to induce them to repent" (98). Even when some understand that they must repent, they have no clear understanding of what repentance consists. Some think of it as walking down the isle and giving the preacher his hand. Some believe it to be godly sorrow. Paul teaches that repentance is preceded by godly sorrow (2 Cor. 7:10); it is followed by restitution (Matt. 3:8), Some think they can repent and continue in their old sinful acts or remain in doctrinal error and still be saved. It takes more than lip service to sincerely submit to the authority of the Lord.

Step four. Confess. The Ethiopian Eunuch said, "I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." (Acts 8: 37; 1 John 4:15; Matt. 16:16). Jesus promised that when the sinner makes the good confession that He (Jesus) will confess the sinner's name to the Father (Matt. 10:32). Even if it means suffering and death one must not be afraid or ashamed to confess the "sweetest name on mortal tongue."

Step five. Baptism. It is extremely important and just as much a part of the plan of salvation as any of the other steps. In fact, one may do all the other four and still be lost. Some declare, "baptism is of no value." Yet Peter tells us as he compares our salvation to Noah's, "the like figure whereunto baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the

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filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:21), Why will men say baptism has nothing to do with saving one when Peter says it does? Whom will you believe?

It is the difference between being in Christ and out of Christ. (Gal. 3:27). It is the difference between being in the body (the church) and being out of the body, (the church) (1 Cor. 12:13). In the watery grave of baptism is where one reaches the blood which washes away his sins. Peter told the Pentecost converts that their sins would be remitted in baptism (Acts 2:38). There are many examples of conversion in the book of Acts. Not one single time was there one converted, saved, or added to the body of Christ without being immersed in water. Preacher, “water doesn't save anybody.” I have never known a faithful gospel preacher who said it did. However, water baptism is the act of obedience, when prompted by faith and preceded by genuine repentance, does what God says it will do. It saves one. The person who does the teaching and baptizing is doing what God bids him do.

Doing God’s bidding doesn't stop with the preaching of first principles. No one doing God’s bidding can avoid or refuse to preach about the church. The apostle Paul wrote the book of Ephesians about A.D. 62. In it we learn that the church was in the eternal purpose of God (Eph. 3:11). One reading the letter could only determine that in God’s mind the church was important.

She was meant to be the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:25, 26).

Do you think Paul thought the church was important? It must surely be such in the sight of God. Do you suppose Paul believed he was preaching God’s bidding when he preached to the church at Ephesus that there is just “one body, and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph. 4:1-6)?

One must be in the church to be saved. Every day when a person obeys the five steps which have been pointed out, the Lord adds him to the church (Acts 2:47). If they, like the people on Pentecost, “continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42) they will be saved eternally.

Paul declared, “[Y]e are many members yet one body” (1 Cor. 12:20). That one body is the church (Matt. 16:18); the family (Col. 3:26; Rom. 8:29). Biblically there are just as many bodies as there are churches; just as many kingdoms as there are churches; as many families

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of God as there are churches. There is just one kingdom, one family, one body and therefore there is just one church.

I sometimes hear it said, “I’m a church of Christ.” The phrases, Church of Christ congregations or Church of Christ churches or Christian Church are sometimes used by some. Peter says, “if any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God” (1 Peter 4:11). May we continually strive to speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent.

In doing God’s bidding I must be sure to teach people who, (not what) how and why to worship. The New Testament points out four kinds of worship. The Athenians were worshipping God ignorantly (Acts 17:22). They worshiped all kinds of idols. Though they had an altar “to the unknown God” (Acts 17:23) ignorance veiled the right object—God! Paul was provoked at what he saw and preached to them “the God that made the world and all things therein” (Acts 17:24). Yet, one may venerate the right God and still fail to worship properly. Jesus called the worship of the Jews vain (Matt. 15:19). Those who follow the doctrines and commandments of men are worshipping in vain. Vain worship would include washing hands or feet as worship, blessing doll babies and puppie dogs, bowing before images, dipping fingers in water and making the sign of the cross, incense burning, mechanical instruments of music, dancing, marijuana smoking, nature worship, etc. Will worship (Col. 2:23) was a fault of some early Christians. It involved self punishment, abstaining from certain foods, but was not what God wanted! True worship is that which God expects. It is easy to learn the elements of true worship. It must be directed to the right object—God, be in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). God has never left man to his own determination of that in which he will engage as worship. In our day people are often more determined to do that which pleases them without even trying to learn if it pleases God. How one worships is often being decided by what the denominational friends of our children want with the idea that engaging in what pleases them will lead them to Christ. Such is not doing God’s bidding. Cain evidently tried to please himself. It cost him dearly (Gen. 4:13). Nadab and Abihu substituted and died at the hand of God (Lev. 10:1-2).

The New Testament prescribes five actions or expressions of true worship “when ye come together therefore into one place” (1 Cor. 11:20). The Word of God must be preached, taught or read. Christians are to observe the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:24). Everyone is to give of his prosperity every Sunday (1 Cor. 16:1-2). Prayers are to be offered to

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God and we are to sing with grace in our hearts to the Lord (Col. 3:16). Cf. Acts 2:42; Colossians 3:17.

Doing God's bidding demands that the truth be taught regarding marriage and the home. God created man, saw that he needed a companion and provided woman for his helper. The relationship was to be a life long one. Drunkenness, incompatibility or desertion is no reason to start another marriage. God despises divorce (Mal. 2:14-16): "I hate putting away, says the Lord." There is only one sin for which God has granted the privilege for the innocent person to marry. Preachers doing God's bidding will make it clear that only fornication justifies divorce and remarriage. Incidentally, baptism does not sanctify the sin of adultery and make it holy. If a mate has been discarded because he committed fornication, whoever married him commits adultery along with him. It makes no difference that children may be involved. God's law does not change. The lake of fire is believed of God to be the just punishment for fornication (Rev. 21:8). Preacher friend, do God's bidding by preaching the truth on marriage and divorce.

Doing God's bidding requires the preacher, teacher including every faithful Christian to be acquainted with the Bible well enough to answer truthfully the questions with which he shall be confronted almost daily. This requires study. He will recognize error when he knows the Bible.

Preaching God's bidding requires as well that the preacher or elder know his congregation. Knowing the needs of people will enable the preacher to better prepare lessons which will benefit the audience more. Association and involvement with people helps the preacher to be aware of the needs of the congregation. He will be able to empathize, communicate and share concerns with individuals.

Jesus comforted individuals. When Lazarus died Jesus comforted Mary and Martha. He wept with them. When a woman was taken in adultery He showed compassion and mercy when others would have stoned her. He did not fail to give stern rebukes to the hypocritical responses of the Pharisees. He addressed the Sadducees for their failing to believe in the resurrection. The woman at the well was comforted and encouraged. When rebuke was necessary He did not fail to give it. When encouragement was important He offered it.

Jimmy Jividen in *Reaching for Passion* says there is a time for "feel bad" sermons. The time may be right for one to "feel bad" for his sinful life. People on Pentecost were made to "feel bad" and cried out to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren what shall we do?" (69-76).

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There is a time for a "feel good" sermon. The eunuch after baptism went on his way rejoicing. It ought to be a time for rejoicing when one sinner repents.

Who is ready to preach? Once it was the case that if one could talk pretty well in public and hold a Bible in his hand brethren thought he was ready to preach. Who is ready to be a doctor, or a nurse, or an auto mechanic or an airplane pilot? Why, one who has prepared by teaching and training. Do you really want to preach? Get some sound teaching from faithful brethren in West Virginia School of Preaching.

Do you really want to preach? Take care of your personal life. It is easy to fall into the Devil's traps. Song of Solomon 1:6 says, "They made me keeper of the vineyard; of my own have I not kept." "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine, continue in them, for in so doing thou shalt save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Tim. 4:16). It matters not how many Scriptures one may quote or how many good sermons he possesses or how capable he may be, if he does not believe with all of his heart that the Gospel is the power by which men are saved he is not ready to do God's bidding. No one is ready to preach unless he is totally convicted that the Gospel and the Gospel only will save the souls to whom he is preaching.

Preachers must not be arrogant, conceited or filled with egotism. George Bailey says, "A man stuck on himself," is "stuck with himself," for he has himself on his hands and nobody else wants him (13).

In years gone by, it was quite common to hear of a preacher who had resigned a work, left town and behind him were a bunch of bills unpaid. Brethren often paid them off, but it hurt the reputation of the preacher. Of course, the preacher must be honest with God. He must handle the Word of God carefully without deceit. He isn't trying to fool anyone.

Preachers are not ready to do God's bidding until they have spent time praying for God's help as they prepare the lesson and above all when time comes to deliver it. It ought always be the case that I pray, "not my will, but thine be done." It is God's Word we are trying to convey to others. Let us be aware that we need God's help and guidance in every sermon that we preach.

We must first be convinced that what we are preaching is really worth while. I was told early on in my preparation to preach that there is a difference in "having to say something" and "having something to say." I ought not to preach a thing if I am in doubt. "Prove all things, hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21).

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We must do God's bidding with a proper attitude. How do I feel toward those who do not agree with me? It is sad when preacher, or anyone else, thinks more of his opinion than he does the glorious church of the Lord. There is no place for a factious, splintering, splitting preacher or anyone else, in the church of our Lord. Such a person needs to examine himself and repent. I know some preachers who are so dogmatic that it doesn't matter how unnecessary a matter is to the salvation of the soul, if a fellow preacher doesn't agree with that one, there is no fellowship. They withdraw from churches, fellow preachers and anyone else who doesn't happen to see it just their way. These cannot successfully do God's bidding.

God wants us to build the church, not tear it down! He wants us to save souls, not drive them away! He wants us to be peace makers, not peace breakers! May God hasten the day when we are all workers together with God. Do God's bidding!

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#### **Biographical Sketch**

Denver E. Cooper was born at Cairo, WV in 1923. He was raised in Parkersburg, WV where he attended and was baptized at the Lynn Street Church of Christ. His preaching spans 65 years, most of which has been spent in the Ohio Valley. Sixty-one years ago Denver married Florence Smith of Sistersville, WV. Nine children were in the family. One son preaches. Two sons-in-law preach. There are 26 grandchildren and 28 great grandchildren.

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# **AN OVERVIEW OF HABAKKUK**

MARK WEAVER

## ***Introduction***

An Overview is a “general review or survey” (*Webster’s* 1029). Therefore, the material in this study will be of a general nature, with the intent of presenting the message of the book of Habakkuk. In order to comprehend the book, its background, including the social, political, geographical, and historical situation, must be known. To more clearly appreciate the message to its original auditors, it will be divided into the prophet’s queries and God’s responses, along with the meaning of the prophet’s prayer that closes the book. The very fact that the book of Habakkuk is part of the canon of Scripture indicates to Christians that there must be some value in it to God’s people today. In order to better convey that information, the book will be examined as a whole to glean its lessons for our time.

## ***The Background of Habakkuk***

The book of Habakkuk was written in approximately 606 B.C., early in the reign of King Jehoiakim, and the name Habakkuk means “embrace or cling” (Hailey 271). This is appropriate in that, by what he writes, he both embraces Israel in its time of trouble, and clings to God as the people’s only salvation. He bears the distinction of being the last prophet to write before the carrying away of Israel into the Babylonian captivity.

God’s prophet Habakkuk spoke to Israel in a time of moral decay, when Israel had departed far from the commandments of God, as evidenced by the prophet’s complaint in the very beginning of the first chapter. He cries out to God about the violence and the perversion of justice in the land. The people of God had become worldly, materialistic,

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and selfish. Clearly, God’s chosen people had turned away from God, and He, in turn, had turned away from Israel.

The political scene, from Habakkuk’s point of view, was just as depressing. Josiah, the great king and reformer, had been gravely wounded at the battle of Megiddo, and later died in Jerusalem. His office was filled by Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and finally Zedekiah. There was no righteous king after Josiah, and Judah was in her death throes.

The political situation in the East was changing. Across the Fertile Crescent, the wide band of arable land that roughly follows the path of the Euphrates River, Egypt and her eastern adversary Assyria had competed to be the preeminent superpower of the ancient world. However, just as God’s prophet Nahum had said, Assyria was about to fall. Judah had been crushed between the two superpowers before, but God reveals to Habakkuk that neither Egypt nor Assyria will be the cause of Judah’s woes; rather, it will be someone they do not expect.

A new power was rising in the East: the Chaldeans (Babylon). Assyria and Egypt had dominated Judah’s politics for quite some time, but it was the Babylonians, to whom Hezekiah had shown all that was in his treasure house, who were the real threat now. At the battle of Carchemish, the remnant of the Assyrian army, aided by the Egyptians under Pharaoh Necho, was thoroughly defeated by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar. Judah is temporarily in bondage to Egypt, while Nebuchadnezzar returns to Babylon to be made king. When he returns, Judah will become a vassal state until the final carrying away and destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (Kessinger 24).

The book of Habakkuk is presented in three chapters, which can be designated: a burden, a vision, and a prayer. In the first chapter, the prophet makes his complaint to God, he is told of the impending punishment to fall upon Judah, and he faces a problem of faith. In the second chapter, the prophet listens, is told of the punishment of Babylon, and by faith finds a solution. In the third chapter, the prophet prays, declares the power of God, and defines a faith that is full of assurance (Daugherty).

