HOSEA TO MICAH

BIBLE STUDY

A Verse-by-Verse Study of Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah



A plumb line against a leaning wall, a prophet in the storm,
and a God who calls His people to return

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A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Study

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this study direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Introduction

Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to work through this verse-by-verse study of the books of Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah. My purpose in writing this study guide is the same as it was for my study of Revelation: to bring you closer to our Creator and to give you a way to grow in your Christian walk.

I experience God's patience with me every day, and most of all when I have been in my sin. Hosea is about a love that would not give up. God has not given up on me. That patience still humbles me.

These six short books are the words of prophets God sent to His people when they had wandered far from Him. Hosea shows us a husband who keeps loving an unfaithful wife, and a God who will not give up on His people. Joel turns a plague of locusts into a call to return to the LORD before the great day of the LORD. Amos, a shepherd from Judah, tells the rich and comfortable in Israel that God sees how they treat the poor. Obadiah warns proud Edom that it will fall. Jonah runs from God and learns how wide God's mercy is. Micah names the town where the Ruler of Israel would be born. I do not claim to be an authority on the Bible or on these books. I am simply someone like you who wants to grow closer to God and understand His heart for His people, a heart that judges sin and still calls sinners home. Before you read any part of this book, or any part of Scripture, I ask that you pray, asking God:

- For the Holy Spirit to be present, to help open your eyes and your heart (Psalm 119:18, 119:105)
- For discernment and knowledge (Psalm 119:66, James 1:5)

2 Timothy 2:15 (SLB)

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker not needing to be ashamed, cutting straight the word of truth."

The Bible is God's Word to us (2 Timothy 3:16), given for training in righteousness. If we cannot understand what it says, we cannot apply it to our lives or help build God's kingdom.

So how do we go about understanding God's Word?

The first rule is context. You may have heard the saying "Context is King," but what does that mean? Every word, sentence, and passage helps explain the ones around it. Before we read any passage, we should ask a few simple questions: Who wrote it? Who was it written to? What came right before it? Knowing the answers gives us a clearer picture of what God is saying, both in general and to each of us personally.

Context matters a great deal in these books. The prophets did not write in a vacuum. They spoke to real kings and real people in the years told in 2 Kings 14 to 20. Most of them preached in the 700s B.C., when the kingdom of Israel in the north was rich and proud on the outside and rotten on the inside, and when the great empire of Assyria was rising in the east. God had made a covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai. He had promised blessing if they obeyed Him and warned of

drought, locusts, enemies and exile if they turned to other gods (Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28). When Hosea speaks of locusts and Amos speaks of drought, they are not guessing. They are pointing back to what God said through Moses. If we forget that background, the prophets can sound harsh and strange. If we remember it, we hear a faithful God keeping His word, both His warnings and His promises.

Exegesis, Eisegesis, and Hermeneutics

People typically interpret the Bible using one of two methods, Exegesis or Eisegesis. Both are explained below, along with a third word, Hermeneutics. Sometimes people use both methods to "make their case" for the interpretation they want. These definitions are based on www.merriam-webster.com, with my own notes added.

Exegesis means explaining a text, especially a passage of Scripture. Exegesis is reading and interpreting the full text of a passage, and drawing out what it is actually saying.

Eisegesis means reading your own ideas into a text. This happens when we try to find something in the text that really isn't there. It can lead to many errors, especially when we bring assumptions to a passage that aren't actually in it. This method can be used to justify a behavior, position, or belief that goes against what the text originally meant.

Hermeneutics is the study of the principles used to interpret a text, such as the Bible. "Hermeneutics" and "Exegesis" are sometimes used to mean the same thing. The difference is that Exegesis is the work of explaining a passage, while Hermeneutics is the set of principles that guides that work. In Biblical Hermeneutics, the Bible should be read literally unless the text itself gives us a different meaning.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (SLB)

"16 Every Scripture ***is*** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which ***is*** in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work."

This passage tells us plainly that the writers of Scripture were inspired by God. Every passage in the Bible came from God and was written down by man. These are not fairy tales or made-up stories. They are God's own breath, given to us so we can be equipped and ready to do good work.

Because every word was inspired and breathed by God, I believe we must let God's Word interpret itself. We must study the Bible using Exegesis, drawing out what the text says, guided by sound Biblical Hermeneutics.

We should study God's Word using the Golden Rule of Interpretation, as Dr. David L. Cooper stated it:

"When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate

context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise."

(http://www.biblicalresearch.info/page55.html)

I read the Bible as it is written. These prophets were real men who spoke for God to real people in real places, and this study takes them at their word. Hosea really did marry Gomer. The locusts really did strip Judah bare. Jonah really was swallowed by a great fish and really did preach in Nineveh, and Jesus Himself spoke of it as fact (Matthew 12:40-41). The prophets do use pictures and poetry. Israel is a wife, a vine, a heifer and a silly dove. When the text itself tells us it is using a picture, we read it as a picture and ask what the picture means. When it speaks of what God will do in history, I believe God means what He says. Many of these prophecies have already come true in plain ways: Samaria fell to Assyria in 722 B.C., Jerusalem fell to Babylon in 586 B.C., and Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Others, such as Israel's full return to the LORD and to "David their king" (Hosea 3:5), the great day of the LORD, and the kingdom of peace, are still ahead. I read those plainly too: God will keep His promises to Israel, and Christ will return to reign. A note on the name of God: in the SLB, when you see "the LORD" in capital letters, it stands for God's personal name, YHWH, often written Yahweh, which He made known to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:14-15). When you see "Lord" in regular letters, it translates a word that means master. When you see "God," it usually translates Elohim, the general Hebrew word for God. "The Lord GOD," common in Amos, joins the word for master with God's name.

This study uses the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB) unless I note otherwise. To better understand the original Hebrew, I also used The Interlinear Bible (Jay P. Green Sr., ISBN 1-56563-977-4).

How This Study Is Laid Out

Each chapter of this study follows the same pattern as my study of Revelation:

- Scripture: the full text of the chapter, broken into sections, so you can read it straight through first.
- Preview: a short look at what the chapter covers.
- Study: the chapter again, verse by verse, with my notes on what each verse says and what it means for us.
- Summary: the main points of the chapter in a few lines.
- Study Questions: questions for personal study or a small group, from simple fact questions to questions about how we live. Some of them are personal. In a group, no one should ever have to answer one aloud, and what is shared in the group stays there.

Each book also has its own Overview and Background before its first chapter, so you know who the prophet was, when he preached, and why his message was given.

Why These Six Prophets Are Studied Together

The last twelve books of the Old Testament are often called the Minor Prophets. In the Hebrew Bible they were written on one scroll and counted as one book, called simply the Twelve. "Minor"

does not mean less important. It means shorter. Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel wrote long books, so they are called the Major Prophets. The Twelve wrote short ones. But the God who spoke through Isaiah is the same God who spoke through Obadiah, and the shortest of these books is just as much God's Word as the longest.

This volume covers the first six of the Twelve, in the order they stand in our Bibles: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah. The next volume covers the other six, Nahum to Malachi. That order is not strictly the order in which they were written, and Bible teachers date some of them differently, as we will see. But these six belong together. Most of them preached in the same stretch of years, the 700s B.C., before and during the fall of the northern kingdom. Hosea and Amos spoke to Israel in the north. Micah spoke to Judah in the south at the same time as Isaiah. Jonah was sent to Nineveh, the capital of the very empire that would later destroy Israel. Joel and Obadiah spoke to Judah and about the nations around her.

The six books share the same great themes. God is holy, and He will judge sin, in the nations and most of all in His own people. God is also "gracious and merciful, slow to anger and great in steadfast love" (Joel 2:13), and His judgment is never His last word. Every one of these books calls people to return to the LORD. And every one of them, in its own way, looks ahead to "the day of the LORD," the time when God steps into history to judge the wicked and save His people. Several of them end with the same hope: Israel gathered back to her land, David's line restored, and God reigning in Zion. The New Testament picks up these books again and again. Matthew quotes Hosea at the birth of Jesus (Matthew 2:15) and Micah about Bethlehem (Matthew 2:6). Peter quotes Joel at Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21). James quotes Amos at the council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:15-17). Jesus Himself pointed to Jonah as the sign of His death and resurrection (Matthew 12:40).

Using This Study With a Group

This study works for one person or for a group. The six books have thirty-eight chapters in all: Hosea has fourteen, Joel three, Amos nine, Obadiah one, Jonah four and Micah seven. Here are two ways a group can pace it:

- One chapter a week: thirty-eight weeks, about nine months. If you like, add a first meeting to read the Introduction together, and a short meeting before each book to read its Overview and Background. Obadiah is one chapter, and Jonah 3 and 4 are short, so a group that wants to save a week can take two of those together.
- Two chapters a week: about nineteen weeks. Some chapters pair well: Hosea 1 and 2, Hosea 6 and 7, Hosea 13 and 14, Joel 1 and 2, Amos 1 and 2, Amos 7 and 8, Jonah 1 and 2, Jonah 3 and 4, and Micah 4 and 5. Take Hosea 3, Hosea 11, Joel 2, Amos 9, Obadiah and Micah 6 on their own if you can, because each one carries a great deal.

For each meeting, I suggest reading the Scripture out loud together first, straight through, before anyone comments. Then walk through the Study section, stopping where the group has questions, and finish with the Study Questions and prayer. The first questions in each list can be answered from the text. The later ones are more personal, and no one should feel pressed to answer them aloud.

The prophets speak in poetry, and their poetry can be hard to follow at first. They jump from judgment to hope and back again, and they use many names for the same people: Israel, Ephraim, Jacob and Samaria often all mean the northern kingdom. When the group gets lost, stop and ask two simple questions: Who is speaking, and who is being spoken to? The notes in each chapter will help.

Some parts of these books are hard. In Hosea 1 to 3, God tells Hosea to marry a woman who will be unfaithful to him, and the book speaks openly about adultery and prostitution as a picture of Israel's unfaithfulness to God. Hosea 13:16 and a few other verses describe the horrors of war that would fall on Samaria. Amos 4 tells of droughts, plagues and disasters God sent to call Israel back. Jonah's time inside the great fish raises honest questions for some readers, and so does God's mercy to a cruel enemy. Micah 5:2 is a well-known prophecy of Christ's birth, and readers sometimes ask how a prophecy can name a town seven hundred years ahead. The study handles each one plainly and with care, and it does not pretend that Scripture approves of everything it describes. Some people in your group may have been hurt by an unfaithful spouse, may have walked away from God and wonder if He will take them back, or may carry memories of war or violence. These chapters can stir that up. If you lead a group, read those sections ahead of time and be ready to listen. If someone shares something that puts them or another person in danger, help them get help right away.

I look forward to walking with you through the books of Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah. If you'd like to share feedback, please email me at andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.

May God bless you and your time studying and getting to know Him better.

Overview of Hosea

Hosea is the twenty-eighth book of the Bible and the first of the twelve Minor Prophets. It comes right after Daniel and right before Joel. Hosea preached to Israel, the northern kingdom, in its last thirty or forty years. He began in the days of Jeroboam II, when Israel was rich, strong and at peace, and he kept preaching while the kingdom fell apart: six kings in about twenty-five years, four of them murdered, and the armies of Assyria closing in. In 722 B.C. Samaria fell, and the people of the northern kingdom were carried away into exile (2 Kings 17). Hosea is the only writing prophet who came from the northern kingdom and preached mainly to it. Amos preached there too, but he came from Judah.

What makes Hosea different from every other prophet is that God told him to live out his message in his own home. He married Gomer, and she was unfaithful to him. He named their children with names that were sermons in themselves. And when Gomer had left him and fallen so low that she had to be bought, God told Hosea to go and love her again, and he paid the price to bring her home. Hosea's broken marriage became a picture of Israel's broken covenant with the LORD. Israel had run after Baal, the Canaanite god of rain and harvest, the way an unfaithful wife runs after lovers. The LORD had every right to put her away. Instead He said He would win her back.

The theme of Hosea is God's faithful love for an unfaithful people. Hosea speaks hard words about sin: lying, murder, drunkenness, idol worship, priests who do not teach, and kings who trust Assyria and Egypt instead of God. Judgment is coming, and it will be terrible. But again and again the book turns from judgment to hope, and it ends with God's call to come home. The key verse comes in the last chapter:

Hosea 14:4 (SLB)

"I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from him."

Hosea has 14 chapters and 197 verses. Here is its structure:

Part One: Hosea's Marriage, a Picture of God and Israel (chapters 1 to 3)

- Hosea 1: Hosea's Wife and Children
- Hosea 2: The Unfaithful Wife and the Faithful Husband
- Hosea 3: Hosea Buys Back His Wife

Part Two: Israel's Unfaithfulness (chapters 4 to 7)

- Hosea 4: The LORD's Case Against Israel
- Hosea 5: Judgment on Priests, People and King
- Hosea 6: Come, Let Us Return to the LORD
- Hosea 7: A Hot Oven and a Silly Dove

Part Three: Israel's Judgment (chapters 8 to 10)

- Hosea 8: Sowing the Wind, Reaping the Storm
- Hosea 9: The Days of Punishment Have Come
- Hosea 10: Break Up Your Fallow Ground

Part Four: God's Love and Israel's Restoration (chapters 11 to 14)

- Hosea 11: Out of Egypt I Called My Son
- Hosea 12: Jacob's Story and Ephraim's Sin
- Hosea 13: Ephraim's Fall and the Ransom From Death
- Hosea 14: Return, O Israel

Where this book points to Christ: the New Testament quotes Hosea several times. Matthew says that when Joseph took Mary and the young child Jesus to Egypt and later brought Him back, it fulfilled the word "out of Egypt I called My son" (Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:15). Jesus twice quoted "steadfast love I desire, and not sacrifice" to the Pharisees (Hosea 6:6; Matthew 9:13; 12:7). Paul and Peter use Hosea's words about "Not My People" becoming "My people" to show God's mercy reaching the Gentiles as well (Hosea 1:10; 2:23; Romans 9:25-26; 1 Peter 2:10). And Paul takes up Hosea 13:14 in his great chapter on the resurrection: Christ has won the victory over death (1 Corinthians 15:55). Many Bible teachers also see Hosea himself, going to buy back the wife who had left him, as a picture of Christ, who paid the price to redeem His people. The New Testament does not name Hosea as a type of Christ, so I hold that as a picture, but it is a fitting one.

Background of Hosea

Author: The book opens with "The word of the LORD which came to Hosea son of Beeri" (1:1). Nothing else is known about Beeri. Hosea's name means salvation, from the same Hebrew root as Joshua and Jesus. Jewish and Christian tradition have always held that Hosea wrote the book, or that his messages were written down by him or under his direction. Some modern scholars think later editors added the verses that speak of Judah or of future hope. I take the book at its word. It names Hosea, it speaks in his voice in chapters 1 and 3, and its hope is woven into every part of it, not tacked on at the end.

When he preached: Hosea 1:1 dates his ministry by four kings of Judah, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, and one king of Israel, Jeroboam son of Joash (Jeroboam II). Using the dates worked out by Edwin Thiele, which this series follows and gives as "about," Uzziah reigned about 792 to 740 B.C., Jotham about 750 to 732 B.C., Ahaz about 735 to 715 B.C. and Hezekiah about 715 to 686 B.C. Jeroboam II reigned about 793 to 753 B.C. Hosea began before Jeroboam died, so his ministry most likely ran from about 755 B.C. to about 715 B.C., some forty years. He preached before the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. and most likely lived to see it.

Setting: When Hosea began, Israel had never been richer. Jeroboam II had won back land from Syria (2 Kings 14:25-28), trade was good, and the wealthy built fine houses. But the wealth was built on cheating the poor, and the people gave the credit for their grain and wine to Baal, not the LORD (2:8). Worship went on at Bethel, Gilgal and the high places, with golden calves and sacred prostitution. After Jeroboam died, the kingdom fell into chaos. Zechariah reigned six months and was murdered. Shallum reigned one month and was murdered. Menahem paid a huge tribute to Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria (called Pul in 2 Kings 15:19). Pekah joined Syria against Judah and lost much of Galilee and Gilead to Assyria about 732 B.C. Hoshea, the last king, turned to Egypt for help, and Assyria came and besieged Samaria for three years until it fell in 722 B.C. (2 Kings 15 to 17). Hosea's words about kings who fall, about calling to Egypt and going to Assyria, and about "King Jareb" (5:13; 7:7, 11) fit those years.

Who it was written to: Mainly to Israel, the northern kingdom. Hosea often calls it Ephraim, after its largest tribe, and sometimes Samaria, after its capital, or Jacob, after its forefather. He also speaks to Judah, the southern kingdom, warning it not to follow Israel's sins (4:15) and telling it that it too will be judged (5:10; 12:2).

Hosea's marriage: God told Hosea, "Go, take for yourself a wife of prostitutions and children of prostitutions" (1:2), and later, "Again, go, love a woman loved by a companion and committing adultery" (3:1). Good Bible teachers have read this in different ways. We will look at them carefully in chapters 1 and 3. What every reading agrees on is the point: Hosea's love for Gomer pictures the LORD's love for Israel, a love that keeps going after an unfaithful people.

Key words: Hosea uses a few Hebrew words that are worth knowing. Hesed, often translated "steadfast love," is loyal, covenant love that keeps its promises (4:1; 6:6). "Knowledge of God" means knowing Him personally and living in His ways, not only knowing facts about Him (4:1, 6; 6:6). "Prostitution" and "adultery" are Hosea's words for idol worship and for trusting other

nations instead of God. And "return," the Hebrew word shuv, is the word for turning back to God in repentance (6:1; 14:1). Hosea uses it more than twenty times.

Purpose: Hosea was written to show Israel how deeply they had sinned against the God who loved them, to warn them that judgment was coming, and to call them back to Him while there was still time. It was also written for the future. God promised that after a long time without a king (3:4), Israel would return to the LORD and to David their king "at the end of the days" (3:5). The book ends with words for every reader: "the ways of the LORD are upright, and the righteous walk in them, and transgressors stumble in them" (14:9).

Hosea 1: Hosea's Wife and Children

Scripture

1:1-11 The word of the LORD which came to Hosea son of Beeri in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, ***and*** Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam son of Joash, king of Israel. The beginning of the LORD's speaking by Hosea. And the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take for yourself a wife of prostitutions and children of prostitutions, for the land surely prostitutes itself ***away*** from after the LORD." And he went and took Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. And the LORD said to him, "Call his name Jezreel, for yet a little ***while***, and I will visit the bloodshed of Jezreel on the house of Jehu, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. And it will be in that day that I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel." And she conceived again and bore a daughter. And He said to him, "Call her name No Mercy, for I will not again have compassion any more on the house of Israel, that I should in any way forgive them. And the house of Judah I will have compassion on, and I will save them by the LORD their God; and I will not save them by bow and by sword and by battle, by horses and by horsemen." And she weaned No Mercy, and she conceived and bore a son. And He said, "Call his name Not My People, for you ***are*** not My people, and I will not be for you." And the number of the sons of Israel will be like the sand of the sea, which will not be measured and will not be counted; and it will be in the place where it was said to them, "You ***are*** not My people," it will be said to them, "Sons of ***the*** living God." And the sons of Judah and the sons of Israel will be gathered together, and they will appoint for themselves one head, and they will go up from the land; for great ***is*** the day of Jezreel.

Preview

Hosea's book begins in his own home. The LORD tells him to marry "a wife of prostitutions," and he marries Gomer. She bears three children, and the LORD names each one. The names are messages to Israel: Jezreel, because judgment is coming on the house of King Jehu; No Mercy, because God's patience with Israel has run out; and Not My People, because Israel has broken the covenant that made them God's people.

But the chapter does not end there. In the same breath God promises that the day will come when Israel will be as many as the sand of the sea, when those called "Not My People" will be called sons of the living God, and when Judah and Israel will be gathered together under one head. Judgment is real, and it is coming soon. God's promise is just as real, and it reaches far into the future.

Study

1:1 *The word of the LORD which came to Hosea son of Beeri in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz,* ***and*** *Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam son of Joash, king of Israel.*

"The word of the LORD which came to Hosea son of Beeri." Hosea did not make up his message. It came to him from God. That is what makes a man a prophet. A prophet is someone God speaks through, who carries God's word to the people, whether they want to hear it or not.

The verse dates his ministry by four kings of Judah, "Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah," and one king of Israel, "Jeroboam son of Joash." That is Jeroboam II, who reigned about 793 to 753 B.C. Hosea preached mainly to Israel, so it may seem odd that he names more kings of Judah than of Israel. One likely reason is that after Jeroboam, Israel's kings came and went so fast, most of them by murder, that Hosea did not count them as worth naming. David's line in Judah was still the line God had chosen (3:5).

Hosea preached for about forty years. That is a long time to keep speaking to people who mostly do not listen. God's servants are called to be faithful, not always to be popular.

1:2 *The beginning of the LORD's speaking by Hosea. And the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take for yourself a wife of prostitutions and children of prostitutions, for the land surely prostitutes itself* ***away*** *from after the LORD."*

"The beginning of the LORD's speaking" through Hosea was a command that must have shaken him: "Go, take for yourself a wife of prostitutions and children of prostitutions, for the land surely prostitutes itself away from after the LORD."

Here God explains the reason. Israel had been joined to the LORD by covenant at Mount Sinai, like a bride to her husband (Jeremiah 2:2). A covenant is a binding agreement, sealed with promises. But Israel had gone after other gods, especially Baal, the Canaanite god they believed gave rain and good crops. In the Bible, worshiping other gods is called spiritual prostitution or adultery, because it breaks faith with the God who loves His people. Hosea's marriage would be a living sermon. The people would see in Hosea's home what they were doing to God.

This is one of the hard passages in the Bible, and good Bible teachers have read it in different ways. Here are the main views, as plainly and fairly as I can give them.

Some believe Gomer was already known as an immoral woman when Hosea married her, and that God told Hosea to marry her anyway, to show that God had taken Israel to Himself when she was already sinful. Others believe Gomer was not unfaithful when Hosea married her, and that "a wife of prostitutions" describes what she would become. On this view Hosea wrote the account looking back, and God, who knew the end from the beginning, told Hosea what kind of wife she would prove to be. Still others take "a wife of prostitutions" to mean a woman from a people given over to idol worship, as all of Israel was, rather than a woman known for sexual sin. A few teachers have taken the whole account as a vision or a story Hosea told, not something that happened. This study does not follow that last view, because the text gives us a real woman with a real father's name, real children, and a real weaning (1:8). It reads as something that happened.

Scripture does not settle the first three questions for us, and I do not want to claim more than the text says. What it does make plain is this: the marriage was real, Gomer was unfaithful, and Hosea kept loving her. And the point of it all is not Gomer's sin but God's love. The LORD loved Israel while she was unfaithful, and He loves us the same way. "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

1:3 *And he went and took Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.*

"And he went and took Gomer daughter of Diblaim." Hosea obeyed. There is no argument recorded, no delay. Whatever it cost him, he did what God said.

"She conceived and bore him a son." Notice the word "him." This first son was Hosea's. Many teachers point out that the next two births (1:6, 8) do not say "bore him," and some think those children may not have been Hosea's. The text does not say so plainly, and we should not say more than it does. But it fits "children of prostitutions" (1:2) and the sad story of chapter 2.

1:4-5 *And the LORD said to him, "Call his name Jezreel, for yet a little **while**, and I will visit the bloodshed of Jezreel on the house of Jehu, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. And it will be in that day that I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel."*

God named the boy: "Call his name Jezreel." Jezreel means God sows. It was also the name of a city and a broad, fertile valley in northern Israel. Everyone in Israel knew what had happened there. About eighty years earlier, Jehu had been anointed king by God's command to wipe out the wicked house of Ahab and Jezebel. At Jezreel he killed King Joram, Jezebel and the rest of Ahab's family, and he went on to kill the king of Judah, his relatives, and the worshipers of Baal (2 Kings 9 and 10).

"I will visit the bloodshed of Jezreel on the house of Jehu." How could God punish Jehu's house for doing what God had told him to do? God did praise Jehu for wiping out Ahab's house (2 Kings 10:30). But Jehu went far beyond the command, and he did it for his own power, not out of love for God. The very next verse says "Jehu did not take care to walk in the law of the LORD" and did not turn from Jeroboam's golden calves (2 Kings 10:31). God judges the heart as well as the deed. A man can do a thing God wants done and still do it in a way that is sin.

"Yet a little while." This came true. Jeroboam II was the fourth king of Jehu's line. His son Zechariah reigned only six months before he was murdered, about 753 B.C., and Jehu's line ended (2 Kings 15:8-12). Thirty years later, in 722 B.C., God did "put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel." Assyria took Samaria, and the northern kingdom was never a kingdom again.

"I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel." The bow stands for Israel's military strength. The place where Jehu had won his throne by the sword is the place where Israel's sword would be broken.

1:6-7 *And she conceived again and bore a daughter. And He said to him, "Call her name No Mercy, for I will not again have compassion any more on the house of Israel, that I should in any way forgive them. And the house of Judah I will have compassion on, and I will save them by the LORD their God; and I will not save them by bow and by sword and by battle, by horses and by horsemen."*

"And she conceived again and bore a daughter." God said, "Call her name No Mercy." In Hebrew the name is Lo-ruhamah, which means not shown compassion, or not pitied. The word for compassion is the tender love of a parent for a child. Can you picture a father calling his little girl No Mercy every day? Every time Hosea called her name, the whole town would hear God's message: "I will not again have compassion any more on the house of Israel."

This was not because God's love had failed. God had been patient with Israel for two hundred years, since the kingdom split about 930 B.C. He had sent prophet after prophet. Israel had refused Him every time. There comes a point when God gives people what they have chosen.

"And the house of Judah I will have compassion on." God would treat Judah differently, at least for a time. And notice how He would save them: "by the LORD their God; and I will not save them by bow and by sword." That happened about 701 B.C. The king of Assyria came against Jerusalem with a huge army in the days of Hezekiah. Judah could not have won by fighting. The angel of the LORD struck the Assyrian camp in one night, and the king went home (2 Kings 19:35-36). God saved Judah without a single arrow from Judah's side.

That is still how God saves. Not by our strength or our weapons, but by Himself.

1:8-9 *And she weaned No Mercy, and she conceived and bore a son. And He said, "Call his name Not My People, for you **are** not My people, and I will not be for you."*

"And she weaned No Mercy." In those days a child was often nursed for two or three years. So some time passed. Then Gomer "conceived and bore a son."

God named him: "Call his name Not My People, for you are not My people, and I will not be for you." In Hebrew this is Lo-ammi. This was the hardest name of all. At Sinai God had said that Israel would be His people and He would be their God (Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:12). "I will not be for you" sounds like the opposite of the name God told Moses at the burning bush, "I am" (Exodus 3:14). The covenant was not dissolved forever, as the next verses show. But Israel had broken it, and for now they would live as though they had no God at all.

The three names move downward, one step at a time. First judgment on a king's house. Then no more compassion. Then no more relationship. Sin always moves that way if we do not turn back. It begins small and ends in distance from God.

1:10-11 *And the number of the sons of Israel will be like the sand of the sea, which will not be measured and will not be counted; and it will be in the place where it was said to them, "You **are** not My people," it will be said to them, "Sons of **the** living God." And the sons of Judah and the sons of Israel will be gathered together, and they will appoint for themselves one head, and they will go up from the land; for great **is** the day of Jezreel.*

And then, without any break, the hope breaks in: "And the number of the sons of Israel will be like the sand of the sea, which will not be measured and will not be counted." These are the words God spoke to Abraham and Jacob (Genesis 22:17; 32:12). Israel's sin could not cancel God's promise to Abraham.

"In the place where it was said to them, You are not My people, it will be said to them, Sons of the living God." The very people who were named Not My People will be called God's sons. In the very place where they were rejected, they will be welcomed.

The New Testament uses these words. Paul quotes this verse and 2:23 in Romans 9:25-26 to show that God has called a people "not only out of the Jews but also out of the Gentiles" (Romans 9:24).

Peter uses the same words for believers: once "not a people," but now "the people of God" (1 Peter 2:10). How can Paul use a promise about Israel to speak of Gentiles? It is simple. If God can take a people who were "not My people" and make them His, He can do that for Gentiles who never were His people. The principle is the same. God's mercy is wide enough for both.

But that does not mean the promise to Israel has been canceled or handed to someone else. Look at verse 11: "the sons of Judah and the sons of Israel will be gathered together, and they will appoint for themselves one head." The two kingdoms, north and south, split since about 930 B.C., will be one nation again, under one ruler. That has not happened yet in any full way. Ezekiel saw the same thing: two sticks, Judah and Israel, joined into one in God's hand, with one king, David, over them (Ezekiel 37:15-24). Hosea will tell us who that head is in 3:5: "David their king." I believe this is the Messiah, Jesus, the Son of David, who will reign over a restored and united Israel when He returns. The church shares in God's mercy through Christ, but God's promises to Israel still stand. Paul himself says so: "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26), for "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29).

"They will go up from the land." This may mean they will go up out of the lands where they were scattered, or that they will spring up from the land like a crop. Either way, it is a picture of new life.

"For great is the day of Jezreel." Jezreel means God sows. The name that meant judgment in verse 4 now means harvest. God will sow His people in their land again (2:23), and they will grow. The same God who breaks is the God who heals (6:1).

Summary

The word of the LORD came to Hosea son of Beeri in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and of Jeroboam II, king of Israel. God told Hosea to take "a wife of prostitutions," because the land had prostituted itself away from the LORD. Hosea married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she bore a son. God named him Jezreel, because He would soon punish the house of Jehu for the blood shed at Jezreel and end the kingdom of Israel. A daughter was born, and God named her No Mercy, because He would no longer have compassion on Israel, though He would save Judah by His own hand and not by weapons. Then a son was born, and God named him Not My People, because Israel was no longer living as His people. Yet God promised that Israel would be as many as the sand of the sea, that those called Not My People would be called sons of the living God, and that Judah and Israel would be gathered together under one head in the great day of Jezreel.

Study Questions

1. Where did Hosea's message come from, and in whose days did he preach? (1:1)

2. What did God tell Hosea to do, and what reason did He give? (1:2)

3. What does the name Jezreel recall from Israel's history, and why was God going to punish the house of Jehu? (1:4-5; 2 Kings 10:30-31)

4. What did God say He would do for Judah, and how would He do it? (1:7)

5. What did the names No Mercy and Not My People say about Israel's relationship with God? (1:6, 9)

6. What three promises does God make in verses 10 and 11? (1:10-11)

7. How do Paul and Peter use Hosea's words about "Not My People"? Does that cancel God's promise to Israel? (Romans 9:24-26; 11:26-29; 1 Peter 2:10)

8. Hosea obeyed a very hard command. Is there something God has made plain to you in His Word that you have been slow to obey?

9. The three names move step by step away from God. Where have you seen small sins lead to greater distance from God, in your own life or someone else's?

10. God promised mercy to the very people He had called Not My People. Do you believe God can welcome you back from wherever you have been? Why or why not?

Hosea 2: The Unfaithful Wife and the Faithful Husband

Scripture

2:1-13 Say to your brothers, "My People," and to your sisters, "Shown Compassion." Contend with your mother, contend—for she ***is*** not My wife, and I ***am*** not her husband—and let her remove her prostitutions from her face, and her adulteries from between her breasts, lest I strip her naked and set her ***out*** as ***on*** the day she was born, and make her like the wilderness, and set her like a land of dryness, and cause her to die with thirst. And on her sons I will not have compassion, for they ***are*** sons of prostitutions. For their mother has prostituted herself; she who conceived them has acted shamefully; for she said, "Let me go after my lovers, who give my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drinks." Therefore look, I am about to hedge up your way with thorns, and I will wall up her wall, and her paths she will not find. And she will pursue her lovers, and she will not overtake them; and she will seek them, and she will not find ***them***; and she will say, "Let me go and let me return to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now." And she did not know that I gave her the grain and the new wine and the fresh oil, and I multiplied silver to her, and gold, ***which*** they made for the Baal. Therefore I will return and take My grain in its time and My new wine in its appointed time, and I will snatch away My wool and My flax, to cover her nakedness. And now I will uncover her lewdness before the eyes of her lovers, and no one will deliver her from My hand. And I will put an end to all her rejoicing, her feast, her new moon, and her Sabbath, and every appointed feast of hers. And I will lay waste her vine and her fig tree, of which she said, "They ***are*** wages for me, which my lovers gave me." And I will make them a thicket, and the living things of the field will eat them. And I will visit on her the days of the Baals, when she burned ***incense*** to them, and she adorned herself ***with*** her ring and her jewelry, and went after her lovers; and Me she forgot, declares the LORD.

2:14-23 Therefore look, I am about to entice her, and I will lead her ***into*** the wilderness, and I will speak to her heart. And I will give her her vineyards from there, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope; and she will answer there as ***in*** the days of her youth, and as ***in*** the day she came up from the land of Egypt. And it will be in that day, declares the LORD, ***that*** you will call ***Me*** "My Husband," and you will no longer call Me "My Baal." And I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they will no longer be remembered by their name. And I will make for them a covenant in that day with the living things of the field and with the flying things of the heavens and the moving things of the ground; and bow and sword and battle I will break from the land, and I will make them lie down in security. And I will betroth you to Me forever; and I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice and in steadfast love and in compassion. And I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you will know the LORD. And it will be in that day ***that*** I will answer, declares the LORD; I will answer the heavens, and they will answer the earth; and the earth will answer the grain and the new wine and the fresh oil, and they will answer Jezreel. And I will sow her for Myself in the land, and I will have compassion on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, "You ***are*** My people," and he will say, "My God!"

Preview

Hosea 2 moves back and forth between Hosea's home and Israel's history, until the two blur into one. The LORD speaks as a husband whose wife has left him for other lovers. She thinks her lovers gave her bread, water, wool and oil. She does not know that her husband gave her all of it. So He will take it back, block her path, and bring her to the point where she says, "Let me go and let me return to my first husband."

Then, beginning at verse 14, the tone changes completely. God will lead her into the wilderness and "speak to her heart." He will give her a door of hope, take the names of the Baals out of her mouth, make a covenant of peace, and betroth her to Himself forever. The chapter that began with a lawsuit ends with a wedding, and the children who were named No Mercy and Not My People are given new names.

Study

2:1 *Say to your brothers, "My People," and to your sisters, "Shown Compassion."*

This verse finishes the hope of 1:10-11. God tells the faithful to speak to their brothers and sisters with new names. The boy named Not My People will be called My People. The girl named No Mercy will be called "Shown Compassion." What sin took away, grace gives back. In the day of restoration, God's people will speak to each other as people who have been forgiven.

2:2-3 *Contend with your mother, contend—for she **is** not My wife, and I **am** not her husband—and let her remove her prostitutions from her face, and her adulteries from between her breasts, lest I strip her naked and set her **out** as **on** the day she was born, and make her like the wilderness, and set her like a land of dryness, and cause her to die with thirst.*

"Contend with your mother." To contend means to bring a case, as in a court of law. The children are called to plead with their mother. In the picture, the mother is Israel as a nation, and the children are the people of Israel one by one. God is calling on anyone in Israel who will listen to plead with the nation to turn back.

God says that she is not His wife, and He is not her husband. That sounds like the words of a divorce. But read the rest of the verse. God does not say "be gone." He says, "let her remove her prostitutions from her face." He wants her back. The goal of the lawsuit is repentance.

Verse 3 is a warning of what will happen if she does not: "lest I strip her naked and set her out as on the day she was born." In that day a husband was to clothe and feed his wife (Exodus 21:10). To strip her bare meant to take back everything he had given her. God had found Israel as a helpless people in Egypt and given her everything (Ezekiel 16:4-14 uses the same picture). Now He warns that He will take it back and leave the land "like the wilderness," dry and dying. This is the language of drought and famine, the very curses Moses had warned of (Deuteronomy 28:23-24, 48).

2:4-5 *And on her sons I will not have compassion, for they **are** sons of prostitutions. For their mother has prostituted herself; she who conceived them has acted shamefully; for she said, "Let me go after my lovers, who give my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drinks."*

"And on her sons I will not have compassion, for they are sons of prostitutions." This is not God punishing innocent children for their mother's sin. The "sons" are the people of Israel, and they had joined their mother in her idol worship. Each generation chose the same sin.

"Let me go after my lovers, who give my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drinks." Here is the heart of Israel's sin. They believed that Baal and the other gods of Canaan gave them rain and good crops. Baal was worshiped as the storm god who brought rain. In a dry land, rain meant life. So Israel went after Baal to make sure the crops grew. They did not think they were leaving the LORD entirely. They just wanted to cover every base.

Is that so different from us? We may not bow to Baal, but we often look to money, a job, a relationship or the government for what only God can give. Whatever we trust to give us what God gives is our "lover."

2:6-7 *Therefore look, I am about to hedge up your way with thorns, and I will wall up her wall, and her paths she will not find. And she will pursue her lovers, and she will not overtake them; and she will seek them, and she will not find **them**; and she will say, "Let me go and let me return to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now."*

"Therefore look, I am about to hedge up your way with thorns." God will block her path. This is judgment, but it is merciful judgment. A thorn hedge keeps a sheep from wandering off a cliff. God makes the road to sin hard so that we will stop and turn back.

"She will pursue her lovers, and she will not overtake them." The gods she runs after cannot be found, because they are not real. Then, when every door is shut, she says, "Let me go and let me return to my first husband, for it was better for me then than now."

This sounds like the prodigal son, who, "having come to himself," decided, starving in a far country, to go home to his father (Luke 15:17-18). It is not yet a deep repentance. She returns because she is hungry. But God often uses our empty hands to turn our faces toward home. Have you ever been glad, looking back, that God blocked a road you wanted to take?

2:8 *And she did not know that I gave her the grain and the new wine and the fresh oil, and I multiplied silver to her, and gold, **which** they made for the Baal.*

"And she did not know that I gave her the grain and the new wine and the fresh oil." These three, grain, new wine and oil, were the main crops of the land, and God had promised them to Israel if she obeyed (Deuteronomy 7:13). She had them, but she gave the credit to Baal. Worse, God had multiplied her silver and gold, and they made it into idols "for the Baal." They took God's gifts and gave them to another god.

Every good thing we have comes from God (James 1:17). Ingratitude is the first step toward idolatry. When we stop thanking God for what we have, we soon start thanking something else.

2:9-10 *Therefore I will return and take My grain in its time and My new wine in its appointed time, and I will snatch away My wool and My flax, to cover her nakedness. And now I will uncover her lewdness before the eyes of her lovers, and no one will deliver her from My hand.*

"Therefore I will return and take My grain in its time and My new wine in its appointed time." Notice the word "My." It was always God's grain, God's wine, God's wool and flax. He had only lent them. Now, at harvest time, when she expected them, they would not come.

"And now I will uncover her lewdness before the eyes of her lovers, and no one will deliver her from My hand." Her shame will be made public. Her false gods will stand by and watch, and they will do nothing, because they can do nothing. Only the God she left could rescue her, and she had left Him.

2:11-13 *And I will put an end to all her rejoicing, her feast, her new moon, and her Sabbath, and every appointed feast of hers. And I will lay waste her vine and her fig tree, of which she said, "They **are** wages for me, which my lovers gave me." And I will make them a thicket, and the living things of the field will eat them. And I will visit on her the days of the Baals, when she burned **incense** to them, and she adorned herself **with** her ring and her jewelry, and went after her lovers; and Me she forgot, declares the LORD.*

"I will put an end to all her rejoicing, her feast, her new moon, and her Sabbath." Israel still kept the feasts. The northern kingdom had its own feast days, set up by Jeroboam I (1 Kings 12:32-33), and worship went on with great noise. But it was mixed with Baal worship, and God would end it. A new moon was a monthly holy day at the start of each month. The Sabbath was the seventh day, a day of rest God gave Israel. Religion without faithfulness is not something God protects.

"I will lay waste her vine and her fig tree." She had called these "wages," gifts from her lovers. God will let the vineyards grow wild until "the living things of the field will eat them."

"And Me she forgot, declares the LORD." These are the saddest words in the passage. Israel did not stop being religious. She burned incense. She wore her jewelry to the feasts of the Baals. What she did was forget the LORD. You can be very busy with religion and still forget God.

2:14-15 *Therefore look, I am about to entice her, and I will lead her **into** the wilderness, and I will speak to her heart. And I will give her her vineyards from there, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope; and she will answer there as **in** the days of her youth, and as **in** the day she came up from the land of Egypt.*

"Therefore look, I am about to entice her, and I will lead her into the wilderness, and I will speak to her heart." This is the second "therefore" in the chapter (see 2:6, 9). The first two led to judgment. This one leads to love. After everything she has done, God says He will woo her, the way a young man wins the heart of the woman he loves. "Speak to her heart" means to speak tenderly, to comfort (Isaiah 40:2 uses the same Hebrew words).

Why the wilderness? Because the wilderness was where Israel had first known God, after the exodus from Egypt. It was a hard place, but it was a place of being alone with God, with no Baal

and no lovers. Sometimes God leads us into a dry, lonely season so that He can speak to us without the noise.

"And the valley of Achor for a door of hope." Achor means trouble. It was the valley where Achan was stoned for stealing what God had banned at Jericho (Joshua 7:24-26). It was a place of shame and judgment. God says He will turn that valley into a doorway of hope. That is what God does. He takes the place of our worst failure and makes it the door into a new beginning.

"And she will answer there as in the days of her youth." She will respond to God the way Israel did when she first came out of Egypt and sang the song of Moses at the sea (Exodus 15).

2:16-17 *And it will be in that day, declares the LORD, **that** you will call **Me** "My Husband," and you will no longer call Me "My Baal." And I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they will no longer be remembered by their name.*

"You will call Me My Husband, and you will no longer call Me My Baal." The word "baal" in Hebrew is also an ordinary word for master, owner or husband. Israel had mixed the LORD up with Baal so badly that they even called the LORD by the name Baal. In that day the confusion will be gone. They will know Him not as a master to be bargained with, but as a husband who loves them.

"I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth." The cure for idolatry is not just a rule against saying a name. It is a changed heart that no longer wants the idol. God will do that.

2:18 *And I will make for them a covenant in that day with the living things of the field and with the flying things of the heavens and the moving things of the ground; and bow and sword and battle I will break from the land, and I will make them lie down in security.*

"And I will make for them a covenant in that day with the living things of the field." God will make peace between His people and the animals, and He will "break" bow, sword and battle from the land. Then "I will make them lie down in security." This is a picture of a world at peace, like Isaiah's picture of the wolf lying down with the lamb (Isaiah 11:6-9). It reverses the curse of verse 12, where the wild animals ate the vineyards.

When will this happen? Israel has never known a peace like this, not after the exile and not since. I believe it looks ahead to the kingdom of Christ, when He reigns on earth and "nation will not lift up sword against nation" (Isaiah 2:4).

2:19-20 *And I will betroth you to Me forever; and I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice and in steadfast love and in compassion. And I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you will know the LORD.*

"And I will betroth you to Me forever." To betroth means to promise in marriage, to pledge yourself to someone. In Israel, a betrothal was as binding as marriage. Notice that God does not say He will take her back as she was. He speaks as though it were a brand new marriage, a fresh start with no past.

Then He names the bride price, the gifts He brings to the marriage: "in righteousness and in justice and in steadfast love and in compassion," and "in faithfulness." These are all things God gives. Righteousness and justice mean He will do what is right. Steadfast love is hesed, loyal covenant love. Compassion is the tender love of a parent, the very word that was taken away in the name No Mercy. Faithfulness means He will never let her down. God supplies everything the marriage needs.

"And you will know the LORD." In Hosea, to know the LORD is the opposite of forgetting Him (2:13). It means a close, personal relationship, the kind a husband and wife share. God's goal is not only that His people would obey, but that they would know Him.

This is the language the New Testament uses of Christ and His church. Paul says the church is like a bride betrothed to one husband, Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:25-27). Hosea's words are first about Israel, and I believe Israel will know this in full. But every believer can see in them the love of Christ, who gave Himself for His bride.

2:21-23 *And it will be in that day **that** I will answer, declares the LORD; I will answer the heavens, and they will answer the earth; and the earth will answer the grain and the new wine and the fresh oil, and they will answer Jezreel. And I will sow her for Myself in the land, and I will have compassion on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, "You **are** My people," and he will say, "My God!"*

"I will answer the heavens, and they will answer the earth." Here is a chain of blessing. God answers the sky, and the sky sends rain on the earth. The earth answers with grain, new wine and oil. And they "answer Jezreel." Remember, Jezreel means God sows. Everything Israel had looked to Baal for will come straight from the LORD, and it will be good.

"And I will sow her for Myself in the land." The name Jezreel, which once meant judgment (1:4), now means planting. God will plant His people in their land, and they will not be uprooted again (Amos 9:15 says the same).

"And I will have compassion on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, You are My people, and he will say, My God!" All three names of chapter 1 are turned around. The covenant is restored in the simplest words: "You are My people," and "My God!"

Paul quotes this verse in Romans 9:25, along with 1:10, and Peter echoes it in 1 Peter 2:10. They show that God, who promised to call unloved Israel "loved," also calls Gentiles who were never His people. But as we saw in chapter 1, that does not erase the promise to Israel. Here God says He will sow her "in the land." That is the land of Israel. I believe God will do exactly that for the nation of Israel in the last days, when they turn to Christ (Romans 11:25-27).

Summary

The LORD tells the faithful in Israel to call their brothers My People and their sisters Shown Compassion, and to plead with their mother, the nation, to put away her unfaithfulness. If she will not, He will strip her of His gifts and make the land like a wilderness. She went after her

lovers, the Baals, thinking they gave her bread, water, wool, flax, oil and drink. She did not know that the LORD gave her grain, new wine, oil, silver and gold, which she made into idols. So He will hedge up her way, take back His harvest, uncover her shame, end her feasts and lay waste her vines, because she forgot Him. Then God says He will win her back. He will lead her into the wilderness, speak to her heart, and make the valley of Achor a door of hope. She will call Him My Husband, not My Baal, and the names of the Baals will be gone. He will make a covenant of peace, break the weapons of war, and betroth her to Himself forever in righteousness, justice, steadfast love, compassion and faithfulness, and she will know the LORD. The heavens, the earth and the harvest will answer Jezreel. God will sow her in the land, have compassion on No Mercy, and say to Not My People, "You are My people," and they will say, "My God!"