## ***A Burden: The Complaint of the Prophet***

*O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save! Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for*

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*spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention. Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth.* (Hab. 1:2-4, emp. added)

The prophet begins with a complaint to the Lord about the moral condition that surrounds him in Judah. He declares that he is crying out to the Lord that the land is overcome with violence and that he continually sees iniquity. Justice and judgment are weakened, because the few righteous who are left are surrounded by those who delight in wickedness. What disturbs the prophet most is that the Lord seems oblivious.

Habakkuk voices the concerns of the Israelites of his day, as well as the Christian today. Those who truly love and follow the Lord are continually dismayed by the wickedness they see in the world, both then and now. Habakkuk clearly believes that God has the power to correct the situation, and is mystified as to why He does not! Many Christians today have the same problem. In our human nature, we want God to act immediately in the way we think He should. Habakkuk will receive an answer to his question, but it is neither the answer he expected, nor wanted! God operates on His own timetable and with His own methods.

### **The Punishment of Judah**

*Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvelously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you. 6 For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwelling places that are not theirs.* (Hab. 1:5-6, emp. added)

God speaks to Habakkuk and reveals that He will do something that the prophet will not believe. He will raise up the Chaldeans, a nation not expected to be a threat to Judah. Instead of punishing Judah directly by His hand, God will use the Chaldeans to carry out His will for Judah. Part of the reason the prophet, and all Judah, are astounded by God's use of the Chaldeans is because of the Chaldean nature, which the Lord describes in verses six through eleven.

The Chaldeans, known to us as the Babylonians, are a bitter, hasty, warlike nation. "They are called 'bitter' because of their fierce and cruel

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behavior toward their conquered, and 'hasty' because of their impetuous decisions and rapid movements" (Hailey 277). Their warlike nature is shown in the Bible's description of their cavalry and their desire for violence (Hab. 1:8-9). They are such fierce fighters that they are unimpressed by fortifications, and the greatness of princes and kings is as nothing to them. It is interesting that the description of their methods of war includes the use of earthen mounds to capture strong points. This is used as an illustration to show that the Babylonians are greatly skilled in the art of war.

The seeds of their own destruction are shown in the pride that they exhibit. They are being raised up by God to do His bidding, but they mistakenly believe it is their own idols, and their own power that cause their might. They are blissfully unaware that they are nothing more, nor less, than tools in the Creator's hand. "It was explained to the prophet, however, that the Lord would use the Chaldeans as a mere tool—to punish Israel—and then, as an unrighteous people, they too would be judged by their Maker (cf. Jer. 25:8-14). The situation, though, was clearly beyond human analysis" (Jackson).

### **A Problem of Faith**

*Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?* (Hab. 1:13, emp. added)

God's stunning answer to the prophet's first complaint leaves Habakkuk with another problem: how can God use a nation even more wicked than Judah to punish Judah's wickedness? Indeed, this seems to shake the prophet's faith. The problem lies in Habakkuk's own understanding of God's providential care. God can use the wickedness of human beings to further His own causes and desires, just as He used Pilate to allow Jesus to be crucified. Habakkuk, however, does not have the completed revelation of Scripture that Christians enjoy today.

In Habakkuk 1:12, the prophet states that because God is from everlasting, the righteous remnant of Judah will not die. He is fully assured that God will save His people as He has done in the past. Although he is in full acceptance of the fact that God must correct Judah, he is mystified as to how God in His Holiness can look upon the evil of the Babylonians.

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In Habakkuk 1:14-17, the prophet questions whether the Babylonians will be allowed to continue to harvest nations, as a fishermen harvests fish. His great concern seems to be that God will allow the Babylonians to continue in their evil ways without any interference from the Divine Power. Habakkuk sees that the Babylonians are so enthralled with their own might, that it has become their god. Is this state of affairs to be allowed to continue, the prophet questions? God will answer him in chapter two.

### **A Vision: The Prophet Listens**

*I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.* (Hab. 2:1, emp. added)

The prophet will now keep silent, and watch to see what answer he will receive. In this, he displays the excellent character of one who truly obeys and fears God. So many things in our own lives would be best handled by patiently waiting to see what God will do! The prophet is convinced that God will help him to understand his perplexity, and that the Judge of all the earth will do right (Gen. 18:5). Notice also his willingness to be reproved, another character trait of the faithful servant of God.

God answers beginning in Habakkuk 2:2: *“And the LORD answered me, and said, ‘Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it’”* (emp. added). There are differing opinions as to whether the phraseology in this verse means to write it very large, or to make the language very plain, but either way the message is to appear in such a forceful way so as no one can misunderstand. Because of the ungodliness in the land, Habakkuk is most likely surrounded by other false prophets, who will attempt to somehow “gentle” or “minimize” the message the prophet brings from God. Habakkuk is to make the language so plain that this will be impossible. The message is to be so plain that it will cause repentance in the wicked, and the righteous to be forewarned.

The Lord then informs the prophet and the people that although these things will not happen immediately, they will happen soon. The prophecy is for an appointed time! There is no uncertainty as to whether or not it will be fulfilled.

But what of the prophet’s question? How can God use a more evil people than Judah to punish Judah? Habakkuk 2:4 says, *“Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith”*

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(emp. added). Here, God makes a comparison between the wickedness of the Babylonians, and the spiritual state of the righteous remnant in Judah. This verse of Scripture is quoted three times in the New Testament at Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and Hebrews 10:38. Paul uses it in Romans and Galatians to show the necessity of living by faith, rather than by the works of the law. The Hebrew writer uses this verse to remind Hebrew Christians to continue in the true faith and not turn back to the old law.

God now describes the Babylonians as a people made treacherous and proud to the point that they seem like a drunken man. The Babylonians are never satisfied with their victories and conquests. They are continually searching for captives and new places to conquer. In fact, here the Lord is informing the prophet that He is well aware of the evil nature of the Babylonians. This will be their undoing.

### **Destruction of the Babylonians**

In Habakkuk 2:6-20, five woes are pronounced on the Babylonians that will cause their utter destruction. The prophet’s question is answered: just as God will use the Babylonians to punish Judah for her wickedness, so God, in His own time, and according to His own purpose, will destroy the Babylonians for the good of His people. The Babylonians will not be allowed to continue to harvest nations, gather captives and destroy cities. God is still on His throne, and He rules in the kingdoms of man. These five woes reflect the crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Babylonians, and the punishment that God will consequently meet out to them.

The First Woe: because Babylon had plundered many nations, she in turn would be plundered. After rampaging across the ancient world for a period of approximately seventy-five years, Babylon would be destroyed in 539 B.C. by the Medes and the Persians.

The Second Woe: because Babylon had built her empire through cruelty and godless gain, it would not last. Babylon’s mighty walls and massive fortifications were built by slave labor. The human harvest of their warlike ways was used in massive building projects. These projects would be to no avail. Despite Babylon’s imposing walls, she would be betrayed from within because walls and fortifications alone will not build a lasting empire. Righteousness alone will cause nations to stand.

The Third Woe: because Babylon had built her cities by cruelty, inequity, and bloodshed she would be destroyed. “The prophet sees the slaves dying under the blows of cruel task masters or falling from

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weariness and hunger as they are mercilessly driven on in their tasks” (Hailey 286). The Third Reich and the Soviet Union were undone by their own cruelty; the same fate would befall the Babylonians.

The Fourth Woe: because Babylon had used her power to shame nations in the same way that a man might use alcohol to shame his neighbor, they in turn would be ashamed. Their abuse of power would cause them to be stripped of power. Just as they had abused the powerless, they would one day become the powerless themselves. It is interesting to note that, according to Daniel 5, Babylon fell while its leaders were attending a drunken feast (Daugherty).

The Fifth Woe: because Babylon trusted in idols, it would be shown that idols could not save them. The remainder of the chapter discusses the utter foolishness of man in regards to idolatry. Isaiah says in 44:19 (ESV) “*No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, Half of it I burned in the fire; I also baked bread on its coals; I roasted meat and have eaten. And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?*” (emp. added). Babylon indeed had fallen down before a block of wood! Their utter foolishness in the practice of idolatry had led to their other sins. The final comparison in the chapter is that of the Babylonians worshiping wood and stone while the true and living God is in His holy Temple in heaven and will judge them.

### **Faith Finds a Solution**

Now the prophet is satisfied! Judah will be corrected for its unrighteousness, and the Babylonians will be stopped by the power of God. Although still frightened by the oncoming judgment, Habakkuk is fully aware that God will still be with the faithful remnant of Judah. While using Babylon, a nation more wicked than Judah, God will still do right for His people. While the prophet looks out upon the nations, and now knows the future to come, he is comforted by the knowledge that God is both just and faithful.

### **A Prayer: The Prophet Prays**

“*O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy*” (Hab. 3:2, emp. added). Habakkuk now turns his attention to a beautiful prayer. In verse 2, he acknowledges the fear he feels because of the coming judgment upon Judah and makes three

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requests of the Lord. First, he asks the Lord to “revive his work.” This is nothing less than a request by the prophet for God to bring Israel back into the Promised Land and for them to once again be His chosen people. This is exactly what the Lord will do after the seventy years of Babylonian captivity are accomplished.

The second request that the prophet makes in verse 2 is that God may “make it known.” This request is that God will make the world know that it was God who brought Israel back. It had been a long time since God had brought Israel out of Egypt with an outstretched arm. It appears that this is a request by Habakkuk that once again, the heathen would know Jehovah and fear Him (Coffman 103).

The third request that Habakkuk makes is that God would “in judgment remember mercy.” Some seem to believe that God showed mercy by allowing Judah to return to the Promised Land. While this is true, there is a more immediate meaning. In light of other biblical passages, it seems likely that this is a reference to God’s providential care for the righteous. God is always concerned about the welfare of those who love Him. Psalm 37:25 reads, “*I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread*” (emp. added. Also, consider Psalm 116:15: “*Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints*” (emp. added). Although Judah is to be destroyed, God’s providential care will yet extend to the righteous.

### **The Power of God**

Habakkuk now recounts some of God’s past deeds. He gives glory to God by pointing out the times in the past when God has helped His people. He uses this as a sure sign that, just as God has helped them in the past, He will help them in the future. Verse 6 says that His ways are everlasting. In other words, they are unchanging. God is eternal and does not change (Mal. 3:6). Just as He used the plagues to bring Egypt to its knees, and caused the sun to stand still in its place for Joshua, He is yet able to do whatever is necessary for His people.

In verse 16, we have a picture of the prophet’s reaction when he first heard of God’s impending judgment upon Judah. Habakkuk is overtaken with fear: his body trembles, his lips quiver, and rottenness has entered his bones. It is not that Habakkuk thinks his own life is in jeopardy; this wrath that is to come would be frightening for anyone to behold.



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## **Faith, Full of Assurance**

*Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: 18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. 19 The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.* (Hab. 3:17-19, emp. added).

The book of Habakkuk closes with the most beautiful thought it contains. In effect, the prophet declares that no matter what happens, he will still trust in God. Job said, in Job 13, “*Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him . . .*” (emp. added). This is the same thought that Habakkuk displays. “This is the prophet’s triumphant avowal, that he recognizes that the Lord who is coming to deliver his people is the same saving God that he experiences in his own personal life” (Szeles 56). The prophet has written a roller coaster of emotion from despair at what he thought was God’s indifference, to horror at God’s solution, and finally to peace that passes all understanding.

He closes the book with the statement that indicates that God will direct his steps. Just as a deer is sure-footed as it navigates its way up a rocky hillside, so will Habakkuk’s path be because of Jehovah God. Certainly Habakkuk would agree with Jeremiah who said, “*O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps*” (10:23, emp. added).

## **Conclusion**

The book of Habakkuk contains powerful lessons for the Christian today. The burden, vision, and prayer of Habakkuk are all worth considering, as we seek to walk the narrow way. The just must live by faith, an enduring faith in our all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving God. We must also trust God, in spite of all the challenges of this world. Knowing and studying the book of Habakkuk will help us to do that very thing.

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## **Biographical Sketch**

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## **LEADERSHIP IN THE BOOK OF MICAH**

### *Micah 3:9-12*

EMANUEL B. DAUGHERTY

It is always a privilege to be asked to appear on a lecture program—to appear on the West Virginia School of Preaching Lectures is truly an honor. I give my deep and sincere thanks to the elders of the Hillview Terrace church of Christ, the esteemed director, Denver Cooper, and the lectureship committee for inviting me to speak.

The theme this year focuses on four of the great prophets of the Old Testament—Jonah, Micah, Nahum and Habakkuk. The lecture for this hour is from the book of Micah centering on Leadership. While there are several passages that are applicable and will be discussed, we will use chapter three as a base for our lecture.

#### ***The Temperament and Disposition of the Prophets***

One of the things that makes a study of the prophets so needful and helpful for our day is that they were the preachers of the Old Testament and thus, examples for those who would preach in every age. Unlike preachers of our day, the prophets under the Old Covenant were inspired men whose message was not from their own will, but they were “holy men of God [who] spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:19-20). Men today do not and cannot speak by inspiration, but the Lord requires of them that they speak from His inspired book, “if any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God” (1 Peter 4:11).