Study Questions

1. What new names are the brothers and sisters given in verse 1? (2:1)

2. Who did Israel think gave her bread, water, wool, flax, oil and drink? Who really gave them? (2:5, 8)

3. What does God say He will do to block Israel's way, and what does she finally decide? (2:6-7)

4. What does God say Israel forgot? (2:13)

5. Where will God lead Israel, and what will He do there? What was the valley of Achor, and what will it become? (2:14-15; Joshua 7:24-26)

6. What is the difference between calling God "My Husband" and "My Baal"? (2:16-17)

7. What five things does God bring to the betrothal in verses 19 and 20? (2:19-20)

8. Israel gave Baal the credit for God's gifts. What good things in your life are you tempted to credit to something other than God?

9. God sometimes hedges up our way with thorns. Can you think of a time God blocked a road you wanted to take, and later you were glad He did?

10. God turned the valley of trouble into a door of hope. Is there a place of failure in your life that you need to bring to God and ask Him to make a new beginning?

Hosea 3: Hosea Buys Back His Wife

Scripture

3:1-5 And the LORD said to me, "Again, go, love a woman loved by a companion and committing adultery, like the love of the LORD ***for*** the sons of Israel, and they are turning to other gods and loving raisin cakes." And I bought her for myself for fifteen ***pieces of*** silver and approximately 6 bushels (a homer) of barley and approximately 3 bushels (a lethech) of barley. And I said to her, "Many days you will dwell for me; you will not prostitute yourself, and you will not belong to a man; and I also ***will be*** toward you." For many days the sons of Israel will dwell ***with*** no king, and no prince, and no sacrifice, and no pillar, and no ephod and teraphim. Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king; and they will ***come*** in dread to the LORD and to His goodness at the end of the days.

Preview

Hosea 3 is only five verses long, but it is the heart of the book. Hosea now tells the story in his own words. The LORD tells him to go again and love a woman who has been unfaithful, "like the love of the LORD for the sons of Israel." Hosea goes and buys her back for fifteen pieces of silver and some barley. He brings her home and tells her there must be a long time of waiting, with no other lovers, and that he will wait for her too.

Then Hosea explains what it means. Israel, too, will live "many days" with no king, no sacrifice and no idols. Afterward they will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king, at the end of the days. In five verses we see the whole history of Israel, from its sin to its long exile to its final return, and at the center of it all a love that pays the price to bring the unfaithful home.

Study

3:1 *And the LORD said to me, "Again, go, love a woman loved by a companion and committing adultery, like the love of the LORD* ***for*** *the sons of Israel, and they are turning to other gods and loving raisin cakes."*

"And the LORD said to me, Again, go, love a woman loved by a companion and committing adultery." The word "again" ties this to chapter 1. God had spoken to Hosea before, and now He speaks again. Hosea is told not just to take her back but to "love" her.

Who is this woman? Most Bible teachers believe she is Gomer. The word "again," the way the chapter follows chapters 1 and 2, and the picture of God taking back His own unfaithful wife Israel all point that way. Gomer had left Hosea, been with another man, and fallen so low that she had to be bought. A few teachers think this is a different woman, because her name is not given. Others think chapter 3 tells the first marriage again from Hosea's own point of view. This study follows the first view, the one most teachers hold: Hosea was told to go and bring back his own wife. But all three views agree on the point, and the point is in the next words.

"Like the love of the LORD for the sons of Israel, and they are turning to other gods." God did not wait until Israel stopped sinning to love her. He loved her while she was still turning to other gods. Hosea's love for Gomer was meant to show Israel what God's love for them was like.

"And loving raisin cakes." Raisin cakes were pressed cakes of dried grapes. In themselves they were a normal food (2 Samuel 6:19). But here they seem to be part of the feasts of the false gods, perhaps offered to them or eaten at their festivals. Israel loved the sweet treats of idol worship more than the God who loved them.

This is our story too. "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). God's love does not wait for us to clean ourselves up.

3:2 *And I bought her for myself for fifteen* ***pieces of*** *silver and approximately 6 bushels (a homer) of barley and approximately 3 bushels (a lethech) of barley.*

"And I bought her for myself for fifteen pieces of silver" and a measure of barley. The SLB gives the barley as a homer and a lethech, about nine bushels in all. Why did Hosea have to buy her? The text does not tell us how she came to need buying. She may have sold herself into slavery to pay debts, or she may have been in the keeping of another man who had to be paid. Either way, she was no longer free, and Hosea paid to set her free.

Many teachers add up the silver and the barley and find a total of about thirty shekels. Thirty shekels of silver was the price of a slave in the Law (Exodus 21:32). The barley may show that Hosea did not have enough silver and paid the rest in grain. Barley was the food of the poor. However we count it, Hosea paid a real price, and it may have cost him all he had.

That is a picture of what Christ did for us. Peter says we were "redeemed not with perishable things, silver or gold," but "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19). To redeem means to buy back, to pay the price to set someone free. We were slaves to sin, and Jesus paid the price to bring us home. Hosea paid fifteen pieces of silver and some barley. Jesus paid with His own life. The New Testament does not name Hosea as a picture of Christ, so I hold this as a picture. But it is hard to read this verse and not think of the cross.

3:3 *And I said to her, "Many days you will dwell for me; you will not prostitute yourself, and you will not belong to a man; and I also* ***will be*** *toward you."*

"Many days you will dwell for me; you will not prostitute yourself, and you will not belong to a man." Hosea brought her home, but not straight back to things as they were. There would be a long time of waiting and quiet. She would give up her other lovers, and she would not yet return to the full closeness of marriage. It was a time of being set apart, of proving and healing.

"And I also will be toward you." Hosea would wait for her too. He was not punishing her. He was keeping himself for her, waiting for the day when the marriage could be whole again. Love that has been betrayed does not heal in a day. Hosea gave it time.

3:4 *For many days the sons of Israel will dwell **with** no king, and no prince, and no sacrifice, and no pillar, and no ephod and teraphim.*

Now Hosea explains the picture: "For many days the sons of Israel will dwell with no king, and no prince, and no sacrifice, and no pillar, and no ephod and teraphim."

Look at that list. A king and a prince were Israel's rulers. Sacrifice was the worship God had given in the Law. A pillar was a sacred stone set up at false places of worship. An ephod was a priest's garment, used in seeking God's guidance. Teraphim were household idols (Genesis 31:19). Hosea lists true things and false things together. In the long time ahead, Israel would lose both. No king of their own. No temple sacrifice. And no idols either.

Has that happened? It has, in a remarkable way. The northern kingdom lost its king in 722 B.C. The southern kingdom lost its king in 586 B.C. and never had a son of David on the throne again. The Jews came back from Babylon and rebuilt the temple, but in A.D. 70 the Romans destroyed it, and there has been no sacrifice since. And after the exile, the Jewish people as a whole never again turned to idols as their fathers had. For about two thousand years the people of Israel have lived just as Hosea said: no king, no sacrifice, no idols. They have been waiting, like Gomer in Hosea's house.

3:5 *Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king; and they will **come** in dread to the LORD and to His goodness at the end of the days.*

"Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king." The waiting will end. Israel will come back, not just to their land but to their God.

"And David their king." David had been dead for more than two hundred years when Hosea wrote this. So who is meant? The prophets use David's name for the great Son of David whom God promised would reign forever (2 Samuel 7:12-16). Jeremiah says, "they will serve the LORD their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them" (Jeremiah 30:9). Ezekiel says, "My servant David will be king over them" (Ezekiel 37:24). The angel told Mary that God would give her Son "the throne of David His father" (Luke 1:32). I believe "David their king" is the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Some teachers think David himself will be raised to rule under Christ in the kingdom. Either way, Christ is the King.

"And they will come in dread to the LORD and to His goodness." The word means to come trembling, the way a child who has run away comes home, shaking, not sure how he will be received, and finds his father's arms open. They will come with awe, and they will find goodness.

"At the end of the days." This phrase points to the last days, the time when God finishes His plan for Israel and the world. I believe this looks ahead to the time when Christ returns. Zechariah says Israel will look on Him whom they pierced and mourn for Him (Zechariah 12:10), and Paul says that a hardening has come on part of Israel "until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, and so all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:25-26). The long days without a king will end when Israel turns to the King they once rejected, and He reigns over them on the throne of David in His thousand-year kingdom (Revelation 20:4-6).

Some teachers believe this was fulfilled when some Jews came back from Babylon, or when Jews and Gentiles came to Christ in the church. The return from Babylon was real, but Israel did not then return to "David their king," and the people as a whole did not seek the LORD in the way Hosea describes. I believe the full fulfillment is still ahead.

This is good news for us too. God has not given up on Israel, and He will not give up on anyone who comes back to Him. If He can keep loving Israel through thousands of years of waiting, He can keep loving you.

Summary

The LORD told Hosea to go again and love a woman who was loved by another and committing adultery, just as the LORD loved Israel while they turned to other gods and loved the raisin cakes of idol feasts. Hosea bought her back for fifteen pieces of silver and about nine bushels of barley. He told her she must wait many days, without prostitution and without belonging to any man, and that he would wait for her too. This was a picture of Israel. For many days the sons of Israel would live with no king or prince, no sacrifice, no sacred pillar, no ephod and no idols. Afterward they would return and seek the LORD their God and David their king, and come trembling to the LORD and to His goodness at the end of the days.

Study Questions

1. What did the LORD tell Hosea to do, and what was it meant to show? (3:1)

2. What price did Hosea pay for her? Why do you think he had to pay? (3:2)

3. What did Hosea tell her about the days ahead, and what did he promise in return? (3:3)

4. What six things would Israel be without for many days? (3:4)

5. What will Israel do afterward, and who is "David their king"? (3:5; Jeremiah 30:9; Luke 1:32)

6. How has Israel's history matched what Hosea said in verse 4?

7. How does Hosea's buying back his wife help you understand what Christ did for you? (1 Peter 1:18-19)

8. God loved Israel even while "they are turning to other gods" (3:1). How does it change things to know that God loved you before you turned to Him?

9. Hosea gave Gomer time to heal and waited for her. Is there a relationship in your life where love needs patience and time rather than a quick fix?

10. Israel will "come in dread to the LORD and to His goodness." Have you ever been afraid to come back to God? What does this verse tell you about how He will receive you?

Hosea 4: The LORD's Case Against Israel

Scripture

4:1-10 Hear the word of the LORD, O sons of Israel, for the LORD ***has*** a contention with the inhabitants of the land; for ***there is*** no truth, and no steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land. Cursing and lying and murdering and stealing and committing adultery—they have broken out, and bloodshed touches bloodshed. Therefore the land will mourn, and everyone who dwells in it will languish, with the living things of the field and with the flying things of the heavens; and also the fish of the sea will be taken away. Only, let no man contend, and let no man reprove a man; and your people ***are*** like those who contend ***with*** a priest. And you will stumble by day, and a prophet also will stumble with you by night; and I will destroy your mother. My people have been destroyed for lack of the knowledge; because you have rejected the knowledge, I will reject you from serving as priest to Me; and you have forgotten the law of your God; I will forget your sons, I also. As they increased, so they sinned against Me; their glory I will change into shame. They eat the sin of My people, and to their iniquity they lift up its soul. And it will be: like people, like priest; and I will visit on him his ways, and his deeds I will repay to him. And they will eat and not be satisfied; they will prostitute themselves and not increase; for they have forsaken paying heed to the LORD.

4:11-19 Prostitution and wine and new wine take away the heart. My people inquires of its wood, and its staff declares to it; for a spirit of prostitutions has led ***them*** astray, and they have prostituted themselves from under their God. On the tops of the mountains they sacrifice, and on the hills they burn ***incense***, under oak and poplar and terebinth, for its shade ***is*** good. Therefore your daughters prostitute themselves, and your brides commit adultery. I will not visit on your daughters when they prostitute themselves, and on your brides when they commit adultery; for they ***themselves*** go aside with the prostitutes, and with the cult prostitutes they sacrifice; and a people ***that*** does not understand will be ruined. Though you ***are*** prostituting yourself, O Israel, let Judah not become guilty; and do not come to Gilgal, and do not go up ***to*** Beth-aven, and do not swear, "***As*** the LORD lives." For like a stubborn heifer Israel is stubborn; now the LORD will pasture them like a lamb in a broad place. Ephraim ***is*** joined to idols; leave him alone. Their drink has come to an end; they have surely prostituted themselves; her shields have loved, loved shame. A wind has wrapped her up in its wings, and they will be ashamed because of their sacrifices.

Preview

With chapter 4 the story of Hosea's family ends, and his sermons begin. The rest of the book is made up of messages Hosea preached to Israel over many years. The first one opens like a court case. The LORD has "a contention with the inhabitants of the land." There is no truth, no steadfast love and no knowledge of God, and the result is a flood of cursing, lying, murder, stealing and adultery.

The heaviest blame falls on the priests. They were supposed to teach God's law, but they rejected it, and so the people were destroyed "for lack of the knowledge." Without the knowledge of God, the people turn to idols of wood, to worship on the hilltops, and to the sexual sins tied to

Canaanite worship. The chapter ends with a warning to Judah not to follow Israel's path, and with a picture of Ephraim joined to idols and swept away by the wind.

Study

4:1 *Hear the word of the LORD, O sons of Israel, for the LORD **has** a contention with the inhabitants of the land; for **there is** no truth, and no steadfast love, and no knowledge of God in the land.*

"Hear the word of the LORD, O sons of Israel, for the LORD has a contention with the inhabitants of the land." A contention is a lawsuit. God is bringing a case against His people, as a covenant partner who has been wronged. The charge is in three parts.

"No truth." The word means faithfulness, being true to your word. "No steadfast love." This is hesed, loyal covenant love. "No knowledge of God in the land." Knowing God in Hosea means more than knowing about Him. It means knowing Him personally, the way a husband knows his wife, and living in His ways. These three things were missing in Israel. And when they are missing, everything else falls apart, as the next verse shows.

4:2-3 *Cursing and lying and murdering and stealing and committing adultery—they have broken out, and bloodshed touches bloodshed. Therefore the land will mourn, and everyone who dwells in it will languish, with the living things of the field and with the flying things of the heavens; and also the fish of the sea will be taken away.*

Cursing, lying, murdering, stealing and committing adultery: these are the Ten Commandments being broken one after another (Exodus 20:7, 13-16). The people still went to the feasts and offered sacrifices, but they ignored the commands that God put at the center of His covenant. "They have broken out," like water breaking through a dam. "Bloodshed touches bloodshed." One murder follows another with no gap between. That is what Israel looked like in the years after Jeroboam II, when king after king was killed.

"Therefore the land will mourn." Sin does not stay inside the sinner. It harms the land, the animals, the birds, "and also the fish of the sea." God made people to care for His creation (Genesis 2:15). When we turn against God, the world around us suffers too. Paul says that all creation groans, waiting for the day God sets it free (Romans 8:20-22).

4:4-5 *Only, let no man contend, and let no man reprove a man; and your people **are** like those who contend **with** a priest. And you will stumble by day, and a prophet also will stumble with you by night; and I will destroy your mother.*

"Only, let no man contend, and let no man reprove a man." The meaning seems to be this: do not point fingers at each other, because everyone is guilty. And then God names who He is really contending with: "your people are like those who contend with a priest." In the Law, anyone who refused to listen to the priest's ruling was to be punished (Deuteronomy 17:12). Here the people had become so stubborn that they argued with God Himself.

But from verse 4 on, God turns His attention to the priest. "You will stumble by day, and a prophet also will stumble with you by night." The religious leaders, who should have been lights, were

stumbling in the dark like everyone else. "And I will destroy your mother." The mother here may be the priest's family, or the nation as a whole.

4:6 *My people have been destroyed for lack of the knowledge; because you have rejected the knowledge, I will reject you from serving as priest to Me; and you have forgotten the law of your God; I will forget your sons, I also.*

"My people have been destroyed for lack of the knowledge." This is one of the best known verses in Hosea, and it is often quoted to mean that people suffer because they lack education. That is not what it means. "The knowledge" here is the knowledge of God and His law, as the rest of the verse makes plain.

Who was to blame? "Because you have rejected the knowledge, I will reject you from serving as priest to Me." God is speaking to the priests. The priests of Israel had a job: to teach the people God's law (Leviticus 10:11; Malachi 2:7). In the northern kingdom, Jeroboam I had made priests "from the ends of the people, who were not of the sons of Levi" (1 Kings 12:31). Those priests did not teach God's law. They ran the worship at the golden calves. The people did not know God because their teachers did not teach them.

"You have forgotten the law of your God; I will forget your sons, I also." What a priest forgets, his children never learn. The punishment matches the sin.

This verse speaks to every pastor, teacher and parent. If we who teach do not know God's Word and do not pass it on, the people we lead will be destroyed. And it speaks to every believer too. You do not need a seminary degree to know God. You need His Word. Are you reading it? Are your children hearing it from you?

4:7-8 *As they increased, so they sinned against Me; their glory I will change into shame. They eat the sin of My people, and to their iniquity they lift up its soul.*

"As they increased, so they sinned against Me." The more priests there were, the more they sinned. Their numbers grew, and so did their wickedness. "Their glory I will change into shame." The honor of the priesthood would become a disgrace.

"They eat the sin of My people." The words "sin" and "sin offering" are the same word in Hebrew. In the Law, the priests ate part of the sin offerings the people brought (Leviticus 6:26). That was their food. So the more the people sinned, the more sin offerings came in, and the better the priests ate. They had a reason to want the people to keep sinning. "To their iniquity they lift up its soul." They longed for the people's sin, because it fed them.

That is a terrible picture of religious leaders who profit from the very things they should be stopping.

4:9-10 *And it will be: like people, like priest; and I will visit on him his ways, and his deeds I will repay to him. And they will eat and not be satisfied; they will prostitute themselves and not increase; for they have forsaken paying heed to the LORD.*

"Like people, like priest." The priests should have been different. They should have lifted the people up. Instead, the priests sank to the people's level, and God would judge them the same way. "I will visit on him his ways, and his deeds I will repay to him."

"They will eat and not be satisfied; they will prostitute themselves and not increase." Israel looked to Baal for full barns and for many children. God says they will get neither. The idols promise what they cannot give. And the reason: "they have forsaken paying heed to the LORD."

4:11-12 *Prostitution and wine and new wine take away the heart. My people inquires of its wood, and its staff declares to it; for a spirit of prostitutions has led **them** astray, and they have prostituted themselves from under their God.*

"Prostitution and wine and new wine take away the heart." The heart in Hebrew is the center of thinking and choosing, not only feeling. Sexual sin and drunkenness take away a person's good sense. They dull the mind until a person can no longer think straight about God or about life.

And the proof follows: "My people inquires of its wood, and its staff declares to it." They asked a piece of wood for guidance. They used a stick, perhaps a carved idol or a rod used in fortune-telling, to find out what to do. The God who spoke to Moses face to face had been traded for a stick. "A spirit of prostitutions has led them astray." Their unfaithfulness was not a passing slip. It had become a spirit, a mindset that drove them.

4:13-14 *On the tops of the mountains they sacrifice, and on the hills they burn **incense**, under oak and poplar and terebinth, for its shade **is** good. Therefore your daughters prostitute themselves, and your brides commit adultery. I will not visit on your daughters when they prostitute themselves, and on your brides when they commit adultery; for they **themselves** go aside with the prostitutes, and with the cult prostitutes they sacrifice; and a people **that** does not understand will be ruined.*

"On the tops of the mountains they sacrifice, and on the hills they burn incense, under oak and poplar and terebinth, for its shade is good." These were the high places, the hilltops and shady groves where the Canaanites worshiped their gods. God had told Israel to tear them down (Deuteronomy 12:2-3). Instead, Israel worshiped there.

"Therefore your daughters prostitute themselves, and your brides commit adultery." Canaanite worship included ritual sex, which they believed would make the land fertile. The fathers took part, and their daughters followed.

Then God says something surprising: "I will not visit on your daughters when they prostitute themselves." Why would God not punish them? Because the men were worse. "For they themselves go aside with the prostitutes, and with the cult prostitutes they sacrifice." A cult prostitute was a woman who served at a pagan shrine. The men of Israel held their daughters to a

standard they did not keep themselves. God will not let them punish the young women for following the example the men had set. Here is a double standard, and God refuses to accept it.

"And a people that does not understand will be ruined." This goes back to verse 6. Without the knowledge of God, people do not understand, and a people that does not understand comes to ruin.

4:15 *Though you **are** prostituting yourself, O Israel, let Judah not become guilty; and do not come to Gilgal, and do not go up **to** Beth-aven, and do not swear, "**As** the LORD lives."*

"Though you are prostituting yourself, O Israel, let Judah not become guilty." Now God turns to Judah, the southern kingdom, with a warning: do not follow Israel. "Do not come to Gilgal, and do not go up to Beth-aven." Gilgal was a famous holy place near Jericho, where Israel had first camped in the promised land (Joshua 4:19-20). By Hosea's day it had become a center of false worship (9:15; Amos 4:4). Beth-aven means house of wickedness. It is Hosea's mocking name for Bethel, which means house of God, where Jeroboam I had set up a golden calf (1 Kings 12:28-29). The house of God had become the house of wickedness.

"And do not swear, As the LORD lives." Swearing by the LORD's name was right in itself (Deuteronomy 6:13). But swearing by the LORD at a place where they worshiped a calf was a lie. God did not want His name mixed with idolatry.

4:16-17 *For like a stubborn heifer Israel is stubborn; now the LORD will pasture them like a lamb in a broad place. Ephraim **is** joined to idols; leave him alone.*

"For like a stubborn heifer Israel is stubborn." A young cow that will not take the yoke digs in its heels and pulls the other way. That was Israel. "Now the LORD will pasture them like a lamb in a broad place." This may be bitter irony: a lamb alone in a wide open field is not free. It is helpless, with wolves all around. Israel wanted to be free of God, and God would give them that freedom, out in the open, alone, in exile.

"Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone." Ephraim was the largest tribe of the northern kingdom, and Hosea often uses its name for the whole nation. "Joined" means bound together, the way a married couple is joined. Ephraim had married the idols. And God says to Judah, "leave him alone." Do not go near him. Do not get drawn in.

These are some of the most sobering words in Scripture. Sometimes God gives people over to what they insist on choosing (Romans 1:24). Being left alone by God is a terrible judgment.

4:18-19 *Their drink has come to an end; they have surely prostituted themselves; her shields have loved, loved shame. A wind has wrapped her up in its wings, and they will be ashamed because of their sacrifices.*

"Their drink has come to an end." Their drinking parties are over, but they keep sinning. "Her shields have loved, loved shame." The shields are the leaders, the men who should have protected the people. They loved what was shameful.

"A wind has wrapped her up in its wings." A wind is about to carry Israel away, like a bird caught in a storm. This points to the Assyrian army that would sweep the nation into exile. "And they will be ashamed because of their sacrifices." The worship they trusted in would become their shame.

Summary

The LORD brought a case against Israel, because there was no truth, no steadfast love and no knowledge of God in the land. Instead there was cursing, lying, murder, stealing, adultery and bloodshed, and the land, its animals, birds and fish suffered for it. God blamed the priests most of all. His people were destroyed for lack of knowledge, because the priests had rejected knowledge and forgotten God's law, and so He would reject them and forget their children. The more priests there were, the more they sinned, feeding on the people's sin offerings. It would be "like people, like priest." Drunkenness and sexual sin took away the people's understanding. They asked wood and a staff for guidance, sacrificed on the hilltops under shady trees, and joined in the sins of pagan worship. God would not single out the young women, because the men were worse. God warned Judah not to follow Israel to Gilgal and Beth-aven, for Israel was like a stubborn heifer, Ephraim was joined to idols, and a wind would carry them away in shame.

Study Questions

1. What three things did the LORD say were missing in the land? (4:1)

2. Which of the Ten Commandments do you see being broken in verse 2? (4:2; Exodus 20)

3. Why were God's people destroyed, and who was most to blame? (4:6)

4. What does it mean that the priests "eat the sin of My people"? (4:8; Leviticus 6:26)

5. What did the people ask for guidance, and where did they worship? (4:12-13)

6. Why did God say He would not punish the daughters and brides? (4:14)

7. What warning did God give to Judah, and why did Hosea call Bethel "Beth-aven"? (4:15)

8. Verse 6 says God's people were destroyed for lack of knowledge. How well do you know God's Word? What is one step you could take to know it better?

9. "Like people, like priest." If you teach or lead others, at home, at church or at work, how does your own walk with God affect those who follow you?

10. Wine and sexual sin "take away the heart." What things in our world today dull our minds toward God?

Hosea 5: Judgment on Priests, People and King

Scripture

5:1-15 Hear this, priests, and pay attention, house of Israel, and house of the king, give ear; for the judgment ***is*** for you, for you have been a trap at Mizpah and a net spread out over Tabor. And rebels have made slaughter deep, and I ***am*** discipline to all of them. I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from Me; for now you have prostituted yourself, Ephraim; Israel has made itself unclean. Their deeds do not permit ***them*** to return to their God, for a spirit of prostitution ***is*** in their midst, and the LORD they do not know. And the pride of Israel testifies to his face, and Israel and Ephraim will stumble in their iniquity; Judah also will stumble with them. With their flocks and with their herds they will go to seek the LORD, and they will not find ***Him***; He has withdrawn from them. They have dealt treacherously with the LORD, for they have begotten strange sons; now a new moon will devour them with their portions. Blow a horn in Gibeah, a trumpet in Ramah; sound an alarm ***at*** Beth-aven: after you, Benjamin! Ephraim will become a waste in a day of rebuke; among the tribes of Israel I make known ***what is*** sure. The princes of Judah have become like ***those who*** move a boundary; on them I will pour out My wrath like water. Ephraim ***is*** oppressed, crushed ***in*** judgment, for he was determined ***to*** walk after a command. And I ***am*** like the moth to Ephraim, and like rottenness to the house of Judah. And Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound; and Ephraim went to Assyria, and he sent to King Jareb. And he is not able to heal you, and the wound will not be cured from you. For I ***am*** like the lion to Ephraim, and like the young lion to the house of Judah. I, I will tear and go; I will carry off, and there is no deliverer. I will go; I will return to My place until they are held guilty and seek My face; in their distress they will seek Me earnestly.

Preview

Hosea 5 calls three groups to court: the priests, the whole house of Israel, and the house of the king. All of them have led the people astray. Their sin has become so deep that their own deeds keep them from returning to God. They will come with their flocks and herds to seek the LORD, but they will not find Him, because He has withdrawn from them.

The middle of the chapter sounds an alarm in the towns of Benjamin, on the border between Israel and Judah, because both kingdoms are under judgment. When they feel their sickness, Ephraim and Judah run to Assyria for help, but no king of Assyria can heal them. The LORD Himself is the one tearing them, like a lion. The chapter ends with God going back to His place until His people admit their guilt and seek His face, and that opens the door to the call to return in chapter 6.

Study

5:1-2 *Hear this, priests, and pay attention, house of Israel, and house of the king, give ear; for the judgment **is** for you, for you have been a trap at Mizpah and a net spread out over Tabor. And rebels have made slaughter deep, and I **am** discipline to all of them.*

"Hear this, priests, and pay attention, house of Israel, and house of the king, give ear." God calls the religious leaders, the people, and the royal family. No one is left out. "For the judgment is for you." The word can mean both that justice was their job and that judgment is coming on them. Both are true. They were supposed to bring justice, and now they will face it.

"You have been a trap at Mizpah and a net spread out over Tabor." Mizpah, in Gilead east of the Jordan, and Mount Tabor, in Galilee, were places of worship. Instead of leading the people to God, the leaders had set traps for them, the way a hunter sets snares for birds. They drew the people into idol worship.

"And rebels have made slaughter deep." This may refer to the sacrifices at those shrines, or to the murders that filled the land. "And I am discipline to all of them." God will correct them all.

5:3-4 *I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from Me; for now you have prostituted yourself, Ephraim; Israel has made itself unclean. Their deeds do not permit **them** to return to their God, for a spirit of prostitution **is** in their midst, and the LORD they do not know.*

"I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from Me." The people may have thought they could hide what they did on the hilltops. God sees it all. "For now you have prostituted yourself, Ephraim; Israel has made itself unclean." Unclean in the Law meant unfit to come before God in worship.

"Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God." This is a sobering truth. Sin is not only something we do. It becomes something that holds us. A habit of sin builds walls between us and God, and the longer we stay in it, the harder it is to turn back. "For a spirit of prostitution is in their midst, and the LORD they do not know." They did not know God, so they did not want Him.

Jesus said, "everyone who does sin is a slave of sin" (John 8:34). The good news is that the Son can set us free (John 8:36). But we should never think we can sin now and turn back easily later.

5:5 *And the pride of Israel testifies to his face, and Israel and Ephraim will stumble in their iniquity; Judah also will stumble with them.*

"And the pride of Israel testifies to his face." Israel's pride is like a witness standing up in court against him. Pride would not let them admit they were wrong. "And Israel and Ephraim will stumble in their iniquity; Judah also will stumble with them." For the first time in this chapter Judah is named with Israel. The south was following the north down the same path.

5:6-7 *With their flocks and with their herds they will go to seek the LORD, and they will not find* ***Him****; He has withdrawn from them. They have dealt treacherously with the LORD, for they have begotten strange sons; now a new moon will devour them with their portions.*

"With their flocks and with their herds they will go to seek the LORD, and they will not find Him." They will bring sacrifices, many of them. But "He has withdrawn from them." God is not moved by the size of the offering when the heart is far from Him. Isaiah said the same to Judah: God had had enough of their burnt offerings while their hands were full of blood (Isaiah 1:11-15).

"They have dealt treacherously with the LORD, for they have begotten strange sons." Strange here means foreign, outside the covenant. The children of Israel were being raised as pagans, not as people of the LORD. Their parents had not taught them God's ways. "Now a new moon will devour them with their portions." The new moon was a monthly feast. The meaning may be that within a month, at one of their own feast days, judgment will fall and eat up their land.

5:8-9 *Blow a horn in Gibeah, a trumpet in Ramah; sound an alarm* ***at*** *Beth-aven: after you, Benjamin! Ephraim will become a waste in a day of rebuke; among the tribes of Israel I make known* ***what is*** *sure.*

"Blow a horn in Gibeah, a trumpet in Ramah; sound an alarm at Beth-aven." These three towns stood on the border between Judah and Israel, in the land of Benjamin. The horn was blown to warn of an enemy coming. "After you, Benjamin!" was probably a battle cry, warning that the enemy was right behind them.

Many teachers think this fits the war of about 734 to 732 B.C. Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Syria attacked Judah, King Ahaz of Judah called in Assyria, and the border towns changed hands (2 Kings 16:5-9; Isaiah 7). Whatever the exact event, the point is plain. "Ephraim will become a waste in a day of rebuke." God made it known "among the tribes of Israel" that this is sure. It will happen.

5:10 *The princes of Judah have become like* ***those who*** *move a boundary; on them I will pour out My wrath like water.*

"The princes of Judah have become like those who move a boundary." In the Law, moving a neighbor's boundary stone was a serious crime (Deuteronomy 19:14; 27:17). It meant stealing land. The princes of Judah were grabbing land, perhaps using the war to take territory from Israel, or taking land from the poor at home. "On them I will pour out My wrath like water." Like a flood that covers everything.

5:11-12 *Ephraim* ***is*** *oppressed, crushed* ***in*** *judgment, for he was determined* ***to*** *walk after a command. And I* ***am*** *like the moth to Ephraim, and like rottenness to the house of Judah.*

"Ephraim is oppressed, crushed in judgment, for he was determined to walk after a command." Whose command? Not God's. Ephraim chose to follow human commands, the orders of their kings to worship at the calves, rather than God's law. And so Ephraim was crushed.

"And I am like the moth to Ephraim, and like rottenness to the house of Judah." A moth eats a garment slowly, quietly, from the inside, until one day it falls apart. Rot does the same to wood. God's judgment does not always come like a storm. Sometimes it comes quietly, as a slow decay that people hardly notice until it is too late. A nation, a church or a family can rot from within for years before anyone sees it.

5:13 *And Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound; and Ephraim went to Assyria, and he sent to King Jareb. And he is not able to heal you, and the wound will not be cured from you.*

"And Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound." They knew something was wrong. But where did they turn? "Ephraim went to Assyria, and he sent to King Jareb." Jareb is not the name of any known Assyrian king. It seems to be a title, meaning something like the great king, or the king who contends. Hosea uses it a second time in 10:6. King Menahem of Israel paid Assyria a huge tribute to keep his throne (2 Kings 15:19-20), and King Hoshea paid tribute too (2 Kings 17:3). King Ahaz of Judah sent silver and gold from the temple to the king of Assyria to get his help (2 Kings 16:7-8).

"And he is not able to heal you, and the wound will not be cured from you." They went to the wrong doctor. The very power they ran to would be the one that destroyed Israel and nearly destroyed Judah.

When we are hurting, where do we run first? It is easy to look for help everywhere except from God. Doctors, friends and counselors are gifts from God. But no one can heal what only God can heal.

5:14-15 *For I **am** like the lion to Ephraim, and like the young lion to the house of Judah. I, I will tear and go; I will carry off, and there is no deliverer. I will go; I will return to My place until they are held guilty and seek My face; in their distress they will seek Me earnestly.*

"For I am like the lion to Ephraim, and like the young lion to the house of Judah." Now we learn who was really behind their trouble. It was not just Assyria. It was God. "I, I will tear and go; I will carry off, and there is no deliverer." Assyria was only the tool. The lion was the LORD. No king, no treaty, no army could take the prey out of His mouth.

But look at what He says next: "I will go; I will return to My place until they are held guilty and seek My face." The lion goes back to his den. God withdraws, and waits. Why? "Until they are held guilty," until they admit their guilt, own their sin. "And seek My face." God's goal was never to destroy them for good. It was to bring them back.

"In their distress they will seek Me earnestly." The word for earnestly can mean seeking early, at dawn, seeking eagerly. Their distress will drive them to Him. This is exactly what happens in the next three verses (6:1-3).

Many teachers also see in these words a picture of Israel's long history. God has withdrawn, and Israel as a nation has waited, until in the last days, "in their distress," the time of Jacob's trouble (Jeremiah 30:7), they will seek Him. I believe that day is coming, during the Tribulation, the

seven years of trouble before Christ returns, when Israel will turn to the One they pierced (Zechariah 12:10).

Summary

God called the priests, the house of Israel and the house of the king to hear His judgment, because they had been a trap at Mizpah and a net on Tabor, drawing the people into sin. God knew Ephraim. Israel had prostituted itself and become unclean, and their deeds now kept them from returning to God. Israel's pride testified against them, and Ephraim and Judah would stumble together. They would come with flocks and herds to seek the LORD, but He had withdrawn from them, for they had raised children as strangers to the covenant. An alarm was sounded at Gibeah, Ramah and Beth-aven, because Ephraim would become a waste. The princes of Judah were moving boundary stones, and God would pour out His wrath on them. God was like a moth and rot to His people. When they saw their sickness and wounds, they went to the king of Assyria, but he could not heal them. The LORD Himself was the lion tearing them, and no one could deliver them. He would go back to His place until they admitted their guilt and sought His face, and in their distress they would seek Him earnestly.

Study Questions

1. Which three groups did God call to hear His judgment, and what had they been to the people? (5:1)

2. Why could the people not return to God? (5:4)

3. What happened when the people came with their flocks and herds to seek the LORD? Why? (5:6)

4. What was the sin of the princes of Judah? (5:10; Deuteronomy 19:14)

5. What two pictures does God use for His quiet judgment on Ephraim and Judah? (5:12)

6. Where did Ephraim and Judah go for help when they saw their sickness, and could he heal them? (5:13)

7. Why does God go back to His place, and what is He waiting for? (5:15)

8. Verse 4 says sin can keep us from returning to God. Is there a habit in your life that makes it harder for you to come to Him?

9. Like a moth in a garment, decay can work quietly for a long time. What are some warning signs of slow spiritual decay in a person or a church?

10. When trouble comes, where do you usually turn first? What would it look like to seek God's face first?

Hosea 6: Come, Let Us Return to the LORD

Scripture

6:1-11 Come, and let us return to the LORD; for He has torn, and He will heal us; He has struck, and He will bind us up. He will revive us after two days; on the third day He will raise us up, and we will live before Him. And let us know, let us pursue to know the LORD; like dawn His going forth is established; and He will come to us like the rain, like spring rain ***that*** waters ***the*** land. What will I do to you, Ephraim? What will I do to you, Judah? And your steadfast love ***is*** like a cloud of morning, and like the dew rising early, going ***away***. Therefore I have hewn ***them*** by the prophets; I have killed them by the words of My mouth; and your judgments ***are*** light ***that*** goes forth. For steadfast love I desire, and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. And they, like Adam, have overstepped ***the*** covenant; there they dealt treacherously with Me. Gilead ***is*** a town of doers of wickedness, tracked with blood. And as marauding bands wait for a man, ***so*** a company of priests murder ***on*** the way to Shechem; for they have done villainy. In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible ***thing***; there ***is*** Ephraim's prostitution; Israel has made itself unclean. Also, Judah, he has appointed a harvest for you, when I turn back the captivity of My people.

Preview

Chapter 5 ended with God waiting for His people to seek Him in their distress. Chapter 6 opens with the words they should say: "Come, and let us return to the LORD." It is one of the most beautiful calls to repentance in the Old Testament. The God who has torn will heal. The God who has struck will bind up. On the third day He will raise us up, and He will come to us like the spring rain.

But then God answers, and His answer is heartbreaking: "What will I do to you, Ephraim?" Their love is like the morning mist, gone by the time the sun is up. What God wants is not more sacrifices but steadfast love and the knowledge of God. Jesus quoted those words twice. The chapter ends with a list of Israel's crimes: broken covenant, bloodshed in Gilead, priests who murder on the road, and a harvest of judgment appointed for Judah too.

Study

6:1 *Come, and let us return to the LORD; for He has torn, and He will heal us; He has struck, and He will bind us up.*

"Come, and let us return to the LORD." The word "return" is the Hebrew word shuv, the main Old Testament word for repentance. To repent means to turn around: to stop going away from God and start going toward Him. It is not just feeling sorry. It is a change of direction.

"For He has torn, and He will heal us; He has struck, and He will bind us up." These words pick up the lion of 5:14, who tears. The speaker understands that the trouble came from God. That is the beginning of real repentance: to stop blaming Assyria, or bad luck, or other people, and to say that

God did this, because of our sin. And the same God who wounds is the God who heals. Moses said the same thing long before: "I have wounded and I, I heal" (Deuteronomy 32:39).

God's discipline is never meant to destroy His children. It is meant to bring them home. "For whom the Lord loves He disciplines" (Hebrews 12:6). The hand that strikes is the hand that binds up.

6:2 *He will revive us after two days; on the third day He will raise us up, and we will live before Him.*

"He will revive us after two days; on the third day He will raise us up, and we will live before Him." In Hebrew poetry, "after two days" followed by "on the third day" is a way of saying in a short time. The people are saying that God will not leave them in their wounds for long. He will soon raise them up, like a sick man getting out of bed, and they will live in His presence.

Many Christians, from early times, have also seen in this verse a hint of the resurrection of Jesus on the third day. Paul says Christ "has been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:4), and Bible teachers have long asked which Scriptures he had in mind. Jonah 1:17 is one. Some believe Hosea 6:2 is another. The New Testament never quotes this verse directly, so I hold it as a possible picture and no more. But it is fitting. Israel's hope of being raised up will come true only because Israel's Messiah was raised up first. And Paul tells us that Israel's future turning to God will be "life out of the dead" (Romans 11:15).

6:3 *And let us know, let us pursue to know the LORD; like dawn His going forth is established; and He will come to us like the rain, like spring rain* ***that*** *waters* ***the*** *land.*

"And let us know, let us pursue to know the LORD." Here is the knowledge of God again (4:1, 6). The cure for Israel's sickness is not just more religion. It is knowing God. And notice the word "pursue." Knowing God takes effort. We chase it the way a hunter chases game, or the way a man in love pursues the woman he loves.

"Like dawn His going forth is established." The sunrise is sure. No one doubts the sun will come up tomorrow. In the same way, God's coming to His people is sure. "And He will come to us like the rain, like spring rain that waters the land." In Israel the rains come in two seasons, the early rains in the fall, which soften the ground for planting, and the latter or spring rains, which ripen the crops before harvest. Without rain there is no harvest. Israel had looked to Baal for rain. Here the people finally say that the LORD Himself is the rain.

These three verses are a model prayer for anyone who has wandered. Come back. Admit God's hand. Trust Him to heal. Pursue Him. Wait for Him like the dawn.

But are the people sincere? The next verse makes us wonder.

6:4 *What will I do to you, Ephraim? What will I do to you, Judah? And your steadfast love **is** like a cloud of morning, and like the dew rising early, going **away**.*

"What will I do to you, Ephraim? What will I do to you, Judah?" This is not the voice of an angry judge. It is the voice of a grieving parent who has tried everything. "And your steadfast love is like a cloud of morning, and like the dew rising early, going away."

In Israel, early morning mists and heavy dew are common in summer. By nine o'clock the sun has burned them away. Israel's love for God was like that. It showed up in the morning, maybe after a scare, or at a feast. By noon it was gone.

Is your love for God like that? Strong on Sunday morning, gone by Monday afternoon? God is not looking for a feeling that comes and goes. He wants steadfast love, love that lasts.

6:5 *Therefore I have hewn **them** by the prophets; I have killed them by the words of My mouth; and your judgments **are** light **that** goes forth.*

"Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets." God had sent prophet after prophet: Elijah, Elisha, Amos and now Hosea. Their words cut like an axe hewing wood or stone. "I have killed them by the words of My mouth." The words of judgment were so sure that it was as though they had already happened. "And your judgments are light that goes forth." God's judgment is as plain and clear as the morning light. No one could say they had not been warned.

6:6 *For steadfast love I desire, and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.*

"For steadfast love I desire, and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."

This is the key verse of the chapter, and one of the most important verses in the Old Testament. Did God not command sacrifices? Yes, He did, in the Law. A burnt offering was an animal wholly burned on the altar, given to God as worship. God is not saying sacrifices were wrong. He is saying they were never the main thing. He wanted the heart behind them. Notice the words "more than." God wanted steadfast love and the knowledge of God first. A sacrifice with no love behind it was empty. Samuel had told King Saul, "to listen is better than sacrifice" (1 Samuel 15:22). Micah, a few years after Hosea, would say what the LORD requires is to "love steadfast love, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

Jesus quoted this verse twice. When the Pharisees complained that He ate with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus told them, "having gone, learn what it is," and then He quoted Hosea: "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice" (Matthew 9:13). He had come to call sinners, and the Pharisees, who kept every rule, had no mercy for them. Later, when the Pharisees accused His disciples of breaking the Sabbath by picking grain to eat, Jesus said that if they had known what this verse means, "you would not have condemned the guiltless" (Matthew 12:7). In the Greek of Matthew, the Hebrew word hesed is given as "mercy." Steadfast love toward God shows itself in mercy toward people.

The Pharisees were careful about religion and careless about people. Israel in Hosea's day was busy with sacrifices and empty of love. What about us? It is possible to go to church every week, give, serve and sing, and still not know God or love the people around us. God wants the heart.

6:7 *And they, like Adam, have overstepped **the** covenant; there they dealt treacherously with Me.*

"And they, like Adam, have overstepped the covenant." Bible teachers read this in more than one way. Some see a reference to Adam in the garden, who broke God's command and fell (Genesis 2:16-17; 3:6). Israel, like Adam, was given a good place and one clear command, and broke it. Others note that Adam was also a town by the Jordan (Joshua 3:16), and the next word, "there," fits a place. Something may have happened at Adam that we do not know about. The word can also simply mean "like men." Whichever is right, the charge is plain: Israel broke covenant. "There they dealt treacherously with Me."

6:8-9 *Gilead **is** a town of doers of wickedness, tracked with blood. And as marauding bands wait for a man, **so** a company of priests murder **on** the way to Shechem; for they have done villainy.*

"Gilead is a town of doers of wickedness, tracked with blood." Gilead was the land east of the Jordan, but here it seems to be a town, perhaps Ramoth-gilead. "Tracked with blood" means there were bloody footprints everywhere. When Pekah murdered King Pekahiah, he had fifty men of Gilead with him (2 Kings 15:25). The whole place was known for violence.

"And as marauding bands wait for a man, so a company of priests murder on the way to Shechem." Shechem was one of the cities of refuge, where a person who killed someone by accident could flee for safety (Joshua 20:7). It was also a place where people traveled to worship. The priests, of all people, were lying in wait on the road like bandits. The ones who should have protected the traveler were killing him. "For they have done villainy."

6:10-11 *In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible **thing**; there **is** Ephraim's prostitution; Israel has made itself unclean. Also, Judah, he has appointed a harvest for you, when I turn back the captivity of My people.*

"In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing; there is Ephraim's prostitution; Israel has made itself unclean." God sums it up. What He sees in His people makes Him shudder.

"Also, Judah, He has appointed a harvest for you." A harvest here means judgment. Judah was not innocent, and its time of reaping would come too. Judah would fall to Babylon in 586 B.C.

"When I turn back the captivity of My people." This phrase is used for God bringing His people home and restoring their fortunes. It may belong with the start of chapter 7. Either way, even in a verse about judgment, God speaks of the day He will bring them back. Judgment and restoration stand side by side in Hosea, because God's last word to His people is always mercy.

Summary

Hosea called the people to return to the LORD, who had torn them and would heal them, who had struck them and would bind them up. After two days He would revive them, and on the third day

raise them up to live before Him. They should pursue the knowledge of the LORD, whose coming is as sure as the dawn and as welcome as the spring rain. But God answered with grief, "What will I do to you, Ephraim?" Their steadfast love was like the morning cloud and the early dew that vanish. So God had cut them down by the words of His prophets. He desires steadfast love and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings, words Jesus quoted to the Pharisees in Matthew 9:13 and 12:7. Like Adam, Israel had broken the covenant. Gilead was tracked with blood, priests murdered travelers on the road to Shechem, and Israel was unclean. A harvest of judgment was appointed for Judah too, even as God spoke of turning back the captivity of His people.

God used my alcoholism to bring me back to Him. After a hiking accident in 2014, I used alcohol to deal with the pain, a little at first and then a lot. It tore me down. Then God began to heal me, starting on May 29, 2020. "He has torn, and He will heal us."

Study Questions

1. What does the call "let us return to the LORD" ask the people to do? What do they believe God will do? (6:1)

2. What does "after two days" and "on the third day" most likely mean, and how have some Christians seen it as a picture? (6:2; 1 Corinthians 15:4)

3. What two pictures does verse 3 use for God's coming to His people? (6:3)

4. What did God say Israel's steadfast love was like? (6:4)

5. What does God desire more than sacrifice? (6:6)

6. On what two occasions did Jesus quote Hosea 6:6, and what point was He making? (Matthew 9:10-13; 12:1-7)

7. What were the priests doing on the road to Shechem? (6:9)

8. "He has torn, and He will heal us." Can you think of a time when God used something painful to bring you back to Him?