The prophets, Jesus, the apostles and evangelists of old were real preachers. What better examples may we have for Gospel preachers today? Men like Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Amos, Peter, John, Paul, Stephen, James and Jude. They were absolutely fearless whether standing before kings or common men. They did not seem to care that

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they were putting their very lives in jeopardy. They had great moral courage and conviction to condemn the grossest of sins without fear or favor. They make the preachers of today ask themselves whether or not they are as true to their calling as the ancient prophets were to theirs, or whether they are simply mouthing things that the people of the day want to hear. Is he a crowd pleaser or a God pleaser? Someone has said, “Today we do not kill the prophets, instead we ask them to dinner.” Today, perhaps as much as anytime in the history of the world, we need preachers who have a sense of dignity, integrity, sobriety and solemnity. He is not to be a man of over-inflated ego, swelled with his own sense of greatness, but one of humility and self-deprecation. We need men in the church of Christ who will “preach the word, in season and out of season” no matter how unwelcome or unpopular it may be.

#### ***The Need for Ethics in Leadership***

Micah was God’s man of the hour for the 7th century B. C., but he is a much-needed spokesman for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, too. He is a modern prophet with a modern message, and this is no more clearly evident than in his scathing condemnation of the leadership of Samaria and Judah. Micah lived in a time of transition. In just a few years, the northern kingdom of Israel would be swept away by the infamously wicked Assyrians (721 B.C.). His warnings against oppression of the poor and sins of the wealthy served as their condemnation and the reason for their becoming “wanderers among the nations” (Hos. 9:17). Judah, on the other hand, would survive for 135 years more, but she, too, would go into captivity to Babylon for her sins. Micah is the first of the Minor Prophets to prophesy of the coming captivity of God’s people. He predicted, “Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed like a field, Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins, and the mountain of the temple like the bare hills of the forest” (3:12).

When a country is going into moral demise, political corruption, and headed for national ruin, sin is always rampant among the general populace. But how does the fall of a nation come about? Is it not because of corruption and ethical sin among its leaders? Micah pointed out these truths in no uncertain terms as he condemned the rich, the princes, the judges, the land barons, the false prophets and sinful priests. Leadership, whether of a nation, state, city, or community is to be judged more harshly and punished more severely, by virtue of the very fact that they are leaders! James stated the leadership principle very well “my brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a

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stricter judgment” (3:1). In the secular realm, leaders decide policies, enact laws, make judgments, assign penalties, and give direction to the people who must follow their lead. Religiously, Hosea expressed it this way, “like people, like priest” (4:9), saying that in the end, the will of sinful people overrides the will of God! The priest, who is supposed to be the leader, is to impose the will of God on the people, but their hardness of heart and stubborn rebellion to God’s will causes the religious leadership to say what the people want to hear. Isaiah said of those of his day, they “say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits, get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us” (Isa. 30:10-11).

Does not God’s servant in this day have a divine obligation to cry out against sin wherever it is found, whether in the workplace, civil government, society, or the religious realm? Why are preachers of the Gospel condemned for speaking against crimes against the people by those in high places in business and government? Why are they accused of preaching politics when they point out the sins of presidents, judges, governors and corrupt politicians? Have not the preachers of our nation been silenced by judges and public opinion on social issues such as abortion, euthanasia, gambling, homosexuality, alcohol, drugs, the removal of prayer and Bible reading and everything connected with Christianity from the classroom, courtrooms, and other government buildings? One cannot even say a prayer for the safety of participants in athletic games, or give a baccalaureate address or benediction at high school graduations! Minority religions have more rights than Christians in the United States of America!

### ***Israel’s Corrupt Leadership***

The thread of bad leadership of God’s people winds through the whole of the Book of Micah. In chapters two and three one finds the prophet taking dead aim on the leadership of the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Micah lists five categories of faulty leadership:

- Wealthy, greedy nobles, and land barons (2:1-2; 8-11; 1 Kings 21:1-15).
- Evil, corrupt rulers and princes (3:1, 9).
- Bribery taking judges (3:11; 7:3).
- Mercenary false prophets (3:5-8, 11; 2:11).
- Hireling priests (3:11).

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The sins of this worthless leadership resulted in oppression of the common people and rebellion against God. Some of the sins on which the prophet concentrated were greed, covetousness, and abuse of power. Their avarice was described and denounced in detail (2:1-2, 8, 9). It is hard to imagine leadership so unscrupulous and consumed with greed that their hours, even when supposedly resting, were filled with scheming and devising evil against their neighbors and fellow-men. Micah describes the evil planning of these land-grabbers as:

- Premeditated, “they devise iniquity upon their beds.”
- It was willful and deliberate, “they practice it.”
- It was habitual. Their cheating of others was an ongoing, oft-happening practice.
- They devise it. Others did not lead them into it, but it was from their own wicked heart.
- They carried it out. The stealing of their neighbor’s inheritance, his family property, was taken because “it is in the power of his hand.” That power was his because of corrupt judges and magistrates looking the other way.

It was their own personal greed that brought them to perpetrate these crimes against their neighbors and countrymen. It was of their own invention, from their own evil hearts that these schemers conjured their wickedness. They plotted, forecasted and fulfilled it in thought before it became an act. “Truly, this only I have found: that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes” (Eccles. 7:29). One of the seven abominable things God hates, is “a heart that devises wicked imaginations” (Prov. 6:19). As someone has said, “Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Today, greedy corporate heads and CEO’s are constantly in the news for their scandalous scheming and plotting to get more and more for their shareholders and in their greed they get caught up in embezzling, illegal trading, and skimming profits for themselves (Enron, Tyco, Martha Stewart).

### ***Micah’s Condemnation of Leadership in Israel and Judah***

*First*, and pointed out specifically by Micah, are the princes, rulers, judges, magistrates and great men dealing primarily in civil affairs. The prophet likened their shady business practices to cannibalism (3:1-3). “Skinning” a person in a business deal was as common then as it is now.

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Some Christians pride themselves on their abilities to skin another in a trade or business deal. The prophet described the rich princes and nobles, who dreamed up plans to take over their neighbor's property (2:1), then they got the judge to receive the reward (7:3), and in the end "the women of my people you cast out of their pleasant houses; from their young children you take away my glory forever" (2:9). He concluded, "it is an evil time" (2:3). Micah said of these rulers of the house of Jacob, "Their hands are upon that which is evil to do it diligently (they do evil with both hands, Berkeley Version) . . . thus they weave it together" (7:3). It is little wonder that the prophet said of them, "The best of them is a briar; the most upright is worse than a thorn hedge" (7:4).

Micah accused the nobles of his day, saying, "You build up Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity" (3:10). No doubt this was true both metaphorically and literally. Isaiah, Micah's contemporary, said:

How is the faithful city become a harlot! she that was full of justice! righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers. Your silver is become dross, your wine mixed with water. Your princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves; every one loves bribes, and follows after rewards: they judge not the fatherless, neither does the cause of the widow come unto them. (1:21-23)

Leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs to be just as concerned about the poor, widows and orphans, the weak and helpless, all who are abused, mistreated, and needing the care of others (James 1:27; Gal. 2:10; 6:10; the parable of the Good Samaritan, Luke 10:30-37etc.). Many times the churches of Christ are last in preaching on issues affecting the poor and downtrodden of society. We can preach on these kinds of issues without becoming wrapped up in the "social gospel." We should be the first to cry out against social and economic injustices, greed and avarice. Whether it is an individual or a large corporation, where men and women are being mistreated, we need to lend our voices to the outcry against it. These are sins that will cost men their souls. Micah talked about "the scant measure that is abominable" (6:10); we use the word "profiteering." Micah spoke of "wicked balances and deceitful weights" (6:11); we use the words "price gouging" and "extortionate prices." Jesus warned against covetousness and greed, so must we warn (Luke 12:15; James 3:8; 1 Tim. 6:6-12; James 5:1-5).

*Second*, the prophet shows others contributing to the error of the day, the false prophets and hireling priests. These were blasted mightily by

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the preaching of Micah. Those who felt the sting of Micah's words said to him, "prophesy not, they prophesy" (2:6). Again, the statement of Micah is provided with a parallel passage from Isaiah:

For it is some rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of Jehovah; that say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophesy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits, get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us. (30:9)

There have been in every age, those who are evil, corrupt, men-pleasers, who are selfish and covetous, false teachers and idolaters—a blight on the people of God. Their numbers are legion; these sons of perdition "who were of old ordained to condemnation" (Jude 4). Today is no exception; many are echoing the words of those who opposed the prophets; those who are out to change the church and make it a denomination, to "drag the church into the 21<sup>st</sup> century kicking and screaming." These self-styled change-agents would have fit in nicely with the false prophets and wicked priests of that ancient time. We have those who would make the preaching of the Gospel wholly a social gospel, with the salvation of one's soul as a secondary part of God's plan. Some who would restructure the church have paved the way for instrumental music in worship, eating the Lords' supper any day of the week. They say, "everything we do in life is worship;" the present worship of the church is "wearisome and boring" they say. They prefer greater variety, with worship more exciting and entertaining. Also, they place women in positions and have them filling roles that God never intended, claiming Bible statements governing women's roles were cultural and not principles for all the Christian age. They deny baptism is for the remission of sins, and refer to the church as a denomination among denominations, that it is an American church, strictly a product of the so-called Stone-Campbell Movement. They are embarrassed to speak of the Gospel as the one and only source of religious truth and that the church is an exclusive body, reserved for only those "in Christ." They are calling these new congregations "Community Churches," "the Grace Church of Christ," "the River of Life Fellowship," or some other contemporary name, and seemingly desire no fellowship with the Lord's people. Ultimately, their aim is to have the undenominational church of Christ, replaced with an ecumenical, progressive, entertainment oriented, man-centered denomination.

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Have times really changed? Is not spiritual Israel, the church (Gal. 6:16), suffering in many places from poor leadership today as did those of Isaiah's day? Have we not many in our churches and schools who are turning our membership, and our children over to those which "cause them to err, and destroy the way of their paths?" (Isa. 3:12). Instead of challenging the people of our generation to seek "the old paths wherein is the good way" (Jer. 6:16), we have men and women who are charting a new course for themselves and the church! They appeal to the emotions, providing that which is sensuous and pleasurable to the flesh and ignoring the needs of the spirit of man. As did Israel of old who wanted a king in order to be like the nations about them, they have rejected God as their King and are seeking to be like the denominations (1 Sam. 8:5-7). As in our nation, so, also, in our churches, we are reaping the fruits of a generation who have rejected the tried and true ways of God and are going off to do their own thing. And many of these individuals occupy the places of leadership in the Body of Christ!

### ***How Do We Raise Up Godly Leaders?***

The starting place must begin in the home with godly mothers and fathers. There is no substitute for a pious family life where boys and girls are nurtured in the admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). With a godly father and mother setting the tenor for spiritual training, the spiritual products coming from this kind of home will doubtless prove useful to the church in years to come. With virtue, truth, honesty and devotion to God being demonstrated and taught the chances are favorable that the children will learn and adopt these qualities. Fathers that are providing proper guidance and leadership in the home are proving their ability to lead the church, says Paul. A candidate for the eldership must be "one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)" (1 Tim. 3:4-5).

Leadership training in the home is complemented by strong churches with kind elders, deacons, teachers and preachers who truly love the church. Both the home-life and church-life will be places where Jesus Christ is held up as the perfect role model "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps" (1 Peter 2:21). A strong church will have people who are fully following the Lord. They are aware of their own personal example before others. They mind their thoughts, words and deeds. They are doing their best to live morally pure lives, hating the evil and loving

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the good. True Christians will be practicing the Golden Rule: "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them" (Matt. 7:12): the Fruit of the Spirit "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance" (Gal. 5:22-23). They will be adding the virtues described by Peter: "faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love" (2 Peter 1:5-9).

Good church leadership will be providing sound Bible education throughout their teaching program providing sound doctrine that enables one to grow up, leave home, and continue as an adult, to be a productive citizen in the Kingdom wherever he may be. **The number of our children leaving home and quitting the church is deplorable!** Many before they leave home! If we expect our children to remain faithful to the Lord and grow old as loyal members of the church, we must do a better job in educating them in the ways of God. Good leadership in the home and church will enable parents to send their children for higher education to schools that are determined to firmly stand for the truth. We will not give credence, support, and endorsement to those schools that are working against our homes and church training. College and university presidents have failed miserably in holding the line against liberalism in our day!

Good leadership in the church of Christ will be optimistic of the future. Yes, there are many things to fear in this world. But God has sent His Son and He is the Light! (John 1:4; 8:12). He has turned on the light in a darkened and benighted world. Those who have been obedient to His will are saved from the darkness of sin, and they have themselves, been made the light-bearers in every generation (Matt. 5:14-16). All saints must trust in God—His providence, grace, and benevolence, to see us through all life's dark hours. Understanding that we "are the light of the world" (Matt. 5), we must let our lights shine in an effort to preach the Gospel, sharing the light with the world. Christ's church is global in its outreach (Matt. 28:18-20). Let us carry and send the good news wherever men may dwell.