9. Is your love for God more like the morning dew or like steadfast love? What helps your love last through the week?

10. Jesus told the Pharisees to go and learn what Hosea 6:6 means. Where might you be more careful about religion than about mercy toward people?

Hosea 7: A Hot Oven and a Silly Dove

Scripture

7:1-7 When I heal Israel, and the iniquity of Ephraim is revealed, and the evil deeds of Samaria; for they practice falsehood, and a thief comes in, a marauding band raids in the street. And they do not say to their heart ***that*** I remember all their evil; now their deeds have surrounded them; they are before My face. By their evil they make ***the*** king glad, and by their lies, princes. All of them ***are*** adulterers, like an oven burning from a baker; he ceases stirring ***it*** from kneading ***the*** dough until it is leavened. ***On*** the day of our king, princes became sick ***with*** the heat from wine; he stretched out his hand with scorners. For they have brought near their heart like the oven in their ambush; all the night their baker sleeps; ***in the*** morning it burns like a fire of flame. All of them are hot like the oven, and they devour their judges; all their kings have fallen; there is none among them calling to Me.

7:8-16 Ephraim mixes himself among the peoples; Ephraim has become a cake not turned over. Strangers have devoured his strength, and he does not know; also gray hair has scattered on him, and he does not know. And the pride of Israel testifies to his face, and they have not returned to the LORD their God, and they have not sought Him for all this. And Ephraim has become like a silly dove without heart; they have called to Egypt; they have gone to Assyria. As they go, I will spread My net over them; like the birds of the heavens I will bring them down; I will discipline them according to the report to their congregation. Woe to them, for they have wandered from Me! Devastation to them, for they have transgressed against Me! And I, I would ransom them, and they have spoken lies against Me. And they have not cried out to Me with their heart when they wail on their beds; for grain and new wine they assemble themselves; they turn aside against Me. And I, I disciplined ***them***, I strengthened their arms, and against Me they plot evil. They return, ***but*** not upward; they have become like a bow of deceit; their princes will fall by the sword from the indignation of their tongue; this ***will be*** their mockery in the land of Egypt.

Preview

God wants to heal Israel, but every time He comes near to heal, more sin comes to light. Hosea 7 paints the inside of Israel's palace in Hosea's last years. The court is full of liars and drunks. The plotters are like a baker's oven, banked low all night and blazing up in the morning, and one king after another falls to their fire. And in all of it, "there is none among them calling to Me."

The second half turns to Israel's foreign policy. Ephraim is a half-baked cake, burned on one side and raw on the other. He is gray-haired and does not know it. He is like a silly dove, flying first to Egypt and then to Assyria, never once flying home to God. God will throw His net over the dove. He longed to redeem them, but they spoke lies against Him, cried on their beds for grain and wine instead of crying to Him, and turned away like a crooked bow.

Study

7:1-2 *When I heal Israel, and the iniquity of Ephraim is revealed, and the evil deeds of Samaria; for they practice falsehood, and a thief comes in, a marauding band raids in the street. And they do not say to their heart* ***that*** *I remember all their evil; now their deeds have surrounded them; they are before My face.*

"When I heal Israel, and the iniquity of Ephraim is revealed, and the evil deeds of Samaria." God wanted to heal them. But like a doctor who pulls back a bandage and finds the wound is far worse than he thought, every time God moved to heal, He found more sin. Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom, built by King Omri (1 Kings 16:24). "For they practice falsehood, and a thief comes in, a marauding band raids in the street." Lying, breaking in, robbing in the open street: crime was everywhere.

"And they do not say to their heart that I remember all their evil." This was the deeper problem. The people did not think God noticed, or that He would remember. They lived as if God had a short memory. "Now their deeds have surrounded them; they are before My face." Their sins were piling up around them, like walls closing in, and every one of them was in plain view before God.

People still think that way. If nothing bad has happened yet, maybe God did not see. But God sees and remembers everything that has not been washed away by the blood of Christ (Hebrews 4:13).

7:3 *By their evil they make* ***the*** *king glad, and by their lies, princes.*

"By their evil they make the king glad, and by their lies, princes." The rulers were not shocked by the evil around them. They enjoyed it. The people in power liked flattery and lies, and the people around them gave them what they liked. When leaders reward liars, they get more lies.

7:4-7 *All of them* ***are*** *adulterers, like an oven burning from a baker; he ceases stirring* ***it*** *from kneading* ***the*** *dough until it is leavened.* ***On*** *the day of our king, princes became sick* ***with*** *the heat from wine; he stretched out his hand with scorners. For they have brought near their heart like the oven in their ambush; all the night their baker sleeps;* ***in the*** *morning it burns like a fire of flame. All of them are hot like the oven, and they devour their judges; all their kings have fallen; there is none among them calling to Me.*

Here Hosea uses a long picture of a baker's oven. In Israel, the baker would build a fire in a clay oven in the evening and let it burn low all night while the dough rose. In the morning he would stir the coals, and the oven would blaze up hot enough to bake the bread.

"All of them are adulterers, like an oven burning from a baker." Their passion, whether for sin or for power, burned inside them. "He ceases stirring it from kneading the dough until it is leavened." The fire is left alone through the night, smoldering.

"On the day of our king, princes became sick with the heat from wine." On a feast day for the king, perhaps his birthday or the day he was crowned, the officials drank until they were sick. "He stretched out his hand with scorners." The king joined in with mockers.

"For they have brought near their heart like the oven in their ambush; all the night their baker sleeps; in the morning it burns like a fire of flame." The plotters waited quietly, like coals through the night. Then, when the time was right, the plot blazed up.

"All of them are hot like the oven, and they devour their judges; all their kings have fallen." This fits the last years of Israel exactly. After Jeroboam II, Zechariah was murdered by Shallum. Shallum was murdered by Menahem. Pekahiah was murdered by Pekah. Pekah was murdered by Hoshea (2 Kings 15:10, 14, 25, 30). Four kings in about twenty years were killed by men in their own court.

And in all the plotting and murder: "there is none among them calling to Me." Not one of them, king or prince, turned to God. They tried everything except prayer.

7:8 *Ephraim mixes himself among the peoples; Ephraim has become a cake not turned over.*

"Ephraim mixes himself among the peoples." Israel was supposed to be a holy people, set apart for God (Deuteronomy 7:6). Instead they mixed in with the nations, taking up their gods, their ways and their treaties.

"Ephraim has become a cake not turned over." In Israel, flat bread was often baked on hot stones or a metal plate, and it had to be flipped. If you forgot to turn it, it was burned black on one side and raw dough on the other. Good for nothing. That was Israel: half one thing and half another, part LORD and part Baal, scorched by the world and never fully given to God.

Many of us know what that is like. One side of our life is given to God, and the other side is untouched. Jesus said, "No one is able to serve two masters" (Matthew 6:24).

7:9-10 *Strangers have devoured his strength, and he does not know; also gray hair has scattered on him, and he does not know. And the pride of Israel testifies to his face, and they have not returned to the LORD their God, and they have not sought Him for all this.*

"Strangers have devoured his strength, and he does not know." Foreign powers were draining Israel. Menahem had paid Assyria a thousand talents of silver (2 Kings 15:19-20), a huge sum, and Hoshea later paid tribute too. The kingdom was being eaten away, and the people did not see it.

"Also gray hair has scattered on him, and he does not know." Gray hair is a sign of age. Israel was growing old and weak, near its end, and did not notice. Have you ever seen a man who will not admit he is getting old? He still thinks he can do what he did at twenty. Israel was like that. They thought they were still as strong as in the days of Jeroboam II, while death was close at hand.

"And the pride of Israel testifies to his face" (as in 5:5). "And they have not returned to the LORD their God, and they have not sought Him for all this." For all this. After all the trouble, all the warnings, all the loss, they still did not turn to God.

7:11-12 *And Ephraim has become like a silly dove without heart; they have called to Egypt; they have gone to Assyria. As they go, I will spread My net over them; like the birds of the heavens I will bring them down; I will discipline them according to the report to their congregation.*

"And Ephraim has become like a silly dove without heart." A dove is easily frightened and easily fooled. It flutters this way and that, and flies straight into the trap. "Without heart" means without sense. "They have called to Egypt; they have gone to Assyria." Israel kept switching sides between the two great powers. King Menahem paid Assyria. King Hoshea paid Assyria, then secretly sent messengers to So, king of Egypt, to rebel, and that betrayal brought the Assyrian army down on Samaria (2 Kings 17:3-6).

"As they go, I will spread My net over them." God is like a fowler, a bird catcher, who throws his net over the fluttering dove. Wherever they fly, they will end up in God's net. "I will discipline them according to the report to their congregation." God would do exactly what He had warned them through Moses and the prophets.

Where do you fly when you are afraid? The silly dove flew everywhere but home. God wants us to fly to Him.

7:13 *Woe to them, for they have wandered from Me! Devastation to them, for they have transgressed against Me! And I, I would ransom them, and they have spoken lies against Me.*

"Woe to them, for they have wandered from Me!" Woe is a cry of grief and warning, the cry at a funeral. "Devastation to them, for they have transgressed against Me!"

"And I, I would ransom them, and they have spoken lies against Me." Here is God's heart. He wanted to ransom them, to buy them back, as He had done when He brought them out of Egypt. He was ready. But they spoke lies about Him. Perhaps they said He could not help, or that He did not care, or that Baal was the one who gave the rain. We can keep God's help away from ourselves by what we believe about Him.

7:14 *And they have not cried out to Me with their heart when they wail on their beds; for grain and new wine they assemble themselves; they turn aside against Me.*

"And they have not cried out to Me with their heart when they wail on their beds." They did cry. They wailed. But not to God, and not from the heart. Their crying was for what they had lost. "For grain and new wine they assemble themselves." They gathered for food and drink, perhaps at the pagan shrines, even cutting themselves as the prophets of Baal did to get Baal's attention (1 Kings 18:28). "They turn aside against Me."

There is a kind of sorrow that is only sorry about losing things. Paul calls it "the grief of the world" and says it "produces death." Godly grief leads to repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10). Israel was sorry they were hungry. They were not sorry they had left God.

7:15-16 *And I, I disciplined **them**, I strengthened their arms, and against Me they plot evil. They return, **but** not upward; they have become like a bow of deceit; their princes will fall by the sword from the indignation of their tongue; this **will be** their mockery in the land of Egypt.*

"And I, I disciplined them, I strengthened their arms, and against Me they plot evil." God had trained them like a father, and He had given them strength. It was God who gave Jeroboam II his victories (2 Kings 14:26-27). And they used that strength to plot against Him.

"They return, but not upward." They turned, but not to God. They turned to Egypt, or to Assyria, or to Baal. "They have become like a bow of deceit." A faulty bow is warped. The archer aims straight, but the arrow goes wide. Israel could never be counted on to hit the mark.

"Their princes will fall by the sword from the indignation of their tongue." Their proud, angry words would bring them down. "This will be their mockery in the land of Egypt." The Egypt they had trusted would laugh at them when they fell.

Summary

Whenever God wanted to heal Israel, more of their sin came to light: lies, theft and robbery in the streets. They did not believe God remembered their evil, but their deeds surrounded them before His face. The king and princes were glad of their evil and their lies. The plotters were like a baker's oven, smoldering all night and blazing in the morning, devouring their judges, and all their kings fell, and none of them called to God. Ephraim mixed with the nations and became a cake not turned over. Strangers devoured his strength and gray hair spread on him, and he did not know it, and still he did not return to the LORD. Ephraim was like a silly dove, calling to Egypt and going to Assyria, and God would throw His net over them. Woe to them, for they wandered from God. He would have ransomed them, but they spoke lies against Him. They wailed on their beds for grain and wine, not crying to Him from the heart. God had trained and strengthened them, and they plotted evil against Him. They turned, but not upward, like a faulty bow, and their princes would fall by the sword and be mocked in Egypt.

Study Questions

1. What did the people not say to their heart about God? (7:2)

2. What did the king and princes take pleasure in? (7:3)

3. What does the picture of the oven tell us about what was happening to Israel's kings? (7:4-7; 2 Kings 15)

4. What was missing from all the plotting and turmoil? (7:7)

5. What does it mean that Ephraim was "a cake not turned over"? (7:8)

6. Why does Hosea call Ephraim "a silly dove," and where did the dove fly? (7:11; 2 Kings 17:3-4)

7. What did God want to do for Israel, and what kept it from happening? (7:13)

8. Israel did not notice they were growing old and weak. Are there signs of spiritual weakness in your life that you might be ignoring?

9. Is any part of your life like a cake not turned over, given to God on one side and untouched on the other?

10. Israel wailed for grain and wine but did not cry to God from the heart. When you pray in hard times, are you more sorry for what you lost or for what has come between you and God?

Hosea 8: Sowing the Wind, Reaping the Storm

Scripture

8:1-14 To your mouth, a horn! Like the eagle over the house of the LORD, because they have overstepped My covenant, and against My law they have transgressed. To Me they cry out, "My God, we know You, Israel!" Israel has rejected good; an enemy will pursue him. They have made kings, and not from Me; they have made princes, and I did not know; their silver and their gold they have made for themselves ***into*** idols, so that it may be cut off. He has rejected your calf, Samaria; My anger has burned against them; until when will they not be capable of innocence? For from Israel ***is*** even it; a craftsman made it, and it ***is*** not God; for the calf of Samaria will become fragments. For they sow wind, and they will reap a storm-wind; standing grain, there is none to it; ***its*** growth will not produce flour; perhaps it will produce ***it***, ***and*** strangers will swallow it up. Israel is swallowed up; now they are among the nations like a vessel; there is no pleasure in it. For they have gone up ***to*** Assyria, a wild donkey isolated by itself; Ephraim has hired lovers. Even though they hire among the nations, now I will gather them; and they have begun ***to be*** few from the burden of a king of princes. For Ephraim has multiplied altars for sinning; they have become to him altars for sinning. I write for him the many ***things*** of My law; they are regarded like a strange ***thing***. ***As for*** the sacrifices of My gifts, they sacrifice flesh and they eat ***it***; the LORD does not accept them. Now He will remember their iniquity, and He will punish their sins; they will return ***to*** Egypt. And Israel has forgotten his Maker and has built palaces, and Judah has multiplied fortified cities; and I will send fire on his cities, and it will devour her fortresses.

Preview

Hosea 8 begins with an alarm: "To your mouth, a horn!" An enemy is swooping down on Israel like an eagle, because they have broken God's covenant and His law. Israel still cries, "My God, we know You," but their life says otherwise. They made kings God did not choose, and they made a calf of gold and called it god.

At the center of the chapter is one of the best known sayings in the Bible: "they sow wind, and they will reap a storm-wind." Israel had hired foreign lovers, built altars that only multiplied sin, and treated God's written law like something strange. They had forgotten their Maker and trusted in palaces and fortified cities. God would send fire on them all.

Study

8:1 *To your mouth, a horn! Like the eagle over the house of the LORD, because they have overstepped My covenant, and against My law they have transgressed.*

"To your mouth, a horn!" God tells the prophet to put the ram's horn trumpet to his lips and sound the alarm. The horn was blown to warn a city that an enemy was coming. "Like the eagle over the house of the LORD." The word can mean eagle or vulture, a great bird of prey circling

over its target. This is Assyria, coming down on "the house of the LORD." Here that means the land and people of Israel, God's household, rather than the temple, which was in Jerusalem.

Why? "Because they have overstepped My covenant, and against My law they have transgressed." Moses had warned that if Israel broke the covenant, God would bring a nation against them "as the eagle swoops down" (Deuteronomy 28:49). It was happening.

8:2-3 *To Me they cry out, "My God, we know You, Israel!" Israel has rejected good; an enemy will pursue him.*

"To Me they cry out, My God, we know You, Israel!" When the trouble came, they cried out, and they claimed to know God. But they did not. Hosea has already told us there was "no knowledge of God in the land" (4:1). They knew His name and used it when they were scared. That is not the same as knowing Him.

Jesus warned that many will say to Him, "Lord, Lord," and He will say, "I never knew you" (Matthew 7:21-23). Saying the right words is not the same as having a relationship with God.

"Israel has rejected good; an enemy will pursue him." Good here means God Himself and all that comes from Him. Having rejected good, they would get the enemy.

8:4 *They have made kings, and not from Me; they have made princes, and I did not know; their silver and their gold they have made for themselves **into** idols, so that it may be cut off.*

"They have made kings, and not from Me; they have made princes, and I did not know." Since Jeroboam I, kings in the north had come to power without God's choosing. In Hosea's day, kings were made by murder and plot (7:7). "I did not know" means God did not approve them. In Judah, God had promised David a lasting line (2 Samuel 7:16). Israel's kings had no such promise.

"Their silver and their gold they have made for themselves into idols, so that it may be cut off." The gold God gave them (2:8) became calves and images. And the result would be that it all would be cut off, destroyed.

8:5-6 *He has rejected your calf, Samaria; My anger has burned against them; until when will they not be capable of innocence? For from Israel **is** even it; a craftsman made it, and it **is** not God; for the calf of Samaria will become fragments.*

"He has rejected your calf, Samaria." When Jeroboam I split the kingdom about 930 B.C., he made two golden calves, one at Bethel and one at Dan, so that the people would not go to Jerusalem to worship. He told them, "Look, your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!" (1 Kings 12:28). Every king of Israel after him kept those calves. Here the calf is called the "calf of Samaria," standing for the whole kingdom's worship.

"My anger has burned against them; until when will they not be capable of innocence?" How long will they go on unable to be clean?

"For from Israel is even it; a craftsman made it, and it is not God." This is the plain truth about every idol. A man made it. So how could it be God? Isaiah mocks the same thing: a man cuts down a tree, burns half to cook his dinner, and makes a god out of the other half (Isaiah 44:14-17). "For the calf of Samaria will become fragments." The Assyrians would break it up and carry it off (10:5-6).

Anything we make with our hands, or our money, or our talent, cannot save us. Only the God who made us can.

8:7 *For they sow wind, and they will reap a storm-wind; standing grain, there is none to it;* ***its*** *growth will not produce flour; perhaps it will produce* ***it, and*** *strangers will swallow it up.*

"For they sow wind, and they will reap a storm-wind." This is the heart of the chapter. A farmer who sows wheat reaps wheat, and usually much more than he sowed. Israel had sown wind: empty worship, empty treaties, empty idols. They would reap a whirlwind, the same emptiness multiplied into a destroying storm.

Paul teaches the same law: "whatever a man sows, this he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7). What we put into our lives comes back to us, and it comes back larger. Small compromises sown over years can come back as a storm.

"Standing grain, there is none to it; its growth will not produce flour." The crop will come up without heads of grain. And if it does produce anything, "strangers will swallow it up." Foreign armies would eat what Israel grew.

8:8-10 *Israel is swallowed up; now they are among the nations like a vessel; there is no pleasure in it. For they have gone up* ***to*** *Assyria, a wild donkey isolated by itself; Ephraim has hired lovers. Even though they hire among the nations, now I will gather them; and they have begun* ***to be*** *few from the burden of a king of princes.*

"Israel is swallowed up; now they are among the nations like a vessel; there is no pleasure in it." A clay pot that is cracked or chipped is thrown away. No one wants it. That is how the nations would see Israel. They had tried so hard to be like the nations, and the nations would toss them aside.

"For they have gone up to Assyria, a wild donkey isolated by itself." A wild donkey roams alone, stubborn and willful. Even a donkey keeps to its own herd. Israel went off alone to Assyria. "Ephraim has hired lovers." Usually a prostitute is paid. Israel was so desperate that she paid her lovers, sending tribute to Assyria to buy its friendship (2 Kings 15:19-20).

"Even though they hire among the nations, now I will gather them." God would gather them, but for judgment, not for blessing. "They have begun to be few from the burden of a king of princes." The "king of princes" is the king of Assyria, who called himself the great king, king over other kings. The tribute he demanded was a burden that wore Israel down.

8:11-12 *For Ephraim has multiplied altars for sinning; they have become to him altars for sinning. I write for him the many **things** of My law; they are regarded like a strange **thing**.*

"For Ephraim has multiplied altars for sinning; they have become to him altars for sinning." Israel built more and more altars. They thought more altars meant more worship and more forgiveness. Instead, each altar became one more place to sin, because they were not the altars God had chosen and the worship was mixed with idols (Deuteronomy 12:5-14).

"I write for him the many things of My law; they are regarded like a strange thing." God had written down His law for them, in great detail. They treated it as foreign, strange, as if it had nothing to do with them.

Many people today have a Bible on the shelf and never open it. God's Word is right there, written out for them, and it seems strange to them. Is God's Word familiar to you, or strange?

8:13 ***As for*** *the sacrifices of My gifts, they sacrifice flesh and they eat **it**; the LORD does not accept them. Now He will remember their iniquity, and He will punish their sins; they will return **to** Egypt.*

"As for the sacrifices of My gifts, they sacrifice flesh and they eat it; the LORD does not accept them." Their sacrifices had become little more than barbecues. They killed the animals and ate the meat, but God did not accept them. "Now He will remember their iniquity, and He will punish their sins; they will return to Egypt."

Egypt was where Israel had been slaves. To go back to Egypt was to undo the exodus. Moses had warned of it (Deuteronomy 28:68). In Hosea, "Egypt" seems to stand both for a real place, where some would flee, and for slavery again, in Assyria (9:3; 11:5).

8:14 *And Israel has forgotten his Maker and has built palaces, and Judah has multiplied fortified cities; and I will send fire on his cities, and it will devour her fortresses.*

"And Israel has forgotten his Maker and has built palaces." The word for palaces can also mean temples. Israel built great buildings, and forgot the God who made them. "And Judah has multiplied fortified cities." Judah was trusting in walls. Both kingdoms were trusting in what they could build.

"And I will send fire on his cities, and it will devour her fortresses." Assyria burned the cities of Israel. Later, in 701 B.C., Sennacherib of Assyria took many of the fortified cities of Judah (2 Kings 18:13). And in 586 B.C. Babylon burned Jerusalem. No wall is strong enough to keep out the judgment of God.

Moses had warned Israel that when they had built fine houses and grown rich, they must not forget the LORD (Deuteronomy 8:11-14). That is a warning for every comfortable people. When we have much, it is easy to forget the One who gave it.

Summary

God told the prophet to sound the alarm, because an enemy was coming like an eagle on Israel for breaking His covenant and law. Israel cried, "My God, we know You," but they had rejected good, and an enemy would pursue them. They made kings and princes God did not choose and made idols of their silver and gold. God rejected the calf of Samaria, which a craftsman made and was not God, and it would be broken to pieces. They sowed wind and would reap a storm. Their grain would not produce, and strangers would eat what did. Israel would be swallowed up, like a vessel no one wants among the nations, for they had gone to Assyria like a lone wild donkey and hired lovers. The burden of the king of Assyria would wear them down. They multiplied altars that only became altars for sinning, and treated God's written law as strange. God did not accept their sacrifices and would punish their sins, and they would return to Egypt. Israel forgot his Maker and built palaces, and Judah multiplied fortified cities, but God would send fire on their cities and fortresses.

Study Questions

1. Why did God tell the prophet to sound the alarm? (8:1; Deuteronomy 28:49)

2. What did Israel say to God, and why was it not true? (8:2-3; 4:1)

3. What does verse 4 say about Israel's kings and their idols? (8:4)

4. What does Hosea say about the calf of Samaria? (8:5-6; 1 Kings 12:28)

5. What does it mean to "sow wind" and "reap a storm-wind"? (8:7; Galatians 6:7)

6. How did Israel treat God's written law? (8:12)

7. What had Israel and Judah forgotten, and what were they trusting in instead? (8:14)

8. Israel claimed to know God when they were in trouble. What is the difference between knowing about God and knowing Him?

9. What are you sowing in your life right now? What kind of harvest might it bring in ten years?

10. Does God's Word feel familiar to you, or strange? What would help it become more a part of your daily life?

Hosea 9: The Days of Punishment Have Come

Scripture

9:1-9 Do not rejoice, Israel, to exultation like the peoples, for you have prostituted yourself away from your God; you have loved a prostitute's hire on all the threshing floors of grain. Threshing floor and winepress will not feed them, and new wine will fail in her. They will not dwell in the land of the LORD, and Ephraim will return ***to*** Egypt, and in Assyria they will eat unclean ***food***. They will not pour out wine to the LORD, and their sacrifices will not be pleasing to Him; ***they will be*** like bread of mourning to them; all who eat it will make themselves unclean; for their bread ***will be*** for their appetite; it will not come ***into*** the house of the LORD. What will you do for a day of appointed feast, and for the day of the festival of the LORD? For look, they have gone from devastation; Egypt will gather them; Memphis will bury them; the treasure of their silver, nettles will possess them; thorns ***will be*** in their tents. The days of punishment have come; the days of retribution have come; let Israel know! The prophet ***is*** a fool; the man of the spirit ***is*** mad, because of the greatness of your iniquity, and great ***is the*** hostility. Ephraim ***is*** a watchman with my God; ***as for*** the prophet, a trap of a fowler ***is*** on all his ways; hostility ***is*** in the house of his God. They have made ***it*** deep; they have acted corruptly as ***in*** the days of Gibeah; He will remember their iniquity; He will punish their sins.

9:10-17 Like grapes in the wilderness I found Israel; like early fruit on a fig tree at its beginning I saw your fathers. They came ***to*** Baal-peor, and they devoted themselves to the shame, and they became detestable things like their love. Ephraim, like the bird their glory will fly away: without birth, and without womb, and without conception. For even if they bring up their sons, I will bereave them of man; for also, woe to them when I depart from them! Ephraim, just as I have seen ***it*** toward Tyre, ***is*** planted in a pasture; and Ephraim ***is*** to bring out his sons to a killer. Give to them, LORD—what will You give? Give to them a miscarrying womb and shriveling breasts. All their evil ***is*** in Gilgal, for there I hated them; because of the wickedness of their deeds I will drive them out of My house; I will not again love them; all their princes ***are*** rebellious. Ephraim has been struck; their root has dried up; they will not produce fruit; even if they give birth, I will put to death the precious ***ones*** of their womb. My God will reject them, for they have not listened to Him, and they will be wanderers among the nations.

Preview

Hosea 9 seems to have been preached at a harvest feast, when the people were celebrating and thanking Baal for the grain. Hosea breaks into the party: "Do not rejoice, Israel." They will not stay in the LORD's land. They will go to Assyria and eat unclean food there, with no temple and no feasts to keep. "The days of punishment have come." The people answer by calling the prophet a fool and a madman.

In the second half, God looks back. When He first found Israel, it was like finding grapes in the desert. But at Baal-peor, on the way into the land, they gave themselves to shame, and they have been the same ever since. Now their glory will fly away like a bird. Their children will be few, and

they will be wanderers among the nations. The chapter is heavy, and Hosea himself, in the middle of it, hardly knows what to pray.

Study

9:1-2 *Do not rejoice, Israel, to exultation like the peoples, for you have prostituted yourself away from your God; you have loved a prostitute's hire on all the threshing floors of grain. Threshing floor and winepress will not feed them, and new wine will fail in her.*

"Do not rejoice, Israel, to exultation like the peoples." The harvest feasts were times of great joy. But Israel was celebrating "like the peoples," the pagan nations, with the same gods and the same practices. "For you have prostituted yourself away from your God; you have loved a prostitute's hire on all the threshing floors of grain." A threshing floor was a flat, hard place where grain was beaten out at harvest. Israel thought the full threshing floors were Baal's payment for their worship, like a prostitute's wages (2:12).

"Threshing floor and winepress will not feed them, and new wine will fail in her." What they thought Baal had given would fail them.

9:3 *They will not dwell in the land of the LORD, and Ephraim will return **to** Egypt, and in Assyria they will eat unclean **food**.*

"They will not dwell in the land of the LORD." The land belonged to God (Leviticus 25:23). Israel lived there as His tenants. If they would not honor Him, they would lose the right to live on His land. "And Ephraim will return to Egypt, and in Assyria they will eat unclean food." Egypt again stands for slavery (8:13). Assyria is where they would really go. There they would have to eat food the Law called unclean, food not prepared God's way and perhaps offered to idols. Daniel faced the same problem in Babylon (Daniel 1:8).

9:4-5 *They will not pour out wine to the LORD, and their sacrifices will not be pleasing to Him; **they will be** like bread of mourning to them; all who eat it will make themselves unclean; for their bread **will be** for their appetite; it will not come **into** the house of the LORD. What will you do for a day of appointed feast, and for the day of the festival of the LORD?*

"They will not pour out wine to the LORD, and their sacrifices will not be pleasing to Him." In exile there would be no altar of the LORD and no offerings. "Like bread of mourning to them." In the Law, food in a house where someone had died was unclean (Numbers 19:14; Deuteronomy 26:14). Their food in exile would be like that: it could feed their bodies, but it could not be offered to God. "It will not come into the house of the LORD."

"What will you do for a day of appointed feast, and for the day of the festival of the LORD?" In a foreign land, there would be no feast days. The joy they were enjoying would be gone. Have you ever had something you took for granted taken away, and only then realized how much it meant?

9:6 *For look, they have gone from devastation; Egypt will gather them; Memphis will bury them; the treasure of their silver, nettles will possess them; thorns **will be** in their tents.*

"For look, they have gone from devastation." Some would run from the destruction. "Egypt will gather them; Memphis will bury them." Memphis was a great city of Egypt, famous for its tombs and pyramids. Those who fled to Egypt for safety would only find their graves there. "The treasure of their silver, nettles will possess them; thorns will be in their tents." The homes and treasures they left behind would be overgrown with weeds.

9:7 *The days of punishment have come; the days of retribution have come; let Israel know! The prophet **is** a fool; the man of the spirit **is** mad, because of the greatness of your iniquity, and great **is the** hostility.*

"The days of punishment have come; the days of retribution have come; let Israel know!" Hosea speaks of it as already here. It was that sure.

"The prophet is a fool; the man of the spirit is mad." These are probably the people's words about Hosea. They called him a fool and a madman. "Man of the spirit" was a title for a prophet. People have always mocked God's messengers. Jeremiah was called mad (Jeremiah 29:26). Festus told Paul he was out of his mind (Acts 26:24). Some even said Jesus had lost His senses (Mark 3:21).

"Because of the greatness of your iniquity, and great is the hostility." Their hatred of the prophet came from their sin. People who love their sin will hate the one who points it out.

9:8-9 *Ephraim **is** a watchman with my God; **as for** the prophet, a trap of a fowler **is** on all his ways; hostility **is** in the house of his God. They have made **it** deep; they have acted corruptly as **in** the days of Gibeah; He will remember their iniquity; He will punish their sins.*

"Ephraim is a watchman with my God." A watchman stood on the wall and warned the city of danger (Ezekiel 3:17). The prophet was God's watchman for Ephraim. "As for the prophet, a trap of a fowler is on all his ways; hostility is in the house of his God." Wherever Hosea went, people set traps for him. Even in the place of worship, he met hatred.

"They have made it deep; they have acted corruptly as in the days of Gibeah." Gibeah was the town in Benjamin where a terrible crime was done to a traveling Levite's concubine, which led to a civil war that nearly wiped out the tribe of Benjamin (Judges 19 to 21). People said nothing like it had happened since Israel came out of Egypt (Judges 19:30). Hosea says Israel in his day had sunk that low. "He will remember their iniquity; He will punish their sins."

9:10 *Like grapes in the wilderness I found Israel; like early fruit on a fig tree at its beginning I saw your fathers. They came **to** Baal-peor, and they devoted themselves to the shame, and they became detestable things like their love.*

"Like grapes in the wilderness I found Israel." Imagine walking through a dry desert and finding a vine full of ripe grapes. What a delight! That is how God felt when He first found Israel, at the exodus. "Like early fruit on a fig tree at its beginning I saw your fathers." The first figs of the season were a special treat (Isaiah 28:4). God took joy in His people.

"They came to Baal-peor, and they devoted themselves to the shame." But right before they entered the land, on the plains of Moab, the men of Israel joined in the worship of the Baal of Peor and fell into sexual sin with the women of Moab (Numbers 25:1-3). "The shame" is Hosea's word for Baal. "And they became detestable things like their love." This is a deep truth: we become like what we love and worship. "Like them will be those who make them, everyone who trusts in them" (Psalm 115:8). Israel loved an idol, and they became as worthless as the idol.

What do you love most? You will become like it.

9:11-12 *Ephraim, like the bird their glory will fly away: without birth, and without womb, and without conception. For even if they bring up their sons, I will bereave them of man; for also, woe to them when I depart from them!*

"Ephraim, like the bird their glory will fly away." Ephraim's name comes from a word for being fruitful (Genesis 41:52). Its glory was its many people. Now that glory would fly away like a bird. "Without birth, and without womb, and without conception." Israel had worshiped Baal to get children. The result would be the opposite: fewer children, not more.

"For even if they bring up their sons, I will bereave them of man." Even the children who grew up would be lost in war and exile. "For also, woe to them when I depart from them!" This is the worst of all. Losing children is terrible. Losing God is worse. All the other woes come because God has left.

9:13-14 *Ephraim, just as I have seen **it** toward Tyre, **is** planted in a pasture; and Ephraim **is** to bring out his sons to a killer. Give to them, LORD—what will You give? Give to them a miscarrying womb and shriveling breasts.*

"Ephraim, just as I have seen it toward Tyre, is planted in a pasture." Tyre was a rich, beautiful trading city on the coast. Israel too was planted in a good place. "And Ephraim is to bring out his sons to a killer." Their sons would go out to war and die.

Then Hosea prays, and his prayer breaks off in the middle as though he cannot find the words. He asks the LORD to give them, and then asks what He will give, and at last he asks for "a miscarrying womb and shriveling breasts." What kind of prayer is that? Hosea is not hoping for suffering. He knows judgment is coming, with war and death for the young. He seems to be saying that it would be kinder for no more children to be born than for them to be born only to die by the sword. Jesus said something like it as He walked to the cross, warning the women of Jerusalem of days when people would call the barren blessed (Luke 23:29). This is the prayer of a man whose heart is breaking for his people.

9:15 *All their evil **is** in Gilgal, for there I hated them; because of the wickedness of their deeds I will drive them out of My house; I will not again love them; all their princes **are** rebellious.*

"All their evil is in Gilgal, for there I hated them." Gilgal was the first camp in the promised land (Joshua 4:19), and the place where Saul was made king (1 Samuel 11:15). By Hosea's day it was a center of false worship (4:15; 12:11). It stood for everything wrong with Israel.

"I will drive them out of My house." God's house here is the land. Like a husband putting an unfaithful wife out of the home, God would drive Israel out. "I will not again love them." These are terribly strong words. They speak of God withdrawing His favor and covenant blessing from that generation. They do not cancel His promise for Israel's future, as chapter 11 and 14 will show (11:8-9; 14:4). "All their princes are rebellious."

9:16-17 *Ephraim has been struck; their root has dried up; they will not produce fruit; even if they give birth, I will put to death the precious **ones** of their womb. My God will reject them, for they have not listened to Him, and they will be wanderers among the nations.*

"Ephraim has been struck; their root has dried up; they will not produce fruit." Ephraim means fruitful, but now the plant has withered from the root. "Even if they give birth, I will put to death the precious ones of their womb." This is a hard verse. It describes what would come in the Assyrian invasion, when war would take the lives of the young. God says He will do it, because He is the one bringing the judgment. Scripture does not hide how terrible judgment is. It tells us so that we will take sin seriously, and turn to God while there is time.

"My God will reject them, for they have not listened to Him." Notice that Hosea says "my God," not "their God." Hosea still belonged to God. They had cut themselves off. "And they will be wanderers among the nations." This is exactly what happened. After 722 B.C. the people of the northern kingdom were scattered across the Assyrian empire (2 Kings 17:6). Moses had warned that God would scatter them "among all the peoples" (Deuteronomy 28:64). The Jewish people have been wanderers among the nations for much of their history since. But God is not finished with them, and He will gather them again (11:10-11).

Summary

Hosea told Israel not to rejoice like the pagan nations at harvest, because they had loved the wages of prostitution on every threshing floor, and the threshing floor and winepress would fail them. They would not stay in the LORD's land, but would go to Egypt and eat unclean food in Assyria, with no offerings to the LORD and no feasts. Those who fled to Egypt would be buried at Memphis, and nettles would cover their treasures. The days of punishment had come. The people called the prophet a fool and a madman, and set traps for him even in God's house, for they had sunk as low as in the days of Gibeah. God remembered how He had found Israel like grapes in the desert, but at Baal-peor they gave themselves to shame and became as detestable as what they loved. Ephraim's glory would fly away, with few children born, and those raised would be lost. Hosea prayed in grief for a miscarrying womb rather than children born to die. Because of their evil in Gilgal, God would drive them out of His house. Ephraim's root had dried up, God would reject them for not listening, and they would be wanderers among the nations.

Study Questions

1. Why did Hosea tell Israel not to rejoice at the harvest? (9:1)

2. Where would Israel go, and what would they lose there? (9:3-5)

3. What did the people say about the prophet, and why? (9:7)

4. What was the sin of Gibeah, and why did Hosea compare Israel to it? (9:9; Judges 19:30)

5. How did God feel when He first found Israel, and what happened at Baal-peor? (9:10; Numbers 25:1-3)

6. What does it mean that Israel "became detestable things like their love"? (9:10; Psalm 115:8)

7. What would happen to Ephraim's glory, and what does verse 12 say is the worst woe? (9:11-12)

8. People often mocked God's messengers. Have you ever been laughed at for speaking up about God's truth? How did you respond?

9. We become like what we love. What do you love most, and is it making you more like Christ?

10. Hosea's prayer in verse 14 came from a broken heart. Is there someone whose choices are leading them toward harm that you need to pray for with that kind of love?

Hosea 10: Break Up Your Fallow Ground

Scripture

10:1-8 Israel ***is*** a luxuriant vine; he produces fruit for himself; according to the abundance of his fruit he has multiplied altars; according to the goodness of his land they have made sacred pillars good. Their heart is smooth; now they will be held guilty; He will break the neck of their altars; He will destroy their sacred pillars. For now they will say, "We have no king, for we have not feared the LORD; and the king, what will he do for us?" They have spoken words, swearing falsely, making a covenant; and judgment sprouts like poisonous weed on the furrows of a field. For the heifers of Beth-aven the inhabitants of Samaria will be afraid; for its people will mourn over it, and its pagan priests will tremble over it, over its glory, for it has gone into exile from it. Also it will be carried to Assyria ***as*** tribute to King Jareb; Ephraim will receive shame, and Israel will be ashamed of its own counsel. Samaria is destroyed; her king ***is*** like a twig on the face of waters. And the high places of Aven, the sin of Israel, will be destroyed; thorn and thistle will go up over their altars; and they will say to the mountains, "Cover us!" and to the hills, "Fall on us!"

10:9-15 Since the days of Gibeah you have sinned, Israel; there they have stood; will not battle overtake them in Gibeah against the sons of injustice? When I desire, I will discipline them, and peoples will be gathered against them when they are bound to their two iniquities. And Ephraim ***is*** a trained heifer ***that*** loves to thresh, and I, I passed over the goodness of her neck; I will harness Ephraim; Judah will plow; Jacob will harrow for himself. Sow for yourselves for righteousness; reap according to steadfast love; break up for yourselves fallow ground; and ***it is*** time to seek the LORD, until He comes and rains righteousness for you. You have plowed wickedness; you have reaped unrighteousness; you have eaten the fruit of lying, for you have trusted in your way, in the multitude of your mighty men. And an uproar will arise among your people, and all your fortresses will be devastated, like Shalman's devastation of Beth-arbel in a day of battle; a mother was dashed in pieces with ***her*** sons. Thus he has done to you, Bethel, because of the evil of your evil; at dawn the king of Israel will be utterly destroyed.

Preview

Israel was a fruitful vine, but the more fruit it bore, the more altars it built to false gods. In Hosea 10, God says He will break those altars and pillars. Israel will lose its king, and the people of Samaria will tremble over their calf idol as it is carried off to Assyria as a gift for the great king. The high places will be covered with thorns, and the people will beg the mountains to fall on them.

In the middle of the chapter comes a farmer's call to repentance: "Sow for yourselves for righteousness; reap according to steadfast love; break up for yourselves fallow ground; and it is time to seek the LORD." Israel had plowed wickedness and reaped injustice because they trusted in their own way and their own soldiers. Now war is coming, and Bethel will be the reason for it.

Study

10:1-2 *Israel **is** a luxuriant vine; he produces fruit for himself; according to the abundance of his fruit he has multiplied altars; according to the goodness of his land they have made sacred pillars good. Their heart is smooth; now they will be held guilty; He will break the neck of their altars; He will destroy their sacred pillars.*

"Israel is a luxuriant vine; he produces fruit for himself." The vine was a common picture for Israel (Psalm 80:8-11; Isaiah 5:1-7). In Jeroboam II's days, the vine was full of fruit. But the fruit was "for himself," not for God.

"According to the abundance of his fruit he has multiplied altars; according to the goodness of his land they have made sacred pillars good." The richer they got, the more they spent on false worship. A sacred pillar was a standing stone set up at a shrine, often linked with Baal worship. God had told Israel to tear them down (Deuteronomy 12:3). It is strange but true: blessing often leads people away from God, not toward Him. God had warned of exactly this (Deuteronomy 8:12-14).

"Their heart is smooth." The word means divided or slippery, like a smooth stone that slides in your hand. Their heart could not be held. They wanted God and Baal both. "Now they will be held guilty; He will break the neck of their altars; He will destroy their sacred pillars." God would break their altars as a man breaks the neck of an animal.

10:3-4 *For now they will say, "We have no king, for we have not feared the LORD; and the king, what will he do for us?" They have spoken words, swearing falsely, making a covenant; and judgment sprouts like poisonous weed on the furrows of a field.*

"For now they will say, We have no king, for we have not feared the LORD; and the king, what will he do for us?" This may be what the people would say after their king was gone, or what they were already saying as one king after another was murdered. Either way, they had come to see that a king without God could not save them.

"They have spoken words, swearing falsely, making a covenant." Treaties with Assyria and Egypt, promises made and broken. "And judgment sprouts like poisonous weed on the furrows of a field." Justice was supposed to grow like good grain. Instead the courts produced poison, like weeds in a plowed field.

10:5-6 *For the heifers of Beth-aven the inhabitants of Samaria will be afraid; for its people will mourn over it, and its pagan priests will tremble over it, over its glory, for it has gone into exile from it. Also it will be carried to Assyria **as** tribute to King Jareb; Ephraim will receive shame, and Israel will be ashamed of its own counsel.*

"For the heifers of Beth-aven the inhabitants of Samaria will be afraid." The heifers are the calf idol at Bethel (Beth-aven, house of wickedness, 4:15). The very god they trusted to protect them was the thing they were afraid for. "Its people will mourn over it, and its pagan priests will tremble over it, over its glory, for it has gone into exile from it." The pagan priests, the priests of the idols, would weep over their god being carried away.

"Also it will be carried to Assyria as tribute to King Jareb." The golden calf would be loaded on a cart and sent to the king of Assyria as a gift. What a picture! A god that has to be carried, that cannot save itself. Isaiah mocks the gods of Babylon the same way, loaded on weary animals (Isaiah 46:1-2). Our God is the opposite: He carries His people (Isaiah 46:3-4).

"Ephraim will receive shame, and Israel will be ashamed of its own counsel." Their plans and their wisdom would be their shame.

10:7-8 *Samaria is destroyed; her king **is** like a twig on the face of waters. And the high places of Aven, the sin of Israel, will be destroyed; thorn and thistle will go up over their altars; and they will say to the mountains, "Cover us!" and to the hills, "Fall on us!"*

"Samaria is destroyed; her king is like a twig on the face of waters." A twig on a flooding river spins around, helpless, and is swept away. That was Israel's last king, Hoshea, carried off by Assyria (2 Kings 17:4).

"And the high places of Aven, the sin of Israel, will be destroyed." Aven means wickedness, again a name for Bethel. "Thorn and thistle will go up over their altars." The places of worship would be abandoned and overgrown.

"And they will say to the mountains, Cover us! and to the hills, Fall on us!" The terror would be so great that people would rather be buried alive than face what was coming. Jesus used these same words on the way to the cross, speaking of the coming destruction of Jerusalem (Luke 23:30). And in Revelation 6:16, in the days of the Tribulation, people cry to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us" from the face of God and "from the wrath of the Lamb." Hosea's words about Samaria look ahead to an even greater day of the LORD.

10:9-10 *Since the days of Gibeah you have sinned, Israel; there they have stood; will not battle overtake them in Gibeah against the sons of injustice? When I desire, I will discipline them, and peoples will be gathered against them when they are bound to their two iniquities.*

"Since the days of Gibeah you have sinned, Israel." Hosea goes back to Gibeah again (9:9), the crime of Judges 19 to 21. Israel had been sinning all the way back to then. "There they have stood." They have not moved. "Will not battle overtake them in Gibeah against the sons of injustice?" In Judges 20, Israel went to war against the wicked men of Gibeah. Now Israel itself was the wicked one, and war would come against them.

"When I desire, I will discipline them, and peoples will be gathered against them when they are bound to their two iniquities." The "two iniquities" may be the two golden calves at Bethel and Dan, or two great sins, such as forsaking God and turning to idols (Jeremiah 2:13). The nations would gather against Israel at the time God chose.

10:11 *And Ephraim **is** a trained heifer **that** loves to thresh, and I, I passed over the goodness of her neck; I will harness Ephraim; Judah will plow; Jacob will harrow for himself.*

"And Ephraim is a trained heifer that loves to thresh." Threshing was easy work for a young cow. She walked in circles on the grain, and she was allowed to eat as she worked (Deuteronomy 25:4).

Ephraim had enjoyed the easy work and the full meals. "And I, I passed over the goodness of her neck." God had spared her smooth, unbruised neck from the yoke. "I will harness Ephraim; Judah will plow; Jacob will harrow for himself." Now the easy days were over. Plowing and harrowing, breaking the ground and dragging it smooth, was hard work under a yoke. God would put them to hard labor.

10:12 *Sow for yourselves for righteousness; reap according to steadfast love; break up for yourselves fallow ground; and **it is** time to seek the LORD, until He comes and rains righteousness for you.*

"Sow for yourselves for righteousness; reap according to steadfast love; break up for yourselves fallow ground; and it is time to seek the LORD, until He comes and rains righteousness for you."