### ***Questions for Future Leaders***

The only way to rightly promote the cause of God is to know God's will. This can only be done by an increase in Bible knowledge. Ignorance of the will of God is always at the root of our problems (Hos. 4:6). When thinking of promoting a man to a place of leadership in the church, there are things to be considered:

Does he know the Bible? Is He able to teach? Does he do a good job of explaining the true meaning of the Scriptures? Is he currently teaching?

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Can he (is he able), will he (does he have the courage, backbone), refute false teachers, publicly if necessary? Is he a student of the Bible? Is he constantly studying, growing and developing his knowledge?

Does he love the Bible? Does he have faith in it? Will he defend it? Will he accept what it says on marriage, divorce and remarriage, the one true church, the worship of the church? What about the role of women, the mission of the church, etc., will he without succumbing to the temptation to alter, change, or compromise defer to the truth? Will he insist that the congregation be governed by the Bible and accept what it says in all matters of faith?

Does he know what is going on in the church locally and across the brotherhood? Does he read brotherhood papers and talk about the issues and problems? Has he expressed alarm with false teachers, does he know the names of any of them on the national scene and also those in the local area? Does he know of churches that have been swept away by false teachers? Is he dismayed about these departures from the faith by individuals and churches? Does he keep current with the problems that are dividing the church across the country? Does he know the danger of liberalism? Is he aware of change agents and their tactics, or is he naïve, ignorant, having his head in the sand?

Is he a people person? Does he care about people? An elder is not an office manager or simply a decision maker—he is a pastor, a shepherd. He must care about people. Has the candidate shown a true interest in people? Has he manifested true love, concern and interest in the problems of his fellow Christians?

Does he have a true interest in the work of the church or is he simply interested in the title? In other words, is he interested in the work or the office; of having a title and being in a position of authority over others—being a church “big shot?”

Does he care about the souls of others? Has he ever brought someone to Christ, or at least tried? Has he ever talked to a neighbor, friend, loved one, or a fellow worker about his soul? Does he care about the Great Commission? Are the lost souls of men and women in foreign nations a concern to him?

Is he involved now in the work of the church? Has he been a good worker in the church for a long period of time, or has he just recently gotten enthusiastic since the possibility of being an elder has come up? Is he a voluntary, willing worker? Does he visit the sick, care for the poor and needy, the widows? Does he encourage the weak, discouraged and heavy-hearted?

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Is he presently demonstrating good leadership abilities? Do people listen to him? Does he have a positive or a negative impact on the church? Would people follow him? If he is new to the local congregation, has he been there long enough for others to know the above-mentioned things about him? Did he have a letter of commendation from his previous church before placing membership with you? Have you checked out these things from the church, or churches, where he has been a member prior to coming to your congregation? In the modern-day world of fast travel and up-rooted living from place to place, churches need to be patient and as sure as they can be, before appointing new-comers into responsible places of leadership.

What about his character? Is he a person of goodness, kindness, gentleness, honesty, integrity and truthfulness? Is he easily discouraged? Does he over-react to problems that are unpleasant and disagreeable? Does he have to have his own way? Is it his way or no way? Is he radical in his assessment of problems? Has he offered solutions to problems the local church is facing that show Bible knowledge and common sense?

Is he optimistic about the future of the church? Pessimism and defeatist attitudes on the part of leaders can kill a congregation. But so can being overly optimistic. Proper balance can be achieved by wisdom, faith, trust and sober thinking and planning.

### **Conclusion**

Micah’s book is one of harsh criticism and judgment on crooked, corrupted leadership. He scathingly rebuked those of his contemporaries who were bringing harm to God’s people and taking them away from God, the princes, judges, wealthy land owners, false prophets and wayward priests.

Leadership in every age is critical to those who must live under the laws and conditions set by their good or bad policies.

Elders and preachers of the Lord’s church have a particular need to be what God wants them to be—good, loyal, vigilant, courageous, bold, sound in doctrine, sound in judgment, sound in the faith, and defenders of the faith. At the same time they must be kind and gentle, loving as fathers, easy to talk to, one who is trustworthy. All elders and preachers who are doing their work, many times without appreciation and proper credit, are indeed a great asset to Christ’s church. Such men are always needed and should be in great demand by all reasonable people. Ours is a critical time. In many ways it is as Micah described his world, *it is an evil time* (2:3). Yet we cannot give in to doubt and fear, skepticism and

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pessimism. As we march forward, let us bring the church to the next generation with faith, hope, love, joyfully optimistic in the fulfillment of our duties “Looking for that blessed hope, and glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).

Lead kindly light, amid th’encircling gloom,  
Lead thou me on;  
The night is dark and I am far from home;  
Lead thou me on.  
Keep thou my feet, I do not ask to see  
The distant scene—one step enough for me.  
(John H. Newman)

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#### **Biographical Sketch**

Emanuel Daugherty was born in Philippi, WV, in 1939, and has been married to the former Judith R. Null since 1958. They have four children and eight grandchildren. Emanuel has been preaching since 1966 and has served the church at Alkire Road, Columbus, OH, (1968-1989), Dewey Ave. Saint Marys, WV, (1989-1994). He was the first Director for West Virginia School of Preaching, also serving as one of her teachers (1994-2003). He remains with WVSOP as a teacher and also preaches for the Salem church of Christ at Glen Easton, Marshall County, WV, and is the author of *Commentary on the Book of Daniel*.

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## THE LORD IS IN HIS HOLY TEMPLE

### *Habakkuk 2:20*

CHARLES J. AEBI

Did you ever complain about how bad things are? I often hear the complaint that young people are rude, the country is going to the dogs, thieves lurk everywhere, there is no justice in the land, the church ignores God's commands, the elders do not shepherd their flocks, the flocks do not follow the shepherds, and other such things, most of which have at least some truth in them. But what would you think if God spoke up and answered your complaints? That's what He did with Habakkuk.

Habakkuk (1:1-4) complains about the sinfulness and perverted justice the prophet sees in Judah. God answers (1:5-11) that He will punish Judah by bringing the Chaldeans/Babylonians against them. Habakkuk does not see the justice of this; he complains that Babylon is worse than Judah (1:12-2:1). God answers that Babylon will also be punished (2:2-20). Habakkuk then prays with confidence in the future based on the past (chapter 3).

It is in the context of God's answer to Habakkuk's second complaint that we find the topic of our study, *The Lord Is in His Holy Temple*. The five woes God pronounces on Babylon (for plundering other nations, exalting themselves by evil gain, building cities by bloodshed, drunken violence, and idolatry) are concluded with the statement, "But the Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him" (2:20, NKJV). Some think that 2:20 is actually Habakkuk's reaction to God's evaluation of Babylon in 2:2-19 rather than God continuing to speak about Babylon (Pusey 203; Hailey 288); it really makes little difference, since the statement is recorded by a prophet inspired by God.

Habakkuk was probably contemporary with Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Zephaniah, since he records God's promise to raise up Babylon to punish

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Judah (1:6), whose sins Habakkuk decries (1:2-4). He may have written a decade or two before the first Babylonian foray into Judah in 605 B.C. His prophecy is in the form of a debate or argument with God in which Habakkuk finally acknowledges his faith in God's justice. As he writes a prayer-song in his final chapter, he reviews God's deliverance of His people in the past, and expresses his trust in God even though the enemies of God's people are coming to invade them.

### *The Lord's Holy Temple*

The LORD is in His holy temple. What, exactly, does our text mean? We know who **the LORD** is; He is the one true God, the Lord God Almighty, the great Jehovah God. He is not Baal, Chemosh, Krishna, Allah, nor any of the other gods or men that have been worshiped or that are even now worshiped. He is the great I AM. What is **His holy temple** in Habakkuk 2:20? Does it have reference to a building, or to God's people, or to heaven itself? The temple Solomon had built in Jerusalem was still standing when Habakkuk wrote, but it along with the rest of Jerusalem and Judah would fall under the Chaldean punishment God predicted in Habakkuk chapter 1, and God was now talking about the reasons He had for dealing harshly with the Chaldeans.

The context of Habakkuk 2:20 deals not with the preservation of the Jerusalem temple, but with the power of God to judge and the need for Babylon and all other nations to be quiet and reverent before Him. The temple in 2:20 is figurative, and Jehovah being in His holy temple here means God is in heaven and is in control of the affairs of men and nations, all of whom should well remember that. C. F. Keil says:

In ver. 20 the contrast is drawn between the dumb lifeless idols and the living God, who is enthroned in His holy temple, *i.e.* not the earthly temple at Jerusalem, but the heavenly temple, or the temple as the throne of the divine glory (Isa. lxvi.1), as in Mic. I.2, whence God will appear to judge the world, and to manifest His holiness upon the earth, by the destruction of the earthly powers that rise up against Him. This thought is implied in the words, "He is in His holy temple," inasmuch as the holy temple is the palace in which He is enthroned as Lord and Ruler of the whole world, and from which He observes the conduct of men (Ps. xi.4). Therefore the whole earth, *i.e.* all the population of the earth, is to be still before Him, *i.e.* to submit silently to Him, and wait for His judgment. (Keil and Delitzsch 2: 91)



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The thrust of Habakkuk 2:20 is like that of three other minor prophets' declarations: "Hear, all you peoples! Listen, O earth, and all that is in it! Let the Lord GOD be a witness against you, The Lord from His holy temple" (Mic. 1:2); "Be silent in the presence of the Lord GOD; For the day of the Lord is at hand, For the Lord has prepared a sacrifice; He has invited His guests" (Zeph. 1:7); and, "Be silent, all flesh, before the Lord, for He is aroused from His holy habitation!" (Zech. 2:13). A similar thought is voiced by David in Psalm 11:4-6:

The Lord is in His holy temple, The LORD's throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men. The LORD tests the righteous, but the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates. Upon the wicked He will rain coals; Fire and brimstone and a burning wind shall be the portion of their cup.

The temple in Jerusalem had not yet been built when David wrote this, nor when he said in Psalm 18:6, "In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, And my cry came before Him, *even* to His ears." The response was, "The LORD thundered from heaven . . . He sent from above . . . He delivered me . . ." (Ps. 18:13, 16, 19). The title of Psalm 18 tells us that David was asking God to rescue him from the hand of Saul, and David says that God answered his prayer. At that time David was not even king yet, the Jerusalem temple did not exist, and David specifies heaven as the temple to which he refers.

Most writers agree with Keil and see Habakkuk 2:20 as the power of God in contrast to the idols of 2:19. Homer Hailey says of Habakkuk 2:20:

In contrast to the dumb idols that cannot awake, arise, or teach, "Jehovah is in his holy temple"; not in the sanctuary at Jerusalem, but, as the psalmist adds to this identical phrase, "Jehovah, his throne is in heaven" (Ps. 11:4). "Let all the earth keep silence before him," silently submitting to His divine rule and judgment, rejecting the dumb idols that cannot answer or help. (288)

E. M. Zerr writes:

The thought is to show a contrast with the foolishness of idolatry and the wisdom of an intelligent Deity. An idol is only a *teacher*

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*of lies* and should not be listened to. The Lord is in his rightful place, the temple, and on the throne of the universe. Therefore when He speaks it is the truth and all the earth should be hushed and with reverent ears receive the divine words. (342)

Jack Lewis similarly connects Habakkuk 2:20 with 2:19—"The idol cannot save him, but the Lord is in his holy temple and all should keep silent before him" (64). Stephens-Hodge quotes S. R. Driver, "The prophet passes by contrast from the contempt of the dumb and helpless idols to the thought of the living God." Then he says, "Thus we are prepared for the theophany of chapter iii" (735). J. R. Dummelow exclaims, "What a contrast to these idols is the majestic God of Israel, the God of all the earth, whose Temple is in the heavens!" (590). Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown say that verse 20 puts Jehovah "in striking contrast with the idols" and that:

his holy temple—"His place" (Isaiah 26. 21); heaven (Psalm 11. 4; Jonah 2. 7; Micah 1. 2). The temple at Jerusalem is a type of it, and there God is to be worshipped. He does not lie hid under gold and silver, as the idols of Babylon, but reigns in heaven and fills heaven, and thence succours His people. (704)

### **Keep Silence Before Him**

"Let all the earth keep silence before Him" means that all men should quit their own pursuits and listen to Jehovah, who is king in heaven and who will bring them into judgment. They should, whether they are Babylonians or Israelites, submit to the one true God who is enthroned in heaven as ruler over all peoples, even those who refuse to acknowledge Him as their king but are concerned only with fulfilling their own desires. E. B. Pusey reminds us that Deuteronomy 26:15 asks God to "Look down from Your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel. . ." and Pusey says, "Since then God is in Heaven, beholding the deeds of men, Himself Unchangeable, Almighty, All-holy, *let all the earth keep silence before Him*" (203-04) . G. L. Robinson's comment on Habakkuk 2:20 is simply, "Jehovah reigns" (125).

One cannot help observing that Habakkuk 2:20 is often used in ways never envisioned by the prophet who delivered those words to his people. People sing the words, "The Lord is in His holy temple: Let all the earth keep silence before Him; Keep silence, keep silence, Keep silence before Him." They may sing this in an opening assembly in Vacation Bible School in order to get the children to quiet down, or they sing it at the

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beginning of a worship service to get the worshipers to be reverent and quit talking to their neighbors in the assembly. Thus we sometimes take words out of their context and accommodate them to an entirely different purpose. It is this writer's belief that if we are going to do this, we would do well to note that we are not using Scripture in its real meaning, but that we are adapting it to a use not intended by its author.