This verse is the heart of the chapter. It uses farming words that every Israelite understood. "Fallow ground" is land that has been left unplowed. It gets hard and packed, and weeds grow on it. Before you can plant, you have to break it up. Jeremiah used the same words to Judah: "Break up for yourselves unplowed ground, and do not sow among thorns" (Jeremiah 4:3).

What is the fallow ground? It is a heart that has grown hard toward God. A heart that once was soft and open can be left alone so long that nothing grows in it. Breaking it up is painful. It means confessing sin, turning from it, and letting God's Word go deep. But only broken-up ground can receive seed.

"Sow for yourselves for righteousness; reap according to steadfast love." If they would sow right living, they would reap a harvest of God's hesed, His loyal love. God's love is not earned by our sowing, but the one who turns to God finds it waiting.

"It is time to seek the LORD." Not later. Now. The time was short for Israel, and it is short for us too. "Look, now is a well-accepted time; look, now is a day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

"Until He comes and rains righteousness for you." The farmer plows and plants, but he cannot make it rain. Only God can send the rain. And here God promises to rain down righteousness, His own goodness, on those who seek Him. Isaiah said the same: "let clouds pour down righteousness" (Isaiah 45:8). We cannot make ourselves righteous. We seek Him, and He gives it. This is what God does in Christ, who became our righteousness (1 Corinthians 1:30).

How about your heart? Is there fallow ground that needs breaking up?

10:13-14 *You have plowed wickedness; you have reaped unrighteousness; you have eaten the fruit of lying, for you have trusted in your way, in the multitude of your mighty men. And an uproar will arise among your people, and all your fortresses will be devastated, like Shalman's devastation of Beth-arbel in a day of battle; a mother was dashed in pieces with **her** sons.*

"You have plowed wickedness; you have reaped unrighteousness; you have eaten the fruit of lying." The other side of the farmer's law. They planted evil and reaped evil. "For you have trusted in your way, in the multitude of your mighty men." Their trust was in their own plans and their army.

"And an uproar will arise among your people, and all your fortresses will be devastated, like Shalman's devastation of Beth-arbel in a day of battle." We do not know for sure who Shalman was or where Beth-arbel was. Many think Shalman is Shalmaneser V, the king of Assyria who began the siege of Samaria (2 Kings 17:3-5). Others think he was a king of Moab named in an Assyrian record. Either way, the people of Hosea's day knew the event, and it was a byword for horror. "A mother was dashed in pieces with her sons." War in that world spared no one. Hosea says it plainly so that Israel would know what was at stake.

10:15 *Thus he has done to you, Bethel, because of the evil of your evil; at dawn the king of Israel will be utterly destroyed.*

"Thus he has done to you, Bethel, because of the evil of your evil." Bethel, house of God, where the golden calf stood, would be the reason for Israel's ruin. "The evil of your evil" means their very great wickedness. "At dawn the king of Israel will be utterly destroyed." Quickly, as fast as night gives way to morning, the king and the kingdom would be gone. Within a few years of Hosea's preaching, it happened.

Summary

Israel was a fruitful vine, but the more fruit it bore, the more altars and sacred pillars it made. Their heart was divided, and God would break their altars. They would say they had no king because they had not feared the LORD. They swore falsely, and justice grew like poisonous weeds. The people of Samaria would mourn over the calf of Beth-aven when it was carried to Assyria as tribute, and Samaria's king would be swept away like a twig on water. The high places would be destroyed and overgrown, and the people would cry to the mountains to cover them. Israel had sinned since the days of Gibeah, and war would come against them. Ephraim had been a heifer that loved easy threshing, but now would be harnessed to plow. God called them to sow righteousness, reap steadfast love, break up their fallow ground and seek the LORD until He came and rained righteousness on them. Instead they had plowed wickedness and trusted in their own way and army, so their fortresses would be devastated like Beth-arbel, and because of Bethel the king of Israel would be cut off at dawn.

Study Questions

1. What did Israel do as its fruit and its land grew richer? (10:1)

2. What does it mean that their heart was "smooth" or divided? (10:2)

3. What would happen to the calf of Beth-aven, and why is that a picture of the weakness of idols? (10:5-6; Isaiah 46:1-4)

4. What will the people say to the mountains and hills? Where else in Scripture do we hear these words? (10:8; Luke 23:30; Revelation 6:16)

5. What three farming commands does God give in verse 12, and what does He promise? (10:12)

6. What had Israel plowed and reaped instead, and what were they trusting in? (10:13)

7. What would happen to Bethel and to the king of Israel? (10:15)

8. Israel built more altars to false gods as they grew richer. How can blessing pull our hearts away from God?

9. Fallow ground is hard ground that has been left alone. Is there an area of your heart that has grown hard toward God? What would it look like to break it up?

10. "It is time to seek the LORD." Is there something you have been putting off in your relationship with God? What keeps you from doing it now?

Hosea 11: Out of Egypt I Called My Son

Scripture

11:1-12 For Israel ***was*** a youth, and I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son. They called to them; so they went from before them; to the Baals they sacrificed, and to the carved images they burned incense. And I, I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them on his arms; and they did not know that I healed them. With cords of man I drew them, with ropes of love; and I was to them like ***those who*** lift a yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to him; I fed ***him***. He will not return to the land of Egypt, and Assyria, he ***will be*** his king, because they have refused to return. And a sword will whirl in his cities, and it will put an end to his bars, and it will devour ***them*** because of their schemes. And My people are hung up on apostasy from Me; and they call him to ***the*** height; together he will not exalt ***him***. How will I give you up, Ephraim? Will I deliver you up, Israel? How will I make you like Admah? Will I set you like Zeboiim? My heart is overturned within Me; together My compassions have grown warm. I will not carry out the burning of My anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I ***am*** God and not man, ***the*** Holy ***One*** in your midst, and I will not come in rage. They will walk after the LORD; He will roar like a lion; for He will roar, and sons will tremble from the west. They will tremble like a bird from Egypt, and like a dove from the land of Assyria; and I will cause them to dwell in their houses, declares the LORD. Ephraim has surrounded Me with lying, and the house of Israel with deceit; and Judah still roams with God, and with ***the*** Holy Ones ***he is*** faithful.

Preview

In Hosea 11 the picture changes. For most of the book Israel has been an unfaithful wife. Here Israel is a little boy, and God is his Father. God remembers calling His son out of Egypt, teaching him to walk, holding him in His arms, healing him, drawing him with cords of love, bending down to feed him. And the more God called, the more the boy ran off to the Baals.

So judgment must come. Assyria will be his king, and the sword will whirl in his cities. But then, in the middle of the chapter, we hear the heart of God break open: "How will I give you up, Ephraim?" God will not destroy Israel completely, as He destroyed the cities of the plain. "For I am God and not man." One day He will roar like a lion, and His children will come trembling home from Egypt and Assyria. This is the chapter Matthew quotes at the childhood of Jesus, and it is one of the tenderest chapters in the whole Bible.

Study

11:1 *For Israel **was** a youth, and I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.*

"For Israel was a youth, and I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son."

Hosea is looking back to the exodus, about seven hundred years before his time. When God sent Moses to Pharaoh, He told him to say, "Israel is My son, My firstborn," and "Let My son go, so that he may serve Me" (Exodus 4:22-23). Israel was a young nation, just a boy, when God loved him

and called him out of slavery. God's love came first. He did not love Israel because Israel was great or good. He loved them because He chose to (Deuteronomy 7:7-8).

Matthew quotes this verse in his account of the childhood of Jesus. When King Herod tried to kill the child, an angel told Joseph to take the child and His mother and flee to Egypt. Joseph did, "and he was there until the death of Herod, so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, Out of Egypt I called My Son" (Matthew 2:15).

How does Matthew use this verse? When we read Hosea 11:1 by itself, it looks back to the exodus. It is history, not a prediction. So why does Matthew say Jesus "fulfilled" it? This question deserves a careful answer, because some people use it to say that the New Testament writers twisted the Old Testament. They did not.

First, the word "fulfill" in Matthew is wider than a prediction coming true. It also means to fill something up, to bring it to its full meaning. Matthew sees that the story of Israel, God's son, is a pattern, and that Jesus, God's only Son, fills that pattern full. Israel was God's son by calling. Jesus is God's Son by nature. Israel went down into Egypt and was called out. So did Jesus. Matthew keeps showing this pattern. Right after the exodus, Israel passed through the waters of the Red Sea; Jesus was baptized in the Jordan, and the Father said, "This is My Son, the beloved" (Matthew 3:17). Israel spent forty years being tested in the wilderness and failed; Jesus spent forty days being tested in the wilderness and did not fail, answering the devil with words from Deuteronomy, the book of Israel's wilderness years (Matthew 4:1-11; Deuteronomy 8:3). Where Israel the son failed, Jesus the Son obeyed perfectly.

Second, Hosea himself gives us a reason to read his words this way. In this book, Israel's history is never only history. Hosea says Israel will go back to "Egypt" (8:13; 9:3) and will be called out again (11:11). And he says Israel will return to "David their king" (3:5), the coming Son of David. The exodus pattern in Hosea is already pointing ahead to a new exodus led by God's King. Some teachers also point out that Balaam had spoken of God "bringing him out from Egypt," where "him" seems to be Israel's coming king (Numbers 24:7-8). Jesus is the King in whom the exodus story comes to its full meaning.

Third, this does not mean that Jesus replaces Israel, or that the church takes Israel's place. Jesus is a Jew, the Son of David, Israel's Messiah. He does for Israel what Israel could not do for itself, and through Him God will keep every promise He made to the nation (Romans 15:8). The Son who was called out of Egypt is the One who will one day call all of Israel home (11:10-11).

So I believe it is right to say plainly that Jesus fulfilled Hosea 11:1. He is the true and perfect Son, and the story of God's son coming out of Egypt finds its fullness in Him. What does this mean for us? It means the whole Old Testament is one story, and it is about Jesus. After His resurrection, "having begun from Moses and from all the prophets," Jesus was explaining to His disciples "in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27).

11:2 *They called to them; so they went from before them; to the Baals they sacrificed, and to the carved images they burned incense.*

"They called to them; so they went from before them." "They" are the prophets God sent. The more the prophets called Israel to come back, the more Israel walked away. Like a child who runs the other way every time his name is called. "To the Baals they sacrificed, and to the carved images they burned incense."

It is a sad truth that the more some people hear God's call, the harder they become. That is why we should never put off answering Him.

11:3-4 *And I, I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them on his arms; and they did not know that I healed them. With cords of man I drew them, with ropes of love; and I was to them like* ***those who*** *lift a yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to him; I fed* ***him****.*

Now God remembers Israel's childhood like a father looking at old photographs. "And I, I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them on his arms." Picture a father holding his little boy's hands and helping him take his first steps, then scooping him up when he falls. That was God and Israel in the wilderness. Moses said the LORD "carried you, just as a man carries his son" (Deuteronomy 1:31).

"And they did not know that I healed them." Every time Israel fell and got hurt, God healed them, and they never knew it was Him. How often has God protected and healed us without our ever knowing?

"With cords of man I drew them, with ropes of love." God did not drive Israel like cattle with whips. He drew them gently, with human kindness, with love. "And I was to them like those who lift a yoke on their jaws." A kind farmer lifts the yoke off the neck of his ox at the end of the day so the animal can rest and eat. "And I bent down to him; I fed him." God stooped down to feed them, as He did with the manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16).

This is the God of the Old Testament. Some people think He is harsh and angry, and the God of the New Testament is gentle. But here He is, the LORD, teaching His child to walk, carrying him, healing him and bending down to feed him. He is the same God, and Jesus showed us His heart (John 14:9).

11:5-7 *He will not return to the land of Egypt, and Assyria, he* ***will be*** *his king, because they have refused to return. And a sword will whirl in his cities, and it will put an end to his bars, and it will devour* ***them*** *because of their schemes. And My people are hung up on apostasy from Me; and they call him to* ***the*** *height; together he will not exalt* ***him****.*

"He will not return to the land of Egypt, and Assyria, he will be his king, because they have refused to return." There is a play on the word "return" here. They refused to return to God, so they would not return to Egypt for help either. Assyria would rule over them. This is what happened in 722 B.C.

"And a sword will whirl in his cities, and it will put an end to his bars." The bars were the bolts of the city gates. The defenses would be broken. "Because of their schemes." Their clever plans and alliances would be their downfall.

"And My people are hung up on apostasy from Me." Apostasy means turning away from the faith. They were bent on it, stuck on it. "And they call him to the height; together he will not exalt him." The prophets called them up to God on high, but none of them would lift Him up. The Hebrew of this verse is hard, but its point is plain: Israel would not turn.

11:8-9 *How will I give you up, Ephraim? Will I deliver you up, Israel? How will I make you like Admah? Will I set you like Zeboiim? My heart is overturned within Me; together My compassions have grown warm. I will not carry out the burning of My anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I* ***am*** *God and not man,* ***the*** *Holy* ***One*** *in your midst, and I will not come in rage.*

"How will I give you up, Ephraim? Will I deliver you up, Israel? How will I make you like Admah? Will I set you like Zeboiim?"

This is one of the most moving passages in all of Scripture. Everything in the chapter so far has led to judgment. Israel deserved it. And then God stops, as if He cannot bring Himself to do it. Admah and Zeboiim were two of the cities of the plain that God destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 14:2; Deuteronomy 29:23). Those cities were wiped out completely, with nothing left. God says He cannot do that to Israel.

"My heart is overturned within Me; together My compassions have grown warm." The word "overturned" is the same word used for the "overthrow" of Sodom (Genesis 19:25). God says, in effect, I overturned those cities, but with you My own heart is overturned. His compassion burns warm. This is the language of a parent who cannot give up on a child, no matter what the child has done. Jeremiah heard the same thing: "My inward parts are in a tumult for him; I will surely have compassion on him" (Jeremiah 31:20).

Does God have feelings? The Bible speaks of God's love, grief, anger and joy. He does not change, and He is not tossed about by moods the way we are. But He is not cold. He is a person, and He loves.

"I will not carry out the burning of My anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim." Judgment would come, but not total destruction. There would always be a remnant, a part of the people kept by God, and a future.

"For I am God and not man." Here is the reason. If God were a man, He would give up. A man who had been betrayed this many times would walk away, and who could blame him? But God is not like us. His love does not run out. "The Holy One in your midst." His holiness is not only His purity. It is His being completely other, above us. And part of His holiness is that He keeps His promises when we break ours. "And I will not come in rage."

Have you ever thought you had pushed God too far? Look at verse 9. He is not a man.

11:10-11 *They will walk after the LORD; He will roar like a lion; for He will roar, and sons will tremble from the west. They will tremble like a bird from Egypt, and like a dove from the land of Assyria; and I will cause them to dwell in their houses, declares the LORD.*

"They will walk after the LORD; He will roar like a lion." In 5:14 God was a lion tearing His people. Here He is a lion roaring to call them home. "For He will roar, and sons will tremble from the west." The west means the lands toward the sea, the coastlands and islands.

"They will tremble like a bird from Egypt, and like a dove from the land of Assyria." Israel was a silly dove flying to Egypt and Assyria (7:11). Now the doves come flying home, quickly, trembling with awe. "And I will cause them to dwell in their houses, declares the LORD."

When does this happen? Some of the people did come back after the exile, but most of the northern tribes never did, and Israel has never been gathered "from the west," from Egypt and from Assyria all together, to live in peace in their homes. Isaiah speaks of the same great gathering from Assyria and Egypt and the coastlands "in that day" (Isaiah 11:11-12). I believe this is still to come, when the Lord Jesus returns and gathers His people Israel to their land for His kingdom (Matthew 24:31).

11:12 *Ephraim has surrounded Me with lying, and the house of Israel with deceit; and Judah still roams with God, and with* ***the*** *Holy Ones* ***he is*** *faithful.*

"Ephraim has surrounded Me with lying, and the house of Israel with deceit." In the Hebrew Bible this verse begins chapter 12, and it leads into the next message. God is surrounded by Israel's lies.

"And Judah still roams with God, and with the Holy Ones he is faithful." This line is hard to translate. The SLB reads it as praise for Judah, still walking with God and faithful, at least for now, in contrast to Ephraim. Some other translations read it as a charge that Judah too is wandering from God. Since the next verse (12:2) says the LORD has a case against Judah, Judah's faithfulness was not complete. But in Hosea's day, under kings like Uzziah and Hezekiah, Judah had not fallen as far as Israel.

Summary

God remembered that when Israel was a child He loved him and called His son out of Egypt, words Matthew says were fulfilled when Jesus came out of Egypt as a child (Matthew 2:15). But the more the prophets called Israel, the more they went after the Baals. God had taught Ephraim to walk, carried them in His arms and healed them without their knowing. He drew them with cords of love, lifted the yoke from their jaws and bent down to feed them. Because they refused to return, Assyria would be their king, and the sword would whirl in their cities. Yet God cried, "How will I give you up, Ephraim?" He could not make them like Admah and Zeboiim. His heart was overturned and His compassion grew warm. He would not destroy Ephraim completely, for He is God and not man, the Holy One in their midst. One day He will roar like a lion, and His children will come trembling like birds from Egypt and doves from Assyria, and He will settle them in their homes. Meanwhile Ephraim surrounded Him with lies, while Judah still walked with God.

Study Questions

1. What does God remember about Israel's beginning? (11:1; Exodus 4:22-23)

2. How does Matthew use Hosea 11:1, and in what ways does Jesus fill full the story of Israel as God's son? (Matthew 2:13-15; 3:17; 4:1-11)

3. What happened every time the prophets called Israel? (11:2)

4. List the things God did for Israel as a child in verses 3 and 4. Which one means the most to you? (11:3-4)

5. Why would Assyria be Israel's king? (11:5)

6. What were Admah and Zeboiim, and why will God not make Israel like them? (11:8-9; Deuteronomy 29:23)

7. What does God say will happen when He roars like a lion? (11:10-11)

8. "They did not know that I healed them." Can you look back and see times God was caring for you when you did not know it?

9. God draws His people "with ropes of love," not whips. How has God drawn you to Himself?

10. "For I am God and not man." Have you ever felt you had pushed God too far? What does this verse say to you?

Hosea 12: Jacob's Story and Ephraim's Sin

Scripture

12:1-14 Ephraim feeds ***on*** wind and pursues an east wind; all the day he multiplies lies and devastation; and they make a covenant with Assyria, and oil is carried to Egypt. And the LORD has a case with Judah, and ***is*** to punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his deeds He will repay him. In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his vigor he struggled with God. And he struggled with ***the*** angel and prevailed; he wept and sought His favor; at Bethel He found him, and there He spoke with us. And the LORD, the God of armies, the LORD ***is*** His memorial. And you, by your God you will return; keep steadfast love and justice, and wait for your God continually. Canaan! In his hand ***are*** scales of deceit; he loves to oppress. And Ephraim has said, "Surely I have become rich; I have found wealth for myself; ***in*** all my toils they will not find in me iniquity that ***is*** sin." And I ***am*** the LORD your God from the land of Egypt; again I will make you dwell in tents as ***in*** the days of an appointed feast. And I have spoken to the prophets, and I, I multiplied vision, and by the hand of the prophets I give parables. If Gilead ***is*** wickedness, surely they have become worthlessness; in Gilgal they have sacrificed bulls; also their altars ***are*** like heaps of stones on the furrows of a field. And Jacob fled ***to*** the field of Syria, and Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept ***sheep***. And by a prophet the LORD brought Israel up from Egypt, and by a prophet he was kept. Ephraim has provoked ***Him*** to anger bitterly; and his blood He will leave on him, and his reproach his Lord will repay to him.

Preview

In Hosea 12 the LORD takes His people back to their own family story. Israel was named after Jacob, and Jacob's life is held up like a mirror. Jacob grabbed his brother's heel in the womb. As a man he wrestled with the angel and would not let go until he was blessed. He wept and sought God's favor, and God met him at Bethel. The lesson for his children is plain: return to your God, keep steadfast love and justice, and wait for Him.

But Ephraim has become like a crooked Canaanite merchant with false scales, proud of his wealth and sure no one can find any sin in him. God reminds him that He has been their God since Egypt, that He spoke by the prophets, and that by a prophet He brought them out of Egypt and kept them. Ephraim has provoked Him bitterly, and his guilt will stay on him.

Study

12:1 *Ephraim feeds **on** wind and pursues an east wind; all the day he multiplies lies and devastation; and they make a covenant with Assyria, and oil is carried to Egypt.*

"Ephraim feeds on wind and pursues an east wind." The east wind in Israel blows hot and dry off the desert. It withers crops and brings nothing good. Chasing it is foolish and harmful. Ephraim's plans were like that. "All the day he multiplies lies and devastation."

"And they make a covenant with Assyria, and oil is carried to Egypt." Here is their foolish wind. They made a treaty with Assyria, and at the same time sent olive oil to Egypt as a gift to win Egypt's help. This is just what King Hoshea did: he served Assyria and then secretly turned to Egypt (2 Kings 17:3-4). Playing both sides only brought ruin.

12:2 *And the LORD has a case with Judah, and **is** to punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his deeds He will repay him.*

"And the LORD has a case with Judah." As in 4:1, God brings a lawsuit. This time Judah is named too. "And is to punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his deeds He will repay him." "Jacob" here means all of Israel, north and south, the children of Jacob. And that name leads Hosea to the story of Jacob himself.

12:3-4 *In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his vigor he struggled with God. And he struggled with **the** angel and prevailed; he wept and sought His favor; at Bethel He found him, and there He spoke with us.*

"In the womb he took his brother by the heel." When Jacob and Esau were born, Jacob came out "grasping the heel of Esau" (Genesis 25:26). The name Jacob sounds like the Hebrew word for heel, and it came to mean one who grabs from behind, one who cheats (Genesis 27:36). Jacob spent his early life grasping: he took Esau's birthright and tricked his father into giving him Esau's blessing.

"And in his vigor he struggled with God. And he struggled with the angel and prevailed." Years later, on his way home, Jacob wrestled all night with a man at the river Jabbok. At dawn the man said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men, and you have prevailed" (Genesis 32:28). Jacob called the place Peniel, saying he had seen God face to face (Genesis 32:30). Hosea calls the One he wrestled with both "God" and "the angel." Many Bible teachers believe this was the Angel of the LORD, the Son of God appearing before He was born as a man. Those who hold this view point out that this "angel" is called God and that Jacob said he saw God's face.

"He wept and sought His favor." Genesis does not tell us that Jacob wept, but it does say he would not let go until he was blessed (Genesis 32:26). Hosea shows us what was in Jacob's heart: tears and pleading. The man who had always grabbed for himself finally clung to God and begged for His blessing. That is how Jacob prevailed. Not by strength, but by holding on to God in weakness.

"At Bethel He found him, and there He spoke with us." Bethel was where God first met Jacob, in the dream of the ladder, and where He met him again when he came home (Genesis 28:10-19; 35:9-15). Notice "with us." What God said to Jacob, He said to all of Jacob's children. And notice the irony. Bethel, where God spoke to Jacob, was now the place of the golden calf (10:15).

What is Hosea's point? Your father Jacob was a grasping cheat, as you are. But he turned to God, wept and sought His favor, and God changed him. You can do the same.

12:5-6 *And the LORD, the God of armies, the LORD **is** His memorial. And you, by your God you will return; keep steadfast love and justice, and wait for your God continually.*

"And the LORD, the God of armies, the LORD is His memorial." The God who met Jacob is the LORD, "the God of armies, the" the commander of the armies of heaven. "Memorial" means the name by which He is to be remembered. God told Moses, "This is My name forever, and this is My memorial to generation after generation" (Exodus 3:15). Israel was calling on Baal. Hosea reminds them of the name of the God who met their father.

"And you, by your God you will return." Here is the call. Like Jacob, return to God, and do it by God's help. "Keep steadfast love and justice, and wait for your God continually." These three go together. Steadfast love (hesed) toward God and others. Justice, doing what is right, especially for the weak. And waiting on God, trusting Him instead of grabbing for yourself. Micah later gives a similar summary: "to do justice, and to love steadfast love, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8).

Waiting on God was hard for Jacob, and it is hard for us. We would rather make it happen ourselves. But the one who waits on God gains strength (Isaiah 40:31).

12:7-8 *Canaan! In his hand **are** scales of deceit; he loves to oppress. And Ephraim has said, "Surely I have become rich; I have found wealth for myself; **in** all my toils they will not find in me iniquity that **is** sin."*

"Canaan!" The word Canaan in Hebrew can also mean merchant, because the Canaanites were known as traders. God calls Ephraim a Canaanite. They had become just like the people God had driven out of the land. "In his hand are scales of deceit; he loves to oppress." A dishonest merchant had two sets of weights, a heavy one for buying and a light one for selling. The Law forbade it (Deuteronomy 25:13-16). Amos, preaching in Israel at about the same time, says the same thing about the merchants of his day (Amos 8:5).

"And Ephraim has said, Surely I have become rich; I have found wealth for myself." Ephraim was proud of his money, and he gave himself the credit. "In all my toils they will not find in me iniquity that is sin." He thought he was clean because no one could prove anything against him. The books balanced. He had covered his tracks.

That is a dangerous place to be. Jesus warned the church in Laodicea, which said, "I am rich, and I have become rich, and I have need of nothing," and did not know that it was "the wretched one and miserable and poor and blind and naked" (Revelation 3:17). Money can hide our sin from others. It cannot hide it from God.

12:9 *And I **am** the LORD your God from the land of Egypt; again I will make you dwell in tents as **in** the days of an appointed feast.*

"And I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt." God has been their God since the exodus, long before they were rich. "Again I will make you dwell in tents as in the days of an appointed feast." The appointed feast here is the Feast of Booths, or Tabernacles, when Israel lived for a week in tents or huts to remember the wilderness years (Leviticus 23:42-43). God would take

away their fine houses and send them back to living in tents. That sounds like judgment, and it is. But it is also a fresh start, a return to the wilderness where Israel had first known God (2:14).

12:10 *And I have spoken to the prophets, and I, I multiplied vision, and by the hand of the prophets I give parables.*

"And I have spoken to the prophets, and I, I multiplied vision, and by the hand of the prophets I give parables." Israel could not say they had not been told. God had sent prophet after prophet, with visions and with word pictures like the ones that fill Hosea's book. "Parables" means comparisons, likenesses. God spoke in ways they could understand, and they still would not listen.

God still speaks today, through His Word, and above all through His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2). Are we listening?

12:11 *If Gilead **is** wickedness, surely they have become worthlessness; in Gilgal they have sacrificed bulls; also their altars **are** like heaps of stones on the furrows of a field.*

"If Gilead is wickedness, surely they have become worthlessness." Gilead, east of the Jordan, was known for its violence (6:8). "In Gilgal they have sacrificed bulls." Gilgal, west of the Jordan, was known for its false worship (4:15; 9:15). "Also their altars are like heaps of stones on the furrows of a field." A farmer clearing a field piles up stones along the edge. Israel had so many altars that they were as common as stone piles in a field, and just as worthless. One day they would be just that, heaps of stones. There is a play on words in the Hebrew: Gilgal sounds like the word for heaps of stones.

12:12 *And Jacob fled **to** the field of Syria, and Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept **sheep**.*

"And Jacob fled to the field of Syria." Hosea goes back to Jacob's story. Jacob ran from Esau to his uncle Laban in Syria (Aram), in the north (Genesis 28:5). "And Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept sheep." Jacob worked fourteen years as a shepherd to marry Rachel (Genesis 29:20, 30). The proud forefather was once a poor runaway and a hired hand. Ephraim, who boasted of his wealth (12:8), should remember where he came from.

12:13 *And by a prophet the LORD brought Israel up from Egypt, and by a prophet he was kept.*

"And by a prophet the LORD brought Israel up from Egypt, and by a prophet he was kept." The prophet was Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15; 34:10). Jacob kept sheep for a wife. God, through Moses, kept Israel like a shepherd keeps his flock. The same word "kept" is used for both. Israel owed its whole life to a prophet God sent. And now they were rejecting God's prophets, Hosea among them (9:7-8).

Moses said that God would one day raise up a prophet "like me" (Deuteronomy 18:15). Peter said that Prophet is Jesus (Acts 3:22-26). The God who saved Israel by a prophet has saved us by the greatest Prophet of all.

12:14 *Ephraim has provoked **Him** to anger bitterly; and his blood He will leave on him, and his reproach his Lord will repay to him.*

"Ephraim has provoked Him to anger bitterly." After all God had done, Ephraim's response was bitter provocation. "And his blood He will leave on him." Blood here means guilt for bloodshed. God would not take it away; Ephraim would carry his own guilt. "And his reproach his Lord will repay to him." The disgrace Ephraim heaped on God would come back on Ephraim.

Summary

Ephraim fed on wind and chased the east wind, multiplying lies and violence, making a treaty with Assyria while sending oil to Egypt. The LORD brought a case against Judah too, and would repay Jacob for his ways. Jacob had grabbed his brother's heel in the womb, and as a man he struggled with God and with the angel and prevailed. He wept and sought God's favor, and God met him at Bethel and spoke there with all of Israel. The LORD, the God of the armies, is His name. So Israel should return by the help of God, keep steadfast love and justice, and wait for God continually. Instead Ephraim had become like a Canaanite merchant with false scales, boasting of his wealth and claiming no sin could be found in him. But the LORD had been their God since Egypt and would make them live in tents again. He had spoken through the prophets with visions and parables. Gilead was wicked, and in Gilgal they sacrificed on altars as common as stone heaps. Jacob fled to Syria and kept sheep for a wife, and by a prophet the LORD brought Israel out of Egypt and kept them. Yet Ephraim provoked Him bitterly, and his guilt and reproach would come back on him.

Study Questions

1. What did Ephraim "feed on," and what two nations was he trying to please? (12:1)

2. What two events in Jacob's life does Hosea recall in verses 3 and 4? (12:3-4; Genesis 25:26; 32:24-30)

3. How did Jacob prevail with the angel, according to Hosea? (12:4)

4. What three things does God call Israel to do in verse 6? (12:6)

5. What did Ephraim boast about, and what did he believe about his own sin? (12:7-8)

6. How had God spoken to Israel, according to verse 10? (12:10)

7. Who is the prophet of verse 13, and how does he point to Jesus? (12:13; Deuteronomy 18:15; Acts 3:22)

8. Jacob prevailed by clinging to God in weakness and tears. When have you found strength in holding on to God rather than in your own effort?

9. Ephraim thought he was clean because no one could prove anything against him. Are there areas of your life where you are content that no one else can see?

10. "Wait for your God continually." What is something you are tempted to grab for yourself instead of waiting on God?

Hosea 13: Ephraim's Fall and the Ransom From Death

Scripture

13:1-8 When Ephraim spoke, ***there was*** trembling; he lifted ***himself*** up in Israel; and he became guilty through Baal, and he died. And now they increase to sin, and they have made for themselves a molten image from their silver, idols according to their skill, the work of craftsmen, all of it. Of them they are saying, "Sacrificers of man kiss calves!" Therefore they will become like a cloud of morning, and like the dew rising early, going ***away***, like chaff storm-driven from a threshing floor, and like smoke from a window. And I ***am*** the LORD your God from the land of Egypt, and gods besides Me you do not know, and there is no savior except Me. I, I knew you in the wilderness, in a land of droughts. According to their pasture, and they were satisfied; they were satisfied, and their heart was exalted; therefore they forgot Me. And I have become to them like a lion; like a leopard on a road I will watch. I will meet them like a bear robbed of cubs, and I will tear the enclosure of their heart, and I will devour them there like a lion; the living thing of the field will rip them open.

13:9-16 It has destroyed you, Israel, for ***you are*** against Me, against your help. Where ***is*** your king now, that he may save you in all your cities, and your judges, of whom you said, "Give me a king and princes"? I give you a king in My anger, and I take ***him*** away in My wrath. The iniquity of Ephraim ***is*** bound up; his sin ***is*** stored up. The pains of ***one*** giving birth will come to him; he ***is*** a son not wise, for ***at the*** time he will not stand at the breaking forth of sons. From the hand of Sheol I will ransom them; from death I will redeem them. Where ***are*** your plagues, death? Where ***is*** your destruction, Sheol? Compassion will be hidden from My eyes. For he is fruitful among brothers; an east wind will come, the wind of the LORD, coming up from the wilderness; and his fountain will dry up, and his spring will be dried up; it will plunder the treasury of every precious article. Samaria will be held guilty, for she has rebelled against her God; they will fall by the sword; their infants will be dashed in pieces, and its pregnant women will be ripped open.

Preview

Hosea 13 is the last message of judgment in the book, and it is the darkest. Ephraim was once the leading tribe of Israel. When he spoke, people trembled. But he turned to Baal, and spiritually he died. Now the people make silver idols and kiss calves. They will vanish like morning mist, like chaff in the wind, like smoke from a window. The God who knew them in the wilderness, who fed them until they were full and proud and forgot Him, will now meet them like a lion, a leopard and a bear robbed of her cubs.

Yet even here, in the middle of the darkness, comes a flash of light: "From the hand of Sheol I will ransom them; from death I will redeem them. Where are your plagues, death?" Paul takes up those words in his great chapter on the resurrection. The chapter ends with the fall of Samaria, told in hard and terrible words, so that no one can mistake what sin costs.

Study

13:1 *When Ephraim spoke, **there was** trembling; he lifted **himself** up in Israel; and he became guilty through Baal, and he died.*

"When Ephraim spoke, there was trembling; he lifted himself up in Israel." Ephraim was the largest and strongest tribe of the northern kingdom. Joshua came from Ephraim, and so did Jeroboam I, the first king of the north (1 Kings 11:26). When Ephraim spoke, the other tribes listened. "And he became guilty through Baal, and he died." Ephraim's turn to Baal was the beginning of his death. He was still alive as a nation, but in God's eyes he was already dead. Sin brings death (Romans 6:23), and it begins long before the funeral.

13:2-3 *And now they increase to sin, and they have made for themselves a molten image from their silver, idols according to their skill, the work of craftsmen, all of it. Of them they are saying, "Sacrificers of man kiss calves!" Therefore they will become like a cloud of morning, and like the dew rising early, going **away**, like chaff storm-driven from a threshing floor, and like smoke from a window.*

"And now they increase to sin." The sin did not stop; it grew. "They have made for themselves a molten image from their silver, idols according to their skill, the work of craftsmen, all of it." Hosea keeps coming back to this point: men made these gods (8:6). They were clever, skilled work. But skill does not make a god.

"Of them they are saying, Sacrificers of man kiss calves!" This line is hard to translate. The SLB reads it as a mocking saying: people who offer sacrifices kiss the calf idols. Kissing an idol was a sign of worship (1 Kings 19:18). Picture grown men bending down to kiss a metal calf. Some read it as speaking of those who sacrifice human beings, which would mean child sacrifice, a horror some in Israel took part in (2 Kings 17:17). Either way, it shows how far they had fallen.

"Therefore they will become like a cloud of morning, and like the dew rising early, going away." The same words Hosea used of their love in 6:4. Their love vanished like mist, and now they will too. "Like chaff storm-driven from a threshing floor, and like smoke from a window." Chaff is the light husk blown away when grain is tossed in the wind. Houses then had no chimneys; smoke drifted out through a hole or window and was gone. Four pictures of something here one moment and gone the next.

13:4-5 *And I **am** the LORD your God from the land of Egypt, and gods besides Me you do not know, and there is no savior except Me. I, I knew you in the wilderness, in a land of droughts.*

"And I am the LORD your God from the land of Egypt." God has said this before (12:9). He goes back to the beginning, to the first commandment: "gods besides Me you do not know, and there is no savior except Me." This echoes Exodus 20:2-3. "No savior except Me" is a strong claim. Isaiah records the same words from God: "besides Me there is no savior" (Isaiah 43:11). The New Testament gives that title to Jesus: "there is not salvation in any other" (Acts 4:12). If there is no savior but the LORD, and Jesus is the Savior, then Jesus is the LORD.

"I, I knew you in the wilderness, in a land of droughts." God knew them, cared for them, in the hardest place. He fed them with manna and gave them water from the rock.

13:6 *According to their pasture, and they were satisfied; they were satisfied, and their heart was exalted; therefore they forgot Me.*

"According to their pasture, and they were satisfied; they were satisfied, and their heart was exalted; therefore they forgot Me."

This verse shows the steps of a fall. They were fed. They were full. Their heart grew proud. They forgot God. Moses warned of exactly these steps (Deuteronomy 8:10-14). It happened in the land, and it happened again under Jeroboam II.

It still happens. When we are hungry, we pray. When we are full, we forget. Agur asked God to give him neither poverty nor wealth, lest he be full and deny Him (Proverbs 30:8-9). Has comfort ever made you forget God?

13:7-8 *And I have become to them like a lion; like a leopard on a road I will watch. I will meet them like a bear robbed of cubs, and I will tear the enclosure of their heart, and I will devour them there like a lion; the living thing of the field will rip them open.*

"And I have become to them like a lion; like a leopard on a road I will watch." The Shepherd who fed them now becomes like the wild animals that attack the flock. A leopard waits beside the path, hidden and still, until the prey comes near. "I will meet them like a bear robbed of cubs." A mother bear who has lost her cubs is one of the most dangerous animals on earth (2 Samuel 17:8). "And I will tear the enclosure of their heart." The enclosure is the chest, the ribcage. "And I will devour them there like a lion."

These pictures are frightening, and they are meant to be. God is not a tame God. His love is real, and His holiness is real. To turn away from the God who loves us is to face the God who judges. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31).

13:9 *It has destroyed you, Israel, for **you are** against Me, against your help.*

"It has destroyed you, Israel, for you are against Me, against your help." Israel's ruin came from Israel's own choice. They turned against the only One who could help them. God was their help, and they made Him their enemy. We destroy ourselves when we fight against the God who wants to help us.

13:10-11 *Where **is** your king now, that he may save you in all your cities, and your judges, of whom you said, "Give me a king and princes"? I give you a king in My anger, and I take **him** away in My wrath.*

"Where is your king now, that he may save you in all your cities?" Israel had trusted in kings. Now, when the enemy came, where were they? Hoshea, the last king, was in an Assyrian prison (2 Kings 17:4). "And your judges, of whom you said, Give me a king and princes?" This goes back

to the day Israel demanded a king from Samuel so they could be like the nations (1 Samuel 8:5-7), and to the day the northern tribes chose their own king (1 Kings 12:20).

"I give you a king in My anger, and I take him away in My wrath." God gave Israel Saul, the king they asked for, even though their asking was a rejection of God. And God was about to take away Israel's last king. The kings God allows can be a judgment as much as a gift.

13:12-13 *The iniquity of Ephraim **is** bound up; his sin **is** stored up. The pains of **one** giving birth will come to him; he **is** a son not wise, for **at the** time he will not stand at the breaking forth of sons.*

"The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up; his sin is stored up." Like a document rolled and tied up, or like treasure stored away, Ephraim's sin was kept on record. Nothing was forgotten. It would all be brought out at the right time.

"The pains of one giving birth will come to him." Birth pains come suddenly and cannot be stopped. "He is a son not wise, for at the time he will not stand at the breaking forth of sons." Here the picture turns: Ephraim is like a baby who will not come out of the womb when it is time to be born. The moment for new life had come, the moment to repent and be born anew, and Ephraim stayed where he was. Some things have to happen at the right time, or they are lost.

13:14 *From the hand of Sheol I will ransom them; from death I will redeem them. Where **are** your plagues, death? Where **is** your destruction, Sheol? Compassion will be hidden from My eyes.*

"From the hand of Sheol I will ransom them; from death I will redeem them. Where are your plagues, death? Where is your destruction, Sheol? Compassion will be hidden from My eyes."

Sheol is the Hebrew word for the place of the dead, the grave. To ransom and to redeem both mean to set free by paying a price. In the middle of a chapter of judgment, God speaks of setting His people free from death itself.

Bible teachers read this verse in two ways. Some read the first lines as questions, asking whether God will ransom them from Sheol and redeem them from death, with the answer no. Then death is being called to bring its plagues on Israel, and "compassion will be hidden from My eyes" means God will not pity them this time. That fits the verses around it. Others read it as the SLB does, as a promise. God will ransom His people from death. He calls out to death and the grave as defeated enemies, "Where are your plagues?" And "compassion will be hidden" then means God will not change His mind about this promise. Even with judgment all around, God's final word is victory over death.

Paul settles how we should read it in the end. In 1 Corinthians 15, writing about the resurrection of believers when Christ comes for His church, he says that when the dead are raised and "this mortal puts on immortality," then "Death has been swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:54, quoting Isaiah 25:8), and then he takes up Hosea's words: "Where, O death, is your sting? Where, O Hades, is your victory?" (1 Corinthians 15:54-55). Paul uses the Greek wording here, and Hades is the Greek word for Sheol. He goes on, "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).

So whatever Hosea's first hearers understood, God's full purpose in these words is triumph. Jesus paid the ransom (Mark 10:45). He went into death, and He came out the other side. Because He lives, death has lost its sting for everyone who trusts in Him. I believe that on the day Christ comes for His church, the dead in Christ will be raised and the living changed in a moment (1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17), and that is when this verse will ring out in full.

13:15 *For he is fruitful among brothers; an east wind will come, the wind of the LORD, coming up from the wilderness; and his fountain will dry up, and his spring will be dried up; it will plunder the treasury of every precious article.*

"For he is fruitful among brothers." There is a play on the name Ephraim, which sounds like the word for fruitful (Genesis 41:52). "An east wind will come, the wind of the LORD, coming up from the wilderness." The hot east wind off the desert dries up everything (12:1). Here it stands for Assyria, sent by God. "And his fountain will dry up, and his spring will be dried up." The source of Ephraim's life would fail. "It will plunder the treasury of every precious article." The enemy would carry off all his wealth.

13:16 *Samaria will be held guilty, for she has rebelled against her God; they will fall by the sword; their infants will be dashed in pieces, and its pregnant women will be ripped open.*

"Samaria will be held guilty, for she has rebelled against her God." Samaria, the capital, stands for the whole nation. Her guilt is plain: she rebelled against her God.

"They will fall by the sword; their infants will be dashed in pieces, and its pregnant women will be ripped open."

This is one of the hardest verses in the Bible to read. It describes what the Assyrian army would do when Samaria fell. These were the horrors of ancient war. The Assyrians were known for their cruelty, and the Bible records that even Israelites had done such things to others (2 Kings 15:16). Amos condemned Ammon for the same crime (Amos 1:13).

Hosea is not saying that God approves of cruelty to children. God hates the shedding of innocent blood (Proverbs 6:16-17), and He later judged Assyria for its cruelty (Nahum 3:1, 19). Hosea is describing, honestly and without softening, what would happen when Israel's protection was taken away. When a people turns from God, God may let them fall into the hands of cruel men, and the innocent suffer along with the guilty. That is the terrible cost of sin in a fallen world.

Why does Scripture tell us this? So that we would never treat sin lightly. And so that we would see how much it cost Jesus to take God's judgment on Himself. If you are troubled by this verse, you are meant to be. It should break our hearts as it broke Hosea's. And it should drive us to the next chapter, where God says, "Return, Israel."

For those who have lost children, to war or in any other way, Scripture gives this hope: I believe little children who die are safe with God (2 Samuel 12:23).

Summary

Ephraim was once the leading tribe, but he became guilty through Baal and died. Now they made silver idols, the work of craftsmen, and kissed calves, and they would vanish like morning mist, dew, chaff and smoke. The LORD had been their God since Egypt, the only Savior, and He knew them in the wilderness. But when they were fed and full, their hearts grew proud and they forgot Him. So He would meet them like a lion, a leopard and a bear robbed of her cubs. They had destroyed themselves by being against their help. Their king could not save them, for God had given them a king in His anger and would take him away in His wrath. Ephraim's sin was stored up, and like a child who will not be born, he would not turn at the right time. Yet God spoke of ransoming His people from Sheol and redeeming them from death, calling out, "Where are your plagues, death?" words Paul uses of the resurrection victory in Christ (1 Corinthians 15:55). An east wind from the LORD would dry up Ephraim's springs and plunder his treasures, and Samaria would fall to the sword with terrible cruelty because she rebelled against her God.

Study Questions

1. What was Ephraim like at first, and what brought about his death? (13:1)

2. What were the people doing with the calf idols? (13:2)

3. What four pictures does Hosea use for how quickly they would vanish? (13:3)

4. What steps led Israel to forget God? (13:6; Deuteronomy 8:10-14)

5. What does God say about the king Israel trusted? (13:10-11; 1 Samuel 8:5-7)

6. What does God say He will do about Sheol and death, and how does Paul use these words? (13:14; 1 Corinthians 15:54-57)

7. What happened to Samaria, and why? (13:16)

8. "They were satisfied, and their heart was exalted; therefore they forgot Me." When have comfort and plenty made you forget God?

9. Israel was destroyed because they were "against your help." In what ways do people today push away the very help God offers?

10. Because of Christ, death has lost its sting for those who trust Him. How does that truth change the way you face death, your own or that of someone you love?

Hosea 14: Return, O Israel

Scripture

14:1-9 Return, Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled in your iniquity. Take words with you and return to the LORD; say to Him, "You will forgive all iniquity; and receive good, and let us pay bulls, our lips. Assyria will not save us; on horses we will not ride; and we will not say again, 'Our gods,' to the work of our hands; for in You the fatherless is shown compassion." I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from him. I will be like the dew to Israel; he will blossom like the lily, and he will strike his roots like Lebanon. His young shoots will go ***forth***, and his splendor will be like the olive tree, and his fragrance like Lebanon. Those who dwell in his shade will return; they will make grain live, and they will blossom like the vine; his memorial ***will be*** like the wine of Lebanon. Ephraim, what ***have*** I ***to do*** anymore with idols? I, I have answered, and I will watch over him; I ***am*** like a luxuriant cypress; from Me your fruit is found. Who ***is*** wise, and let him understand these ***things***; discerning, and let him know them? For the ways of the LORD ***are*** upright, and the righteous walk in them, and transgressors stumble in them.

Preview

After thirteen chapters of warning, Hosea's book ends with an invitation. "Return, Israel, to the LORD your God." God even gives His people the words to pray: ask Him to forgive all iniquity, offer Him the praise of your lips, and promise never again to trust Assyria, horses or idols, because in Him the fatherless find compassion.

Then God answers, and every line is tender. "I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely." He will be like the dew to Israel, and Israel will blossom like the lily, put down roots like the cedars of Lebanon, spread out like an olive tree, and smell like Lebanon. The pictures of judgment in the book are all turned around. The book closes with a word to every reader: the wise will understand these things, because the ways of the LORD are upright.