It may be tempting to suggest yet another meaning for those words. One may observe that the temple or house of the Lord in the New Testament is His church, and use Habakkuk 2:20 to emphasize that the Lord is in His church or in us as individual members of His church. For instance, 1 Corinthians 3:16 says the church is the temple of God, and 6:19 points to the individual Christian's body as the temple of the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 2:20-22 speaks of the church as a holy temple, a dwelling place of God, and Colossians 1:21 declares that Christ is in you. But this is not the meaning of Habakkuk 2:20 and is not the proper application of it.

The real implication of Habakkuk 2:20 for us is that God reigns, and we should in quiet submission yield our lives to His will. Jehovah and His Christ are in control, and we had better not wait until we stand before the great white throne to bow to His will. The gods of this world must not be given a hearing; we must listen to Him whose word has been given through the Holy Spirit in His servants, the apostles and prophets. Our citizenship is in heaven, which is the holy temple of the Lord before whom we silence our own desires and surrender our lives as we present our bodies a living sacrifice to be transformed into the image of Christ.

The greatness of the God we serve is highlighted by the power we see demonstrated in the wonders of what we call "nature." He who spoke the worlds into existence and set in place the "laws of nature" in our earth's winds and weather systems is the LORD who is in His holy temple, from which He rules and overrules in the affairs of men, most of which ignore Him as much as they can. However, they can ignore Him no longer when He determines that it is time to judge a nation and bring about its downfall, or when a small portion of His creation erupts into a tsunami or an earthquake or a tornado or a volcanic blast like that of Mount St. Helens. The LORD who is still in His holy temple is the same God who set the power into the atom that allows it to become an explosion difficult to imagine. He is the same LORD to whom all the earth shall one day give account as we come before His judgment bar. Surely it behooves us all to keep silence and hearken to Him instead of following our own inventions.

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### Biographical Sketch

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## **THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH**

### *Habakkuk 2:4*

BRAD POE

I thank the eldership at the Hillview Terrace church of Christ for their invitation to contribute to this lectureship program and Denver Cooper for his direction of it.

#### **Introduction: The Prophetic Inquisition of Habakkuk**

Regarding the occasion for Habakkuk, if a prophet's sandals were stirring dust and his mouth was stirring public discourse, then something must not have been right among God's people. So it was in Habakkuk's day. The exact date of his oracle is unknown but, based upon internal evidence, commentators are agreed upon a range from around 625 to around 605 B. C.<sup>1</sup> That places the setting during Judah's great downward spiral, immediately prior to the Chaldean invasion. Religious and moral conditions made God's people "ripe for judgment" (Hailey 225). Judah's sins required God to finally do what He said He would do (cf. Deut. 28:15f).

To summarize the book, Habakkuk is a short exchange, not between the prophet and the people, but between the prophet and God. The interaction begins with Habakkuk raising his voice above the ongoing evil clatter of his community to ask God, "How long are You going to let this go on?" (Hab. 1:2-4). God's answer was startling: "I am raising up the Chaldeans" to apply corrective pain (1:5-11), a prophecy satisfied when the Chaldeans (Babylon) invaded and felled Jerusalem in 597 B. C. (2 Kings 24:10-17; 2 Chron. 36:8-10) (Wiseman 117). This revelation about future, catastrophic events was the prompt for Habakkuk's second question, "Why?" (1:12-17). He then isolated himself on a watchtower to

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wait for God's reply (2:1; cf. Ezek. 3:17; Mic. 7:4). God's reply is 2:2-20—the context for my passage. Habakkuk's prayer finishes the oracle (3:1-19).

To clarify, Habakkuk was not a skeptic wobbling in disbelief about God's existence, nor did he doubt God's good character or power to intervene. We know this, not only by reading Habakkuk's line of questioning, but also by reading how God answered. Habakkuk did not wonder aloud about whether or not God is, or about who God is but about what He was going to do; more to the point, about the reconciling of who God is with what He was going to do. Habakkuk's grumbling about God's inaction, "Aren't you going to do something?" (1:2) pivoted into confusion about God's choice of action, "Why are you going to do *that*?!" (1:12-17). Habakkuk could not fit the "square peg" of the coming Chaldean hordes into the "round hole" of God's just management of the world. Sure, Jerusalem was bad but Babylon was worse. The "This is not right!" complaint about Judah quickly became a "How is that right?!" complaint about the Chaldeans. This pregnant moment gave birth to the phrase for our examination, "The just shall live by his faith."

#### **Examination: The Original Message**

God's answer to Habakkuk's lament is in the form of a "vision" introduced by a command to the prophet about what to do with the vision when he received it: "Write the vision and make it plain on tablets . . . For the vision is yet for an appointed time." The reason for writing the vision (probably on stone or clay tablets) was "to preserve it" because it had "lasting relevance" (Armstrong 511) and also because the event predicted in the vision was (obviously) in the future, so it would not happen immediately but would "tarry" until the period fixed by God. As soon as the vision revealed from the mind of God became inspired words written for man to read, the hourglass was flipped and the sand began spilling to the bottom. "The end," that is, the "end of the Babylonian oppression" (Armstrong 512) would occur at the "appointed time" (cf. Dan. 8:19; 11:27, 29, 35; 12:27). Since the content is prophecy, God emphasized the certainty of the prophecy coming to fruition: "at the end it will speak, and it will not lie . . . it will surely come, it will not tarry."

But remember, all that Habakkuk could see from where he stood was the approaching Chaldean horses (1:8). His perspective was limited. By the prophecy, God extended Habakkuk's horizon to show him the approaching "horses of judgment" which would also rumble someday upon the Chaldeans (cf. 2:17)—a judgment described by the five "woes"

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which follow (2:5-19) and a judgment which did come straddling horses decorated by Medo-Persian bridles and ornaments in 539 B. C. (Smith, W. 39).

Whereas, God stands over the span of history like a man stands over a flower, Habakkuk was time-bound, fastened to a fixed point on the timeline of history, receiving this vision promising the “end” of Chaldean terror before that terror even began. All well and good that God would prosecute the Chaldeans someday “at the appointed time” but what was Habakkuk—and others like him—to do in the meantime? Until “someday”? What was the designated activity in the space between God’s promise and performance? “Wait for it” (Ps. 33:20; 40:1f; 106:13; Isa. 8:17; Dan. 12:12; Zeph. 3:8).

This space of time between promise and performance exposes who a man or a woman is. Two contrasting characters become naked when people wait for God. Habakkuk 2:4 profiles these two rival responses from two different kinds of hearts.

God describes the first: “Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him.” “Behold” calls attention to the “proud,” either the Chaldean who trusts in the power of his battle-weaponry (Hab. 1:13-16) or the disbelieving Judean Jew who trusts in the power of foreign alliances (Gill 186). The word translated “proud” is “inflated, swollen, not level or normal” and means “arrogant” (Num. 14:44) (Smith, G. 134). There is a character who will not trust God and may even display arrogance when God’s justice, though certain, is delayed (cf. 2 Peter 3:3, 4). While this specimen is described further by the text that follows (Hab. 2:5-19), at 2:4 it is said, “His soul is not upright in him.” Notice, it is not that the Chaldeans are “not Jews” but that they are “not upright.” Pride heaps up their coming judgment because of their character, not their race or family tree.

The other character that will demonstrate itself during this time of waiting is an antithesis to the proud who has a crooked soul: “But the just shall live by his faith.” The word translated “just” has a legal flavor and refers to “those in right standing with God” (Smith, J. 452). “Faith” is the translation of the Hebrew word *emunah* meaning “faithfulness” or “steadiness”, a flexible term with a wide range of usage, including the physical stability of Moses’ hands as Aaron and Hur supported them in the battle against Amalek (Ex. 17:12), the responsible discharge of public office (2 Chron. 19:9) and honesty in business or civil dealings (Prov. 12:22) (Smith, G. 140). Unlike the proud, a sane and patient posture is the correct response while waiting for God to perform His promises:

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“One who has been justified by faith must continue to live by his steadfast trust” (Smith, J. 452).

Thus, God would hire the Chaldeans to nurture faith. The purpose of God’s punishment was “not to slay them, but to correct them, to keep them from becoming proud and perverted” (Laetsch 332). Afterwards, He would deal with the Chaldeans.

The rule of Habakkuk 2:4 is unpacked in the narratives of Scripture (cf. Deane 23). When one reads the exploits of men and women of faith, he is seeing this phrase packaged up in skin and bones. Habakkuk, in his historical circumstance, was to do what every other just person had done standing in the long line before him, from Seth on down to him. Noah waited for rain, Sarah waited to become pregnant, Joseph waited in prison for his dreams to come true, Moses waited 40 years, Israel waited for Messiah and the disciples would wait three days for the Lord to rise and about ten days in Jerusalem for the Promise of the Holy Spirit. Habakkuk, too, must wait and be patient for God to perform what He promised—or “live by his faith.”

[The prophecy’s] future development is perfectly determined by God and He allows man to glimpse this future as a basis for faith and hope (Ro. 8:18-25; 1 Co. 15:51-58). However, man never sees the entire pattern of salvation, so that events may seem to be delayed and disappointing from his perspective. For this reason man must lay hold of the future that God has revealed, waiting for it with an eager faith and hope that surpasses the apparent obstacles to its realization. (3:17-19; cf. Ro. 4:16-23; Heb. 6:11-12, 18-19; 10:32-11:1; 12:1-29). (Armstrong 512)

### ***Elaboration: The New Testament Slogan***

The utility of the clause, “the just shall live by faith,” is not exhausted with Habakkuk’s generation, and rightfully so. Other generations would be told to stay sane and patient while waiting for God. “Although this is the first time the principle is stated in these words, it is not new; it is as old as God’s dealings with man” (Hailey 283) a fact that the Hebrews writer presumes and takes advantage of when he inserts it as a preface to his article on faith (Heb. 10:35ff). In fact, the Holy Spirit re-handles the clause three times in the New Testament to make application on the other side of the cross, treating the statement almost like a slogan. A brief review of its three occurrences can help illuminate the meaning of the clause in the original revelation from Habakkuk.

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### *Romans 1:17*

Paul, under the Spirit, treats the phrase as a launching pad for a treatise on the Gospel in Romans. The statement as it is quoted in Romans 1:17 reads, “the just shall live by faith,” a slight variation from Habakkuk 2:4 (“the just shall live by *his* faith,” emp. added) because first, the reading follows the Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures extant in the first century, and second, the Spirit further adapts the statement from the Septuagint, by omitting the personal pronoun. The Septuagint renders the clause at Habakkuk 2:4 as “the just shall live by my faith.” In the quotation at Romans 1:17, Paul by the Holy Spirit eliminated the pronoun “my” (“his” in the Hebrew). Unlike the Habakkuk appearance, in which “the just” who lives by “faith” is rivaled by “the proud” who lives by military might (the Chaldeans) or military alliance (the worldly Judean Jew), the “just” in Romans is rivaled by the proud Jew who seeks justification by the law in so much as the law provides the ethnic identity markers, especially, dietary restrictions and circumcision. Lewis affirms “In the thought of Paul, justification by faith takes as its antithesis justification by the law” (66). The article that follows Romans 1:17 drives towards the teaching of “justification by faith” in 3:21-8:39 built upon the fixed point of Habakkuk 2:4.

### *Galatians 3:11*

In much the same manner as Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11 again cites Habakkuk 2:4 by the same rendering to argue in favor of “justification by faith” against opponents of Paul at the Galatian congregations. These false teaching Judaizers had captured the attention of the church members and were having some apparent success at convincing them to pursue “justification by the law” by enforcing circumcision and perhaps other identity markers from the covenant at Sinai (Gal. 5:1-12). In both Romans and Galatians the clause from Habakkuk is treated as a generic principle from the Hebrew Scriptures, already privileged by Jewish converts, to reinforce Paul’s doctrine of “faith in Jesus Christ” (Rom. 3:26; Gal. 3:26).

### *Hebrews 10:38*

Because of the similarity of circumstance between the situation faced by the faithful at Habakkuk and the situation faced by the faithful recipients of the epistle to the Hebrews, more of the prophetic context for

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the clause is retained. Hailey writes, “As the writer of Hebrews saw the Roman invasion approaching, and realizing a parallel destruction of the Jewish order in his day, he appealed to this passage” (283). The exhortation written to the church, “. . . [Y]ou have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise” (Heb. 10:36), fits the situation of Habakkuk and the remnant there like a glove. As Lightfoot has stated, “The author of Hebrews reflects more of the original sense of Habakkuk [than the text at Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11]” (198). At the same time, the danger stalking the original readers of Hebrews—reverting back to Judaism—was also akin to the danger which Paul confronted in his reliance upon Habakkuk 2:4 for both the Galatian and Roman epistles. Furthermore, like Romans 1:17, the Hebrews insertion is followed by a lengthy article, the famous “faith chapter” (Heb. 11:1f).