Study

14:1 *Return, Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled in your iniquity.*

"Return, Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled in your iniquity."

This is the call the whole book has been building toward. The word "return" is shuv, Hosea's great word for repentance (6:1). Notice two things about it.

First, God still calls Himself "the LORD your God." After all Israel had done, after Baal and the calves and the murders and the lies, He is still their God. The covenant has not been thrown away. He is still waiting at the door.

Second, God names the problem honestly: "you have stumbled in your iniquity." Iniquity means crookedness, sin that twists what is right. Israel did not fall because of bad luck, or because

Assyria was too strong. They fell because of their own sin. Real repentance begins there. As long as we blame others, we cannot come home. When we admit that we have stumbled in our own sin, the way home opens.

Have you been blaming someone or something else for where you are? God's call is to return, and to own the truth.

14:2 *Take words with you and return to the LORD; say to Him, "You will forgive all iniquity; and receive good, and let us pay bulls, our lips.*

"Take words with you and return to the LORD." Coming back to God is not only a feeling. It is something we say. God wants His people to put their repentance into words. That is what confession is: saying to God what is true about our sin. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous so that He may forgive us the sins" (1 John 1:9).

Then God gives them the words. "Say to Him, You will forgive all iniquity." Not some. All. The first thing they are to say is a statement of faith in God's forgiveness. They do not come bargaining. They come asking for mercy and trusting Him to give it.

"And receive good." Ask God to accept what is good, or to receive us graciously. "And let us pay bulls, our lips." Instead of offering bulls on an altar, which God had rejected when the heart was far away (6:6; 8:13), they will offer the words of their lips, their praise and their confession. The writer of Hebrews uses the same idea: "let us offer up a sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of lips confessing His name" (Hebrews 13:15). Because Christ has made the one sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 10:10-14), what we bring now is not bulls but thanks.

14:3 *Assyria will not save us; on horses we will not ride; and we will not say again, 'Our gods,' to the work of our hands; for in You the fatherless is shown compassion."*

The prayer goes on with three promises to give up three false hopes.

"Assyria will not save us." No more running to the great powers for help (5:13; 7:11). "On horses we will not ride." Horses meant military strength, especially the chariots and cavalry of Egypt (Isaiah 31:1). No more trust in weapons. They will never again call "the work of our hands" their gods. No more idols. The three things Israel had trusted in, foreign kings, military might and man-made gods, are named and given up.

Repentance is not only turning to God. It is turning away from what we trusted in place of God. What would you need to name and give up?

"For in You the fatherless is shown compassion." This is the reason they can come. The words "shown compassion" echo the name of Hosea's daughter, No Mercy (1:6). Israel had been like a child with no father, with no one to care for her. Now she says that in the LORD, the fatherless find compassion. God is "a father of the fatherless" (Psalm 68:5). No one is too alone or too lost to be loved by Him.

14:4 *I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from him.*

Now God answers the prayer. "I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from him."

This is the key verse of the book. Every word matters.

"I will heal." God speaks of their sin as a sickness, and He is the doctor. Israel had gone to Assyria for healing, and Assyria could not heal them (5:13). God can.

"Their apostasy." Apostasy is turning away from God. Their constant backsliding, turning away again and again, was a disease. God will not just forgive it. He will heal it, cure the sickness at its root so that they will not keep turning away. That is what the new covenant promises: a new heart (Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:26).

"I will love them freely." Freely means as a free gift, without being paid, without being earned. God's love is not wages for good behavior. It is grace. Israel had loved for wages (2:12; 9:1). God loves for nothing. Paul says we are "justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24).

"For My anger has turned away from him." How can God's anger turn away from sinners? The Old Testament does not fully answer that here. The New Testament does. God's anger against sin fell on His Son at the cross. Jesus is the "propitiation," the sacrifice that turns away God's wrath (Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2). Because the anger fell on Him, it turns away from us.

If you have wandered from God, this verse is for you. He does not say, fix yourself and then I will love you. He says, "I will heal," and He will love them freely.

14:5-7 *I will be like the dew to Israel; he will blossom like the lily, and he will strike his roots like Lebanon. His young shoots will go **forth**, and his splendor will be like the olive tree, and his fragrance like Lebanon. Those who dwell in his shade will return; they will make grain live, and they will blossom like the vine; his memorial **will be** like the wine of Lebanon.*

Now God paints a picture of what His healing will do, and it is the picture of a garden coming back to life.

"I will be like the dew to Israel." In Israel there is almost no rain in summer, and the heavy night dew keeps plants alive. Israel's own love was like the dew that vanished (6:4; 13:3). Now God Himself will be their dew, the dew that never fails.

"He will blossom like the lily." A lily blooms quickly and beautifully. "And he will strike his roots like Lebanon." The mountains of Lebanon were famous for their great cedars, with deep roots that could not be moved. Beauty above, strength below. Israel would be both.

"His young shoots will go forth, and his splendor will be like the olive tree." New growth would spread out. The olive tree lives for hundreds of years, stays green all year, and gives oil for food,

light and healing. Paul uses the olive tree for Israel in Romans 11:17-24, where he says God is able to graft the natural branches back in.

"And his fragrance like Lebanon." The cedar forests of Lebanon had a sweet smell. Israel's life would be a pleasing fragrance.

"Those who dwell in his shade will return." People will come back to live under Israel's shelter. "They will make grain live, and they will blossom like the vine; his memorial will be like the wine of Lebanon." The land will be full of grain and grapes, and the fame of restored Israel will be like the famous wine of Lebanon.

Notice how every picture of judgment is turned around. The vine that was laid waste (2:12) blossoms. The grain that would not grow (8:7) lives. The dew that vanished (6:4) becomes God Himself. The root that dried up (9:16) goes deep. The east wind that dried their springs (13:15) is gone. What sin destroyed, God restores.

When will this happen? Some of it was tasted when the Jews returned from Babylon. But Israel has never yet been the fruitful, faithful, deep-rooted people these verses describe. I believe this looks ahead to the day when Israel as a nation returns to the LORD and to David their king (3:5), when Christ comes back to reign, and "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26). It is a picture of Israel in the kingdom. At the same time, every believer who comes back to God can know this healing and this new life now.

14:8 *Ephraim, what **have** I **to do** anymore with idols? I, I have answered, and I will watch over him; I **am** like a luxuriant cypress; from Me your fruit is found.*

"Ephraim, what have I to do anymore with idols?" The SLB reads this as God speaking: what more does He have to do with idols? It may also be read as Ephraim's own words, finally saying he is done with idols. Either way, the idols are finished. The long affair with Baal is over.

"I, I have answered, and I will watch over him." God has heard the prayer of verses 2 and 3, and He will care for Ephraim. "I am like a luxuriant cypress." A cypress, or fir, is an evergreen tree that stays green all year. God is never dry, never bare. Many teachers note that this is the only place in the Old Testament where God compares Himself to a tree.

"From Me your fruit is found." Israel had given Baal the credit for their fruit. Now God says plainly that every bit of fruit comes from Him. Jesus said the same thing to His disciples: "I am the vine; you are the branches," and "apart from Me you are not able to do anything" (John 15:5). We do not produce fruit by our own strength. It comes from staying close to Him.

14:9 *Who **is** wise, and let him understand these **things**; discerning, and let him know them? For the ways of the LORD **are** upright, and the righteous walk in them, and transgressors stumble in them.*

"Who is wise, and let him understand these things; discerning, and let him know them?"

The last verse of Hosea speaks to us, the readers. It is like the closing words of a wise teacher. Hosea's book is not just history. It is a book to be understood and lived. The wise person will take its lessons to heart.

"For the ways of the LORD are upright." God's ways are straight and right. His judgments are just, and His mercy is true. Everything God did in Hosea, the warnings, the judgments, the long patience and the call to return, was right.

"And the righteous walk in them, and transgressors stumble in them." The same road, two very different results. The righteous walk on God's ways and find life. Those who rebel stumble on the very same ways. The first Psalm ends the same way: "the LORD knows the way of the righteous, and the way of the wicked will perish" (Psalm 1:6). God's Word is either a road we walk or a stone we trip over. Peter says Jesus is like that: a precious cornerstone to those who believe, and a stone of stumbling to those who disobey (1 Peter 2:6-8).

So the book of Hosea ends with a choice. Israel had stumbled in her iniquity (14:1). God offered her a way to walk instead. That same choice is in front of every one of us. Will you walk in God's ways, or stumble over them?

Summary

Hosea called Israel to return to the LORD their God, because they had stumbled in their own sin. He told them to take words with them and say to God, "You will forgive all iniquity," to offer the praise of their lips instead of bulls, and to promise never again to trust Assyria, horses or idols, because in God the fatherless find compassion. God answered that He would heal their apostasy and love them freely, because His anger had turned away. He would be like the dew to Israel, and Israel would blossom like the lily, take root like the cedars of Lebanon, spread like the olive tree and be fragrant like Lebanon. People would come back to live in Israel's shade, and grain and vines would flourish. Ephraim would be done with idols, and God, like an evergreen cypress, would answer and watch over him, for all his fruit comes from God. The book ends with a word to the wise: the ways of the LORD are upright, and the righteous walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them.

Study Questions

1. What does God call Israel to do, and what does He say caused their fall? (14:1)

2. What words does God tell Israel to take with them when they return? (14:2)

3. What three things does Israel promise to stop trusting in? (14:3)

4. What does God promise in verse 4, and what does "love them freely" mean? (14:4; Romans 3:24)

5. What pictures does God use for Israel's restoration in verses 5 to 7? How do they reverse the judgments earlier in the book?

6. Where does Israel's fruit come from, and how does Jesus say the same thing? (14:8; John 15:5)

7. What two kinds of people does verse 9 describe, and how do they respond to God's ways? (14:9)

8. God tells Israel to "take words" with them. Is there something you need to say to God in confession today?

9. Israel had to name and give up the things they trusted instead of God. What would you need to name?

10. "I will love them freely." How does knowing that God's love is a free gift, not wages, change the way you come back to Him after you have failed?

Overview of Joel

Joel is the twenty-ninth book of the Bible and the second of the twelve Minor Prophets. It comes right after Hosea and right before Amos. It is a short book, only three chapters, but it has one of the clearest messages in all the prophets, and the New Testament quotes it on the day the church was born.

Joel's book begins with a disaster. A plague of locusts, wave after wave of them, had stripped the land of Judah bare. The vines, the fig trees, the grain and the pastures were gone. On top of that came drought and fire. There was nothing left even for the grain offerings at the temple. Joel tells the people to wake up and weep, and the priests to put on sackcloth and call a fast. Then he looks past the locusts to something worse: "the day of the LORD." The day of the LORD is the time when God steps into history to judge sin and to save His people. The locusts were only a warning of that day.

But Joel's message is not only judgment. In the middle of the book he calls the people to tear their hearts and not their garments, and to return to the LORD, for He is gracious and merciful. Then the LORD answers with promise after promise. He will drive away the northern army, send the rain, and repay the years the locusts ate. Afterward He will pour out His Spirit on all flesh. And in the last chapter, He will gather the nations to the valley of decision, judge them for how they treated His people, and dwell in Zion forever.

The theme of Joel is the day of the LORD, and the call to return to God before it comes. The key verse is the call at the center of the book:

Joel 2:13 (SLB)

"And tear your heart and not your garments, and return to the LORD your God; for He ***is*** gracious and merciful, slow to anger and great in steadfast love, and relenting over the harm."

Joel has 3 chapters and 73 verses. Here is its structure:

Part One: The Locust Plague and the Day of the LORD (chapter 1 to 2:17)

- Joel 1: The Locust Plague

Part Two: The LORD's Answer, Now and in the Last Days (2:18 to chapter 3)

- Joel 2: The Day of the LORD and the Promise of the Spirit
- Joel 3: The Valley of Decision

Joel 2 belongs to both parts: verses 1 to 17 finish the warning and the call to repent, and verses 18 to 32 begin the LORD's answer.

Where this book points to Christ: on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came on the disciples in Jerusalem, Peter stood up and said, "this is that which has been spoken through the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16), and he quoted Joel 2:28-32. The Spirit Joel promised was poured out because Jesus had died, risen and gone up to the Father (Acts 2:32-33). Peter and Paul both take

up Joel's promise that "everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will escape" (2:32), and they apply it to calling on the Lord Jesus (Acts 2:21, 36; Romans 10:9-13). Joel's picture of the LORD judging the nations and reigning in Zion looks ahead to the return of Christ as King (Revelation 14:14-20; 19:11-16).

Background of Joel

Author: The book opens, "The word of the LORD that came to Joel the son of Pethuel" (1:1). That is all we know about him. Joel's name means the LORD is God. He seems to have lived in or near Jerusalem, because he speaks often of Zion, the temple, the priests and the altar. Some think he may have been a priest, but the book does not say so. Jewish and Christian tradition have always held that Joel wrote the book. Some modern scholars think a later writer added the second half, about the day of the LORD and the nations. I take the book as one message from one prophet. The words "the day of the LORD" and the pictures of the locust army run all through it, binding the halves together.

When it was written: Joel does not name any king, and he does not date his book. So his date is uncertain, and good Bible teachers disagree. There are two main views, and I will give them both fairly.

The early view: Many conservative scholars date Joel early, about 835 B.C. or a little after, in the early years of King Joash of Judah (2 Kings 11 and 12). Joash became king as a boy of seven, and for some years the priest Jehoiada guided the kingdom. That would explain why Joel speaks to elders and priests and never mentions a king. The enemies Joel names, Tyre, Sidon, Philistia, Egypt and Edom (3:4, 19), were Judah's enemies in that early time, and he does not name Assyria or Babylon, which came later. Joel's place among the early prophets in the order of the Twelve also points that way, and Amos seems to echo Joel's words (Joel 3:16; Amos 1:2). This is the view the SLB introduction gives.

The later view: Other scholars date Joel after the exile, about 500 to 400 B.C. They point out that the temple is standing and its worship is going on (1:9, 13-14), but there is no king, which fits Judah under Persian rule. They see the words "when I turn back the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem" (3:1) and the scattering of Israel among the nations (3:2) as looking back on the exile. And they note the mention of selling Jews "to the sons of the Greeks" (3:6), a people who became more important in later centuries. A few teachers place Joel in between, near 600 B.C., just before Babylon came.

Why it matters little: Both views can be held by people who believe the Bible is God's Word, and the meaning of the book does not change much either way. The locust plague was real, the call to repent is clear, and the promises of the Spirit and the day of the LORD stand whenever Joel lived. This study follows the early date, as the SLB introduction does, while holding it loosely.

Setting: Judah had been struck by a locust plague of a kind no one alive had ever seen (1:2). Locusts are a kind of grasshopper that sometimes gather into enormous swarms, millions upon millions, that can strip a whole region of every green thing in a few hours. Joel names four kinds or stages of locust (1:4). A drought followed, with wildfires in the pastures (1:19-20). The farmers were ruined, the animals were starving, and the grain offering and drink offering at the temple had to stop because there was nothing to offer (1:9, 13). God had warned through Moses that locusts would come if His people turned from Him (Deuteronomy 28:38, 42), and Solomon had prayed about such a day at the dedication of the temple (2 Chronicles 6:28; 7:13-14).

Who it was written to: The people of Judah and Jerusalem: the elders, the priests, the farmers, the drinkers of wine, and "all inhabitants of the land" (1:2). Joel also speaks to every later generation. He tells them to pass the story on to their children and grandchildren (1:3).

The day of the LORD: This phrase appears five times in Joel (1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14). In the prophets, "the day of the LORD" can mean a judgment God brings in history, such as the locusts, the fall of Samaria, or the fall of Jerusalem. It also means the great and final day at the end of this age, when God judges the nations and sets up His kingdom. Joel moves from the first meaning to the second. I believe the final day of the LORD includes the seven years of Tribulation, the time of trouble before Christ returns (Matthew 24:21; Jeremiah 30:7), and the return of Christ to judge and to reign. I also believe the church will be taken up to be with Christ before that time of wrath begins (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 5:9).

Purpose: Joel was written to call God's people to real repentance, from the heart, in a time of disaster, to show them that the disaster was a warning of a greater day of the LORD, and to give them God's promises: restored harvests, the gift of His Spirit, rescue for all who call on His name, judgment on the nations that harmed His people, and the LORD dwelling in Zion forever.

Joel 1: The Locust Plague

Scripture

1:1-12 The word of the LORD that came to Joel the son of Pethuel. Hear this, elders, and give ear, all inhabitants of the land! Has this happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers? Concerning it recount to your sons, and your sons to their sons, and their sons to another generation. The remainder of the cutting locust the swarming locust has eaten; and the remainder of the swarming locust the hopping locust has eaten; and the remainder of the hopping locust the destroying locust has eaten. Wake up, drunkards, and weep, and wail, all drinkers of wine, over sweet wine, for it has been cut off from your mouth. For a nation has come up against my land, mighty, and there is no number; its teeth ***are*** the teeth of a lion, and the fangs of a lioness ***are*** its. It has made my vine into a waste, and my fig tree into splinters; it has stripped it completely bare and thrown ***it*** away; its branches have become white. Wail like a virgin girded with sackcloth over the husband of her youth. Grain offering and drink offering have been cut off from the house of the LORD; the priests, the ministers of the LORD, mourn. ***The*** field is devastated; ***the*** ground mourns; for ***the*** grain is devastated, ***the*** new wine has dried up, ***the*** fresh oil languishes. Be ashamed, farmers; wail, vinedressers, over wheat and over barley, for the harvest of ***the*** field has perished. The vine has dried up, and the fig tree languishes; pomegranate, also palm, and apple tree, all the trees of the field have dried up; for joy has withered away from the sons of mankind.

1:13-20 Gird yourselves and lament, priests; wail, ministers of the altar; come, spend the night in sackcloth, ministers of my God; for grain offering and drink offering are withheld from the house of your God. Sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather ***the*** elders, all the inhabitants of the land, ***to*** the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD. Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD ***is*** near, and like devastation from the Almighty it will come. Is not food cut off before our eyes, joy and rejoicing from the house of our God? The seeds have shriveled under their clods; the storehouses are desolate; the granaries are torn down, for the grain has dried up. How the beasts groan! The herds of cattle wander in confusion, for there is no pasture for them; also the flocks of sheep suffer punishment. To You, LORD, I call, for fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and a flame has set ablaze all the trees of the field. Also the beasts of the field pant to You, for the channels of water have dried up, and fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

Preview

Joel opens with a question for the old men: has anything like this ever happened in your lifetime, or in your fathers'? A plague of locusts has come in waves, one kind after another, until nothing green is left. Joel calls on everyone touched by it to mourn. The drunkards have no wine. The vines and fig trees are stripped white. The farmers have no harvest. And worst of all, the grain offering and drink offering have stopped at the house of the LORD.

So Joel calls the priests to put on sackcloth, call a fast, gather all the people to the temple and cry out to the LORD. Then he names what the locusts mean: "the day of the LORD is near." The

chapter ends with Joel himself praying, as fire burns the pastures, the streams run dry, and even the wild animals pant to God for water.

Study

1:1 *The word of the LORD that came to Joel the son of Pethuel.*

"The word of the LORD that came to Joel the son of Pethuel." Like Hosea, Joel begins by telling us that his message came from God. We know nothing else about him or his father. His name means the LORD is God. That name was a sermon in itself, in a land where people were tempted to look to other gods for rain and harvest. In the disaster that follows, Joel's name answers the question of who is really in charge.

1:2-3 *Hear this, elders, and give ear, all inhabitants of the land! Has this happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers? Concerning it recount to your sons, and your sons to their sons, and their sons to another generation.*

"Hear this, elders, and give ear, all inhabitants of the land!" The elders were the older men, the leaders of each town. They had seen the most. "Has this happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers?" The answer was no. No one could remember anything like it.

"Concerning it recount to your sons, and your sons to their sons, and their sons to another generation." This was to be told for four generations. Why? Not just because it was a big event, but because of what God was saying through it. Israel was always to pass down the story of what God had done, both His mighty acts of saving and His acts of judgment (Exodus 10:2; Deuteronomy 6:20-25; Psalm 78:4-7).

Are we telling our children and grandchildren what God has done, the good and the hard? Faith that is not passed on dies in one generation.

1:4 *The remainder of the cutting locust the swarming locust has eaten; and the remainder of the swarming locust the hopping locust has eaten; and the remainder of the hopping locust the destroying locust has eaten.*

"The remainder of the cutting locust the swarming locust has eaten; and the remainder of the swarming locust the hopping locust has eaten; and the remainder of the hopping locust the destroying locust has eaten."

Joel uses four Hebrew words for locusts. Some think these are four different kinds of locust. Others think they are four stages in the life of one kind, from the young hopper to the full-grown flier. Others see four waves of swarms, one after another. Whichever is right, the point is plain: what one wave left, the next one ate, until nothing was left at all.

A locust swarm is hard to picture if you have never seen one. Swarms can cover many square miles and number in the billions. A swarm can eat as much in a day as a city of people. When they move on, the fields look as if they had been burned. Moses had warned that if Israel turned from God, "the locust will consume" their crops (Deuteronomy 28:38).

1:5 *Wake up, drunkards, and weep, and wail, all drinkers of wine, over sweet wine, for it has been cut off from your mouth.*

"Wake up, drunkards, and weep." Joel starts with the people who would feel it first. Those who lived for their wine were the first to notice it was gone. "Wail, all drinkers of wine, over sweet wine, for it has been cut off from your mouth." The locusts had eaten the vines, so there would be no grapes and no new wine.

Joel says "wake up." The drunkards were asleep, dulled by drink (Hosea 4:11). God's judgment was a wake-up call. Sometimes God takes away the very thing we have been living for so that we will wake up and see Him.

1:6-7 *For a nation has come up against my land, mighty, and there is no number; its teeth **are** the teeth of a lion, and the fangs of a lioness **are** its. It has made my vine into a waste, and my fig tree into splinters; it has stripped it completely bare and thrown **it** away; its branches have become white.*

"For a nation has come up against my land, mighty, and there is no number." Joel calls the locusts "a nation," an invading army. They had no number, too many to count. "Its teeth are the teeth of a lion." A locust's jaws are tiny, but together they tore through everything like the teeth of a lion. In Revelation 9:7-8, the locusts from the pit also have teeth "like those of lions."

"It has made my vine into a waste, and my fig tree into splinters." Notice that God calls it "my land," "my vine" and "my fig tree." The land belonged to God (Leviticus 25:23). The vine and the fig tree were the signs of peace and plenty in Israel; every man sitting under his own vine and fig tree was a picture of a good life (1 Kings 4:25; Micah 4:4). "It has stripped it completely bare and thrown it away; its branches have become white." The locusts had eaten even the bark, leaving the branches bare and white.

1:8-10 *Wail like a virgin girded with sackcloth over the husband of her youth. Grain offering and drink offering have been cut off from the house of the LORD; the priests, the ministers of the LORD, mourn. **The** field is devastated; **the** ground mourns; for **the** grain is devastated, **the** new wine has dried up, **the** fresh oil languishes.*

"Wail like a virgin girded with sackcloth over the husband of her youth." In Israel a betrothed woman was already counted as a wife. Picture a young woman whose husband-to-be dies before the wedding. Her grief is bitter and her hope is gone. Sackcloth was rough cloth made of goat's hair, worn as a sign of mourning.

Why such deep grief? "Grain offering and drink offering have been cut off from the house of the LORD." A grain offering was flour and oil offered to God, and a drink offering was wine poured out at the altar. These went with the daily sacrifices morning and evening (Exodus 29:38-41; Numbers 28:3-8). Now there was nothing to offer. The daily worship of God had stopped. "The priests, the ministers of the LORD, mourn."

For Joel, the worst part of the disaster was not empty stomachs but broken worship. The link between God and His people, carried on morning and evening at the altar, was cut.

"The field is devastated; the ground mourns; for the grain is devastated, the new wine has dried up, the fresh oil languishes." Grain, wine and oil, the three great gifts of the land (Deuteronomy 7:13; Hosea 2:8), all gone.

1:11-12 *Be ashamed, farmers; wail, vinedressers, over wheat and over barley, for the harvest of **the** field has perished. The vine has dried up, and the fig tree languishes; pomegranate, also palm, and apple tree, all the trees of the field have dried up; for joy has withered away from the sons of mankind.*

"Be ashamed, farmers; wail, vinedressers, over wheat and over barley, for the harvest of the field has perished." The farmers had worked all year, and they had nothing. To be ashamed here means to be disappointed and dismayed, to have hoped for something and seen it fail.

"The vine has dried up, and the fig tree languishes; pomegranate, also palm, and apple tree, all the trees of the field have dried up." Every kind of tree was stricken. "For joy has withered away from the sons of mankind." The harvest was the happiest time of the year in Israel, with singing in the fields and the vineyards (Isaiah 16:10). This year there was no joy, because there was no harvest.

When the things we enjoy are taken away, where is our joy? Habakkuk learned to say that even if the fig tree does not blossom and there is no fruit on the vines, "I will exult in the LORD" (Habakkuk 3:17-18). Joy that rests on God cannot be eaten by locusts.

1:13 *Gird yourselves and lament, priests; wail, ministers of the altar; come, spend the night in sackcloth, ministers of my God; for grain offering and drink offering are withheld from the house of your God.*

"Gird yourselves and lament, priests; wail, ministers of the altar." Now Joel turns to the priests. They are to lead the way in mourning. "Come, spend the night in sackcloth, ministers of my God." Not just a show in the daytime, but all night long in rough clothing on the hard floor, before God.

"For grain offering and drink offering are withheld from the house of your God." Joel says it again (1:9). The priests' whole work was to offer these things, and now they had none.

1:14 *Sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather **the** elders, all the inhabitants of the land, **to** the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD.*

"Sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly;" To sanctify means to set apart as holy. A fast was a time of going without food in order to humble oneself before God and seek Him. An assembly was a sacred gathering of all the people. "Gather the elders, all the inhabitants of the land, to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD."

This is the right response to disaster. Not just to mourn, but to turn to God together. Solomon had prayed that when locusts came, if the people would pray toward the temple and turn from their sin, God would hear from heaven and forgive (1 Kings 8:37-39; 2 Chronicles 7:13-14). Joel calls them to do exactly that.

When trouble comes to a family, a church or a nation, do we gather to pray? Or do we only complain?

1:15 *Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD **is** near, and like devastation from the Almighty it will come.*

"Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and like devastation from the Almighty it will come."

Here is the key to the whole book. The locusts were terrible, but they were not the worst thing. They were a sign of something worse, "the day of the LORD." This is the first time the phrase appears in Joel. The day of the LORD is the time when God Himself steps in to judge sin. In the Hebrew there is a play on words: "devastation" (shod) "from the Almighty" (Shaddai). The same words are used in Isaiah 13:6.

The locust plague was a small day of the LORD, a preview. Joel wanted the people to see it as a warning that a far greater day was coming. Do we see the troubles in our world as warnings? Every disaster in this fallen world is a reminder that this world will not go on forever as it is, and that God will judge it.

1:16-18 *Is not food cut off before our eyes, joy and rejoicing from the house of our God? The seeds have shriveled under their clods; the storehouses are desolate; the granaries are torn down, for the grain has dried up. How the beasts groan! The herds of cattle wander in confusion, for there is no pasture for them; also the flocks of sheep suffer punishment.*

"Is not food cut off before our eyes, joy and rejoicing from the house of our God?" The people could see it with their own eyes. And the joyful feasts at the temple, where they ate before the LORD (Deuteronomy 12:7), had ended.

"The seeds have shriveled under their clods." Now we learn that a drought had come too. The seed that was planted dried up in the ground. "The storehouses are desolate; the granaries are torn down." No harvest to store, so the barns stood empty and falling down.

"How the beasts groan! The herds of cattle wander in confusion, for there is no pasture for them." Even the animals suffered. The cattle wandered, bewildered, looking for grass. "Also the flocks of sheep suffer punishment." The animals suffered for the sins of people. Paul writes that all creation groans, waiting to be set free from the curse (Romans 8:19-22).

1:19-20 *To You, LORD, I call, for fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and a flame has set ablaze all the trees of the field. Also the beasts of the field pant to You, for the channels of water have dried up, and fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.*

"To You, LORD, I call." Now Joel himself prays. He does what he told the people to do (1:14). "For fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and a flame has set ablaze all the trees of the field." In a long drought, dry grass catches fire easily, and wildfires sweep across the land.

"Also the beasts of the field pant to You, for the channels of water have dried up." The wild animals, too, cry out to God. Psalm 104:21 says the young lions "seek their food from God," and Psalm 42:1 pictures a deer panting for streams of water. If the animals look to God in their need, how much more should we?

Joel ends the chapter where every hard time should end, in prayer. He has no answer yet. He does not know what God will do. But he calls on the LORD. That is where hope begins.

Summary

The word of the LORD came to Joel son of Pethuel. Joel asked the elders whether anything like this had happened in their days or their fathers' days, and told them to pass the story down for generations. Wave after wave of locusts had eaten everything. The drunkards were to wake up and weep, for the wine was gone. A nation of locusts, countless, with teeth like a lion's, had stripped God's vine and fig tree bare. The people were to mourn like a young bride whose husband died, for the grain offering and drink offering were cut off from the house of the LORD, and the priests mourned. The fields, grain, wine and oil were ruined, the farmers and vinedressers were dismayed, every tree had dried up, and joy had withered. Joel called the priests to put on sackcloth, call a fast and an assembly, gather the elders and all the people to the house of the LORD, and cry out to Him, for the day of the LORD was near, coming like devastation from the Almighty. Food and joy were cut off, the seed shriveled, the barns were empty, and the cattle and sheep suffered. Joel cried out to the LORD, for fire had burned the pastures and trees, and even the wild animals panted to God because the streams had dried up.

Study Questions

1. What question did Joel ask the elders, and what did he tell them to do with the story? (1:2-3)

2. What happened to the land, wave after wave? (1:4)

3. What does Joel call the locusts, and what did they do to the vine and fig tree? (1:6-7)

4. What had been cut off from the house of the LORD, and why was that so serious? (1:9, 13)

5. What did Joel tell the priests and people to do? (1:13-14)

6. What did Joel say the locust plague pointed to? (1:15)

7. Who else suffered in the drought, and to whom did Joel and the animals cry out? (1:18-20)

8. What has God done in your life that you need to tell your children or grandchildren? How could you pass it on?

9. Joel saw the locusts as a wake-up call. Has God ever used a hard time to wake you up spiritually?

10. Joel ended the chapter in prayer, without yet knowing God's answer. What hard situation do you need to bring to God in prayer today, even before you see how He will answer?

Joel 2: The Day of the LORD and the Promise of the Spirit

Scripture

2:1-17 Blow a ram's horn in Zion, and sound an alarm on the mountain of My holiness! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD ***is*** coming, for ***it is*** near: a day of darkness and gloom, a day of cloud and thick darkness. Like dawn spread out over the mountains ***is*** a people numerous and mighty; like it ***there*** has not been from antiquity, and after it it will not recur until the years of generation and generation. Before it fire has consumed, and after it a flame blazes. Like the garden of Eden ***is*** the land before it, and after it a wilderness of desolation; and also ***there*** has been no escape for it. Like the appearance of horses ***is*** its appearance, and like horsemen, so they run. Like the sound of chariots over the tops of the mountains they leap, like the sound of a flame of fire consuming stubble, like a mighty people arrayed for battle. Before it peoples are in anguish; all faces have gathered a glow. Like warriors they run; like men of war they go up a wall; and each goes on his ways, and they do not change their paths. And each does not crowd his brother; they go, ***each*** man on his track; and through the weapons they fall, they do not break off. In the city they rush about; on the wall they run; into the houses they go up; through the windows they come in like the thief. Before it ***the*** earth trembles, ***the*** heavens shake; ***the*** sun and ***the*** moon have grown dark, and ***the*** stars have gathered in their brightness. And the LORD gives forth His voice before His army, for His camp ***is*** very great; for mighty ***is the one*** doing His word; for the day of the LORD ***is*** great and very awesome, and who can endure it? "And even now," declares the LORD, "return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with wailing." And tear your heart and not your garments, and return to the LORD your God; for He ***is*** gracious and merciful, slow to anger and great in steadfast love, and relenting over the harm. Who knows? He may turn and relent, and leave behind Him a blessing, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God. Blow a ram's horn in Zion; consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly. Gather ***the*** people; consecrate an assembly; assemble ***the*** elders; gather ***the*** children and those nursing at ***the*** breasts; let ***the*** bridegroom go out from his room, and ***the*** bride from her canopy. Between the porch and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep, and let them say, "Have pity, O LORD, on Your people, and do not make Your inheritance a reproach, for nations to rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where ***is*** their God?'"

2:18-32 And the LORD became jealous for His land and had compassion on His people. And the LORD answered and said to His people, "Look, I ***am*** sending to you the grain and the new wine and the fresh oil, and you will be satisfied with it; and I will not make you again a reproach among the nations. And the northerner I will remove far from you, and I will drive it into a land of dryness and desolation, its face toward the eastern sea and its end toward the western sea; and its stench will go up, and let its foul smell go up, for it has done great ***things***." Do not fear, O ground; be glad and rejoice, for the LORD has done great ***things***. Do not fear, O animals of ***the*** field, for the pastures of ***the*** wilderness have sprouted, for ***the*** tree has borne its fruit; ***the*** fig tree and ***the*** vine have given their strength. And sons of Zion, be glad and rejoice in the LORD your God, for He has given to you the early rain for righteousness, and He has brought down for you rain, ***the*** early rain and ***the*** spring rain, at the first. And the threshing floors will be full ***of*** grain, and the vats will

overflow ***with*** new wine and fresh oil. And I will repay to you the years which the swarming locust has eaten, the hopping locust and the destroying locust and the cutting locust, My great army which I sent among you. And you will surely eat and be satisfied, and you will praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you; and My people will not be ashamed forever. And you will know that I ***am*** in the midst of Israel, and I ***am*** the LORD your God, and ***there is*** none else; and My people will not be ashamed forever. And it will be afterward ***that*** I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy; your old men will dream dreams; your young men will see visions. And also on the ***male*** servants and on the female servants in those days I will pour out My Spirit. And I will set wonders in the heavens and on the earth: blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. And it will be ***that*** everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will escape; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem ***there*** will be escape, just as the LORD has said, and among the survivors whom the LORD ***is*** calling.

Preview

Joel 2 begins with an alarm. The day of the LORD is coming, a day of darkness, and before it marches an army like nothing ever seen. It runs like horses, climbs walls like soldiers, and comes through the windows like a thief, and at its head is the LORD Himself. Then, in the middle of the terror, God says, "even now," return to Me. Tear your hearts, not your garments, for He is gracious and merciful.

At verse 18 everything turns. The LORD has pity on His people. He will drive away the northern army and repay the years the locusts have eaten. And afterward He will pour out His Spirit on all flesh, with wonders in the heavens before the great and awesome day of the LORD, and everyone who calls on His name will escape. Peter quoted these words on the day of Pentecost.

Study

2:1-2 *Blow a ram's horn in Zion, and sound an alarm on the mountain of My holiness! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD **is** coming, for **it is** near: a day of darkness and gloom, a day of cloud and thick darkness. Like dawn spread out over the mountains **is** a people numerous and mighty; like it **there** has not been from antiquity, and after it it will not recur until the years of generation and generation.*

"Blow a ram's horn in Zion, and sound an alarm on the mountain of My holiness!" The ram's horn trumpet was blown to warn of an enemy coming (Hosea 5:8). Zion is Jerusalem, and "the mountain of My holiness" is the temple mount. "For the day of the LORD is coming, for it is near."

"A day of darkness and gloom, a day of cloud and thick darkness." A locust swarm can be so thick it blots out the sun. But these are also the words used for God's coming at Mount Sinai (Deuteronomy 4:11), and Zephaniah uses them for the day of the LORD (Zephaniah 1:15). "Like dawn spread out over the mountains is a people numerous and mighty," spreading fast and everywhere, like the first light.

2:3 *Before it fire has consumed, and after it a flame blazes. Like the garden of Eden* ***is*** *the land before it, and after it a wilderness of desolation; and also* ***there*** *has been no escape for it.*

"Before it fire has consumed, and after it a flame blazes." The land looks burned wherever the army has been. "Like the garden of Eden is the land before it, and after it a wilderness of desolation." A paradise becomes a desert, and nothing escapes.

2:4-9 *Like the appearance of horses* ***is*** *its appearance, and like horsemen, so they run. Like the sound of chariots over the tops of the mountains they leap, like the sound of a flame of fire consuming stubble, like a mighty people arrayed for battle. Before it peoples are in anguish; all faces have gathered a glow. Like warriors they run; like men of war they go up a wall; and each goes on his ways, and they do not change their paths. And each does not crowd his brother; they go,* ***each*** *man on his track; and through the weapons they fall, they do not break off. In the city they rush about; on the wall they run; into the houses they go up; through the windows they come in like the thief.*

"Like the appearance of horses is its appearance." A locust's head looks a little like a tiny horse's head. "Like the sound of chariots over the tops of the mountains they leap." A great swarm roars and crackles like a grass fire.

"Like warriors they run; like men of war they go up a wall." They keep their lines and do not crowd one another. "Through the weapons they fall, they do not break off." You cannot fight locusts with a sword. "In the city they rush about; on the wall they run; into the houses they go up; through the windows they come in like the thief." There is nowhere to hide.

Who is this army? Bible teachers read it in three main ways. Some believe it is the locust plague of chapter 1, now pictured as an army. Others believe it is a human army such as Assyria or Babylon, pictured as locusts; verse 20 calls it "the northerner," and invaders came from the north. Others believe it looks to the armies of the last days. Many teachers join the first and third readings: Joel starts with the locusts he had seen, describes them as an army, and lets that picture point ahead to a far greater day still to come. Revelation 9:3-11 uses locusts like horses, with teeth like lions and the sound of chariots, for a judgment in the Tribulation.

2:10-11 *Before it* ***the*** *earth trembles,* ***the*** *heavens shake;* ***the*** *sun and* ***the*** *moon have grown dark, and* ***the*** *stars have gathered in their brightness. And the LORD gives forth His voice before His army, for His camp* ***is*** *very great; for mighty* ***is the one*** *doing His word; for the day of the LORD* ***is*** *great and very awesome, and who can endure it?*

"Before it the earth trembles, the heavens shake; the sun and the moon have grown dark." Now the picture is bigger than locusts. The whole creation shakes. Jesus used words like these for the end of the Tribulation, just before His return (Matthew 24:29).

"And the LORD gives forth His voice before His army." Whose army is this? The LORD's. Israel's enemies, locusts or nations, only do what God sends them to do (2:25 calls the locusts "My great army"). "For the day of the LORD is great and very awesome, and who can endure it?" That is the

question every person must face. The answer, as the next verses show, is only those who turn to Him for mercy.

2:12 *"And even now," declares the LORD, "return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with wailing."*

"And even now," declares the LORD, "return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with wailing."

"Even now." These may be the two most hopeful words in the book. The army is at the door, and still God says it is not too late. "With all your heart." God does not want half a heart (Hosea 7:8). Fasting, weeping and wailing show that repentance is not cold. It feels the weight of sin.

2:13 *And tear your heart and not your garments, and return to the LORD your God; for He **is** gracious and merciful, slow to anger and great in steadfast love, and relenting over the harm.*

"And tear your heart and not your garments, and return to the LORD your God; for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and great in steadfast love, and relenting over the harm."

In Israel, people tore their clothes when struck with grief (Genesis 37:34; 2 Kings 22:11). But that could become only a show. Anyone can tear a robe. God says, Tear your heart. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit" (Psalm 51:17). Jesus warned against fasting to be seen by people (Matthew 6:16-18).

Why return? Because of who God is. Joel repeats what God said of Himself to Moses: "a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and great in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Exodus 34:6). Gracious means He gives what we do not deserve. Merciful means He holds back what we do deserve. Slow to anger means He gives time to turn. "Relenting over the harm" means He is willing to turn back from the judgment He has threatened when people repent. Jonah knew this about God and did not like it (Jonah 4:2).

If you have been afraid that God is only angry with you, read this verse again. This is who He is.

2:14 *Who knows? He may turn and relent, and leave behind Him a blessing, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God.*

"Who knows? He may turn and relent, and leave behind Him a blessing." Repentance is not a way to force God's hand. It is throwing ourselves on His mercy. The king of Nineveh said the same (Jonah 3:9). And the blessing they hoped for was "a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God," enough harvest to worship God again (1:9).

2:15-17 *Blow a ram's horn in Zion; consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly. Gather **the** people; consecrate an assembly; assemble **the** elders; gather **the** children and those nursing at **the** breasts; let **the** bridegroom go out from his room, and **the** bride from her canopy. Between the porch and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep, and let them say, "Have pity, O LORD, on Your people, and do not make Your inheritance a reproach, for nations to rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where **is** their God?'"*

"Blow a ram's horn in Zion; consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly." The horn sounds again, this time calling the people to prayer. Everyone must come, the elders, the children, "those nursing at the breasts," even the bridegroom and bride on their wedding day, who under the Law were excused from war (Deuteronomy 24:5). Nothing is more important than this.

"Between the porch and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep." The priests stood between the temple entrance and the altar of burnt offering, standing in the gap for the people. Their prayer appeals to God's own honor: "do not make Your inheritance a reproach," or the nations will ask, "Where is their God?" Moses prayed this way (Exodus 32:11-12).

2:18-20 *And the LORD became jealous for His land and had compassion on His people. And the LORD answered and said to His people, "Look, I **am** sending to you the grain and the new wine and the fresh oil, and you will be satisfied with it; and I will not make you again a reproach among the nations. And the northerner I will remove far from you, and I will drive it into a land of dryness and desolation, its face toward the eastern sea and its end toward the western sea; and its stench will go up, and let its foul smell go up, for it has done great **things**."*

"And the LORD became jealous for His land and had compassion on His people." This is the turning point of the book. The people prayed, and God answered. Jealous here means a burning, protective love for what is His.

"Look, I am sending to you the grain and the new wine and the fresh oil." What the locusts took, God gives back, and He will no longer make them "a reproach among the nations."

"And the northerner I will remove far from you." God will drive this army into the desert, "its face toward the eastern sea," the Dead Sea, "and its end toward the western sea," the Mediterranean. Locust swarms have been known to be blown out to sea and die, washing up in stinking heaps on the shore. "For it has done great things." The enemy made itself great, but God would do greater things (2:21).

2:21-24 *Do not fear, O ground; be glad and rejoice, for the LORD has done great **things**. Do not fear, O animals of **the** field, for the pastures of **the** wilderness have sprouted, for **the** tree has borne its fruit; **the** fig tree and **the** vine have given their strength. And sons of Zion, be glad and rejoice in the LORD your God, for He has given to you the early rain for righteousness, and He has brought down for you rain, **the** early rain and **the** spring rain, at the first. And the threshing floors will be full **of** grain, and the vats will overflow **with** new wine and fresh oil.*

"Do not fear, O ground; be glad and rejoice, for the LORD has done great things." Everything that mourned in chapter 1 is told to rejoice. The pastures that burned (1:19-20) are green. "Sons of

Zion, be glad and rejoice in the LORD your God, for He has given to you the early rain for righteousness," the fall rain and the spring rain, given in right measure as a sign of His faithfulness. "And the threshing floors will be full of grain." The empty barns of 1:17 are full.

2:25-27 *And I will repay to you the years which the swarming locust has eaten, the hopping locust and the destroying locust and the cutting locust, My great army which I sent among you. And you will surely eat and be satisfied, and you will praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you; and My people will not be ashamed forever. And you will know that I **am** in the midst of Israel, and I **am** the LORD your God, and **there is** none else; and My people will not be ashamed forever.*

"And I will repay to you the years which the swarming locust has eaten." This is one of the most loved promises in Joel. God cannot change the past, but He can repay. The locusts are named again, "My great army which I sent among you." God does not pretend He had nothing to do with it. He sent it, and He will restore.

Many people have years that feel eaten up, by sin, by foolish choices, by suffering, by others' sin against them. God does not always give back the same thing that was lost. But He is able to redeem those years. "To those who love God all things work together for good" (Romans 8:28).

Twice God says, "My people will not be ashamed forever." And the best gift is not the harvest: "you will know that I am in the midst of Israel, and I am the LORD your God, and there is none else."

2:28-29 *And it will be afterward **that** I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy; your old men will dream dreams; your young men will see visions. And also on the **male** servants and on the female servants in those days I will pour out My Spirit.*

"And it will be afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh." After the land is restored, God promises something far greater than rain. He will pour out His Spirit, like rain on dry ground (Isaiah 44:3).

In the Old Testament, the Spirit came on certain people for certain tasks: prophets, judges, kings and craftsmen. Moses had wished that "all the people of the LORD were prophets, that the LORD would put His Spirit on them!" (Numbers 11:29). Joel says that day is coming. "All flesh" means all kinds of people: "your sons and your daughters," "your old men" and "your young men," and even "the male servants" and "the female servants." No one is left out because of age, sex or rank.

2:30-32 *And I will set wonders in the heavens and on the earth: blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. And it will be **that** everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will escape; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem **there** will be escape, just as the LORD has said, and among the survivors whom the LORD **is** calling.*

"And I will set wonders in the heavens and on the earth: blood and fire and columns of smoke." "The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD." These are signs of world-shaking upheaval before God's final judgment.

"And it will be that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will escape." In the middle of the terror there is a way out, for anyone at all. To call on the LORD is to cry out to Him, trusting Him to save. "For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be escape," "among the survivors whom the LORD is calling." Those who call on Him are those whom He is calling. Salvation begins with God's call.

On the day of Pentecost, fifty days after Jesus rose, the Holy Spirit came on the disciples in Jerusalem, and they spoke in other languages. Peter stood up and said, "this is that which has been spoken through the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16), and he quoted Joel 2:28-32, beginning with the words "in the last days" (Acts 2:17). He explained that the risen and exalted Jesus "has poured out this which you now see and hear" (Acts 2:33). And he ended with Joel's promise, "everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved" (Acts 2:21), calling them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38). Paul quotes the same promise in Romans 10:13, and the Lord we call on there is Jesus (Romans 10:9). The LORD of Joel 2:32 is the Lord Jesus.

So was Joel's prophecy fulfilled at Pentecost? I believe the answer is yes, and not yet. Yes: Peter said plainly, "this is that." The Spirit poured out at Pentecost was the Spirit Joel promised, and since then He has been given to every believer, Jew and Gentile, men and women, young and old (Acts 2:39; 10:44-45). The last days began with Christ's first coming (Hebrews 1:2). Not yet in full: at Pentecost the sun did not turn dark or the moon to blood. Jesus placed those signs after the tribulation of those days (Matthew 24:29-30), and John saw them at the sixth seal (Revelation 6:12). And Joel's promise was made to Israel, with escape "on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem." The prophets say God will pour out His Spirit on the house of Israel when He brings them home in the last days (Ezekiel 39:29; Zechariah 12:10). I believe Pentecost was the first fulfillment, and the full fulfillment will come at the end of the Tribulation, when Israel as a nation calls on the name of the Lord and Christ returns to Zion. The church, I believe, will already have been taken up to be with Christ before that time of wrath (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 5:9).

Other teachers see it differently. Some believe Joel was completely fulfilled at Pentecost and in the church age, and read the signs in the sky as pictures of great upheaval, such as the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Others believe Pentecost was only a sample of what Joel described. I believe the first view leaves out the signs and the promise to Israel, and the second does not take Peter's "this is that" (Acts 2:16) seriously enough.

What does this mean for you? The same Spirit Joel promised is given to everyone who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus today. If you call on Him, He will save you, and He will give you His Spirit.

Summary

Joel sounded the alarm in Zion, for the day of the LORD was near, a day of darkness, with a great army that burned the land, ran like horses, climbed walls and came through windows, while the earth shook and the sun and moon went dark. The LORD led this army, and no one could endure His day. Yet even now He called them to return with all their heart, tearing their hearts and not their garments, because He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, great in steadfast love and relenting over harm. Then the LORD had compassion. He promised grain, wine and oil, to drive

away the northern army, to send the rains, and to repay the years the locusts had eaten, so His people would know He was in their midst. Afterward He would pour out His Spirit on all flesh and show wonders in the heavens before the great day of the LORD, and everyone who calls on His name will escape. Peter said Pentecost was "that which has been spoken through the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16).

Study Questions

1. How does Joel describe the day of the LORD and the army that comes before it? (2:1-9)

2. Whose army is it, and what question does Joel ask about the day of the LORD? (2:11)

3. What does God say "even now," and what does "tear your heart and not your garments" mean? (2:12-13)

4. What does verse 13 say about God? Where did God first say these words? (2:13; Exodus 34:6)

5. Who was to come to the solemn assembly, and what were the priests to pray? (2:15-17)

6. What did God promise to give back to His people? (2:19-27)

7. On whom will God pour out His Spirit, and how did Peter use these words at Pentecost? (2:28-32; Acts 2:16-21)

8. "Even now." Is there an area of your life where you have thought it was too late to return to God? What does this verse say to you?

9. God says, "I will repay to you the years which the swarming locust has eaten." Are there years in your life that feel eaten up? How might God redeem them?

10. "Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will escape." Have you called on the name of the Lord Jesus to save you? Who in your life still needs to hear this promise?

Joel 3: The Valley of Decision

Scripture

3:1-8 For look, in those days and at that time, when I turn back the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, and I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat, and I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people and My inheritance Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; and My land they have divided up. And for My people they have cast a lot, and they have given the boy for the prostitute, and the girl they have sold for the wine, and they have drunk. And also, what ***are*** you to Me, O Tyre and Sidon and all the regions of Philistia? ***Are*** you repaying a recompense to Me? Or ***are*** you dealing out to Me? Swiftly, quickly I will return your recompense on your head, because My silver and My gold you have taken, and My good desirable things you have brought into your temples. And the sons of Judah and the sons of Jerusalem you have sold to the sons of the Greeks, in order to remove them far from their territory. Look, I ***am*** rousing them from the place where you sold them, and I will return your recompense on your head. And I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the sons of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, to a distant nation; for the LORD has spoken.

3:9-21 Proclaim this among the nations: consecrate war; rouse the warriors; let them draw near, let them go up, all the men of war. Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning knives into spears; let the weak say, "I ***am*** a warrior." Hurry and come, all the nations from round about, and they will be gathered there. Bring down, O LORD, Your warriors. Let the nations be roused and go up to the valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the nations from round about. Send out ***the*** sickle, for ***the*** harvest has ripened; come, tread, for ***the*** winepress is full; the vats overflow, for their evil ***is*** great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD ***is*** near in the valley of decision. ***The*** sun and ***the*** moon have grown dark, and ***the*** stars have gathered in their brightness. And the LORD will roar from Zion, and from Jerusalem He will give forth His voice, and ***the*** heavens and ***the*** earth will shake; and the LORD ***will be*** a refuge for His people and a stronghold for the sons of Israel. And you will know that I ***am*** the LORD your God, dwelling in Zion, the mountain of My holiness; and Jerusalem will be holiness, and strangers will not pass through it again. And it will be in that day ***that*** the mountains will drip sweet wine, and the hills will flow ***with*** milk, and all the ravines of Judah will flow ***with*** water; and a spring will go out from the house of the LORD and will water the wadi of the Shittim. Egypt will become a desolation, and Edom will become a wilderness of desolation, because of the violence of the sons of Judah, in that they shed innocent blood in their land. And Judah will remain forever, and Jerusalem to generation and generation. And I will clear their blood ***that*** I have not cleared; and the LORD ***is*** dwelling in Zion.

Preview

Joel's last chapter carries us to the end of the story. "In those days and at that time," when God brings His people home, He will gather all the nations to the valley of Jehoshaphat and judge them there for what they did to Israel: scattering His people, dividing His land, and selling His children

as slaves. Tyre, Sidon and Philistia are named first, and their crimes will come back on their own heads.

Then God calls the nations to war. Let them beat their plowshares into swords and come up to the valley, for the harvest is ripe and the winepress is full. Multitudes fill the valley of decision. The sun and moon go dark, and the LORD roars from Zion. But for His people He is a refuge. The book ends in peace: mountains dripping with sweet wine, a spring flowing from the house of the LORD, Judah and Jerusalem inhabited forever, and the LORD dwelling in Zion.

Study

3:1 *For look, in those days and at that time, when I turn back the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem,*

"For look, in those days and at that time, when I turn back the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem." "In those days" ties this chapter to the days of 2:28-32, the time of the great and awesome day of the LORD. To "turn back the captivity" means to bring the captives home and restore their fortunes. God is speaking of the time when He brings His scattered people back.

Has this already happened? The Jews did return from Babylon in 538 B.C., but the judgment of all the nations described here did not happen then. In our own time, millions of Jews have returned to the land of Israel. I believe the full restoring of Judah and Jerusalem will come when Christ returns.

3:2 *and I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat, and I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people and My inheritance Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; and My land they have divided up.*

"And I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat." Jehoshaphat means the LORD judges. It was also the name of a godly king of Judah, in whose day God won a great victory for His people without their fighting, in a valley they named Beracah, blessing (2 Chronicles 20:20-26). We do not know for sure where the valley of Jehoshaphat is. Since the fourth century A.D., many have linked it with the Kidron Valley, east of Jerusalem, between the temple mount and the Mount of Olives. Zechariah says that when the Lord returns, His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives and it will split, forming "a very great valley" (Zechariah 14:4). That may be the place. The name tells us what happens there: the LORD judges.

"And I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people and My inheritance Israel." Why does God judge the nations? Because of how they treated Israel. After all of Israel's sin, they are still "My people" and "My inheritance." God had promised Abraham, "the one who disdains you I will curse" (Genesis 12:3). He has not forgotten that promise.

"Whom they have scattered among the nations; and My land they have divided up." Two crimes. They scattered God's people, and they carved up God's land as if it were theirs. The land of Israel is God's land (Leviticus 25:23). The nations that divide it will answer to Him.

Many Bible teachers connect this with what Jesus taught about the judgment of the nations when "the Son of Man comes in His glory" (Matthew 25:31-46). There the nations are judged by how

they treated "these My brothers" (Matthew 25:40). I believe Joel 3 and Matthew 25 describe the same time, when Christ returns at the end of the Tribulation and judges the nations before His kingdom begins.

3:3 *And for My people they have cast a lot, and they have given the boy for the prostitute, and the girl they have sold for the wine, and they have drunk.*

"And for My people they have cast a lot, and they have given the boy for the prostitute, and the girl they have sold for the wine, and they have drunk." This is how cheaply the nations valued God's people. After a war, soldiers would divide up the captives by casting lots. A boy was traded for a night with a prostitute. A girl was sold for the price of a drink. Children made in God's image were treated as small change.

God sees every one of those children. Human trafficking is not new, and neither is God's hatred of it.

3:4-6 *And also, what **are** you to Me, O Tyre and Sidon and all the regions of Philistia? **Are** you repaying a recompense to Me? Or **are** you dealing out to Me? Swiftly, quickly I will return your recompense on your head, because My silver and My gold you have taken, and My good desirable things you have brought into your temples. And the sons of Judah and the sons of Jerusalem you have sold to the sons of the Greeks, in order to remove them far from their territory.*

"And also, what are you to Me, O Tyre and Sidon and all the regions of Philistia?" Tyre and Sidon were the great trading cities of Phoenicia, on the coast north of Israel. Philistia was on the coast to the southwest. "Are you repaying a recompense to Me?" Are you getting back at Me for something? They had no reason to attack Israel. "Swiftly, quickly I will return your recompense on your head." Whatever they did will come back on them.

"Because My silver and My gold you have taken, and My good desirable things you have brought into your temples." When they looted Judah and Jerusalem, they carried off God's treasures to the temples of their own gods.

"And the sons of Judah and the sons of Jerusalem you have sold to the sons of the Greeks, in order to remove them far from their territory." Tyre and Philistia were slave traders. They sold Jewish captives to the Greeks, far across the sea, so that they could never come home. Amos condemned Tyre and Gaza for the same trade (Amos 1:6, 9).

3:7-8 *Look, I **am** rousing them from the place where you sold them, and I will return your recompense on your head. And I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the sons of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, to a distant nation; for the LORD has spoken.*

"Look, I am rousing them from the place where you sold them." God knows where every one of His scattered people is. He will stir them up and bring them back. "And I will return your recompense on your head."

"And I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the sons of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, to a distant nation." The Sabeans lived in Sheba, in southern Arabia, far to

the south and east, as far from Tyre as Greece was from Judah. The punishment fits the crime. "For the LORD has spoken."

Some of this came true in history. When Alexander the Great took Tyre in 332 B.C., thousands of its people were sold as slaves, and Sidon had been crushed by the Persians about 345 B.C. But the full judgment of "all the nations" waits for the day of the LORD.

3:9-10 *Proclaim this among the nations: consecrate war; rouse the warriors; let them draw near, let them go up, all the men of war. Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning knives into spears; let the weak say, "I **am** a warrior."*

Now God calls out to the nations, almost like a challenge: "Proclaim this among the nations: consecrate war; rouse the warriors." To consecrate war means to prepare for it with religious rites, as ancient armies did before battle. "Let them draw near, let them go up, all the men of war."

"Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning knives into spears." This turns Isaiah's and Micah's famous words upside down. They said that in the kingdom of the LORD, the nations "will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning knives" (Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3). Before that peace comes, the nations will do the opposite. They will turn their farm tools into weapons for one last war. "Let the weak say, I am a warrior." Everyone will be called up.

God is not urging them to sin. He is telling them, in effect, Gather your strength, bring everything you have. It will not be enough. The battle will be the LORD's.

3:11-12 *Hurry and come, all the nations from round about, and they will be gathered there. Bring down, O LORD, Your warriors. Let the nations be roused and go up to the valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the nations from round about.*

"Hurry and come, all the nations from round about, and they will be gathered there." "Bring down, O LORD, Your warriors." Here Joel prays for God to send His own army, the army of heaven. When Christ returns, He comes with "the armies in heaven" following Him (Revelation 19:14).

"Let the nations be roused and go up to the valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the nations from round about." The nations think they are coming to fight. They are really coming to court. Revelation describes the kings of the earth and their armies gathered "to make war with the One sitting on the horse," at the place "called in Hebrew Armageddon" (Revelation 16:16; 19:19). I believe Joel is describing that same gathering at the end of the Tribulation.

3:13 *Send out **the** sickle, for **the** harvest has ripened; come, tread, for **the** winepress is full; the vats overflow, for their evil **is** great.*

"Send out the sickle, for the harvest has ripened; come, tread, for the winepress is full; the vats overflow, for their evil is great." Two pictures of judgment. The grain harvest: the sickle cuts down the ripe grain. The grape harvest: the grapes are trampled in the winepress until the juice runs over. The nations' evil is ripe and overflowing.

John uses both pictures in Revelation 14. An angel cries, "Send in Your sickle and reap, because the hour to reap has come" (Revelation 14:15), and the vine of the earth is thrown "into the great winepress of the fury of God" (Revelation 14:19). At His return, Christ Himself treads that winepress (Revelation 19:15).

Why does God wait so long to judge? Because He is patient, giving time to repent (2 Peter 3:9). But there comes a time when evil is full, and the harvest must come (Genesis 15:16).

3:14-15 *Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD **is** near in the valley of decision. **The** sun and **the** moon have grown dark, and **the** stars have gathered in their brightness.*

"Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision."

This verse is often used in sermons to mean that people today stand in a valley of decision, needing to decide for Christ. Every person does need to decide, but that is not what this verse means. The "decision" here is God's decision, His verdict. The word means a sharp cutting, a sentence handed down. The valley of Jehoshaphat, where the LORD judges, is the valley of decision, where God decides the case of the nations. By then, the time for the nations to decide will be past.

That makes the call of 2:32 all the more urgent. Today, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. The day is coming when God, not man, will make the final decision.

"The sun and the moon have grown dark, and the stars have gathered in their brightness." The same signs as 2:10 and 2:31. The day of the LORD has come.

3:16 *And the LORD will roar from Zion, and from Jerusalem He will give forth His voice, and **the** heavens and **the** earth will shake; and the LORD **will be** a refuge for His people and a stronghold for the sons of Israel.*

"And the LORD will roar from Zion, and from Jerusalem He will give forth His voice, and the heavens and the earth will shake." The LORD roars like a lion over its prey. Amos begins his book with these very words (Amos 1:2). The whole universe shakes at His voice (Hebrews 12:26).

"And the LORD will be a refuge for His people and a stronghold for the sons of Israel." The same voice that terrifies His enemies is a shelter for His people. That is the great difference the day of the LORD makes. For those who refuse Him, it is darkness. For those who belong to Him, He is a refuge. Where will you stand on that day?

3:17 *And you will know that I **am** the LORD your God, dwelling in Zion, the mountain of My holiness; and Jerusalem will be holiness, and strangers will not pass through it again.*

"And you will know that I am the LORD your God, dwelling in Zion, the mountain of My holiness." Israel will finally know the LORD (2:27; Hosea 2:20). "And Jerusalem will be holiness, and strangers will not pass through it again." Jerusalem has been invaded, trampled and conquered

many times, by Assyria, Babylon, Greece, Rome and others. Jesus said it would be "trampled by the nations until the times of the nations are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24). Joel says that day will end. Jerusalem will be holy, and no foreign army will ever march through it again.

3:18 *And it will be in that day **that** the mountains will drip sweet wine, and the hills will flow **with** milk, and all the ravines of Judah will flow **with** water; and a spring will go out from the house of the LORD and will water the wadi of the Shittim.*

"And it will be in that day that the mountains will drip sweet wine, and the hills will flow with milk." The land that was stripped bare by locusts (1:5, 10) will overflow. Amos uses the same picture of the kingdom (Amos 9:13).

"And all the ravines of Judah will flow with water." The dry streambeds of 1:20 will run full. "And a spring will go out from the house of the LORD and will water the wadi of the Shittim." A wadi is a valley that is dry most of the year. Shittim means acacia trees, which grow in dry places; the valley may be one running down toward the Dead Sea. Ezekiel saw a river flowing from the temple in the kingdom, growing deeper as it went and bringing life wherever it flowed, even healing the Dead Sea (Ezekiel 47:1-12). Zechariah says "living waters will go out from Jerusalem" (Zechariah 14:8). I believe this will be a real river in a real land when Christ reigns, and it is also a picture of the life that flows from God's presence. In the new creation, John sees "a pure river of water of life" flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb (Revelation 22:1).

3:19-21 *Egypt will become a desolation, and Edom will become a wilderness of desolation, because of the violence of the sons of Judah, in that they shed innocent blood in their land. And Judah will remain forever, and Jerusalem to generation and generation. And I will clear their blood **that** I have not cleared; and the LORD **is** dwelling in Zion.*

"Egypt will become a desolation, and Edom will become a wilderness of desolation." Egypt and Edom stand for Israel's long-time enemies; Edom came from Esau, Jacob's own brother. "Because of the violence of the sons of Judah, in that they shed innocent blood in their land." This means the violence done to the sons of Judah, the innocent blood of God's people.

"And Judah will remain forever, and Jerusalem to generation and generation." God's covenant with His people cannot be broken (Jeremiah 31:35-37).

"And I will clear their blood that I have not cleared." God will deal with the guilt of the blood that has not yet been answered for. Some read it as God avenging the innocent blood of His people. Others read it as God cleansing His people of their own guilt. Both are true of what God will do. He will judge their enemies, and He will make His people clean.

"And the LORD is dwelling in Zion." This is how Joel ends: with God living among His people. The locusts came because God's people had wandered. The book ends with God at home with them forever. Ezekiel ends his book the same way, naming the city "The LORD Is There" (Ezekiel 48:35). And the Bible ends that way too: "Look, the tabernacle of God is with men" (Revelation 21:3). That is where all of history is heading.

Summary

In those days, when God brings back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, He will gather all the nations to the valley of Jehoshaphat and judge them for what they did to His people Israel: scattering them, dividing His land, and trading boys and girls for a prostitute and a drink. Tyre, Sidon and Philistia, who robbed His treasures and sold Judah's people to the Greeks, would be repaid in kind. God then calls the nations to prepare for war, to beat plowshares into swords and come to the valley of Jehoshaphat, where He will sit to judge them. The harvest is ripe and the winepress full, for their evil is great. Multitudes fill the valley of decision, the sun and moon go dark, and the LORD roars from Zion, shaking heaven and earth. But He is a refuge for His people. They will know He is the LORD dwelling in Zion, and Jerusalem will be holy, never invaded again. The land will overflow, and a spring will flow from the house of the LORD. Egypt and Edom will be desolate for their violence against Judah, but Judah and Jerusalem will remain forever, God will deal with the blood not yet answered for, and the LORD will dwell in Zion.

Study Questions

1. When will God gather the nations, and where will He bring them? (3:1-2)

2. Why does God judge the nations? What does He call Israel? (3:2-3)

3. What had Tyre, Sidon and Philistia done, and what would happen to them? (3:4-8)

4. How does verse 10 turn around the words of Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3? (3:10)

5. What two harvest pictures does verse 13 use, and where does Revelation use them? (3:13; Revelation 14:14-20)

6. Whose decision is made in the valley of decision? (3:14)

7. What is the LORD to His people on that day, and what will happen to Jerusalem? (3:16-17)

8. God sees every child traded and sold (3:3). How does that shape the way you think about the weak and vulnerable people around you?

9. The same voice that shakes the heavens is a refuge for God's people. Is the LORD your refuge? What does it mean to take shelter in Him today?

10. Joel ends with the LORD dwelling in Zion. How does knowing where history is heading give you hope in a troubled world?

Overview of Amos

Amos is the thirtieth book of the Bible and the third of the twelve Minor Prophets. It comes right after Joel and right before Obadiah. Amos preached to Israel, the northern kingdom, a few years before Hosea began, in the long and prosperous reign of Jeroboam II. He was not a priest or a trained prophet. He was a shepherd and a farmer from Tekoa, a small town in the hills of Judah south of Bethlehem. God took him from his flock and sent him north across the border to Bethel, the king's own place of worship, with a message no one there wanted to hear.

Israel had never had it so good. Her armies had won back land lost to Syria, trade was booming, and the rich had winter houses and summer houses with walls and beds inlaid with ivory. Worship was busy too. The shrines at Bethel and Gilgal were full of sacrifices, songs and offerings. But under the surface the nation was rotten. The rich cheated in the market, bribed the judges, and sold the poor for a pair of sandals. They went to worship and then went home to crush the needy. Amos told them that God hated their feasts, that the day of the LORD they were looking forward to would be darkness for them, and that Israel would go into exile beyond Damascus.

The theme of Amos is that God judges sin in every nation, and most of all in the people He chose, and that worship without justice and righteousness means nothing to Him. Amos is the prophet of justice. But his book does not end in ruin. In its last verses God promises to raise up the fallen booth of David and plant His people in their land forever. The key verse comes in the middle of the book:

Amos 5:24 (SLB)

"And let justice roll like the waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing wadi."

Amos has 9 chapters and 146 verses. Here is its structure:

Part One: Judgment on the Nations and on Israel (chapters 1 and 2)

- Amos 1: Judgment on the Nations
- Amos 2: Judgment on Moab, Judah and Israel

Part Two: Three Messages to Israel (chapters 3 to 6)

- Amos 3: The Lion Has Roared
- Amos 4: Yet You Have Not Returned to Me
- Amos 5: Seek the LORD and Live
- Amos 6: Woe to Those at Ease in Zion

Part Three: Five Visions and the Promise of Restoration (chapters 7 to 9)

- Amos 7: Locusts, Fire and the Plumb Line
- Amos 8: The Basket of Summer Fruit
- Amos 9: The Fallen Booth of David Rebuilt

Where this book points to Christ: at the council in Jerusalem, when the church had to decide whether Gentiles must become Jews to be saved, James quoted Amos 9:11-12. God had said He would rebuild the fallen house of David so that the nations called by His name would seek Him (Acts 15:15-17). Jesus is the Son of David who will sit on David's throne (Luke 1:32-33). Stephen quoted Amos 5:25-27 in his speech before the council (Acts 7:42-43). And Amos's cry for justice is echoed by Jesus, who told the Pharisees they had tithed their spices and neglected "the justice and the mercy and the faith" (Matthew 23:23).

Background of Amos

Author: The book opens, "The words of Amos, who was among the sheep-breeders from Tekoa" (1:1). Later Amos tells the priest at Bethel that he was not a prophet by trade but "a herdsman and a tender of sycamores" (7:14). His name means burden or one who carries a load, and that fits his message. Jewish and Christian tradition have always held that Amos wrote the book. Some modern scholars think later editors added the parts about Judah (2:4-5) and the hopeful ending (9:11-15). I take the book at its word. Amos was a man of Judah, so it is no surprise that he names Judah, and the promise of restoration fits the way every prophet in this volume ends: God's judgment is not His last word.

When he preached: Amos 1:1 says he preached "in the days of Uzziah king of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake." Using Thiele's dates, as in Hosea, Uzziah reigned about 792 to 740 B.C. and Jeroboam II about 793 to 753 B.C. Amos most likely preached about 760 B.C. That earthquake was so great that people still remembered it more than two hundred years later, when Zechariah wrote, "you fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah" (Zechariah 14:5). Amos's ministry may have been short, perhaps a year or less, but his words were written down and kept.

Setting: Israel and Judah were at the height of their power. Assyria had grown weak for a time, and Syria had been beaten. Jeroboam II "restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath to the sea of the Arabah" (2 Kings 14:25), just as Jonah had said he would. Uzziah made Judah strong in the south. With peace came money, and with money came pride. The rich lived in luxury, while the poor were sold into debt slavery. The courts, held "in the gate" of the city, were bought. Worship went on at Bethel, where Jeroboam I had set up a golden calf about 170 years before (1 Kings 12:28-29), and at Gilgal, Dan and Beersheba. It looked like God was blessing Israel. Amos said God was about to judge her. About forty years later, in 722 B.C., Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away.

Who it was written to: Mainly to Israel, the northern kingdom, which Amos also calls "the house of Jacob," "the house of Joseph," and "Isaac." He also speaks to Judah (2:4-5; 6:1) and to six nations around them (1:3-2:3).

The day of the LORD: Joel had already warned of the day of the LORD. Amos uses the phrase to shock his hearers. The people of Israel thought the day of the LORD would be a day when God would beat their enemies and lift them up. Amos told them that it would be "darkness and not light" (5:18) for them, because they were God's enemies too. In this study, as in Joel, I read the day of the LORD as any time God steps into history to judge, and above all as the great day still ahead.

Key words: Justice (mishpat) means doing right by people, especially in court: fair judgments, honest weights, and protecting the weak. Righteousness (tsedaqah) means living rightly before God and with others. Amos joins the two again and again (5:7, 24; 6:12). He also uses the phrase "the Lord GOD," which in the SLB joins Adonai, master, with God's name, YHWH.

Purpose: Amos was written to warn Israel that God would judge her for her sins against Him and against the poor, to call her to "Seek the LORD and live" (5:6), and to show that God's judgment would not wipe out His people. A remnant would be kept, and in the end God would raise up David's house and plant Israel in her land, never to be uprooted again (9:11-15).

Amos 1: Judgment on the Nations

Scripture

1:1-15 The words of Amos, who was among the sheep-breeders from Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake. And he said, "The LORD will roar from Zion, and from Jerusalem He will give forth His voice; and the pastures of the shepherds will mourn, and the top of the Carmel will wither." Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not revoke it, because they threshed the Gilead with threshing sledges of iron. And I will send a fire on the house of Hazael, and it will consume the fortresses of Ben-hadad. And I will break the bar of Damascus, and I will cut off ***the*** inhabitant from the valley of Aven, and the one holding the scepter from Beth-eden; and the people of Syria will go into exile to Kir," says the LORD. Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not revoke it, because they carried into exile a complete exile, to deliver ***them*** up to Edom. And I will send a fire on the wall of Gaza, and it will consume its fortresses. And I will cut off ***the*** inhabitant from Ashdod, and the one holding the scepter from Ashkelon; and I will turn My hand against Ekron, and the remnant of the Philistines will perish," says the Lord GOD. Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of Tyre, and for four, I will not revoke it, because they delivered up a complete exile to Edom, and they did not remember the covenant of brothers. And I will send a fire on the wall of Tyre, and it will consume its fortresses." Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not revoke it, because he pursued his brother with the sword and destroyed his compassion, and his anger tore continually, and his fury, he kept it perpetually. And I will send a fire on Teman, and it will consume the fortresses of Bozrah." Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of the sons of Ammon, and for four, I will not revoke it, because they ripped open the pregnant ***women*** of the Gilead in order to enlarge their territory. And I will kindle a fire on the wall of Rabbah, and it will consume its fortresses, with a shout on the day of battle, with a storm on the day of a whirlwind. And their king will go into exile, he and his officials together," says the LORD.

Preview

Amos begins with a roar. The LORD roars from Zion, and the land withers. Then God speaks against Israel's neighbors one by one: Damascus, the capital of Syria; Gaza, the leading city of the Philistines; Tyre, the great port of Phoenicia; Edom, the nation that came from Esau; and Ammon, east of the Jordan. Each message begins the same way, "For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four," with only the name changed, then names a cruel crime, and ends with fire.

Picture the crowd at Bethel hearing this. Every name brings a cheer, because these were Israel's enemies. But Amos is circling closer and closer. In chapter 2 he will name Moab, then Judah, and then Israel itself. Chapter 1 teaches us that God is the Judge of all nations, not only of His own people, and that He holds every nation to account for how it treats human beings.

Study

1:1 *The words of Amos, who was among the sheep-breeders from Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.*

"The words of Amos, who was among the sheep-breeders from Tekoa." Amos was not from a family of prophets or priests. He raised sheep in Tekoa, a small town in the hills of Judah about ten miles south of Jerusalem, at the edge of the wilderness. Later he adds that he also tended sycamore fig trees (7:14). God often calls ordinary people. David was a shepherd too, and so were Moses and Jacob for many years. What made Amos a prophet was not his training but God's call.

"Which he saw concerning Israel." Amos "saw" his words. The prophets received God's message as a vision, a revelation from God, not as their own ideas. He was a man of Judah sent to Israel, the northern kingdom.

"In the days of Uzziah king of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam son of Joash king of Israel." Uzziah reigned about 792 to 740 B.C. and Jeroboam II about 793 to 753 B.C. These were the richest, strongest years either kingdom had known since Solomon.

"Two years before the earthquake." This must have been a great earthquake, because everyone knew which one Amos meant. More than two hundred years later Zechariah still spoke of it: "you fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah" (Zechariah 14:5). By dating his book this way, Amos may be telling us that the earthquake was a sign that his words were true. He had warned that God would shake the land, and two years later He did (8:8; 9:1).

1:2 *And he said, "The LORD will roar from Zion, and from Jerusalem He will give forth His voice; and the pastures of the shepherds will mourn, and the top of the Carmel will wither."*

"The LORD will roar from Zion, and from Jerusalem He will give forth His voice." Amos the shepherd knew what a lion's roar meant. A lion roars when it is about to attack, and every shepherd's heart jumps at the sound (3:8). Joel used the same words (Joel 3:16). Notice where the roar comes from: Zion, Jerusalem, where the temple of the LORD stood. The people of Israel worshiped at Bethel, but the LORD had never moved His house there. He still spoke from Jerusalem.

"And the pastures of the shepherds will mourn, and the top of the Carmel will wither." Mount Carmel, on the coast in the north, was known for its green woods and rich pastures. When God roars, everything from the shepherd's fields in the south to the richest mountain in the north dries up. This is the theme of the whole book. God has spoken, and judgment is coming.

1:3-5 *Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not revoke it, because they threshed the Gilead with threshing sledges of iron. And I will send a fire on the house of Hazael, and it will consume the fortresses of Ben-hadad. And I will break the bar of Damascus, and I will cut off **the** inhabitant from the valley of Aven, and the one holding the scepter from Beth-eden; and the people of Syria will go into exile to Kir," says the LORD.*

"Thus says the LORD, For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not revoke it." This pattern opens each of the eight messages in chapters 1 and 2. Three, and then four, is a Hebrew way of saying the sins have piled up past full. Three would have been enough, and there is still one more. Amos then names one sin, usually the worst. A transgression is a rebellion, a crossing of the line God has drawn. "I will not revoke it" means God will not take back His judgment. The time for patience has run out.

Damascus was the capital of Syria (Aram), Israel's neighbor to the northeast. "Because they threshed the Gilead with threshing sledges of iron." Gilead was Israel's land east of the Jordan. A threshing sledge was a heavy wooden board studded with sharp stones or iron teeth and dragged over grain to break it apart. Syria had done that to people. When Elisha wept before Hazael, he told him the evil he would do to Israel (2 Kings 8:12), and Hazael later struck Israel throughout the land of Gilead (2 Kings 10:32-33).

"And I will send a fire on the house of Hazael, and it will consume the fortresses of Ben-hadad." Hazael and his son Ben-hadad were kings of Damascus. Fire is the picture of God's judgment in all eight messages: war, burning cities, and fallen walls.

"And I will break the bar of Damascus." The bar was the great beam that locked the city gate. "And the people of Syria will go into exile to Kir." This came true exactly. About 732 B.C. Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria took Damascus, carried its people away to Kir, and killed its king (2 Kings 16:9). Amos 9:7 says Kir was where the Syrians had come from in the first place. God sent them back where they started.

1:6-8 *Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not revoke it, because they carried into exile a complete exile, to deliver **them** up to Edom. And I will send a fire on the wall of Gaza, and it will consume its fortresses. And I will cut off **the** inhabitant from Ashdod, and the one holding the scepter from Ashkelon; and I will turn My hand against Ekron, and the remnant of the Philistines will perish," says the Lord GOD.*

"Thus says the LORD, For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not revoke it." Gaza was the southernmost of the five chief cities of the Philistines, on the coast southwest of Judah. "Because they carried into exile a complete exile, to deliver them up to Edom." The Philistines raided whole villages, took everyone, men, women and children, and sold them to Edom as slaves. They did not take captives in battle. They hunted people to sell them.

"And I will send a fire on the wall of Gaza." Then Amos names three more Philistine cities, Ashdod, Ashkelon and Ekron. (The fifth, Gath, may already have been weakened by this time; Amos 6:2 speaks of it as fallen.) "And the remnant of the Philistines will perish." Assyria struck these cities

again and again in the years after Amos, and Babylon finished the work. The Philistines as a people disappeared from history.

"Says the Lord GOD." This is the title Amos uses more than any other. "Lord" is Adonai, master, and "GOD" in capitals stands for God's name, YHWH. The Master of the whole world has spoken.

God cares about people who are bought and sold. Human trafficking is one of the oldest sins, and He has never looked away from it.

1:9-10 *Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of Tyre, and for four, I will not revoke it, because they delivered up a complete exile to Edom, and they did not remember the covenant of brothers. And I will send a fire on the wall of Tyre, and it will consume its fortresses."*

"Thus says the LORD, For three transgressions of Tyre, and for four, I will not revoke it, because they delivered up a complete exile to Edom." Tyre was the great trading city of Phoenicia, on the coast north of Israel. Like Gaza, Tyre traded in slaves, and Joel names the same crime (Joel 3:4-6).

"And they did not remember the covenant of brothers." This makes Tyre's crime worse. Long before, King Hiram of Tyre had been a friend of David and Solomon, and Solomon and Hiram made a covenant together (1 Kings 5:1, 12). Hiram even called Solomon "my brother" (1 Kings 9:13). Tyre sold the people of the nation it had sworn to treat as brothers.

"And I will send a fire on the wall of Tyre, and it will consume its fortresses." Tyre was besieged by Assyria, then by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon for thirteen years, and finally taken and burned by Alexander the Great in 332 B.C.

God takes promises seriously, even promises between nations. Breaking our word, especially to someone who trusted us, is a sin He sees.

1:11-12 *Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not revoke it, because he pursued his brother with the sword and destroyed his compassion, and his anger tore continually, and his fury, he kept it perpetually. And I will send a fire on Teman, and it will consume the fortresses of Bozrah."*

"Thus says the LORD, For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not revoke it, because he pursued his brother with the sword." Edom lived south and east of the Dead Sea. The Edomites came from Esau, Jacob's twin brother (Genesis 25:23-26; 36:1). So Edom and Israel were brothers, and God told Israel, "You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother" (Deuteronomy 23:7). But Edom never forgot the old rivalry. When Israel came out of Egypt, Edom would not let them pass (Numbers 20:14-21), and again and again Edom attacked Judah when it was weak.

"And destroyed his compassion, and his anger tore continually, and his fury, he kept it perpetually." Edom's sin was not one act but a grudge kept alive for centuries. Edom smothered every bit of pity it might have had and let its anger tear like a wild animal. We will see the same sin in Obadiah.

"And I will send a fire on Teman, and it will consume the fortresses of Bozrah." Teman was a region or town in Edom, named for a grandson of Esau (Genesis 36:11). Bozrah was one of its chief cities.

What does an old grudge do to a person? Edom shows us. Anger kept "perpetually" does not stay small. It grows into cruelty. Jesus told us to forgive from the heart (Matthew 18:35), and this is one reason why.

1:13-15 *Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of the sons of Ammon, and for four, I will not revoke it, because they ripped open the pregnant **women** of the Gilead in order to enlarge their territory. And I will kindle a fire on the wall of Rabbah, and it will consume its fortresses, with a shout on the day of battle, with a storm on the day of a whirlwind. And their king will go into exile, he and his officials together," says the LORD.*

"Thus says the LORD, For three transgressions of the sons of Ammon, and for four, I will not revoke it." The Ammonites lived east of the Jordan, north of Moab. They came from Lot, Abraham's nephew (Genesis 19:38). Their capital was Rabbah, where the city of Amman, Jordan, stands today.

"Because they ripped open the pregnant women of the Gilead in order to enlarge their territory." This is one of the cruelest acts named in the Bible, and I will not dwell on it. Ammon wanted Gilead's land, and to make sure no one would grow up to claim it, they killed mothers and their unborn children. They did it for land. God names it so that no one will ever think He does not see. The unborn child in the womb matters to God (Psalm 139:13-16), and so does the mother.

"And I will kindle a fire on the wall of Rabbah, and it will consume its fortresses, with a shout on the day of battle, with a storm on the day of a whirlwind." The judgment would come like a battle cry and a storm.

"And their king will go into exile, he and his officials together." Ammon fell under Assyria and later Babylon. Its rulers were carried away, and in time the nation disappeared.

Notice something about all five nations. Not one of them had the Law of Moses. God did not judge them for breaking the Sabbath or eating unclean food. He judged them for cruelty, slave trading, broken promises and murder. They knew those things were wrong, because God has written His law on every human heart (Romans 2:14-15). Every nation is accountable to God.

Summary

Amos, a shepherd from Tekoa, received God's word about Israel in the days of Uzziah and Jeroboam II, two years before the great earthquake. The LORD roars from Zion like a lion, and the land withers. Then God judges Israel's neighbors, each for three transgressions, and for four: Damascus for crushing Gilead with iron sledges, Gaza for selling whole villages to Edom as slaves, Tyre for the same slave trade and for breaking the covenant of brothers, Edom for chasing its brother Israel with the sword and keeping its anger forever, and Ammon for ripping open pregnant women in Gilead to grab land. On each God would send fire on its walls and fortresses,

and Syria and Ammon would go into exile. God is the Judge of every nation, and He holds each one accountable for how it treats people made in His image.

Study Questions

1. What did Amos do for a living, and where was he from? (1:1; 7:14)

2. How does Amos date his message? What later prophet remembered the same event? (1:1; Zechariah 14:5)

3. From where does the LORD roar, and what happens when He does? (1:2)

4. What does the pattern of three transgressions, and four, mean? (1:3)

5. What crimes did Gaza and Tyre share? What made Tyre's sin worse? (1:6, 9)

6. How was Edom related to Israel, and what was Edom's sin? (1:11; Deuteronomy 23:7)

7. Why did Ammon commit its terrible crime? (1:13)

8. None of these nations had the Law of Moses. Why does God still hold them responsible? What does that tell you about God's justice? (Romans 2:14-15)

9. Edom kept its anger "perpetually." Is there an old grudge you are holding? What would it look like to let God deal with it?

10. Picture the crowd at Bethel cheering as Amos named their enemies. Is it easier for you to see the sins of others than your own? How can you guard against that?

Amos 2: Judgment on Moab, Judah and Israel

Scripture

2:1-16 Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not revoke it, because he burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime. And I will send a fire on Moab, and it will consume the fortresses of the Kerioth; and Moab will die in uproar, with a shout, with the sound of a ram's horn. And I will cut off ***the*** judge from its midst, and all its officials I will kill with him," says the LORD. Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not revoke it, because they have rejected the law of the LORD, and His statutes they have not kept; and their lies have led them astray, after which their fathers walked. And I will send a fire on Judah, and it will consume the fortresses of Jerusalem." Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke it, because they sold the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals, those who trample on the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and the way of the humble they turn aside; and a man and his father go to the young woman, in order to profane the name of My holiness. And on garments taken in pledge they stretch out beside every altar, and the wine of fines they drink ***in*** the house of their God. And I, I destroyed the Amorite from before them, whose height ***was*** like the height of cedars, and he ***was*** strong like the oaks; and I destroyed his fruit from above and his roots from beneath. And I, I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and I led you in the wilderness forty years, to possess the land of the Amorite. And I raised up some of your sons for prophets, and some of your young men for Nazirites. Is this not indeed ***so***, O sons of Israel?" declares the LORD. "And you made the Nazirites drink wine, and the prophets you commanded, saying, 'You shall not prophesy.' Look, I ***am*** making ***it*** totter under you, just as the cart totters that is full of cut grain for itself. And refuge will perish from the swift, and the strong will not strengthen his power, and the warrior will not deliver his life; and the one handling the bow will not stand, and the swift on his feet will not deliver ***himself***, and the rider of the horse will not deliver his life. And the stout of heart among the warriors will flee naked in that day," declares the LORD.

Preview

Amos finishes his circle of the nations. Moab is judged for burning the bones of Edom's king. Then the circle closes in. Judah, Amos's own nation, is judged, not for cruelty to others but for rejecting the law of the LORD. And then the eighth message, the one the crowd at Bethel never expected, falls on Israel itself.

Israel's message is the longest. God names their sins: selling the poor, trampling the weak, sexual sin at the shrines, and drinking wine taken from the poor in the house of their god. Then He reminds them what He had done for them: He drove out the Amorites, brought them out of Egypt, led them through the wilderness, and gave them prophets and Nazirites. They silenced the prophets. So God will press them down like an overloaded cart, and not even their best soldiers will escape. The nation that cheered at its neighbors' judgment hears that its own is worst of all.

Study

2:1-3 *Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not revoke it, because he burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime. And I will send a fire on Moab, and it will consume the fortresses of the Kerioth; and Moab will die in uproar, with a shout, with the sound of a ram's horn. And I will cut off* ***the*** *judge from its midst, and all its officials I will kill with him," says the LORD.*

"Thus says the LORD, For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not revoke it." Moab lived east of the Dead Sea, south of Ammon. Like Ammon, the Moabites came from Lot (Genesis 19:37).

"Because he burned the bones of the king of Edom to lime." This crime was not even against Israel. Moab had dug up or burned the body of an Edomite king until only white powder was left. In the ancient world, to deny a man burial, or to destroy his remains, was the deepest insult. It said, You do not even deserve to rest in the ground. We do not know when this happened. What we do know is that God cared about it. The king of Edom was not one of His people, and still God judged Moab for its hatred of him. God's justice does not take sides by nation.

"And I will send a fire on Moab, and it will consume the fortresses of the Kerioth." Kerioth was a city of Moab, perhaps a center of the worship of Chemosh, Moab's god. "And Moab will die in uproar, with a shout, with the sound of a ram's horn." The ram's horn was blown as a call to war. Moab would fall in the noise of battle. "And I will cut off the judge from its midst." Moab's ruler and officials would be destroyed with it. Moab fell under Assyria and then Babylon, and it too vanished as a nation.

2:4-5 *Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not revoke it, because they have rejected the law of the LORD, and His statutes they have not kept; and their lies have led them astray, after which their fathers walked. And I will send a fire on Judah, and it will consume the fortresses of Jerusalem."*

"Thus says the LORD, For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not revoke it." Now the crowd at Bethel would have cheered loudest of all. Judah was their rival to the south, and Amos was from Judah. But notice the change. The six nations were judged for cruelty against people. Judah is judged for something else: "because they have rejected the law of the LORD, and His statutes they have not kept."

Why the difference? Because Judah had something the nations did not have. Judah had God's written Word. They had the Law of Moses, the temple, the priests and the promises to David. The more light God gives, the more He holds us responsible for it (Luke 12:48).

"And their lies have led them astray, after which their fathers walked." Their lies are their false gods and the false teaching that went with them. They are lies because they promise what they cannot give. And these lies were handed down from father to son.

"And I will send a fire on Judah, and it will consume the fortresses of Jerusalem." This came true in 586 B.C., when Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon burned Jerusalem and its temple (2 Kings 25:9).

What does it mean for us? We have the whole Bible, more light than Judah ever had. Do we treat it as God's Word, or set it aside for the ideas of our day?

2:6 *Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke it, because they sold the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals,*

"Thus says the LORD, For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not revoke it." Here is the message Amos was sent to give. The circle has closed. Israel's neighbors are on every side: Syria to the northeast, Philistia to the southwest, Tyre to the northwest, Edom, Ammon and Moab to the east and south, and Judah to the south. Now God's finger points at the center.

"Because they sold the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals." The righteous here means people who were in the right, innocent people. A poor man fell into debt, and instead of helping him, the rich sold him as a slave. Some sold the innocent through bribed courts. And for what? For silver, or for a debt as small as the price of a pair of sandals. The Law allowed a poor Israelite to sell his labor to pay a debt, but it set strict limits, demanded kindness, and set him free (Leviticus 25:39-43; Deuteronomy 15:12-15). Israel had thrown away the limits and kept the profit.

2:7-8 *those who trample on the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and the way of the humble they turn aside; and a man and his father go to the young woman, in order to profane the name of My holiness. And on garments taken in pledge they stretch out beside every altar, and the wine of fines they drink* ***in*** *the house of their God.*

"Those who trample on the dust of the earth on the head of the poor." The rich were so greedy that they even begrudged the poor the dust they threw on their heads in mourning. Or, as many read it, they trampled the poor into the dust. Either way, they crushed the weak. "And the way of the humble they turn aside." They pushed the humble out of the way, denying them a fair hearing.

"And a man and his father go to the young woman, in order to profane the name of My holiness." Father and son used the same girl. She may have been a servant in the house or a prostitute at the pagan shrines. Either way it was shameful sin, and the Law forbade it (Leviticus 18:7-8, 15). Worse, it was done in a way that dragged God's name through the mud. People who called themselves the LORD's people were living like the Canaanites.

"And on garments taken in pledge they stretch out beside every altar." The Law said that if you took a poor man's cloak as a pledge for a loan, you had to give it back before sunset, because it was all he had to sleep in (Exodus 22:26-27). These men kept the cloaks and lay on them beside the altar at their feasts.

"And the wine of fines they drink in the house of their God." They fined the poor, often unjustly, took the payment in wine, and drank it at worship. They were worshiping with stolen goods. God does not want worship paid for with the tears of the poor.

2:9-11 *And I, I destroyed the Amorite from before them, whose height **was** like the height of cedars, and he **was** strong like the oaks; and I destroyed his fruit from above and his roots from beneath. And I, I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and I led you in the wilderness forty years, to possess the land of the Amorite. And I raised up some of your sons for prophets, and some of your young men for Nazirites. Is this not indeed **so**, O sons of Israel?" declares the LORD.*

Now God reminds Israel of all He had done for them. Notice the word "I." "And I, I destroyed the Amorite from before them." The Amorites stand for all the peoples of Canaan, the giants who frightened the spies (Numbers 13:28-33). Their "height was like the height of cedars," and they were "strong like the oaks." But God cut them down, fruit and root, so that nothing was left.

"And I, I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and I led you in the wilderness forty years." God rescued them from slavery. Now they were selling their own brothers into it.

"And I raised up some of your sons for prophets, and some of your young men for Nazirites." A prophet spoke God's word. A Nazirite was a man or woman who took a vow to be set apart to God for a time, not drinking wine, not cutting the hair, and not touching the dead (Numbers 6:1-21). Samson and Samuel were Nazirites from birth. God gave Israel both: men who spoke for Him, and young people whose lives showed what it means to belong to Him. "Is this not indeed so, O sons of Israel?" They could not deny it.

2:12 *"And you made the Nazirites drink wine, and the prophets you commanded, saying, 'You shall not prophesy.'*

"And you made the Nazirites drink wine." They pressured the young people who had set themselves apart for God until they broke their vows. "And the prophets you commanded." What did they command? "You shall not prophesy." They silenced the men God sent. Amos would soon hear those very words himself (7:12-13, 16).