### ***Explanation: A “Twisted Motto”***

“The just shall live by faith” was a biblical reference for the rallying cry of the Protestant Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (NIV Study Bible 1389). Martin Luther manufactured an adaptation of the clause as his watchword and that adaptation became the key thought of the Reformation. Since the Protestant Reformation was a reaction to abuses in the Catholic Church (many of which were accurately diagnosed), the reaction resulted in an over-correction by Luther and the other reformers who preached not “justification by faith” (Rom. 5:1) but “justification by faith *only*.” Luther’s mistake “introduced a new idea that is neither in Habakkuk nor in Paul from whom Luther took his cue” (Lewis 66).

Furthermore, Luther saw in his fight with Catholicism an exact historical replica of Paul’s fight with Judaizers, transferring the flaws of Catholic doctrine onto the flaws of first-century Judaism. This historical transference by Luther formed the basis for all Reformed Theology’s<sup>2</sup> understanding of Judaism, the Law, and most New Testament doctrine (cf. Nygren 87). During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, critics of Luther began re-thinking the accuracy of making the New Testament scuffle between the apostle Paul and the Judaizing teachers an historical equivalent to the Reformer’s scuffle with Catholicism (cf. Westerholm).

Regardless, Luther would have been right to see in Habakkuk 2:4 and its New Testament echoes (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38) a refutation of Catholicism’s error had he left the clause alone and interpreted it soundly. Instead, he and the other European reformers over-

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corrected, mishandling the clause (“justification by faith *only*”) and twisting the Scripture into a motto for an erroneous religious movement.

### **Conclusion: The Just Shall Live By Faith**

Any mishandling of the clause “the just shall live by faith” does not frustrate any Bible reader’s effort to recover the original meaning and learn the sense of it. The original text and its re-handling by the Holy Spirit in the New Testament writings are plain enough. God deals with people on the basis of their obedient faith. Thus, according to the article in Hebrews 11, “Abel offered,” “Noah...prepared,” “Abraham...went out,” “Sarah...bore,” etc. By doing what God said we show that we believe what God said is true and this completed action places us in the company of all men and women of faith.

Messages that compete with the word of God are sometimes attractive. A personal crisis can make it difficult to see the prospect of a favorable outcome. Live long enough, and the Christian will be told to keep on believing, keep on obeying and “wait for it.” When that happens, let us continue to comply confidently with the old but sure, still relevant rule, “the just shall live by faith.”

### **Endnotes:**

1. For a summary of issues related to the date of *Habakkuk*, See: Laetsch, Theo. *The Minor Prophets*. Saint Louis: Concordia, 1956, 313-316 or Harrison, Roland K. *Introduction to the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969, 932-937.
2. “Reformed Theology” is the collection of doctrines about Bible teachings as understood by the denominational groups which were spawned by the Protestant Reformation.

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### **Biographical Sketch**

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## **PROPHETS IN CONTRAST**

### *Micah 3:5-8*

TIM HATFIELD

In Micah 3:5-8, we read of the contrast between the false prophets in the nations of Israel and Judah and Micah, the prophets of God. Micah was attempting to confront the nations with their sins and call them back to God. The false prophets were busy leading the people into error, and prophesying what would make the people feel good. While Micah warned of judgment to come, the false prophets spoke of peace. As we study this passage we want to consider the false prophets, consider the true prophet, and notice three lessons for us today.

#### ***Consider the False Prophets***

In Micah 3:5-7, we find the prophet of God writing these words:

Thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that make my people err, that bite with their teeth, and cry, "Peace"; and he that putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him. "Therefore night shall be unto you, that ye shall not have a vision; and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine; and the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them. Then shall the seers be ashamed, and the diviners confounded: yea, they shall all cover their lips; for there is no answer of God."

The first charge brought against the false prophets is that they make the people to err. This was one of the great problems brought to others by the false prophets. Years later the prophet Jeremiah would face the same problem. In Jeremiah 23:32, he wrote, "Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams, saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my

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people to err by their lies, and by their lightness; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them: therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD." These prophets claimed to be speaking for God, but instead were guilty of deceiving the people. When the people followed what the false prophets had told them it would lead them away from God, rather than draw them closer to him. In 1 Kings chapter thirteen, we read of an older prophet lying to a younger prophet. The older prophet claimed that an angel had given to him the instruction that he gave to the younger prophet. When the younger prophet believed him and acted upon the words of the older prophet, it cost him his life. The false prophets of Micah's day were guilty of the same thing. They were lying to the people, and leading them into error. Sadly, as people followed these lies, it would cost them their souls.

The second charge brought against the false prophets by Micah is that their words inflict pain. He writes, "that bite with their teeth." Their prophecies were like a poisonous bite from a serpent. Tragically, the toxic nature of their words was often hidden from those who heard them. These false prophets would wrap their false words with some truth, making it easier to fool their listeners. Many would blindly follow them thinking they would receive the blessings of God, only to suffer hardship. This is the same situation that we have today. False teachers do not come with signs. They do not warn the people that their teachings are full of poison. Instead, they too cover their deceit in some truths, and many never taste the poison they have swallowed.

Consider the people of Jesus' day. In Matthew fifteen, we read of the Pharisees questioning Jesus about His disciples. They wanted to know why they had not observed the tradition of washing their hands before eating. Jesus used this opportunity to show how the Pharisees had taught the people to forsake the commandment of God to follow the traditions of men. Most did not recognize the departure from the truth. The people simply followed the Pharisees because they thought they were sharing with them the truth. They did not know these false teachers were biting them.

The third charge made against the false teachers was that their message was dictated by the peoples' desires, rather than by what God had given. They would preach only what the people wanted to hear. In the days of Micah the people wanted to hear a message that spoke of peace. While the prophets of God were warning the people of God's judgment, which would be seen in their captivity, the false prophets were declaring that the land would have peace for years to come. We see this

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same problem in the days of Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 6:13-14, we are told, “For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely. They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace.”

In the New Testament, Paul would warn that many would succumb to this same temptation. In 2 Timothy 4:1-4, Paul would write:

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. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

The majority has always loved preaching that calls for no repentance. People love to hear messages that tell them they can continue in their sins and still enjoy the blessings of God. Sadly, the false prophets of Micah’s day, and many so-called preachers of our day have adopted the motto of the entertainment industry, “give the people what they want.”

The last charge Micah brings against the false prophets is that their motive for teaching was financial gain. He writes, “and he that putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him.” Why were these men willing to speak these false words? The answer is because of their covetousness and greed. Because the people wanted to hear the lies that brought them comfort, they were willing to pay those who would deliver them. The false prophets would speak what the people wanted to hear, because of the financial gain it would bring them. It was also the case that if any would not support them, they would turn against him. He and his family would be the target of their attacks.

In 2 Peter 2:1-3, we read of the work of false prophets in the first century. Peter wrote:

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall

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they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.

In verse fifteen of this same chapter Peter again speaks of the covetousness of the false prophets, “Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness.”

Just as there were in Micah’s day, there are still those who will prophesy for profit. There are men and women who will tell people the things that tickle their ears because they know it will bring them financial gain. God only knows of the millions of dollars that are given each year to those who appear on television and proclaim false doctrines and then plead for support. These actions have caused many to turn away from religion completely.

The false prophets were guilty of leading the people away from God. Because of this, Micah shares with them the consequences of their actions. He informs them of God’s judgment. Because of their position in society and their prosperity it might appear to the world that these prophets were blessed, but the time was coming when they would be put to shame. “Therefore night shall be unto you, that ye shall not have a vision; and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine; and the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them. Then shall the seers be ashamed, and the diviners confounded: yea, they shall all cover their lips; for there is no answer of God” (Mic. 3:6-7).

Those who speak falsehood in the name of the Lord may receive the praise of men, but they will never receive the praise of God. In Jeremiah 14:13-16, God’s prophet wrote:

Then said I, “Ah, Lord GOD! behold, the prophets say unto them, ‘Ye shall not see the sword, neither shall ye have famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place.’” Then the LORD said unto me, “The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart. Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that prophesy in my name, and I sent them not, yet they say, ‘Sword and famine shall not be in this land; By sword and famine shall those prophets be consumed. And the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the



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sword; and they shall have none to bury them, them, their wives, nor their sons, nor their daughters: for I will pour their wickedness upon them.”

These false prophets would soon suffer because of their lies. Their deceitfulness would cost them their lives and their souls.

In Matthew chapter twenty-three and twenty-four, we see that the people of Jerusalem would suffer because of their false and deceitful ways. In chapter twenty-three, Jesus pronounces several woes upon the scribes and Pharisees. In chapter twenty-four, we see God’s judgment upon Jerusalem because of their rejection of Christ. False teaching had lead to false practices and now they were to suffer the consequences.

### ***Consider the True Prophet***

In Micah 3:8, Micah speaks of himself as the true prophet of God. “But truly I am full of power by the spirit of the LORD, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin.” The first item Micah tells us about the true prophet of God is that he is led by the Spirit of the Lord. The word that he gives to the people is not his own, but is given to him by God. In Amos 7:14-16, we find this prophet speaking of the source of his message, “Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet’s son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycomore fruit: And the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel. Now therefore hear thou the word of the LORD.” In 2 Peter 1:20-21, Peter tells us of the inspiration of the prophets, “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” In contrast with the false prophets who spoke the doctrines of demons, the Holy Spirit gave the true prophet his message.

Today, we have the Spirit given word. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, we are told, “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 perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.” While we do not have prophets today, we can still put forth the Word of God when we teach His will. This will is given to us in the Bible. The true teacher will only speak those things that are taught in the Bible.

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The second detail that Micah reveals to us about the true prophet of God is that He is full of power, judgment and might. This strength rests in the message from God and knowing that the Lord would be with him as he delivered it. This truth reminds us of the courage of the prophets of old. Think of Nathan and how he stood boldly before King David and declared unto him, “thou art the man.” Think of Elijah as he stood on Mount Carmel against Ahab and the prophets of Baal. It also reminds us of the great courage of the apostles and early disciples as they stood and taught before hostile crowds.

In Second Timothy 1:6-8, Paul reminds the younger preacher of what God has given unto us:

Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God.

Those who teach truth can speak with great conviction, because we know the source of our message.

Today, we too can speak with great courage, power, and might. As long as we hold to the Bible we have the assurance we are sharing the message of God with our world. We will have to bring lessons that the world will not like, and they may attempt to take their anger out on the messenger, but with boldness from above we can declare both the blessings and judgments of God.

The final point Micah makes about the true prophet of God in this passage is that he declares all the will of God. Micah was given the difficult task of confronting the people with their sins. This was something the false prophet would not dare to do, yet with great love for God and love for souls, Micah challenged Israel and Judah with repentance.

I believe that in Ezekiel we see God’s thought concerning His prophets. In Ezekiel 3:17-21, God spoke to His prophet about his work. He told him:

Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the

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wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Again, When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul.

The prophet of God was a watchman. He was to warn the people of the dangers of their wickedness. He was to call them back to God. He was to tell the people of both the blessings of righteousness, and the curses of unrighteousness.

The apostle Paul understood this responsibility in his preaching. In Acts 20:26-27, we find him being able to say these words to the Ephesians, “Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” Paul could speak these words truthfully because he had taught them of both the positive and negative commandments of God. This serves as a great example to every preacher and teacher of the word today. We like Paul must declare all the counsel of God.

### **Lessons to Learn**

As we consider Micah 3:5-8, there are many lessons for us to learn. I would like to share three very important ones for us today. The first is that the teaching of God’s word is a great responsibility. The false prophets that Micah writes of were sowing destruction for both themselves and the people who followed them. In James 3:1, we are reminded, “My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.” This passage reminds us that we are accountable for what we teach. We must make sure it is the truth. We must make sure we are living what we teach. In 1 Timothy 4:16, Paul would challenge Timothy with these words, “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.” These words serve as a challenge to us

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today as well. May we never take lightly the responsibility of teaching God’s Word.

A second lesson of which Micah reminds us is that we must make sure we have the right motives in serving God. The false prophets served God for profit and popularity. This led them to say only the things they knew would please the people. Today, we have many who claim to be preachers of the Gospel, but speak lies to gain notoriety and riches. They, like the false prophets of old, tell the people only the things that bring them delight, and keep from the people the truth of God’s Word. They freely change the doctrine of Christ, rather than call for a change in the people. This may bring them treasures on earth, but it leaves them very poor in the eyes of God.

I believe there are two great motives for why we should preach the Word of God. The first is our love for God and His Word. The work God has given to us is spreading His message throughout the world. It is only by knowing the Word of God and obeying it that man can be saved. In James 1:21, we read, “Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.” The second great motive is our love for souls. We must recognize that every soul is priceless. We need to see that God wants all souls to be saved. Because of this, Paul would speak of himself as a debtor to all men. The obligation he felt was to share the Gospel of Christ with all. We should preach and teach because we want to see souls coming to Christ.

The final lesson we will notice is that we are to test what is taught with the Scriptures. The false prophets were leading the people into error, but the people were responsible to make sure what they were practicing was indeed the Word of God. The same is true for us today. We each have the responsibility to make sure what we are taught is truly God’s Word. In Acts 17:11, Luke tells us how the Bereans took this responsibility very seriously, “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” This is a wonderful example for us. Any preacher of truth is delighted when his listeners check what he is teaching with the Bible. It is only those who are teaching falsehoods who would attempt to keep the hearers from looking to the Scriptures. Ultimately, every accountable person is responsible to God for what he or she practices.