This is a warning for us. Do we pressure young believers to give up their convictions? Do we try to quiet a preacher who tells us what we do not want to hear (2 Timothy 4:3)?

2:13 *Look, I **am** making **it** totter under you, just as the cart totters that is full of cut grain for itself.*

"Look, I am making it totter under you, just as the cart totters that is full of cut grain for itself." Amos the farmer uses a picture every farmer knew. A cart piled high with sheaves creaks and sways under the weight. God says He will press down on Israel like that until it gives way. Some read the Hebrew as God groaning under Israel's sins like an overloaded cart. Either way the meaning is clear. The weight of their sin has become too heavy, and something is about to break.

2:14-16 *And refuge will perish from the swift, and the strong will not strengthen his power, and the warrior will not deliver his life; and the one handling the bow will not stand, and the swift on his feet will not deliver **himself**, and the rider of the horse will not deliver his life. And the stout of heart among the warriors will flee naked in that day," declares the LORD.*

"And refuge will perish from the swift, and the strong will not strengthen his power, and the warrior will not deliver his life." Amos lists the people who would normally escape a battle: the

fast runner, the strong man, the warrior, the archer, the horseman. Not one of them will save himself. "And the stout of heart among the warriors will flee naked in that day." The bravest soldier will throw away his armor and clothes and run.

Israel was proud of its army. Jeroboam II had won great victories (2 Kings 14:25-28). But no army can stand when God Himself is against a nation. This came true when Assyria crushed Israel and took Samaria in 722 B.C.

"Declares the LORD." Every message in these two chapters ends with God's own signature. The crowd at Bethel had cheered for seven judgments. The eighth fell on them. What had Israel done that was so much worse than the nations? They had sinned against greater light and greater love. The God who had carried them out of Egypt was the God they had forgotten.

Summary

God judged Moab for burning the bones of Edom's king, showing that He defends even a pagan king's dignity. Then He judged Judah, not for cruelty but for rejecting His law and following the lies of their fathers, and Jerusalem's fortresses would burn. Last of all He judged Israel. They sold the innocent for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, trampled the poor, turned aside the humble, defiled themselves at the shrines, and lay on pledged cloaks and drank the wine of unjust fines in worship. Yet God had destroyed the Amorites for them, brought them out of Egypt, led them in the wilderness, and given them prophets and Nazirites. Israel made the Nazirites drink wine and told the prophets to be quiet. So God would press them down like an overloaded cart, and not even the swift, the strong or the bravest warrior would escape in that day.

Study Questions

1. What did Moab do, and to whom? What does this show about God's justice? (2:1)

2. Why was Judah judged, and how was its sin different from the nations' sins? (2:4)

3. Why do you think Amos left Israel for last? (2:6)

4. List the sins Amos names in Israel. (2:6-8)

5. What does the Law say about a cloak taken in pledge? (2:8; Exodus 22:26-27)

6. What had God done for Israel? (2:9-11)

7. How did Israel treat the Nazirites and the prophets? (2:11-12)

8. Judah was judged for rejecting God's law. We have the whole Bible. How do you treat it from day to day?

9. Israel worshiped with goods taken from the poor. In what ways can worship and injustice sit side by side in a church or a life today?

10. Have you ever pressured someone to give up a conviction, or been pressured yourself? How can you encourage those who want to live wholly for God?

Amos 3: The Lion Has Roared

Scripture

3:1-15 Hear this word which the LORD has spoken against you, O sons of Israel, against the whole clan which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying: "Only you have I known from all the clans of the ground; therefore I will visit on you all your iniquities." Do two walk together unless they have met by appointment? Does a lion roar in the forest and ***there is*** no prey for it? Does a young lion give forth its voice from its den unless it has caught ***something***? Does a bird fall on a trap of the earth and ***there is*** no snare for it? Does a trap go up from the ground and surely not catch ***anything***? Is a ram's horn blown in a city and the people do not tremble? Or is ***there*** calamity in a city and the LORD has not done ***it***? For the Lord GOD does not do a thing unless He has revealed His secret counsel to His servants the prophets. A lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken; who will not prophesy? Proclaim on the fortresses in Ashdod and on the fortresses in the land of Egypt, and say, "Gather yourselves on the mountains of Samaria, and see the great tumults in its midst and the oppressions within it." "And they do not know ***how*** to do uprightness," declares the LORD, "those who store up violence and devastation in their fortresses." Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "An adversary, and ***he is*** around the land! And he will bring down your strength from you, and your fortresses will be plundered." Thus says the LORD, "Just as the shepherd delivers from the mouth of the lion two legs or a piece of an ear, so the sons of Israel who dwell in Samaria will be delivered, with a corner of a bed and with silk of a couch." "Hear and testify against the house of Jacob," declares the Lord GOD, the God of armies. "For on the day I visit the transgressions of Israel on it, then I will visit the altars of Bethel, and the horns of the altar will be cut off and will fall to the earth. And I will strike the winter house along with the summer house; and the houses of ivory will perish, and many houses will be swept away," declares the LORD.

Preview

Amos now begins the first of three messages that open with "Hear this word" (3:1; 4:1; 5:1). God speaks to the whole family He brought out of Egypt. Because He chose Israel and knew them as no other nation, He will punish them for all their sins. Being chosen is not a free pass. It is a greater responsibility.

Then Amos asks a string of questions from everyday life. Do two walk together without meeting? Does a lion roar with no prey? Does a trap spring with nothing in it? Every effect has a cause. Amos is speaking because God has spoken, and God has spoken because judgment is coming. The chapter ends with Philistines and Egyptians called as witnesses to Samaria's violence, a picture of a shepherd pulling scraps from a lion's mouth, and God's promise to strike the altars of Bethel and the fine houses of the rich.

Study

3:1 *Hear this word which the LORD has spoken against you, O sons of Israel, against the whole clan which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying:*

"Hear this word which the LORD has spoken against you, O sons of Israel, against the whole clan which I brought up from the land of Egypt." God speaks to "the whole clan," all twelve tribes, north and south. The exodus made them one family. What God says next applies to everyone He brought out of Egypt, including Judah.

3:2 *"Only you have I known from all the clans of the ground; therefore I will visit on you all your iniquities."*

"Only you have I known from all the clans of the ground." God made every nation, and He judges every nation, as chapters 1 and 2 showed. So what does He mean, "only you have I known"? In the Bible, "know" can mean more than knowing facts. It can mean to choose, to love, and to enter a close relationship. God chose Israel out of all the nations, made a covenant with them at Sinai, and called them His own treasured possession (Exodus 19:5-6; Deuteronomy 7:6-8). He did not choose them because they were greater than others. He chose them because He loved them.

"Therefore I will visit on you all your iniquities." This is the surprise. We would expect God to say, Therefore I will protect you. The people of Israel certainly expected that. They thought being God's chosen people meant God would always be on their side, no matter how they lived. Amos says the opposite. Because God had chosen them, He would hold them to a higher standard. To "visit" iniquities means to come and deal with them, to punish.

What does this mean for us? Every believer in Jesus Christ is chosen and known by God (Ephesians 1:4; 2 Timothy 2:19). That is a wonderful gift. But it is not permission to sin. God disciplines those He loves (Hebrews 12:6), and Peter says, "it is the time for the judgment to begin from the house of God" (1 Peter 4:17). Privilege brings responsibility.

I want to be clear on one thing. God's judgment of Israel did not end His choice of Israel. Amos ends his book with God's promise to restore them (9:11-15), and Paul says "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29). God punishes His people because He has not let them go.

3:3-6 *Do two walk together unless they have met by appointment? Does a lion roar in the forest and **there is** no prey for it? Does a young lion give forth its voice from its den unless it has caught **something**? Does a bird fall on a trap of the earth and **there is** no snare for it? Does a trap go up from the ground and surely not catch **anything**? Is a ram's horn blown in a city and the people do not tremble? Or is **there** calamity in a city and the LORD has not done **it**?*

Now Amos asks seven questions, one after another. Each one has the answer no, and each one shows that nothing happens without a cause.

"Do two walk together unless they have met by appointment?" Two people walking together in the wilderness did not just bump into each other. They had arranged to meet. In the same way, Amos and the LORD are walking together. The prophet has met with God.

"Does a lion roar in the forest and there is no prey for it?" A lion roars when it has caught its prey or is about to pounce. "Does a young lion give forth its voice from its den unless it has caught something?" A shepherd like Amos knew those sounds.

"Does a bird fall on a trap of the earth and there is no snare for it? Does a trap go up from the ground and surely not catch anything?" A bird does not fall into a trap unless someone set it, and a trap does not spring shut for nothing.

"Is a ram's horn blown in a city and the people do not tremble?" The ram's horn on the city wall warned of an enemy coming. Everyone who heard it was afraid.

"Or is there calamity in a city and the LORD has not done it?" This is the point the other questions have been building to. The calamity here is not moral evil, as though God makes people sin. It means disaster: war, famine, earthquake. Amos says that when disaster strikes a city of God's people, it does not just happen. God is behind it, and He is saying something through it. Chapter 4 will show what He was saying.

Not every hardship in our lives is punishment for a particular sin. Jesus said so plainly (John 9:1-3; Luke 13:1-5). But in Luke 13 Jesus also used disasters to warn everyone to repent. When hard times come, it is right to ask God, Is there something You want me to hear?

3:7 *For the Lord GOD does not do a thing unless He has revealed His secret counsel to His servants the prophets.*

"For the Lord GOD does not do a thing unless He has revealed His secret counsel to His servants the prophets." Before God brought judgment on His people, He warned them through His prophets. He told Noah before the flood, Abraham before Sodom (Genesis 18:17), and Israel through prophet after prophet before the exile. The "secret counsel" is God's plan, which no one could know unless He told it.

This verse shows us God's mercy. He did not have to warn anyone. He warned them because He wanted them to turn. Does this verse mean that every event in history must first be announced by a prophet? No. In context it speaks of God's judgments on His people. And today God has spoken His full and final word to us in His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2), written down in the Scriptures. We do not need to look for new secret messages. We need to listen to what He has already said.

3:8 *A lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken; who will not prophesy?*

"A lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken; who will not prophesy?" Here Amos answers why he has come all the way from Tekoa to Bethel. When a lion roars, you cannot help being afraid. When God speaks, the prophet cannot keep quiet. Amos did not choose this job. God's word had grabbed him. Jeremiah said the same: God's word was like a fire shut up in his bones (Jeremiah 20:9). Peter and John told the rulers, "we are not able not to speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

Has God's Word ever gripped you like that? It should make us tremble, and it should make us speak.

3:9-10 *Proclaim on the fortresses in Ashdod and on the fortresses in the land of Egypt, and say, "Gather yourselves on the mountains of Samaria, and see the great tumults in its midst and the oppressions within it." "And they do not know **how** to do uprightness," declares the LORD, "those who store up violence and devastation in their fortresses."*

"Proclaim on the fortresses in Ashdod and on the fortresses in the land of Egypt." God calls the Philistines and the Egyptians to come and look. These were pagan nations, and they were known for their own cruelty. Yet even they would be shocked at what was going on in Samaria. "Gather yourselves on the mountains of Samaria, and see the great tumults in its midst and the oppressions within it." Samaria, Israel's capital, sat on a hill with higher hills around it. From those hills the nations could look down into the city and watch the rich crushing the poor.

"And they do not know how to do uprightness," declares the LORD. They had sinned so long that they had forgotten how to do right. "Those who store up violence and devastation in their fortresses." Their fine houses were full of treasure taken by force. They thought they were storing up wealth. God says they were storing up violence, and it would come back on them.

3:11 *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "An adversary, and **he is** around the land! And he will bring down your strength from you, and your fortresses will be plundered."*

"Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, An adversary, and he is around the land!" An enemy would surround the land. Amos does not name him, but we know who came: Assyria. "And he will bring down your strength from you, and your fortresses will be plundered." The fortresses stuffed with stolen goods would be stripped bare. Assyria besieged Samaria for three years and took it in 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17:5-6).

3:12 *Thus says the LORD, "Just as the shepherd delivers from the mouth of the lion two legs or a piece of an ear, so the sons of Israel who dwell in Samaria will be delivered, with a corner of a bed and with silk of a couch."*

"Just as the shepherd delivers from the mouth of the lion two legs or a piece of an ear." Under the Law, a shepherd who kept another man's sheep had to pay for any animal that was lost. But if a wild animal tore it, he could bring back what was left as proof, and he did not have to pay (Exodus 22:13). So a shepherd would snatch two leg bones or a scrap of an ear from a lion's mouth. That was not a rescue. It was proof that the sheep was dead.

"So the sons of Israel who dwell in Samaria will be delivered, with a corner of a bed and with silk of a couch." The rich of Samaria lounged on fine beds and silk cushions (6:4). When the lion of judgment was done, all that would be left of them was a scrap of furniture. Only a remnant would survive, and barely.

3:13-15 *"Hear and testify against the house of Jacob," declares the Lord GOD, the God of armies. "For on the day I visit the transgressions of Israel on it, then I will visit the altars of Bethel, and the horns of the altar will be cut off and will fall to the earth. And I will strike the winter house along with the summer house; and the houses of ivory will perish, and many houses will be swept away," declares the LORD.*

"Hear and testify against the house of Jacob," declares the Lord GOD, the God of armies. "The God of armies" means the LORD who commands all the armies of heaven, the angels and the stars. Some versions say the LORD of hosts.

"For on the day I visit the transgressions of Israel on it, then I will visit the altars of Bethel." Bethel was the center of Israel's false worship, with its golden calf (1 Kings 12:28-29). "And the horns of the altar will be cut off and will fall to the earth." The horns were points at the four corners of an altar. A person in danger could grab them and ask for mercy (1 Kings 1:50). With the horns cut off, there would be no place left to run. Their false altar could not save them. More than a hundred years later, King Josiah of Judah tore down the altar at Bethel (2 Kings 23:15).

"And I will strike the winter house along with the summer house; and the houses of ivory will perish." The rich had one house for winter and another for summer. Their walls and furniture were inlaid with carved ivory. King Ahab had built such a house in Samaria a century before (1 Kings 22:39), and archaeologists have found many carved ivory pieces there. God would strike them all.

What were they trusting in? Their religion at Bethel and their wealth in Samaria. Both would fall in the same day. Only God Himself is a safe place to stand.

Summary

God spoke to the whole family He had brought out of Egypt: because He had known Israel above all nations, He would punish them for all their iniquities. Amos asked seven questions from daily life to show that every effect has a cause. Two do not walk together without meeting, a lion does not roar without prey, and disaster does not fall on a city unless the LORD has done it. The Lord GOD does nothing without first revealing His plan to His servants the prophets, and when He speaks, the prophet must speak, just as everyone fears when a lion roars. God called the Philistines and Egyptians to look at Samaria's oppression. An enemy would surround the land and plunder its fortresses, and Israel would be rescued like scraps from a lion's mouth. God would cut off the horns of the altar at Bethel and strike the winter houses, summer houses and houses of ivory.

Study Questions

1. Who is God speaking to in this chapter? (3:1)

2. What does God mean when He says He has "known" only Israel, and what follows from it? (3:2)

3. What is the point of the seven questions in verses 3 to 6? (3:3-6)

4. What does God do before He brings judgment? (3:7)

5. Why could Amos not keep quiet? (3:8)

6. What does the picture of the shepherd and the lion tell us about how many would survive? (3:12; Exodus 22:13)

7. What two things were the people of Israel trusting in, and what would happen to both? (3:14-15)

8. As a believer, you are known and chosen by God. How should that make you live? Does it make sin more serious or less? (1 Peter 4:17)

9. When hard times come, how can you ask God what He is saying without assuming every hardship is a punishment? (Luke 13:1-5)

10. Amos said, "The Lord GOD has spoken; who will not prophesy?" Is there someone God may want you to speak to about Him this week?

Amos 4: Yet You Have Not Returned to Me

Scripture

4:1-13 Hear this word, O cows of the Bashan who ***are*** on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress ***the*** poor, who crush ***the*** needy, who say to their lords, "Bring, and let us drink!" The Lord GOD has sworn by His holiness, "For look, days ***are*** coming on you, and one will carry you away with hooks, and the last of you with fishhooks. And ***through*** breaches you will go out, each woman before her, and you will throw ***yourselves*** toward the Harmon," declares the LORD. "Come ***to*** Bethel and transgress; ***at*** the Gilgal multiply transgressing; and bring your sacrifices ***every*** morning, your tithes ***every*** three days. And burn a thank offering from ***what is*** leavened, and proclaim freewill offerings, make ***them*** heard; for so you love ***to do***, O sons of Israel," declares the Lord GOD. "And also I, I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and lack of bread in all your places; and you did not return to Me," declares the LORD. "And also I, I withheld the rain from you when ***there were*** yet three months to the harvest; and I would send rain on one city, and on another city I would not send rain; one portion would be rained on, and the portion on which it would not rain would dry up. And two ***or*** three cities staggered to one city to drink water, and they were not satisfied; and you did not return to Me," declares the LORD. "I struck you with blight and with mildew; the multitude of your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees the gnawing locust ate; and you did not return to Me," declares the LORD. "I sent among you pestilence in the manner of Egypt; I killed your young men with the sword, along with the captivity of your horses; and I made the stench of your camp go up, even into your nostrils; and you did not return to Me," declares the LORD. "I overthrew among you like God's overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were like a firebrand snatched from the burning; and you did not return to Me," declares the LORD. "Therefore thus I will do to you, O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel." For look, the ***One*** forming mountains and creating wind, and declaring to mankind what his thought ***is***, making dawn darkness, and treading on the high places of the earth, the LORD God of armies ***is*** His name.

Preview

Amos's second message begins with a shock. He calls the rich women of Samaria "cows of the Bashan," well-fed cattle who crush the poor and tell their husbands to bring them more to drink. God swears that they will be dragged out of their city through holes in the wall. Then Amos mocks Israel's busy religion. Go to Bethel and sin, he says, go to Gilgal and sin some more, and bring your offerings and brag about them, because that is what you love.

The heart of the chapter is a list of disasters God had already sent: hunger, drought, crop disease, locusts, plague, war and destruction like Sodom's. After each one comes the same sad line: "and you did not return to Me." Five times God reached out through hardship, and five times Israel refused. So God says, "prepare to meet your God, O Israel." The chapter closes by telling us who that God is: the Creator of the mountains and the wind, whose name is the LORD God of armies.

Study

4:1 *Hear this word, O cows of the Bashan who **are** on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress **the** poor, who crush **the** needy, who say to their lords, "Bring, and let us drink!"*

"Hear this word, O cows of the Bashan who are on the mountain of Samaria." Bashan was the high, rich grassland east of the Sea of Galilee, famous for its fat cattle (Deuteronomy 32:14; Psalm 22:12). Amos the herdsman had seen such cows: sleek, well fed, and thinking about nothing but the next meal. He uses the picture for the wealthy women of Samaria, who lived on the hill of the capital.

Was Amos being rude? He was being blunt, the way the prophets often were, because these women were doing real harm. "Who oppress the poor, who crush the needy." They may not have cheated anyone with their own hands. But their luxury was paid for by men who did. "Who say to their lords, Bring, and let us drink!" Their lords are their husbands. These women pushed their husbands for more wine and more luxury, and the husbands squeezed it out of the poor.

This was not a word against women. Amos has just spoken against the men (2:6-8; 3:10), and he will again (6:1-6). God holds each person responsible for his or her own part. When our comfort depends on someone else's suffering, God sees it, even if we never touch the victim ourselves.

4:2-3 *The Lord GOD has sworn by His holiness, "For look, days **are** coming on you, and one will carry you away with hooks, and the last of you with fishhooks. And **through** breaches you will go out, each woman before her, and you will throw **yourselves** toward the Harmon," declares the LORD.*

"The Lord GOD has sworn by His holiness." When God swears by His holiness, He swears by His very nature (Hebrews 6:13). There is nothing higher to swear by. This will happen.

"For look, days are coming on you, and one will carry you away with hooks, and the last of you with fishhooks." The women who had been dragging wealth out of the poor would be dragged away themselves, like fish pulled from the water. Ancient carvings from that part of the world show captives being led away on ropes, some with rings through the lip. Whether Amos meant that, or meant only that they would be hauled off as easily as fish, the meaning is the same: the people who had lived in comfort would be taken away helpless.

"And through breaches you will go out, each woman before her." A breach is a hole broken in a city wall. When Samaria fell, the women would not leave through the gate in a procession. They would be pushed out single file through the gaps the enemy had smashed in the walls. "And you will throw yourselves toward the Harmon." No one knows for sure where the Harmon was. Some think it means Mount Hermon, to the north, on the road to Assyria. The point is plain. They would be thrown out of their land.

This is hard to read. But remember who is speaking: the God who had watched these women's victims suffer for years with no one to defend them. His judgment is never cruel. It is just.

4:4-5 *"Come **to** Bethel and transgress; **at** the Gilgal multiply transgressing; and bring your sacrifices **every** morning, your tithes **every** three days. And burn a thank offering from **what is** leavened, and proclaim freewill offerings, make **them** heard; for so you love **to do**, O sons of Israel," declares the Lord GOD.*

Now Amos speaks like a priest calling the people to worship, but every word drips with irony. "Come to Bethel and transgress; at the Gilgal multiply transgressing." Bethel was where the golden calf stood. Gilgal was where Israel had first camped in the promised land under Joshua (Joshua 4:19-20; 5:9), a place full of holy memories. Both had become centers of false worship. Amos says: go ahead and go to church there. Every trip you make is another sin.

"And bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days." The Law asked for a tithe, a tenth of the harvest, and for the special tithe every third year (Deuteronomy 14:28). These people were outdoing the Law. They tithed every three days.

"And burn a thank offering from what is leavened." A thank offering was a kind of peace offering, brought to thank God for a blessing. The Law let leavened bread be brought with it, but leaven was never to be burned on the altar (Leviticus 2:11; 7:13). They were breaking the Law while showing off how much they kept it. "And proclaim freewill offerings, make them heard." They made sure everyone knew how generous they were. Jesus warned against the same thing: do not sound a trumpet when you give (Matthew 6:2).

"For so you love to do, O sons of Israel." That is the sting. They loved religion. They loved the feasts, the crowds and the praise. They did not love God, and they did not love their neighbor.

Can that happen to us? It can. We can be busy in church, give generously, and still have hearts far from God. God does not want more religious activity. He wants us (5:4).

4:6 *"And also I, I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and lack of bread in all your places; and you did not return to Me," declares the LORD.*

Now comes the center of the chapter. God lists, one after another, the hard things He had already sent on Israel. These were not random disasters. God had warned in the Law that if Israel turned away from Him, He would send drought, crop failure, disease, war and defeat to call them back (Leviticus 26:14-39; Deuteronomy 28:15-68). Solomon had prayed that when such things came, the people would turn and pray, and God would hear (1 Kings 8:33-40). Every one of these troubles was a call home.

"And also I, I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and lack of bread in all your places." Clean teeth because there was nothing to eat. This was famine. "And you did not return to Me," declares the LORD.

To "return" is the Hebrew word shuv, the word Hosea uses over and over. It means to turn around, to repent, to come back to God. God was not trying to destroy Israel through the famine. He was trying to get their attention.

4:7-8 *"And also I, I withheld the rain from you when **there were** yet three months to the harvest; and I would send rain on one city, and on another city I would not send rain; one portion would be rained on, and the portion on which it would not rain would dry up. And two **or** three cities staggered to one city to drink water, and they were not satisfied; and you did not return to Me," declares the LORD.*

"And also I, I withheld the rain from you when there were yet three months to the harvest." In Israel, the late rains of early spring were what filled out the grain before harvest. If they failed, the crop was lost. "And I would send rain on one city, and on another city I would not send rain." God made it plain that this was no accident of weather. One field was soaked, and the field next to it dried up. It was as though God was pointing, saying, This is My hand.

"And two or three cities staggered to one city to drink water, and they were not satisfied." People walked from town to town looking for water, weak with thirst, and still could not get enough. "And you did not return to Me," declares the LORD.

4:9 *"I struck you with blight and with mildew; the multitude of your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees the gnawing locust ate; and you did not return to Me," declares the LORD.*

"I struck you with blight and with mildew." Blight is a hot wind that scorches the grain. Mildew is a disease that turns it yellow and rotten. These are the very words of the covenant warning in Deuteronomy 28:22. "The multitude of your gardens and your vineyards and your fig trees and your olive trees the gnawing locust ate." Locusts finished what the blight had left, as in Joel's day. "And you did not return to Me," declares the LORD.

4:10 *"I sent among you pestilence in the manner of Egypt; I killed your young men with the sword, along with the captivity of your horses; and I made the stench of your camp go up, even into your nostrils; and you did not return to Me," declares the LORD.*

"I sent among you pestilence in the manner of Egypt." The plagues of Egypt had fallen on Israel's enemies. Now they were falling on Israel, because Israel was acting like Egypt. Moses had warned of this too (Deuteronomy 28:60).

"I killed your young men with the sword, along with the captivity of your horses." Israel lost battles. Their young men died, and their horses, the pride of their army, were captured. Before Jeroboam II, the Syrians had crushed Israel so badly that the king of Israel had only fifty horsemen and ten chariots left (2 Kings 13:7). "And I made the stench of your camp go up, even into your nostrils." The dead lay unburied in the army camp. War is awful, and God does not hide it. "And you did not return to Me," declares the LORD.

4:11 *"I overthrew among you like God's overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were like a firebrand snatched from the burning; and you did not return to Me," declares the LORD.*

"I overthrew among you like God's overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah." Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by fire from heaven (Genesis 19:24-25). Some disaster had struck parts of Israel so

hard that it reminded people of Sodom. It may have been an earthquake, a fire, or the ruin of war. We are not told.

"And you were like a firebrand snatched from the burning." A firebrand is a stick pulled out of the fire, already charred, just before it burns up. Israel had been rescued at the last moment. God had shown them mercy right in the middle of judgment. Zechariah uses the same picture of Jerusalem saved by grace (Zechariah 3:2). Even that did not move them. "And you did not return to Me," declares the LORD.

Five times now. Famine, drought, crop disease, war, destruction. Five times God called, and five times Israel did not come home. Revelation tells us that in the Tribulation it will be the same. Plague after plague will fall, and still people will not repent (Revelation 9:20-21; 16:9).

What does this mean for us? God still speaks through hard times. A lost job, an illness, a broken family or a crisis in a nation can be God's call to come back to Him. I want to say this carefully. Not every hardship is punishment. Job suffered, and he was a righteous man. Jesus said the man born blind was not blind because of his sin or his parents' (John 9:1-3). If you are suffering today, do not let anyone tell you it must be your fault. But hard times always give us a chance to ask, Lord, am I right with You? Is there something You want me to turn from? The tragedy of Israel was not that hard times came. It was that they came five times and changed nothing.

4:12 *"Therefore thus I will do to you, O Israel; because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel."*

"Therefore thus I will do to you, O Israel." God had sent warning after warning. Now He would come Himself. Amos does not say what "this" is. Chapters 5 to 9 will tell us: the end of the kingdom, the sword, and exile.

"Because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel." These are some of the most solemn words in the Bible. In context, they are not first of all an invitation. They are a warning, like a summons to court. Israel had refused to come back to God through all the disasters. Now God was coming to them, and they would have to stand before Him.

Is there any hope in these words? There is. To prepare means to get ready. As long as there is time, there is time to get ready. Amos himself goes on in the next chapter to call, "Seek Me and live" (5:4).

Every one of us will meet God. "It is appointed to men to die once, and after this judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). The question is not whether we will meet Him, but how. We can meet Him as a Judge we have run from, or as a Father we have come home to. The only way to be ready is to come to Him now through Jesus Christ, who took the judgment for our sins on the cross (Romans 5:8-9; 2 Corinthians 5:21). "Look, now is a day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). Are you ready to meet your God?

4:13 *For look, the **One** forming mountains and creating wind, and declaring to mankind what his thought **is**, making dawn darkness, and treading on the high places of the earth, the LORD God of armies **is** His name.*

Who is this God Israel must meet? Amos tells us in a short hymn of praise, one of three in the book (5:8-9; 9:5-6).

"For look, the One forming mountains and creating wind." He made the solid mountains and the moving wind, the things that last and the things we cannot see. "And declaring to mankind what his thought is." He knows our thoughts and tells us what they are. Nothing in us is hidden from Him (Psalm 139:1-4; Hebrews 4:13). "Making dawn darkness, and treading on the high places of the earth." He can turn morning into night, and He walks on the mountaintops as a man walks on a path. The high places were also where Israel worshiped idols. God treads on them.

"The LORD God of armies is His name." This is the God Israel had treated as a mascot for their nation. He is the Creator of everything, the Master of heaven's armies, who knows every heart. That is why meeting Him is so serious, and why being at peace with Him is the greatest gift there is.

Summary

Amos called the wealthy women of Samaria "cows of the Bashan" for crushing the poor and demanding more to drink, and God swore by His holiness that they would be dragged out through broken walls like fish on hooks. Amos mocked Israel's worship at Bethel and Gilgal, where the people multiplied sacrifices, tithes and offerings and bragged about them, because they loved religion more than God. Then God listed the disasters He had already sent: hunger, drought that fell on one city and not another, blight, mildew and locusts, plague and war, and an overthrow like Sodom's, from which Israel was snatched like a burning stick. After each one came the same words: "and you did not return to Me." Because they would not come back, God would come to them: "prepare to meet your God, O Israel." He is the Creator of the mountains and the wind, who knows every thought, and "the LORD God of armies is His name."

Study Questions

1. Why did Amos call the women of Samaria "cows of the Bashan"? What were they doing wrong? (4:1)

2. What would happen to them when Samaria fell? (4:2-3)

3. What was wrong with Israel's worship at Bethel and Gilgal, even though it was so busy? (4:4-5)

4. List the five kinds of disaster God says He sent. Where had He warned of these things before? (4:6-11; Deuteronomy 28)

5. What sentence is repeated after each disaster, and what does "return" mean? (4:6, 8, 9, 10, 11)

6. What is a "firebrand snatched from the burning"? What does it say about God's mercy? (4:11)

7. What does "prepare to meet your God" mean in this chapter? (4:12)

8. What does verse 13 teach about who God is? (4:13)

9. Has God ever used a hard time in your life to call you back to Him? How did you respond? (If you are hurting right now, remember that not every hardship is punishment, John 9:1-3.)

10. Every person will meet God (Hebrews 9:27). If you met Him today, would you meet Him as a Judge or as a Father? What makes the difference?

Amos 5: Seek the LORD and Live

Scripture

5:1-17 Hear this word which I ***am*** lifting up against you, a lamentation, O house of Israel: "She has fallen; she will not again rise, the virgin of Israel; she has been abandoned on her ground; ***there is*** no one raising her up." For thus says the Lord GOD, "The city going out ***with*** a thousand will have a hundred left, and the ***one*** going out ***with*** a hundred will have ten left, for the house of Israel." For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel, "Seek Me and live. And do not seek Bethel, and ***to*** the Gilgal do not go, and ***to*** Beersheba do not cross over; for the Gilgal will surely go into exile, and Bethel will become trouble." Seek the LORD and live, lest He rush like the fire ***on*** the house of Joseph, and it consume, and ***there is*** no one quenching ***it*** for Bethel, O those who turn justice into wormwood, and righteousness they have cast down to the earth! The ***One*** making ***the*** Pleiades and Orion, and turning deep darkness into the morning, and the day He has darkened ***into*** night, the ***One*** calling to the waters of the sea and He pours them out on the face of the earth, the LORD ***is*** His name; the ***One*** making devastation flash on ***the*** strong, and devastation will come on ***the*** fortification. They hate the ***one*** reproving in the gate, and the ***one*** speaking blamelessly they abhor. Therefore, because you trample on the poor, and a levy of grain you take from him, houses of hewn stone you have built, and you will not dwell in them; vineyards of delight you have planted, and you will not drink their wine. For I know ***that*** your transgressions ***are*** many and your sins ***are*** mighty, ***you*** afflicting the righteous, taking a ransom; and the needy in the gate they turn aside. Therefore the prudent ***one*** will be silent at that time, for it ***is*** an evil time. Seek good and not evil, so that you may live; and so let the LORD God of armies be with you, just as you have said. Hate evil and love good, and set up justice in the gate; perhaps the LORD God of armies will be gracious ***to*** the remnant of Joseph. Therefore thus says the LORD God of armies, the Lord, "In all the squares ***there will be*** wailing, and in all the streets they will say, 'Alas! Alas!' And they will call ***the*** farmer to mourning, and wailing to those who know lamentation. And in all the vineyards ***there will be*** wailing, for I will pass through your midst," says the LORD.

5:18-27 Woe to those desiring the day of the LORD! Why ***would*** this, the day of the LORD, ***be*** for you? It ***is*** darkness and not light; as when a man flees from before the lion, and the bear meets him; and he goes ***into*** the house and leans his hand on the wall, and the snake bites him. ***Is*** not the day of the LORD darkness and not light, and gloom, and ***there is*** no brightness to it? "I hate, I reject your feasts, and I will not smell your solemn assemblies. For even if you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept ***them***; and the peace offering of your fatlings I will not look at. Remove from Me the noise of your songs, and the melody of your harps I will not listen to. And let justice roll like the waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing wadi. ***Did*** you bring near sacrifices and grain offering to Me in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? And you will lift up Sikkuth your king and Chiun your images, the star of your gods, which you made for yourselves. And I will send you into exile beyond Damascus," says the LORD; God of armies ***is*** His name.

Preview

Amos's third message begins as a funeral song. He mourns for Israel as though she were already dead: the virgin of Israel has fallen and will not rise. Yet in the middle of the mourning God calls out, "Seek Me and live." Not Bethel, not Gilgal, not Beersheba, but the LORD Himself. He is the One who made the stars and pours out the sea. Israel had turned justice into bitterness, hated anyone who spoke the truth in court, and trampled the poor. If they would hate evil, love good and set up justice in the gate, perhaps God would be gracious to a remnant.

The second half of the chapter shatters two false hopes. The people longed for the day of the LORD, sure that it would be a day of victory for them. Amos says it will be darkness, like a man who runs from a lion and meets a bear. And they trusted their worship. God says He hates their feasts and will not listen to their songs. What He wants is for justice to roll like the waters and righteousness like a stream that never runs dry. Without that, Israel will go into exile beyond Damascus.

Study

5:1-3 *Hear this word which I **am** lifting up against you, a lamentation, O house of Israel: "She has fallen; she will not again rise, the virgin of Israel; she has been abandoned on her ground; **there is** no one raising her up." For thus says the Lord GOD, "The city going out **with** a thousand will have a hundred left, and the **one** going out **with** a hundred will have ten left, for the house of Israel."*

"Hear this word which I am lifting up against you, a lamentation, O house of Israel." A lamentation was a funeral song, sung over the dead. Israel was rich and strong, and Amos was singing at her funeral.

"She has fallen; she will not again rise, the virgin of Israel." Israel is called a virgin because she had never been conquered by a foreign power in her own land. That was about to change. "She has been abandoned on her ground; there is no one raising her up."

"The city going out with a thousand will have a hundred left." Only one in ten of Israel's soldiers would come home. The northern kingdom never rose again. But this is not God's last word for Israel's people (9:11-15).

5:4-6 *For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel, "Seek Me and live. And do not seek Bethel, and **to** the Gilgal do not go, and **to** Beersheba do not cross over; for the Gilgal will surely go into exile, and Bethel will become trouble." Seek the LORD and live, lest He rush like the fire **on** the house of Joseph, and it consume, and **there is** no one quenching **it** for Bethel,*

"For thus says the LORD to the house of Israel, Seek Me and live." Right after the funeral song comes the call to life. To seek God is to turn to Him, to look for Him, to want Him more than anything else. Moses had promised that even in exile, those who searched for God with all their heart would find Him (Deuteronomy 4:29).

"And do not seek Bethel, and to the Gilgal do not go, and to Beersheba do not cross over." These were the famous places of worship. Beersheba was far south in Judah, yet northerners went there

on pilgrimage. Israel was seeking places. God wanted them to seek Him. "For the Gilgal will surely go into exile, and Bethel will become trouble." In Hebrew this is a play on words. Gilgal sounds like "go into exile," and Bethel, house of God, had become a house of nothing. Hosea called it Beth-aven, house of wickedness (Hosea 4:15).

"Seek the LORD and live, lest He rush like the fire on the house of Joseph." The house of Joseph means the northern tribes, led by Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph's sons. If they would not seek Him, His judgment would sweep through them like a wildfire, "and there is no one quenching it for Bethel." Their shrine could not put the fire out.

God's call to us is not, Seek a building or a ritual. It is, Seek Me. Jesus said, "Come to Me, all who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

5:7 *O those who turn justice into wormwood, and righteousness they have cast down to the earth!*

"O those who turn justice into wormwood, and righteousness they have cast down to the earth!" Wormwood is a bitter plant. Justice should be sweet to the poor, the one thing they can count on. In Israel it had become bitter, because the courts were bought. Righteousness had been thrown on the ground and walked on.

5:8-9 *The **One** making **the** Pleiades and Orion, and turning deep darkness into the morning, and the day He has darkened **into** night, the **One** calling to the waters of the sea and He pours them out on the face of the earth, the LORD **is** His name; the **One** making devastation flash on **the** strong, and devastation will come on **the** fortification.*

Amos breaks into another hymn about who God is. "The One making the Pleiades and Orion." The Pleiades is a small cluster of stars, and Orion is the great hunter in the winter sky. "And turning deep darkness into the morning, and the day He has darkened into night." He rules every sunrise and every sunset. "The One calling to the waters of the sea and He pours them out on the face of the earth." He lifts the sea into the clouds and pours it out as rain or flood. "The LORD is His name."

"The One making devastation flash on the strong, and devastation will come on the fortification." The God who made the stars can bring down the strongest fortress in a moment.

Why put this hymn in a message about corrupt courts? Because the people who twisted justice thought no one was watching. The Maker of the stars was.

5:10-13 *They hate the **one** reproving in the gate, and the **one** speaking blamelessly they abhor. Therefore, because you trample on the poor, and a levy of grain you take from him, houses of hewn stone you have built, and you will not dwell in them; vineyards of delight you have planted, and you will not drink their wine. For I know **that** your transgressions **are** many and your sins **are** mighty, **you** afflicting the righteous, taking a ransom; and the needy in the gate they turn aside. Therefore the prudent **one** will be silent at that time, for it **is** an evil time.*

"They hate the one reproving in the gate, and the one speaking blamelessly they abhor." The city gate was the courthouse, where elders heard cases (Ruth 4:1-2). Anyone who spoke the truth there was hated.

"Therefore, because you trample on the poor, and a levy of grain you take from him." The rich took grain from poor farmers through high rents or unfair taxes. "Houses of hewn stone you have built, and you will not dwell in them." "Vineyards of delight you have planted, and you will not drink their wine." The very things they had stolen to build would be taken from them. Moses had warned of this exact curse (Deuteronomy 28:30, 39).

"For I know that your transgressions are many and your sins are mighty." God knows every bribe. "Afflicting the righteous, taking a ransom." A ransom here is a bribe to buy off a judge. "And the needy in the gate they turn aside." The poor man came to court for help and was sent away.

"Therefore the prudent one will be silent at that time, for it is an evil time." When the courts are this corrupt, a careful man may judge that speaking up is useless or dangerous. Others read it as a warning that when judgment comes, it will be too late for words.

5:14-15 *Seek good and not evil, so that you may live; and so let the LORD God of armies be with you, just as you have said. Hate evil and love good, and set up justice in the gate; perhaps the LORD God of armies will be gracious **to** the remnant of Joseph.*

"Seek good and not evil, so that you may live." Seeking God (5:4) and seeking good go together. You cannot seek God and keep seeking evil. "And so let the LORD God of armies be with you, just as you have said." The people said, God is with us. They said it at every festival. Amos says, If you want that to be true, seek good.

"Hate evil and love good, and set up justice in the gate." Repentance is practical. It means hating the wrong we used to love and putting things right where we can. For these people, that meant honest courts.

"Perhaps the LORD God of armies will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph." Notice the word "perhaps." God owes no one mercy. And notice "the remnant." A remnant is the part left over, the faithful few who survive judgment. Amos knew the nation would fall. But God could still be gracious to those who turned.

5:16-17 *Therefore thus says the LORD God of armies, the Lord, "In all the squares* ***there will be*** *wailing, and in all the streets they will say, 'Alas! Alas!' And they will call* ***the*** *farmer to mourning, and wailing to those who know lamentation. And in all the vineyards* ***there will be*** *wailing, for I will pass through your midst," says the LORD.*

"In all the squares there will be wailing." The funeral song of verse 1 fills the land. Farmers would be called in to mourn, and even the vineyards, places of harvest joy, would ring with grief.

"For I will pass through your midst," says the LORD. These words recall the night of the Passover, when the LORD passed through Egypt and struck the firstborn (Exodus 12:12). Then He passed over Israel. This time He would pass through Israel, because Israel had become like Egypt.

5:18-20 *Woe to those desiring the day of the LORD! Why* ***would*** *this, the day of the LORD,* ***be*** *for you? It* ***is*** *darkness and not light; as when a man flees from before the lion, and the bear meets him; and he goes* ***into*** *the house and leans his hand on the wall, and the snake bites him.* ***Is*** *not the day of the LORD darkness and not light, and gloom, and* ***there is*** *no brightness to it?*

"Woe to those desiring the day of the LORD!" "Woe" was the cry of mourning at a funeral.

The day of the LORD is the time when God steps into history to judge His enemies. Israel was sure it would be a great day for them. They never imagined that they might be His enemies.

"Why would this, the day of the LORD, be for you? It is darkness and not light." For people living in sin, the day of the LORD is not good news. It is judgment.

"As when a man flees from before the lion, and the bear meets him." "And he goes into the house and leans his hand on the wall, and the snake bites him." He makes it home, leans on the wall to catch his breath, and a snake in a crack bites him. There will be no escape.

"Is not the day of the LORD darkness and not light, and gloom, and there is no brightness to it?" Amos says it twice so that no one can miss it.

For Israel, the day of the LORD came first in 722 B.C., when Assyria took Samaria. But the prophets also look ahead to the great and final day of the LORD, which I believe includes the Tribulation and the return of Christ to judge the earth (Joel 2:31; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Revelation 6:16-17). It will be darkness for everyone who has refused God, however religious they may be.

What does this say to us? People can chart the end times and still not be ready. Amos asks, Why would that day be good for you? The only answer is that we are found in Christ. "God did not appoint us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:9). I believe the church will be caught up to meet the Lord before the Tribulation begins (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). But that is not a reason to be careless. It is a reason to live ready.

5:21-23 *"I hate, I reject your feasts, and I will not smell your solemn assemblies. For even if you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept* ***them****; and the peace offering of your fatlings I will not look at. Remove from Me the noise of your songs, and the melody of your harps I will not listen to.*

"I hate, I reject your feasts, and I will not smell your solemn assemblies." God Himself had commanded the feasts, such as Passover and Booths. He hates them as Israel was keeping them. "I will not smell" means He will not accept them, as a sacrifice was said to be a pleasing aroma to Him (Genesis 8:21).

"For even if you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them." A burnt offering was burned whole on the altar, given wholly to God. A grain offering was flour, oil and incense. "And the peace offering of your fatlings I will not look at." A peace offering was shared in a meal before God, a sign of fellowship with Him. God refused them all.

"Remove from Me the noise of your songs, and the melody of your harps I will not listen to." Their music was only noise to God.

Why would God reject what He had commanded? Because the worship was a lie. They sang on the Sabbath and cheated on Monday. Samuel told Saul, "to listen is better than sacrifice" (1 Samuel 15:22).

5:24 *And let justice roll like the waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing wadi.*

"And let justice roll like the waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing wadi."

This is the heart of Amos. God does not want less worship. He wants worship that comes from lives that are right with Him and with other people.

Justice means treating people rightly: honest courts, fair wages, fair prices, and protection for the weak, the widow, the orphan and the poor. Righteousness means living as God says is right. In Israel, both had dried up.

Amos uses two pictures from his own land. "Like the waters" is a great flood, a river rolling down in power, sweeping away everything in its path. A wadi is a streambed in the dry country. Most run only in the rainy season. An "ever-flowing wadi" never dries up. That is what God wants justice and righteousness to be in His people's lives: not a show at festival time, not a trickle when it is convenient, but a strong, steady stream that never stops.

Is this verse about saving ourselves by good deeds? No. We are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9), and Old Testament believers were saved the same way, trusting God (Genesis 15:6; Habakkuk 2:4). But the faith that saves is never alone. A person who has been made right with God will begin to do right by others. James says faith without works is dead (James 2:17).

So what does this verse ask of us? It asks whether our worship on Sunday and our lives on Monday fit together. How do we treat employees, customers and neighbors? Do we stand up for someone being cheated? God still listens to our songs, and He still looks at our lives.

5:25-27 ***Did*** *you bring near sacrifices and grain offering to Me in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? And you will lift up Sikkuth your king and Chiun your images, the star of your gods, which you made for yourselves. And I will send you into exile beyond Damascus," says the LORD; God of armies* ***is*** *His name.*

"Did you bring near sacrifices and grain offering to Me in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?" This is a hard question to read. Israel did offer sacrifices in the wilderness. Most likely God means that even then the heart of it was not sacrifice but listening to His voice (Jeremiah 7:22-23).

"And you will lift up Sikkuth your king and Chiun your images, the star of your gods, which you made for yourselves." Sikkuth and Chiun seem to be the names of star gods worshiped in Assyria and Babylon, often linked with the planet Saturn. Israel had taken up the gods of the very empire that would destroy them. "Which you made for yourselves." A god you make cannot save you.

"And I will send you into exile beyond Damascus," says the LORD; God of armies is His name. Damascus was the farthest city most Israelites could imagine. They would be taken beyond it, to Assyria. That is exactly what happened (2 Kings 17:6).

Stephen quoted these verses before the council in Jerusalem, following the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which uses other names for these gods, and he said "beyond Babylon" (Acts 7:42-43). His point was Israel's long history of idols, and he spoke of both exiles together.

Summary

Amos sang a funeral song for Israel: the virgin of Israel had fallen, and only a tenth of her soldiers would survive. Yet God called, "Seek Me and live," not Bethel, Gilgal or Beersheba. The people had turned justice into wormwood and hated anyone who spoke the truth in court, though the God who made the Pleiades and Orion was watching. They trampled the poor to build stone houses and vineyards they would never enjoy. Amos called them to seek good, hate evil, love good and set up justice in the gate, for perhaps God would be gracious to a remnant. Otherwise there would be wailing everywhere when the LORD passed through. The people longed for the day of the LORD, but it would be darkness, like running from a lion into a bear. God hated their feasts, rejected their offerings and would not listen to their songs. He wanted justice to roll like the waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Because they had carried the star gods they made for themselves, He would send them into exile beyond Damascus.