In Micah’s day the false prophets were leading the people into error. The people blindly followed because these prophets were telling them

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what they wanted to hear. In contrast to this Micah stood as a true prophet of God. He was one who had pure motives and would declare unto them all the counsel of God. May we strive to be like Micah and the true prophets of God, faithfully declaring the glorious Gospel of Christ.

### ***Biographical Sketch***

Tim Hatfield was born in Columbus, Ohio, in 1964. He was baptized into Christ January 3, 1977. Tim married Tammy Bates in 1986, and together they have three children, Jim, Jessica and Jennifer. Tim graduated from Ohio Valley College in 1986, with a Bachelor of Arts in Bible. From 1986 to 1996, Tim worked with the Camden Avenue church of Christ, in Parkersburg, West Virginia. He served first as the assistant minister and later as the pulpit minister. From 1997 to 2000, Tim worked with the Martin church of Christ, in Martin, Tennessee. In June of 2000, Tim moved to New Philadelphia, Ohio, to work with the New Philadelphia church of Christ. As a part of his work in New Philadelphia Tim is the speaker for two radio programs, "What Saith The Scriptures" and "Bible Thoughts." Brother Hatfield conducts three meetings each year, and has been involved in campaigns to Costa Rica, for the past nine years.

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## LOOK UNTO JEHOVAH

### *Micah 7:7-8*

STEVE JOHNSON

Micah, willing prophet of Moresheth, brought prospects of judgment, lament, and hope to God's people during a time of moral decadence and impending change. While details of the background and call of Micah are murky, the stern warnings he brings to both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms are unmistakable. He condemns the sins of the common people and leaders alike (chapters 1-3), predicts both captivity and restoration (chapters 4-5), and confesses the justice of God that allows for a continuing message of hope (chapters 6-7). It is that message of "disappointment turned into hope" (McKeating 187) which brings us to the text assigned for this study: "Therefore I will look to the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me. Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; when I fall, I will arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me" (Mic. 7:7-8).

#### ***Look Unto Jehovah for Hope: Because The Faithful Will Be Heard***

Micah begins this section of text with a first person phrase of distinction, one which both represents the prophet's attitude and personifies Jerusalem (Judah), or at least the faithful remnant. "Therefore" (KJV, NKJ), also translated "but as for me" (ASV, NAS), indicates that Micah and a minority still understood that the only solution in difficult times was to look unto Jehovah. In view of the absence of justice in society (7:1-6), no one else could be trusted to help. In view of the coming captivity and deliverance (7:8-20), no one else would be able to help.

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Commentators are about equally divided (Hillers 85) as to whether verse seven best fits as a conclusion in response to the dire circumstances of the here and now (7:1-6), or a prelude to the hopeful future (7:8-20). It would seem most natural to understand verse seven as a bridge between present and future, "an expression of trust. . . which alerts the readership of a significant shift in the general atmosphere" (Zvi 173).

The word for "look" suggests that Micah would "watch expectantly" (NAS). Wolff draws the image of someone who would "climb a high tower and peer out, examining the horizon and the surrounding land to see if there is anything of God's help to be seen" (118). God's people were often inclined to look elsewhere for help – to Assyria, to Egypt, to the gods of the nations around them. But rather than glancing horizontally, Micah was gazing vertically. It is one thing to believe that God is out there somewhere and another thing to know that God is in the midst of one's life when circumstances get tough.

When Micah declares a willingness to "wait" for God, he uses another word overflowing with hope, describing one who was "tenaciously enduring and expectantly waiting" (Wolff 118). It is possible to simply wait with folded hands, oblivious to one's personal responsibility and wish that somehow the situation would improve. But Micah was not a spectator, watching the skirmish from the sidelines, but one who took his place in the midst of the struggle, guided and strengthened by Jehovah (Snaith 108).

It is also notable that Micah's confidence in Jehovah was not preconditioned upon "immunity from trouble and freedom from chastisement" for himself (Tait 105). The prophet would continue to live among a people destroying themselves with corruption. Micah knew the futility of searching for a faithful man (7:2) and perhaps even the threat of a man's enemies being from his own household (7:6). Still, his commitment to God was without stipulation.

That for which Micah was patiently awaiting from His God was salvation. Whatever lay ahead for Micah in a morally bankrupt nation, he knew that ultimately there was the deliverance of God. For Judah, captivity loomed in the distance, after which salvation would take the form of rescue, deliverance, and prosperity.

Micah was convinced that God would hear the faithful. The enemies of God's people and even some of those people themselves may have reasoned that their difficulties and eventual captivity came about because God either was not hearing them or did not care. The poor person cheated out of his land during Micah's time or the displaced Jew in

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Babylon later on may have wondered if God were still there. But Micah knew that none of the woes were due to either the absence or weakness of God. His conviction was unwavering because he understood that in the current situation, “injustice had become its own punishment” (Hillers 83), and that the upcoming exile would be due to the Jew’s sin against Jehovah. The prophet admitted, “I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against Him, until He pleads my case and executes justice for me. He will bring me forth to the light; I will see His righteousness” (Mic. 7:9).

But still there was hope. The prophet recognized that even when encircled by a culture of injustice and disobedience, he and the faithful remnant could address God and be heard. “The faith that lives with such buoyant hope when everything has been lost is rooted in two convictions. All events are under the management of the sovereign Lord Yahweh; and His purposes [4:12] are altogether just” (Anderson 579). Micah looked to Jehovah for hope because the faithful will be heard.

***Look Unto Jehovah for Hope:  
Because the Faithful Will Be Vindicated Before Their Enemies***

Micah, speaking for Jerusalem, warns an enemy against premature conclusions as to his nation’s future. But, just who was this enemy? Several possibilities have been suggested, frequently including Edom or Babylon, and less frequently Assyria, Syria, or Samaria.

Babylon was indeed the nation that leveled Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple, and enslaved Judah for seventy years. It would seem reasonable that the inclination of Babylon toward Judah might be to take pleasure in their victory and dominion. The psalmist lamented: “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion. We hung our harps upon the willows in the midst of it. For there those who carried us away captive asked of us a song, and those who plundered us requested mirth, saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” (Ps. 137:1-3). Considering the grandeur of their empire, the Babylonians would never have expected such a reversal of roles for themselves or the tiny captive nation of Judah as was divinely destined.

However, others believe the celebrating enemy to be best represented by Edom, a nation that taunted Judah as God was punishing His people through the Babylonians. This is reinforced by various passages. “Remember, O LORD, against the sons of Edom the day of Jerusalem, who said, “Raze it, raze it, to its very foundation!” (Ps. 137:7). Obadiah reprimanded Edom saying, “But you should not have gazed on the day of

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your brother in the day of his captivity; nor should you have rejoiced over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction; nor should you have spoken proudly in the day of distress” (Obad. 1:12).

Edom stood by cheering on the Babylonian conquerors and did not hesitate to plunder what was left of the defenseless land (cf. Psalm 137:7, Isaiah 63:1-6, etc.). As a matter of fact, Edom was destined for a national fate far more dismal than that of Judah in defeat. Judah regained its identity at about the same time that Edom was losing its own finally and utterly through foreign incursions which scattered it and left it without a name. (Vawter 166)

The image of Edom rejoicing as the Jews were marched away by the Babylonian forces and cowardly taking advantage of the situation seems to fit Micah’s words of caution well.

Whatever nation was the intended recipient of Micah’s warning, it was clear that their conclusions were premature and that the resulting consequences would be severe. This was true of all the opponents of God’s chosen, who mocked the seeming weakness of the people and the One in whom they hoped. Micah wrote of these enemies, “Now also many nations have gathered against you, who say, ‘Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion.’ But they do not know the thoughts of the LORD, nor do they understand His counsel; for He will gather them like sheaves to the threshing floor” (Mic. 4:11-12). These pagan nations did not grasp that sometimes God used them to discipline the Jews. But eventually the foes would be vanquished, not comprehending that “the fate of Jerusalem is not in the hands of her enemies but in the hands of her God. He will deliver Jerusalem and will humble the pride of the oppressor” (Alfaro 78).

As surely as Zion “would be plowed like a field” (3:12), her adversary would be “trampled down like mud in the streets” (7:12). Both fates coincided with the will of God. Micah looked unto Jehovah for hope because the faithful will be vindicated before their enemies.

***Look Unto Jehovah for Hope:  
Because The Faithful Will Be Restored***

While the first portion of verse eight served to silence the enemy, the latter part pointed forward in anticipation of a rainbow of restoration following a storm of exile. “. . . [I]t was precisely such encouraging words as these that enabled the humbled and enslaved remnant of the

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people to endure and triumph over captivity” (Coffman 371). Babylon was coming and Jerusalem would crumble. Lives would be disrupted and a homeland lost. But ultimately, there were better days ahead.

Prophesying Judah’s recovery, Micah employs two metaphors for desperate situations and their antidotes. First, his people would fall, but the fall would not be permanent. Unlike the ungodly enemies, they would arise to stand again. From Micah’s perspective Judah would fall to Babylon within just a few generations, but they would arise to return and rebuild under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Furthermore, they would find themselves sitting in the darkness of captivity, a place of apparent helplessness. But the Lord would provide the light to guide a remnant back to the land of promise. According to conventional wisdom, no one could see and no one could help. But Micah’s faith enabled him to distinguish a hopeful outcome while others could not.

The features of Judah’s restoration are depicted just a few verses later. “In the day when your walls are to be built, in that day the decree shall go far and wide. In that day they shall come to you from Assyria and the fortified cities, from the fortress to the River, from sea to sea, and mountain to mountain” (Mic. 7:11-12). There would be reconstruction and expansion for the kingdom. God’s preparation of a people through whom the Messiah would come was to continue by way of a faithful remnant.

This restoration of the faithful few satisfied Jehovah’s promise to Abraham. Coffman notes that “. . . the pledge on the part of God assuring the posterity of Abraham of blessing and prosperity always pertained exclusively to the ‘spiritual seed’ of the great patriarch, and not at all merely to his fleshly descendents” (370). Their re-establishment reflected the balance of God’s mercy and justice.

The idea of the remnant is an extremely important one, for it helped to solve . . . the theological dilemma of how to reconcile the absolute righteousness and the everlasting love of God. God could judge his people, and destroy them, but nevertheless save enough of them (the remnant), penitent, purified, to serve as the nucleus of a renewed Israel. Thus is his righteousness vindicated but his purposes of salvation do not fail. (McKeating 192)

Micah’s vision for the future was designed to instill hope. Unfortunately, many writers have rejected predictive prophecy and assigned crucial sections of his message to editors who were looking

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back at history rather than looking forward through inspiration. Typical of this approach is this observation: “The final sections of the Book of Micah are undoubtedly supplement to the work of the eighth-century prophet attached to it by the postexilic redactors who followed a customary pattern of concluding these works with oracles of salvation and consolation. The woes of Israel had come and gone; now was the time for rebuilding on new hopes” (Vawter 165). But if hope springs from taking God’s message and editing or adapting it after one has seen the end of the story, is it really Biblical hope at all? Paul wrote, “For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance” (Rom. 8:24-25). Micah’s hope was based not on what he had seen, but what he knew would be, because God had revealed it. He looked unto Jehovah for hope because he knew the faithful would be restored.

### **Conclusion**

Micah’s conclusions about both present and future depended upon the direction of his scrutiny. Looking around the land of his birth, he could have seen injustice whispering that God did not care. He could have witnessed adversaries laughing at his people’s troubles. He might have visualized a captivity from which there was no return. But he did none of that. Instead, he turned his face toward God, accepting that there was hope—hope that the faithful would be heard by God, that they would be vindicated before their enemies, and that they would be restored to their place of blessing.

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### ***Biographical Sketch***

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## **THE GLORY OF THE LORD**

### *Habakkuk 2:14*

FRANK HIGGINBOTHAM

It would be impossible for anyone to adequately describe the glory of the Lord. He is far greater than human words could express. We find these words used by the prophet Habakkuk in his prophecy to Judah shortly before their being taken into captivity by the nation of Babylon. “For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14). We must stand back in awe as we think of the greatness of our God. David expressed this view in the eighth Psalm. He began with a burst of praise for God. He detailed some of the things that displayed God’s greatness and then closed with the same burst of praise. “O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth” (Ps. 8:1). The book of Habakkuk gives us a picture of the majesty of the Lord and how He is able to foresee what will happen in the affairs of men. Habakkuk had some serious questions about the way God was handling things and expressed this to God. How could God in mercy and love for His own people use a more wicked nation to bring Judah to its senses? Because of our weaknesses we are unable to see the greatness of God and give to Him the glory He deserves. His glory, as expressed by the Prophet, does fill the earth.

There were some things which the Prophet saw or thought he saw that lead to the questions that Habakkuk asked. He had seen the sister nation, Israel to the north, draw themselves deeper in sin to the point that God gave them up to be captured and ravished by the Assyrian nation? Wicked kings and disobedient people allowed themselves to be taken up in the worship of idols. The Law of God forbade that they turn in this direction. They had been instructed when they entered the land to drive out the idolatrous nations but they had not listened. God raised up

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prophets to point out the error they had embraced but they would not listen. In about 721 B.C. the nation of Israel fell. This tragedy was seen and observed by Israel’s sister nation to the South.

The Prophet had also seen that Judah was following in the same path. They knew of the demise of Israel and could clearly see why they had fallen but they did not heed. When the prophet Jeremiah called on Judah to turn around before it was too late, they said that they would not walk in the old paths. “Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein” (Jer. 6:16). The lesson that Judah had set before them had not been heeded. They did not intend to repent.

It was also clearly known that the Babylonian nation was deeply involved in sinful practices. As compared to Judah, it was obvious that they were more sinful. If God would punish Israel and Judah, why would anyone think that He would overlook this wicked nation? This presented a great question for Habakkuk. The Prophet saw what he considered an injustice. How could God use a nation more sinful than Judah to punish His own people? Was God unjust? Had He ignored the fact that the Chaldeans were exceedingly wicked? The Prophet finds himself questioning whether God was being fair in His administration of judgment. These were some of the things that Habakkuk had seen.

However, there were some other things that he should have seen. He should have been conscious of several things. He needed to remember the glory of the Lord as it was reflected in the greatness of God’s attributes. God must be recognized as the all powerful creator of all things. He is without limitations.

That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: Which in his times he shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen. (1 Tim. 6:14-16)

The word “Potentate” means one that is powerful. While men have their limitations, this is not so with God. His great power is clearly seen in the fact that He was able to speak the world into existence. He said, “Let there be light and there was light.” Such power is hard for us to be able to understand. Habakkah, the prophet of God needed to lead the



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people in realizing the fact that God is without limitations. His glory fills the earth.

God is without limitation in wisdom. He knows everything. David expressed his knowledge of the fact that God is unlimited in wisdom in Psalms 139:

O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassed my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. (1-6)

David confessed that this attribute of God was beyond his comprehension. God is glorious.

Another attribute of God that causes us to observe in complete awe is the fact that He sees everything. Men are limited in that they can only be in one place at one time and can only see the things around them. This is not the case with God. The prophet needed to remember that God is everywhere and does not need to be reminded of what is going on. "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me" (Ps. 139:7-10). The Hebrews writer stated that all things are naked and open before the eyes of God (Heb. 4:13). The writer of the book of Proverbs makes known the fact that God sees everything. "The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good" (Prov. 15:3). Could it be possible that God has overlooked something that the prophet saw? The answers to Habakkuk's questions are quickly seen when we realize the glory and majesty of our God.

Is God ever unjust? Has He ever shown a lack of fairness in His dealings with men? On one occasion as recorded in Genesis chapter eighteen there was a plea on the part of Abraham concerning the city of Sodom. Abraham was pleading that God spare the city. If enough righteousness existed in the city, God promised to spare it. In his discussion with the Lord about the justice of destroying the city, Abraham made this statement. "That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous

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should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25). We have flaws in our fairness as we deal with our fellowmen but God's judgment is always right. He is the ultimate in fairness.

Habakkuk would have done right in remembering that God, in all His glory is greatly patient with mankind. Why did God not just utterly destroy the nation of Judah and the Chaldeans at the same time? The answer lies in the fact that God is longsuffering and wants all men to be saved. "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:3-4). Some picture God as an angry person who is anxious to let out His wrath against men but the Bible reveals that God is patiently giving us the time to repent. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Though Habakkuk saw clearly the problem facing Judah, he needed to think seriously about the great attributes of the glorious God of Heaven.

The prophet needed to see that God does not work on man's timetable. The simple fact that God had not settled at that particular time the account of Judah and the Chaldeans in regard to sin, did not mean that it would not come to pass. Man has always tried to hold God to our timetable. The Apostle Peter dealt with this error in thinking when he addressed the end of the world and the coming of Christ. Some were thinking that since Jesus had not returned at this point in time this meant that God was remiss in His promise:

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. (2 Peter 3:3-8)

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God is not obligated to keep His promises on our schedule. He looks at time in a different way. The Prophet needed to realize that God will do His work in His own time.

Let it also be remembered that God hates sin. “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he” (Hab. 1:13).

He had to momentarily look away from the one who “bore our sins in his own body upon the tree” (1 Peter 2:24). Jesus was not a sinner but was made to be sin-offering for us all (2 Corinthians 5:21). Sin separates man from God (Isaiah 59:1-2) therefore Jesus cried: “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” (Ramsey 86)

God was not overlooking sin on the part of His children nor on the part of a heathen nation, but their day of judgment would come. To think that God will excuse or overlook sin in our lives or in the lives of others is a dreadful mistake. Christ went to the cross because of the great hatred God has for sin. Jesus hanging on the cross gives us a picture of just how God holds sin and its influence. Jesus cried: “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is to say, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’” (Matt. 27:46). John the Baptist introduced Jesus to the world as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). Jesus made known that if we die in sin we cannot go to Heaven. “Then said Jesus again unto them, ‘I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come’” (John 8:21).

In view of these great characteristics, we are not surprised to hear the prophet say that the glory of the Lord would fill the earth. The answer to the problem concerning God’s handling of this situation is seen in the greatness and completeness of His characteristics.

Another fact that must be kept in mind is the fact that God rules in the kingdoms of men. God is not indifferent in the affairs of men but is still in control. The Deist is committed to the idea that God is not active in what is going on in the earth. It is like a clock that is wound up and then left alone to run down. This is their concept of things today. However, God is not indifferent to us. He still rules. In the book of Daniel God makes it known to Nebuchadnezzar that He was still in control. In punishment for His sinful ways God described what would happen. “This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by

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the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men” (Dan. 4:17). He was reminded that he would be made to eat grass like oxen. “That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will” (Dan. 4:25). It would have been a great mistake to think that God was unaware of the sin of the Chaldeans. He knew what a wicked people they were. He was also aware of the sins of His people. If He chose to use the wicked nation of Babylon to punish His people this was His choice and He had a right to deal with it this way. He still rules in the kingdoms of men.

It would be well if all nations realized that this fact is still true. Sometimes nations forget God and seem to think that God is unaware of it and indifferent to any justice for nations. He still rules in the kingdoms of men and this includes the United States of America. Those who forget God need to turn back to Him. “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:14). A nation is foolishly headed for a fall when they choose to forget God. “Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 14:34). Sometimes we pay a great price as we remember that the way of the transgressor is hard (Prov. 13:15).

Our great nation needs to be reminded that God rules. A serious attempt has been made to remove God from the thinking of people in the United States. A brash atheist appeared before the Supreme Court of our nation and was successful in making a separation between our school system and any recognition of God. They are hoping to remove the influence of God and Christianity from the conduct of all of us by corrupting the thinking of our children. In their thinking, the first amendment was meant to provide freedom from religion instead of freedom of religion. This certainly was not in the minds of the founders of our great country. People came to this country to be able to practice the religion they felt was right and to get away from the forced ways they experienced in their former land. We are now seeing an effort to make us all practice the religion of the atheist. While a momentary success for the atheist in this field may sound like they have won, remember that God

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rules in the kingdoms of men. You may remove God from the teaching and praying in our schools, you may take away the part of our Pledge of Allegiance that respects God as being in control of our nation, you may remove God's name from our coinage, but God still rules in the kingdoms of men. Don't be surprised when our young boys and girls act in undisciplined and immoral ways. They have been taught in school day after day that they are no different than the beast of the field and they see no reason for restraint and responsibility in conduct. Atheists often complain because they are blamed for the bad things that happen in our schools. They need to be reminded that teachings have consequences that follow and they are responsible for the consequences. When you propagate a doctrine that removes a divine standard of right and wrong, do not be surprised when people do bad things. When God is taken out, how do men determine what is right and what is wrong? Is it done by a majority vote? Does a committee decide what is right? Next we wonder what makes the committee think that they know what is the best thing to do. Is the individual on his own in deciding what is proper conduct? Without God there is just no way to know what we can or cannot do. We cannot know right from wrong without God telling us. When an atheist tells us that a thing is wrong, where did he learn that? The nation that forgets God is still going to have to deal with Him. He is still in charge. He still rules.

Our nation is now in a bitter battle centering on the value of life. A few years ago, our Supreme Court handed down an opinion that opened the way for mothers to legally get rid of unwanted, unborn babies. It is obvious that the real reason for this ruling was to aid mothers and fathers in covering for their promiscuous behavior. It was given to the American public as a way of preventing the death of a mother and also needed in rape cases. This was just a ploy to get sympathy. Women are now reasoning openly that they have a right of choice. They have the right to control their own bodies. Does it follow then that she has the right to murder an unborn offspring? Does this also authorize her to kill her two year old child who has become a burden to her? "These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood" (Prov. 6:16-17). Shedding innocent blood is an abomination to the Lord. No blood is more innocent than the blood of the unwanted, unborn child. Some seem to be encouraging people to be completely devoid of natural love. "Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful" (Rom. 1:31). A person wanting to kill an

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unborn offspring certainly is without natural affections. It is natural for a mother to love her babies. It is unnatural for her to want to end the life of her child. This issue has greatly divided our nation but the answer rests in returning to God. This disregard for life is also threatening those who grow older and are unable to have the quality of life others do. Do we have the right to take the life of those who are costing too much for society? The issue of euthanasia is a growing concern in our nation but God prohibits our taking the life of others. Who determines what is quality life and what is not? This matter is best settled in the hands of God instead of man. However, if we can take the life of an unborn baby, why not take the life of an older person who is too much trouble to us? God has always taught us to have respect for life. God still rules in the kingdoms of men. We may ignore and defy His laws but God is still in control. Many great nations have fallen in the past and we are not immune to the vengeance of God.

Another perplexing problem that we face today is the problem introduced by the application of what some have called "Political Correctness." This idea calls for us to refrain from any condemning words in regard to what others want to do. Our society has been driven by this idea of tolerance to the point that the only person who is wrong is the person who has the courage to speak up in defense of his own beliefs. In this climate, the sin of homosexuality has thrived. Laws are being made which protect the rights of the guilty and punish those who speak out against such practices. So much confusion has come from this condition that people in our great nation are having trouble in defining what marriage is. In the beginning God created a man and a woman. Woman was created to be an help-meet for man. This has been God's arrangement from the beginning of time. Look at this significant statement from the words of Christ. "And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female" (Matt. 19:4). It is not hard to see that God's answer to the question concerning marriage is that it is a relationship between one male and one female. All the arguments of those who want our endorsement for their evil practices and the pleas for being politically correct do not change what God has said about this conduct. Two men do not make one mother and two women do not make one father. We wonder how long it will be before we are by law forbidden to speak out about this perverted concept. We must remember that God is not mocked. We will reap what we sow whether it is a nation or even if it is an individual (Gal. 6:6, 7).

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The glory of the Lord will fill the earth. When men were in the presence of God they were instructed to act in a manner in harmony with this great event. Moses was instructed to remove his shoes because the ground on which he stood was holy ground. This was so because the presence of the Lord had been there. The book of Habakkuk helps us to be impressed with the greatness of our God. We may not understand the ways of God even as the prophet did not understand but we must move with reverence and respect for Him. It did not appear that the proper thing was being done in punishing the people in the manner that God did but realizing His greatness and just how little we are in comparison with His glory and majesty, we ought not question His judgment. The example of Abraham should help us to realize that we do not need to understand how God works in the affairs of men but to humbly submit to His will. God told Abraham to leave his family and home and to go to a land that he would be shown. Abraham submitted. "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went" (Heb. 11:8). Normally, man would need the answers to dozens of questions about this instruction but Abraham knew God's greatness and quickly obeyed. He did not have to understand all of the details of the move before he would obey. His wife, Sarah also cooperated in this action and showed her great faith. They are listed in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews among other great characters of faith whose examples are worthy of following. Habakkuk sincerely wanted to understand why God was dealing with His children in this manner but as the book progresses it is clear that he had resolved to accept God's will in all things. The thoughts about the greatness and glory of the Lord were enough to convince him that God knows what He was doing. When Job questioned the majesty and wisdom of God he soon learned that there are no limitations with God. His glory fills the earth.

Then Job answered the LORD, and said, I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. (Job 42:1-6)

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In view of the greatness of the Lord and His endless glory, all the earth should bow before His majesty.

**Works Cited:**

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***Biographical Sketch***

Frank Higginbotham was born in New Martinsville, WV, a son of A. G. (Bus) and Garnet Higginbotham. He was graduated from Magnolia High School in New Martinsville and Florida Christian College in Tampa, FL. He is married to the former Rose King and they had three children. Donna passed away in 1955 and Janie is married to Brent Gallagher, the preacher of the Oakwood Road Church of Christ in Fairmont, WV. Steve is the minister of the South Green Church of Christ in Glasgow, KY. The preaching work of Frank Higginbotham has covered fifty four years. He has located with four congregations and has worked with the Virginia Avenue Church of Christ in Chester, WV, for forty two years. He has seven grandchildren, one of whom is a Gospel preacher. He has done radio and television work and conducts several Gospel meetings each year.