Study Questions

1. What kind of song does Amos sing over Israel, and why is that shocking? (5:1-2)

2. What does God call Israel to do, and what places does He tell them not to seek? (5:4-6)

3. Why does Amos put a hymn about the stars in the middle of a message about the courts? (5:7-10)

4. What sins does God name in verses 10 to 12? (5:10-12)

5. What does real repentance look like in verses 14 and 15? (5:14-15)

6. Why did the people look forward to the day of the LORD, and what would it be like for them? (5:18-20)

7. Why did God hate Israel's feasts and refuse their offerings? (5:21-24)

8. What do the two pictures of water in verse 24 tell you about the justice and righteousness God wants? (5:24)

9. Do your worship on Sunday and your life during the week fit together? Where might God want justice to "roll" in your life: at work, at home, in your spending?

10. If Christ returned today, would that day be light or darkness for you? What makes the difference? (1 Thessalonians 5:9)

Amos 6: Woe to Those at Ease in Zion

Scripture

6:1-14 Woe ***to*** those at ease in Zion, and those trusting in the mountain of Samaria, the notable ***ones*** of the first of the nations, and the house of Israel comes to them! Pass over ***to*** Calneh and see, and go from there ***to*** Hamath the great (Chamat-Raba), and go down ***to*** Gath of the Philistines. ***Are they*** better than these kingdoms? Or ***is*** their territory greater than your territory? those putting off an evil day, and you have brought near a seat of violence; those lying on beds of ivory, and sprawled out on their couches, and eating lambs from ***the*** flock and calves from the midst of ***the*** stall; those improvising to the sound of the harp; like David they have devised for themselves instruments of song; those drinking in bowls of wine, and ***with*** the best of oils they anoint ***themselves***; and they have not been grieved over the ruin of Joseph. Therefore now they will go into exile at the head of the exiles, and the revelry of those sprawled out will pass away. The Lord GOD has sworn by Himself, declares the LORD God of armies, "I ***am*** loathing the pride of Jacob, and his fortresses I hate; and I will deliver up the city and its fullness." And it will be, if ten men remain in one house, and they will die. And his relative, even the one burning him, will lift him up to bring out ***the*** bones from the house, and he will say to the one who ***is*** in the innermost parts of the house, "***Is there*** still ***anyone*** with you?" And he will say, "None." And he will say, "Hush! For ***we are*** not to mention the name of the LORD." For look, the LORD ***is*** commanding, and one will strike the great house ***into*** fragments and the small house ***into*** breaches. Do horses run on the crag? Or does one plow with the oxen? For you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood; those rejoicing in Lo-debar, who say, "Have we not by our strength taken Karnaim for ourselves?" "For look, I ***am*** raising up against you, O house of Israel," declares the LORD, the God of armies, "a nation, and they will oppress you from Lebo-hamath to the wadi of the Arabah."

Preview

Amos speaks a second woe, this time against the leaders of both kingdoms who lived at ease in Zion and felt safe on the mountain of Samaria. They lay on ivory beds, ate the choicest lambs and calves, made up songs on the harp, drank wine by the bowlful and rubbed themselves with the best oils. But they did not grieve over the ruin of their own people. So they would be first in line when the exiles were led away.

God swears by Himself that He hates the pride of Jacob. Death will sweep through the houses until people are afraid even to say the LORD's name. Israel has turned justice upside down, as foolish as running horses on a cliff. They boast about small victories at Lo-debar and Karnaim, but God is raising up a nation that will crush them from one end of the land to the other.

Study

6:1-2 *Woe **to** those at ease in Zion, and those trusting in the mountain of Samaria, the notable **ones** of the first of the nations, and the house of Israel comes to them! Pass over **to** Calneh and see, and go from there **to** Hamath the great (Chamat-Raba), and go down **to** Gath of the Philistines. **Are they** better than these kingdoms? Or **is** their territory greater than your territory?*

"Woe to those at ease in Zion, and those trusting in the mountain of Samaria." Zion is Jerusalem, the capital of Judah. The mountain of Samaria is Israel's capital. Amos speaks to the rich and powerful in both, people who felt safe and comfortable. Being at ease is not a sin in itself. God gives rest. The sin is being careless about God and about others because life is going well.

"The notable ones of the first of the nations, and the house of Israel comes to them!" These were the leading men of what they thought was the greatest nation on earth. People came to them for judgment and favors, and they enjoyed it.

"Pass over to Calneh and see, and go from there to Hamath the great (Chamat-Raba), and go down to Gath of the Philistines." Calneh and Hamath were cities to the north, in Syria. Gath was a Philistine city to the southwest. "Are they better than these kingdoms? Or is their territory greater than your territory?" Amos may be quoting the leaders' own boast: look at those other cities, we are better than all of them. Or he may be saying, Those cities were great once, and they fell. Do you think you are safer? Either way the warning is the same. Assyria took Calneh and Hamath within a few years (Isaiah 10:9), and Samaria would be next.

6:3 *those putting off an evil day, and you have brought near a seat of violence;*

"Those putting off an evil day, and you have brought near a seat of violence." They told themselves the day of disaster was far away. Meanwhile, by their violent rule, they were bringing it closer. A "seat of violence" may be a throne of injustice, a court that ruled by force. People still do this. We tell ourselves there is plenty of time to get right with God, and all the while our choices bring the day nearer.

6:4-6 *those lying on beds of ivory, and sprawled out on their couches, and eating lambs from **the** flock and calves from the midst of **the** stall; those improvising to the sound of the harp; like David they have devised for themselves instruments of song; those drinking in bowls of wine, and **with** the best of oils they anoint **themselves**; and they have not been grieved over the ruin of Joseph.*

Amos paints a picture of a rich man's feast.

"Those lying on beds of ivory, and sprawled out on their couches." Most people sat on the floor to eat. These men lay on couches inlaid with ivory, a sign of great wealth (3:15). "Sprawled out" pictures someone lying limp from too much food and drink.

"And eating lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall." Ordinary people seldom ate meat. These men ate the best young animals, fattened in the stall for the table.

"Those improvising to the sound of the harp; like David they have devised for themselves instruments of song." David made instruments and wrote songs to worship God (1 Chronicles 23:5). These men made music for their own pleasure. They thought of themselves as artists like David, but their songs were about themselves.

"Those drinking in bowls of wine." The word for bowls is used elsewhere for the large basins at the altar. Cups were not enough for them. "And with the best of oils they anoint themselves." Oil soothed dry skin and was used as perfume. They used the finest.

"And they have not been grieved over the ruin of Joseph." Here is the real charge. Joseph means the northern kingdom. The nation was rotting from the inside. The poor were being crushed, justice was gone, and judgment was coming. These men saw it all and did not care. They kept the party going.

Is it wrong to enjoy good food, music and comfort? No. God gives us "all things richly for enjoyment" (1 Timothy 6:17). The sin was enjoying them while ignoring the suffering around them and the sin of their nation. Jesus told of a rich man who feasted every day while a poor man named Lazarus lay at his gate (Luke 16:19-31). The rich man's sin was not his money. It was that he never saw Lazarus. Do we grieve over what grieves God?

6:7 *Therefore now they will go into exile at the head of the exiles, and the revelry of those sprawled out will pass away.*

"Therefore now they will go into exile at the head of the exiles." They were the "first of the nations" (6:1). Now they will be first in line for exile. When Assyria carried people off, it took the leaders first. "And the revelry of those sprawled out will pass away." The party would be over.

6:8 *The Lord GOD has sworn by Himself, declares the LORD God of armies, "I **am** loathing the pride of Jacob, and his fortresses I hate; and I will deliver up the city and its fullness."*

"The Lord GOD has sworn by Himself." God has no one greater to swear by, so He swears by Himself (Hebrews 6:13). "I am loathing the pride of Jacob, and his fortresses I hate." The pride of Jacob was everything Israel boasted in: its wealth, its army and its strong cities. God hates pride because pride sets itself in God's place. "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5).

"And I will deliver up the city and its fullness." The city is Samaria, and its fullness is everyone and everything in it. God would hand it over to the enemy.

6:9-10 *And it will be, if ten men remain in one house, and they will die. And his relative, even the one burning him, will lift him up to bring out **the** bones from the house, and he will say to the one who **is** in the innermost parts of the house, "**Is there** still **anyone** with you?" And he will say, "None." And he will say, "Hush! For **we are** not to mention the name of the LORD."*

Amos now pictures what the siege of Samaria would be like. "And it will be, if ten men remain in one house, and they will die." Even a house that had ten survivors would be wiped out, most likely by plague during the siege.

"And his relative, even the one burning him, will lift him up to bring out the bones from the house." Israelites normally buried their dead. Burning bodies was done only in times of great plague, when there were too many dead to bury and disease had to be stopped. A relative comes to carry out the bodies. "Is there still anyone with you?" he calls into the back of the house. "None," comes the answer from the one survivor.

"Hush! For we are not to mention the name of the LORD." This is a chilling end. The survivor is told to keep quiet, not to speak God's name, for fear that saying it might bring God's attention and more judgment. The people who had used God's name lightly at their feasts would be afraid to say it at all. Some read it as a moment of shame: they had ignored God for so long that they did not know how to call on Him now.

I will not dwell on this picture. It is a hard one. But God wants Israel, and us, to see the end of a life lived without Him while there is still time to turn.

6:11 *For look, the LORD **is** commanding, and one will strike the great house **into** fragments and the small house **into** breaches.*

"For look, the LORD is commanding, and one will strike the great house into fragments and the small house into breaches." No house would be spared, big or small, rich or poor. When judgment falls on a nation, everyone feels it. The earthquake two years after Amos spoke (1:1) may have been a foretaste of this.

6:12 *Do horses run on the crag? Or does one plow with the oxen? For you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood;*

"Do horses run on the crag? Or does one plow with the oxen?" A crag is a rocky cliff. No one races horses on bare rock, and no one plows rock with oxen. It would destroy the animals and accomplish nothing. That would be foolish, against nature.

"For you have turned justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood." What Israel had done was just as foolish. Justice is meant to heal a nation. Israel had made it poison. Righteousness should bear sweet fruit. Israel had made it bitter (5:7). Sin is not only wrong. It is foolish. It goes against the way God made the world to work.

6:13 *those rejoicing in Lo-debar, who say, "Have we not by our strength taken Karnaim for ourselves?"*

"Those rejoicing in Lo-debar, who say, Have we not by our strength taken Karnaim for ourselves?" Lo-debar and Karnaim were towns east of the Jordan that Jeroboam II had won back from Syria (2 Kings 14:25). Israel was proud of these victories. But Amos plays on the names. Lo-debar sounds like "nothing," and Karnaim means "horns," a picture of strength. They were celebrating nothing, and boasting of horns they had won "by our strength." In truth, God had given them those victories out of His mercy (2 Kings 14:26-27). They gave themselves the credit.

How often do we do the same? We thank ourselves for what God has given.

6:14 *"For look, I **am** raising up against you, O house of Israel," declares the LORD, the God of armies, "a nation, and they will oppress you from Lebo-hamath to the wadi of the Arabah."*

"For look, I am raising up against you, O house of Israel," declares the LORD, the God of armies, "a nation." Amos does not name it, but it is Assyria. God raises up nations and brings them down (Daniel 2:21). "And they will oppress you from Lebo-hamath to the wadi of the Arabah." Lebo-hamath was the northern border of Israel. The wadi of the Arabah was in the far south, near the Dead Sea. These were exactly the borders Jeroboam II had restored (2 Kings 14:25). Everything Israel had won would be lost, from one end to the other.

Within about thirty years, Tiglath-pileser III began taking Israel's land, and in 722 B.C. Samaria fell. God's word through Amos came true to the letter.

Summary

Amos pronounced woe on the leaders who lived at ease in Zion and felt secure on the mountain of Samaria, thinking themselves the first of the nations. They put off the evil day while their violence brought it closer. They lay on ivory beds, ate the best lambs and calves, made songs like David, drank wine by the bowl and anointed themselves with the finest oils, but they did not grieve over the ruin of Joseph. So they would go first into exile. God swore by Himself that He hated Jacob's pride and would deliver up the city. Plague would empty the houses until survivors were afraid to speak the LORD's name, and every house, great or small, would be struck. Israel had turned justice into poison, as foolish as running horses on a cliff, and boasted of taking Lo-debar and Karnaim by its own strength. God would raise up a nation to oppress them from Lebo-hamath to the wadi of the Arabah.

Study Questions

1. Who are the people Amos speaks to in verse 1, and what was their attitude? (6:1)

2. What were they doing about the "evil day"? (6:3)

3. Describe the feast in verses 4 to 6. What was the real charge against these men? (6:4-6)

4. Why would they be the first to go into exile? (6:1, 7)

5. What does God say He hates? Why does God hate pride? (6:8; 1 Peter 5:5)

6. What point does Amos make with horses on a crag? (6:12)

7. What did Israel boast about in verse 13, and who had really given them those victories? (6:13; 2 Kings 14:25-27)

8. Is there a way you are "at ease" while ignoring a need God has put in front of you? What would it look like to grieve over what grieves Him?

9. Have you ever told yourself there is plenty of time to get right with God? What does verse 3 say to that?

10. What victories or blessings in your life have you credited to your own strength? How can you thank God for them this week?

Amos 7: Locusts, Fire and the Plumb Line

Scripture

7:1-9 Thus the Lord GOD showed me, and look, ***He was*** forming locusts at the beginning of the coming up of the spring crop; and look, ***it was*** a spring crop after the mowings of the king. And it was, when it had finished eating the vegetation of the land, that I said, "Lord GOD, please forgive! How will Jacob stand? For he ***is*** small." The LORD relented concerning this. "It will not be," said the LORD. Thus the Lord GOD showed me, and look, the Lord GOD ***was*** calling to contend by fire, and it ate the great deep, and it ate the portion. And I said, "Lord GOD, please cease! How will Jacob stand? For he ***is*** small." The LORD relented concerning this. "This also will not be," said the Lord GOD. Thus He showed me, and look, the Lord ***was*** standing on a plumb-line wall, and in His hand ***was*** a plumb line. And the LORD said to me, "What ***are*** you seeing, Amos?" And I said, "A plumb line." And the Lord said, "Look, I ***am*** setting a plumb line in the midst of My people Israel; I will not continue any longer to pass by it. And the high places of Isaac will be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel will be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword."

7:10-17 And Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is not able to endure all his words. For thus Amos has said, 'By the sword Jeroboam will die, and Israel will surely go into exile from upon its land.'" And Amaziah said to Amos, "Seer, go, flee for yourself to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and there you will prophesy. And ***at*** Bethel you must not continue any longer to prophesy, for it ***is*** a sanctuary of a king, and it ***is*** a house of a kingdom." And Amos answered and said to Amaziah, "I ***am*** not a prophet, and I ***am*** not a son of a prophet; but I ***am*** a herdsman and a tender of sycamores. And the LORD took me from after the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to My people Israel.' And now, hear the word of the LORD. You ***are*** saying, 'You must not prophesy against Israel, and you must not drip ***words*** against the house of Isaac.' Therefore thus says the LORD: 'Your wife will be a prostitute in the city, and your sons and your daughters will fall by the sword, and your land will be divided by the measuring line; and you will die on an unclean land, and Israel will surely go into exile from upon its land.'"

Preview

The last part of Amos is built around five visions. Chapter 7 gives the first three. In the first, God is forming a swarm of locusts to eat the spring crop. Amos prays, "Lord GOD, please forgive!" and the LORD relents. In the second, a fire eats up the great deep and the land. Amos prays again, and again the LORD relents. In the third, the Lord stands by a wall with a plumb line in His hand. Israel has been measured and found crooked, and this time there is no turning back.

Then the visions are interrupted by a true story. Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, reports Amos to King Jeroboam as a traitor and tells him to go home to Judah and make his living there. Amos answers that he is no professional prophet. He was a herdsman and a fig farmer, and the LORD took him from the flock and sent him. Then he gives Amaziah a word from God about his own family and about Israel's exile.

Study

7:1-3 *Thus the Lord GOD showed me, and look, **He was** forming locusts at the beginning of the coming up of the spring crop; and look, **it was** a spring crop after the mowings of the king. And it was, when it had finished eating the vegetation of the land, that I said, "Lord GOD, please forgive! How will Jacob stand? For he **is** small." The LORD relented concerning this. "It will not be," said the LORD.*

"Thus the Lord GOD showed me, and look, He was forming locusts at the beginning of the coming up of the spring crop." God showed Amos what He was about to do. "Forming" is the word used of a potter shaping clay, and of God forming Adam (Genesis 2:7). God was shaping a locust swarm, as in Joel's day.

"And look, it was a spring crop after the mowings of the king." It seems the king took the first cutting of hay as a tax for his horses and army. The second crop, which came up with the late spring rains, was what the farmers lived on. If locusts ate it, there would be nothing left until the next year.

"And it was, when it had finished eating the vegetation of the land, that I said, Lord GOD, please forgive! How will Jacob stand? For he is small." Amos was not a hard man glad to see judgment. When he saw what was coming, he prayed for the very people who would soon reject him. Notice what he does not say. He does not say Israel deserved better. He asks for forgiveness, and he appeals to their weakness. Israel thought it was great (6:1, 13). Amos saw how small it really was before God.

"The LORD relented concerning this. It will not be," said the LORD. To relent means to turn back from a judgment God had announced. The Hebrew word is nacham. It can also mean to be sorry or to have compassion.

Does this mean God changed His mind like a man who did not know what he would do? No. Scripture says, "God is not a man, that He should lie, and a son of mankind, that He should relent" (Numbers 23:19). God's character and purposes never change. But God Himself tells us how He deals with people: when He warns a nation of judgment and that nation turns, He relents (Jeremiah 18:7-8). His warnings carry an unspoken "unless." And God has chosen to work through the prayers of His people. Moses prayed, and God relented (Exodus 32:14). Amos prayed, and God relented. Joel said God is "relenting over the harm" (Joel 2:13). God's relenting is not weakness or confusion. It is His mercy.

What does this teach us? Prayer matters. God really does hear and answer when we pray for others, even for people who are far from Him.

7:4-6 *Thus the Lord GOD showed me, and look, the Lord GOD **was** calling to contend by fire, and it ate the great deep, and it ate the portion. And I said, "Lord GOD, please cease! How will Jacob stand? For he **is** small." The LORD relented concerning this. "This also will not be," said the Lord GOD.*

"Thus the Lord GOD showed me, and look, the Lord GOD was calling to contend by fire." To contend means to bring a case in court. God was calling for fire to carry out His sentence. "And it ate the great deep, and it ate the portion." The great deep is the waters under the earth, the source of springs and rivers (Genesis 7:11). This fire was so fierce that it dried up the deep and then began to eat the land, the "portion" God had given Israel. It may picture a terrible drought and heat.

"And I said, Lord GOD, please cease! How will Jacob stand? For he is small." This time Amos does not ask God to forgive. He simply begs Him to stop. "The LORD relented concerning this. This also will not be," said the Lord GOD.

Twice Amos stood in the gap for Israel, and twice God held back. Ezekiel tells us God looked for a man "standing in the breach before Me for the land" (Ezekiel 22:30). Amos was that man. Who are you standing in the gap for?

7:7-9 *Thus He showed me, and look, the Lord **was** standing on a plumb-line wall, and in His hand **was** a plumb line. And the LORD said to me, "What **are** you seeing, Amos?" And I said, "A plumb line." And the Lord said, "Look, I **am** setting a plumb line in the midst of My people Israel; I will not continue any longer to pass by it. And the high places of Isaac will be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel will be laid waste, and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword."*

"Thus He showed me, and look, the Lord was standing on a plumb-line wall, and in His hand was a plumb line." A plumb line is a cord with a weight on the end. When it hangs down, it shows a perfectly straight up-and-down line. Builders used it to make sure a wall was straight. A wall that leans will one day fall.

"And the LORD said to me, What are you seeing, Amos? And I said, A plumb line." God asked so that Amos would say it himself. "Look, I am setting a plumb line in the midst of My people Israel." Israel was being measured against God's standard, His law. God did not measure them against the nations around them, or against their own idea of right. He measured them against what He had said. And they were crooked.

"I will not continue any longer to pass by it." To pass by means to overlook, to let go. God had passed by Israel's sin for a long time. Not anymore. This time Amos does not pray. He has seen the plumb line, and he knows the wall must come down.

"And the high places of Isaac will be made desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel will be laid waste." Isaac here means Israel. Their shrines would be destroyed. "And I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword." This came true when Jeroboam's son Zechariah was murdered after reigning six months, about 753 B.C. (2 Kings 15:8-10).

Why did God relent at the locusts and the fire but not at the plumb line? The first two visions show what God could do. The third shows why He must do it. God is patient, but His patience is not endless. There comes a time when He has measured, the wall is crooked, and judgment must fall.

God's plumb line is still His Word. We do not measure ourselves by comparing ourselves to others (2 Corinthians 10:12). We let God's Word show us where we lean. And when it does, we have one hope: the One who was straight in every way took our crookedness on Himself (2 Corinthians 5:21).

7:10-11 *And Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is not able to endure all his words. For thus Amos has said, 'By the sword Jeroboam will die, and Israel will surely go into exile from upon its land.'"*

Now the story turns from visions to an event. "And Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel." Amaziah was the chief priest at the king's shrine. He was not a priest of Aaron's line serving at God's temple. Jeroboam I had appointed his own priests for the calf worship at Bethel (1 Kings 12:31).

"Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel; the land is not able to endure all his words." Amaziah calls Amos a traitor. To him, preaching against the king was the same as plotting against him. "The land is not able to endure all his words." In a way, he was right. The land could not stand under the weight of what God was saying.

"For thus Amos has said." Then he gives his version: "By the sword Jeroboam will die, and Israel will surely go into exile from upon its land." Amaziah twisted Amos's words a little. Amos had said God would rise against "the house of Jeroboam" with the sword (7:9), not that Jeroboam himself would be killed. Jeroboam II died in peace (2 Kings 14:29), but his son was killed, and his house ended. Amaziah also left out the most important part: that this word came from the LORD, and that Amos had prayed for Israel. People who oppose God's message often twist it to make the messenger look bad.

7:12-13 *And Amaziah said to Amos, "Seer, go, flee for yourself to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and there you will prophesy. And **at** Bethel you must not continue any longer to prophesy, for it **is** a sanctuary of a king, and it **is** a house of a kingdom."*

"And Amaziah said to Amos, Seer, go, flee for yourself to the land of Judah." A seer is another word for a prophet, someone who sees what God shows him. Amaziah may have used it with scorn. "And eat bread there, and there you will prophesy." In other words, go home and preach for money there. Amaziah assumed Amos was a prophet for hire, because that is what Amaziah was, a priest for hire.

"And at Bethel you must not continue any longer to prophesy, for it is a sanctuary of a king, and it is a house of a kingdom." This tells us everything about Bethel. Amaziah did not say it was God's

sanctuary. He said it was the king's. The worship at Bethel was there to serve the state, not to serve God. When a church becomes more loyal to a ruler or a party than to God, it has lost its way.

7:14-15 *And Amos answered and said to Amaziah, "I **am** not a prophet, and I **am** not a son of a prophet; but I **am** a herdsman and a tender of sycamores. And the LORD took me from after the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to My people Israel.'*

"And Amos answered and said to Amaziah, I am not a prophet, and I am not a son of a prophet." A "son of a prophet" meant a member of a group of prophets, like the schools of prophets in the days of Elijah and Elisha (2 Kings 2:3-5). Amos was saying, I am not a professional. I did not go to prophet school, and I am not doing this for a living.

"But I am a herdsman and a tender of sycamores." The sycamore here is a kind of fig tree. Its fruit had to be pierced or nipped to ripen properly, and tending it was humble work. Amos had his own living. He did not need Bethel's money.

"And the LORD took me from after the flock." And the LORD gave him one command: "Go, prophesy to My people Israel." Here is Amos's authority. The LORD took him, just as He took David "from the pasture, from after the flock" (2 Samuel 7:8). Amos was not at Bethel because he wanted to be. He was there because God sent him. That is the only answer a servant of God needs when men tell him to be quiet. Peter and John gave the same answer (Acts 5:29).

Notice that God calls Israel "My people" even here. They were not Amaziah's people or Jeroboam's people. They belonged to God.

7:16-17 *And now, hear the word of the LORD. You **are** saying, 'You must not prophesy against Israel, and you must not drip **words** against the house of Isaac.' Therefore thus says the LORD: 'Your wife will be a prostitute in the city, and your sons and your daughters will fall by the sword, and your land will be divided by the measuring line; and you will die on an unclean land, and Israel will surely go into exile from upon its land.'"*

"And now, hear the word of the LORD." Amaziah had told Amos not to prophesy. Amos prophesies to him. Amaziah had said it: "You must not prophesy against Israel, and you must not drip words against the house of Isaac." To "drip words" is a Hebrew way of speaking of preaching, words falling like rain.

"Therefore thus says the LORD." What follows is terrible, and it shows what war and exile would mean. Amaziah's wife would be forced into prostitution in the city when the enemy took it, his sons and daughters would die by the sword, his land would be measured out and given to others, and he himself would die "on an unclean land," a foreign country where the LORD was not worshiped. These were the common horrors of conquest in that age. God was not taking pleasure in them. He was telling Amaziah what his rebellion would bring on his own house.

"And Israel will surely go into exile from upon its land." Amaziah had quoted these words to the king as a lie. Amos repeats them as God's sure word. And they came true in 722 B.C. (2 Kings 17:6).

It is a serious thing to silence God's Word. Amaziah thought he was protecting the king and the nation. He was fighting God.

Summary

God showed Amos three visions. In the first, He was forming locusts to eat Israel's spring crop. Amos prayed, "Lord GOD, please forgive!" and the LORD relented. In the second, fire ate up the great deep and the land. Amos prayed for it to cease, and again the LORD relented. In the third, the Lord stood by a wall with a plumb line and said He was setting it among His people Israel and would not pass by them any longer. Their high places would be destroyed, and He would rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword. Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, reported Amos to the king as a traitor and told him to go back to Judah and prophesy there, because Bethel was the king's sanctuary. Amos answered that he was not a professional prophet but a herdsman and a tender of sycamores, and the LORD had taken him from the flock and sent him. He told Amaziah what would happen to his own family and land, and repeated that Israel would go into exile.

Study Questions

1. What did Amos see in the first two visions, and what did he do each time? (7:1-6)

2. What does it mean that the LORD "relented"? How can that fit with Numbers 23:19? (7:3, 6; Jeremiah 18:7-8)

3. What is a plumb line, and what did it show about Israel? (7:7-8)

4. Why do you think Amos did not pray after the third vision? (7:8-9)

5. What did Amaziah accuse Amos of, and how did he twist Amos's words? (7:9-11)

6. What did Amaziah call Bethel, and what does that show about its worship? (7:13)

7. How did Amos answer Amaziah? Where did his authority come from? (7:14-15)

8. Amos prayed for people who would reject him. Who could you pray for this week who is far from God, even someone who does not like you?

9. What does it mean to let God's Word be your plumb line? Where might it show you are leaning?

10. Have you ever been told to keep quiet about God? How can Amos's answer help you?

Amos 8: The Basket of Summer Fruit

Scripture

8:1-14 Thus the Lord GOD showed me, and look, a basket of summer fruit. And He said, "What ***are*** you seeing, Amos?" And I said, "A basket of summer fruit." And the LORD said to me, "The end has come to My people Israel; I will not continue any longer to pass by it. And the songs of ***the*** temple will wail in that day," declares the Lord GOD. "Many ***are*** the corpses; in every place one will throw ***them***. Hush!" Hear this, you who trample the needy, and to make the afflicted of the land cease, saying, "When will the new moon pass, so that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, so that we may open ***up*** wheat, to make the ephah small and to make the shekel great, and to make crooked balances of deceit, to buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals? And the refuse of the wheat we will sell." The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob: "I will never forget any of their deeds. Will not the land tremble on account of this, and everyone who dwells in it mourn? And all of it will rise like the Nile, and it will be tossed, and it will sink like the Nile of Egypt. And it will be in that day," declares the Lord GOD, "and I will make the sun go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in a day of light. And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring up sackcloth on all loins, and baldness on every head; and I will make it like the mourning of an only ***son***, and its end like a bitter day. Look, days ***are*** coming," declares the Lord GOD, "and I will send a famine in the land, not a famine for bread, and not a thirst for water, but for hearing the words of the LORD. And they will stagger from sea to sea, and from ***the*** north and to ***the*** east; they will rove about to seek the word of the LORD, and they will not find ***it***. In that day the beautiful virgins and the young men will faint from thirst. Those who swear by the guilt of Samaria, and say, '***As*** your god lives, Dan,' and, '***As*** the way of Beersheba lives,' they will fall and will not rise again."

Preview

In the fourth vision God shows Amos a basket of ripe summer fruit. The Hebrew word for summer fruit sounds like the word for end, and God makes the point: "The end has come to My people Israel." Israel was ripe for judgment. The temple songs would become wailing.

Then Amos turns to the merchants who could hardly wait for the holy days to be over so they could get back to cheating: shrinking the measure, raising the price, rigging the scales, and buying the poor for a pair of sandals. God swears He will never forget. The land will heave like the Nile in flood, the sun will go down at noon, and feasts will become funerals. Worst of all, God will send a famine, not of bread or water, but of hearing the words of the LORD. People will wander from sea to sea looking for a word from God and will not find it.

Study

8:1-3 *Thus the Lord GOD showed me, and look, a basket of summer fruit. And He said, "What **are** you seeing, Amos?" And I said, "A basket of summer fruit." And the LORD said to me, "The end has come to My people Israel; I will not continue any longer to pass by it. And the songs of **the** temple will wail in that day," declares the Lord GOD. "Many **are** the corpses; in every place one will throw **them**. Hush!"*

"Thus the Lord GOD showed me, and look, a basket of summer fruit." Summer fruit means the last fruit of the year, such as figs, picked ripe in late summer. It does not keep long. Once it is ripe, it must be eaten, or it rots.

"And He said, What are you seeing, Amos? And I said, A basket of summer fruit." The question is the same as at the plumb line (7:8). "And the LORD said to me, The end has come to My people Israel." In Hebrew, summer fruit is qayits, and end is qets. They sound almost the same. Amos looked at the fruit, heard the word, and understood. Israel was like that basket. It was ripe, and its time was up. "I will not continue any longer to pass by it." These are the same words as 7:8. God's mind was settled.

"And the songs of the temple will wail in that day," declares the Lord GOD. The word for temple can also mean palace. Either way, the songs of worship or of the king's feasts would turn to wailing. "Many are the corpses; in every place one will throw them. Hush!" The dead would be too many to bury properly. And again comes the word "Hush!" (6:10). Some griefs are too deep for words.

8:4-6 *Hear this, you who trample the needy, and to make the afflicted of the land cease, saying, "When will the new moon pass, so that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, so that we may open **up** wheat, to make the ephah small and to make the shekel great, and to make crooked balances of deceit, to buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals? And the refuse of the wheat we will sell."*

"Hear this, you who trample the needy, and to make the afflicted of the land cease." Amos speaks to the merchants and landowners. Their goal was to get rid of the poor, to squeeze them off their land and out of the way.

"Saying, When will the new moon pass, so that we may sell grain?" The new moon was a monthly holy day, and the Sabbath was the weekly day of rest. On those days, trade stopped (Nehemiah 13:15-22). These men kept the holy days outwardly. They did not open their shops. But they spent the day watching the clock, waiting to get back to business. Their bodies were at worship, and their hearts were at the market.

"To make the ephah small and to make the shekel great, and to make crooked balances of deceit." An ephah was a measure for grain, a little more than half a bushel. A shekel was a weight of silver used to pay. These men used an ephah that was too small, so the buyer got less grain, and a shekel weight that was too heavy, so the buyer paid more silver. And they rigged the scales. The Law

commanded honest weights and measures (Leviticus 19:35-36; Deuteronomy 25:13-16), and Proverbs says, "Scales of deceit are an abomination of the LORD" (Proverbs 11:1).

"To buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals?" Once the poor were ruined by these tricks, they had to sell themselves. The merchants then bought them as slaves (2:6). "And the refuse of the wheat we will sell." They even sold the sweepings from the threshing floor, chaff and dirt mixed in with the grain, to people who could not afford better.

Do we keep God's day but give our hearts to the business of the week? Are we honest in what we charge and what we give? God cares about how we do business. Honesty in small things is part of following Him (Luke 16:10).

8:7-8 *The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob: "I will never forget any of their deeds. Will not the land tremble on account of this, and everyone who dwells in it mourn? And all of it will rise like the Nile, and it will be tossed, and it will sink like the Nile of Egypt.*

"The LORD has sworn by the pride of Jacob." Earlier God swore by His holiness (4:2) and by Himself (6:8). The pride of Jacob may be a name for God Himself, the One Israel should have boasted in (1 Samuel 15:29 calls Him "the Eminence of Israel"). Or it may be said with irony: as surely as Israel's pride will never change, God will never forget. "I will never forget any of their deeds." Every cheated buyer, every rigged scale, every family sold. God remembers. The only way sin is forgotten by God is through forgiveness (Jeremiah 31:34).

"Will not the land tremble on account of this, and everyone who dwells in it mourn?" The land itself would shake under the weight of such sin. "And all of it will rise like the Nile, and it will be tossed, and it will sink like the Nile of Egypt." The Nile rose every year in flood and then went down again. The whole land would heave up and down like that river, perhaps a picture of the earthquake to come (1:1).

8:9-10 *And it will be in that day," declares the Lord GOD, "and I will make the sun go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in a day of light. And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will bring up sackcloth on all loins, and baldness on every head; and I will make it like the mourning of an only **son**, and its end like a bitter day.*

"And it will be in that day," declares the Lord GOD, "and I will make the sun go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in a day of light." Darkness at midday is a picture of sudden disaster and of the day of the LORD (5:18-20; Joel 2:31). It may also refer to a real eclipse. Many teachers note that Assyrian records tell of a total eclipse of the sun in 763 B.C., not long before Amos preached. If so, it would have been a fresh memory and a warning.

Many readers also think of the darkness that covered the land from noon until three in the afternoon while Jesus hung on the cross (Matthew 27:45). The New Testament does not say Amos 8:9 was fulfilled there, so I mention it only as a picture: at the cross, God's judgment on sin fell on His own Son, so that it would not fall on us.

"And I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation." The very festivals the merchants could not wait to end would become funerals. "And I will bring up

sackcloth on all loins, and baldness on every head." Sackcloth was rough cloth worn in grief, and people shaved their heads to mourn. "And I will make it like the mourning of an only son." There is no grief like a parent losing an only child. Zechariah uses the same picture of Israel's mourning when they look on the One they pierced (Zechariah 12:10). "And its end like a bitter day."

8:11-12 *Look, days **are** coming," declares the Lord GOD, "and I will send a famine in the land, not a famine for bread, and not a thirst for water, but for hearing the words of the LORD. And they will stagger from sea to sea, and from **the** north and to **the** east; they will rove about to seek the word of the LORD, and they will not find **it**.*

"Look, days are coming," declares the Lord GOD, "and I will send a famine in the land, not a famine for bread, and not a thirst for water, but for hearing the words of the LORD."

This is the most frightening judgment in the chapter. Israel had already known famine of bread (4:6) and drought (4:7-8). But God now promises something worse. He would stop speaking.

Think about what Israel had done. They had told the prophets not to prophesy (2:12). Amaziah had told Amos to go home (7:12-13). They did not want God's word. Now God says, in effect, Very well. You will not have it.

"And they will stagger from sea to sea, and from the north and to the east." From the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean, from one end of the land to the other, people would wander like starving men looking for food. "They will rove about to seek the word of the LORD, and they will not find it." When the disaster came, they would want a word from God. They would go looking for a prophet. And there would be none. King Saul knew that silence. When he had rejected God's word for years, he finally cried out to God, and "the LORD did not answer him" (1 Samuel 28:6).

For the northern kingdom, this came true in the exile. Later the whole nation went through a long silence. After Malachi, about 430 B.C., no prophet spoke for God for some four hundred years, until John the Baptist came. Then the Word Himself came, Jesus Christ (John 1:1, 14).

What does this verse say to us? Jesus said, "Man will not live by bread alone, but by every word coming out through the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). We need God's Word more than we need food. And we have it, the whole Bible, in our own language, often several copies on one shelf. The danger for us is not that God will take it away, but that we will not listen. A heart that keeps refusing God's Word can grow hard until it no longer hears (Hebrews 3:7-8, 15). Paul warned of a time when people would not put up with sound teaching but would gather teachers who say what they want to hear (2 Timothy 4:3). Is there a famine of hearing in your life? Not because the Bible is missing, but because it stays closed? Today, while you can hear His voice, open it and listen.

8:13-14 *In that day the beautiful virgins and the young men will faint from thirst. Those who swear by the guilt of Samaria, and say, '**As** your god lives, Dan,' and, '**As** the way of Beersheba lives,' they will fall and will not rise again."*

"In that day the beautiful virgins and the young men will faint from thirst." Even the strongest, healthiest young people would collapse. The thirst is real thirst, and it is also the thirst for God's word that cannot be satisfied.

"Those who swear by the guilt of Samaria." The guilt of Samaria may be the idol worshiped there, perhaps the calf of Bethel, or a goddess. They swear, "As your god lives, Dan." Dan, in the far north, had the second golden calf (1 Kings 12:29). And they swear, "As the way of Beersheba lives." The way of Beersheba may be the pilgrimage road to the shrine in the far south (5:5). People took oaths by these idols and shrines, the way they should have sworn by the LORD.

"They will fall and will not rise again." The northern kingdom, with its calves and shrines, would fall and never stand again as a kingdom. Those who trust in false gods fall with them. Only the God who lives can lift us up.

Summary

God showed Amos a basket of summer fruit and said, "The end has come to My people Israel," because the word for summer fruit sounds like the word for end. Temple songs would turn to wailing, and the dead would lie everywhere. Amos spoke to merchants who could not wait for the new moon and Sabbath to pass so they could sell grain with a small ephah, a heavy shekel and rigged scales, buy the poor for a pair of sandals, and sell the sweepings of the wheat. The LORD swore He would never forget their deeds. The land would heave like the Nile, the sun would go down at noon, and feasts would become mourning like the mourning for an only son. Worst of all, God would send a famine of hearing the words of the LORD, and people would stagger from sea to sea seeking His word without finding it. The young would faint, and those who swore by the idols of Samaria, Dan and Beersheba would fall and never rise again.

Study Questions

1. What did Amos see in the fourth vision, and what did it mean? (8:1-2)

2. What were the merchants thinking about on the new moon and the Sabbath? (8:5)

3. List the ways they cheated people. (8:5-6)

4. What does God say He will never do? (8:7)

5. What will happen to the sun and to Israel's feasts? (8:9-10)

6. What kind of famine does God promise, and why is it worse than a famine of bread? (8:11)

7. Why do you think God would take away His word from Israel? (8:11-12; 2:12; 7:12-13)

8. Are you honest in small things: prices, hours, promises, taxes? Is there something God wants you to make right? (Luke 16:10)

9. Is your body ever in church while your mind is somewhere else? How can you guard your heart in worship?

10. Is there a famine of hearing God's Word in your life, not because you lack a Bible but because it stays closed? What one step will you take this week to listen to Him?

Amos 9: The Fallen Booth of David Rebuilt

Scripture

9:1-15 I saw the Lord standing on the altar, and He said, "Strike the capital, so that the thresholds may shake, and break them off on the head of all of them; and the last of them I will kill with the sword. No one fleeing of them will flee, and no escapee of them will escape. If they dig into Sheol, from there My hand will take them; and if they go up ***to*** the heavens, from there I will bring them down. And if they hide themselves on the top of Carmel, from there I will search ***them*** out, and I will take them; and if they conceal themselves from before My eyes on the floor of the sea, from there I will command the serpent, and it will bite them. And if they go into captivity before their enemies, from there I will command the sword, and it will kill them; and I will set My eye on them for evil and not for good." And the Lord GOD of armies, who touches the earth, and it melts, and all who dwell in it mourn, and all of it rises like the Nile, and it sinks like the Nile of Egypt; who builds His stairs in the heavens, and has founded His vault on the earth; who calls to the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the face of the earth: the LORD ***is*** His name. "***Are*** you not like the sons of the Cushites to Me, sons of Israel?" declares the LORD. "Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor, and Syria from Kir? Look, the eyes of the Lord GOD ***are*** on the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from upon the face of the ground; nevertheless, I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob," declares the LORD. "For look, I ***am*** commanding, and I will shake the house of Israel among all the nations, as ***grain*** is shaken in the sieve, and not a pebble will fall ***to the*** earth. By the sword all the sinners of My people will die, who say, 'The calamity will not draw near and will not confront us.' In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is falling, and I will wall up their breaches, and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as ***in*** the days of old, so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations on whom My name is called," declares the LORD who does this. "Look, days ***are*** coming," declares the LORD, "and the plowman will come near the reaper, and the treader of grapes the sower of the seed; and the mountains will drip sweet wine, and all the hills will melt. And I will turn back the captivity of My people Israel, and they will build desolated cities and dwell ***in them***, and they will plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they will make gardens and eat their fruit. And I will plant them on their land, and they will not be plucked up again from upon their land which I have given to them," says the LORD your God.

Preview

In the fifth and last vision Amos sees the Lord standing by the altar, commanding it to be struck down on the heads of the worshipers. No one will escape. If they dig down to Sheol or climb up to heaven, hide on Carmel or at the bottom of the sea, God's hand will find them. The Creator who touches the earth and makes it melt has set His eye on the sinful kingdom.

But then the book turns. God will destroy the sinful kingdom, "nevertheless," He will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob. He will shake Israel among the nations like grain in a sieve, and not one true grain will be lost. And "in that day" He will raise up the fallen booth of David, bring His people back, and plant them in their land so that they will never be pulled up again. James quoted

these words at the council in Jerusalem. The book that began with a lion's roar ends with full harvests, new wine and a people at home for good.

Study

9:1 *I saw the Lord standing on the altar, and He said, "Strike the capital, so that the thresholds may shake, and break them off on the head of all of them; and the last of them I will kill with the sword. No one fleeing of them will flee, and no escapee of them will escape.*

"I saw the Lord standing on the altar." This is most likely the altar at Bethel, the center of Israel's false worship. Amaziah had told Amos not to prophesy there (7:13). Now the Lord Himself stands there.

"And He said, Strike the capital, so that the thresholds may shake." The capital is the top of a pillar that holds up the roof. When it is struck, the whole building shakes down to the doorway. "And break them off on the head of all of them." The shrine would collapse on the worshipers inside. "And the last of them I will kill with the sword." Those who survived the collapse would fall in war.

"No one fleeing of them will flee, and no escapee of them will escape." This is the day of the LORD Amos described in 5:18-20. There is nowhere to run.

9:2-4 *If they dig into Sheol, from there My hand will take them; and if they go up **to** the heavens, from there I will bring them down. And if they hide themselves on the top of Carmel, from there I will search **them** out, and I will take them; and if they conceal themselves from before My eyes on the floor of the sea, from there I will command the serpent, and it will bite them. And if they go into captivity before their enemies, from there I will command the sword, and it will kill them; and I will set My eye on them for evil and not for good."*

"If they dig into Sheol, from there My hand will take them; and if they go up to the heavens, from there I will bring them down." Sheol is the place of the dead, the deepest place a person could imagine. The heavens are the highest. David said the same thing in a psalm of comfort: "If I ascend to the heavens, You are there; and if I make my bed in Sheol, look, You are there" (Psalm 139:8). For David that was comfort. For Israel, running from God, it was terror.

"And if they hide themselves on the top of Carmel." Mount Carmel was covered in thick woods and full of caves. Even "the floor of the sea" is no hiding place. God will "command the serpent," a sea creature, and it will obey Him.

"And if they go into captivity before their enemies, from there I will command the sword, and it will kill them." Exile itself would not be safe. "And I will set My eye on them for evil and not for good." God's eye had always been on Israel for good (Deuteronomy 11:12). Now it was set on them for judgment.

There is no hiding from God. Jonah would try it and fail (Jonah 1:3). The only safe place to run is to Him, not away from Him.

9:5-6 *And the Lord GOD of armies, who touches the earth, and it melts, and all who dwell in it mourn, and all of it rises like the Nile, and it sinks like the Nile of Egypt; who builds His stairs in the heavens, and has founded His vault on the earth; who calls to the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the face of the earth: the LORD* ***is*** *His name.*

Amos gives his third hymn to the Creator (4:13; 5:8-9). "And the Lord GOD of armies, who touches the earth, and it melts." God does not need an army to bring a nation down. He only has to touch the earth. "And all of it rises like the Nile, and it sinks like the Nile of Egypt" (see 8:8).

"Who builds His stairs in the heavens, and has founded His vault on the earth." The universe is His house, upper rooms in heaven and foundation on earth. "The LORD is His name."

9:7 *"****Are*** *you not like the sons of the Cushites to Me, sons of Israel?" declares the LORD. "Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor, and Syria from Kir?*

"Are you not like the sons of the Cushites to Me, sons of Israel?" declares the LORD. The Cushites lived far to the south, in the land along the upper Nile, south of Egypt. To Israel they were a distant people. God says, You are no more special to Me than they are, if you think being Israel means you can sin and get away with it.

"Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor, and Syria from Kir?" Israel boasted of the exodus as proof that God would always protect them, no matter what. God reminds them that He has moved other nations too. He brought the Philistines from Caphtor, most likely the island of Crete, and the Syrians from Kir (1:5). God rules the movements of every nation.

Does this cancel God's choice of Israel? No. In 3:2 God said He had known Israel alone, and in 9:8-15 He promises to restore them. The point is that the exodus was not a charm. Israel's privilege was real, but it did not make them safe in their sin.

9:8 *Look, the eyes of the Lord GOD* ***are*** *on the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from upon the face of the ground; nevertheless, I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob," declares the LORD.*

"Look, the eyes of the Lord GOD are on the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from upon the face of the ground." The sinful kingdom is the northern kingdom of Israel, with its calf worship and its unjust rulers. It would be destroyed, and it was, in 722 B.C.

"Nevertheless, I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob," declares the LORD. This "nevertheless" is the turning point of the whole book. God would destroy the kingdom, but He would not destroy the people. He had made promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and He would keep them.

9:9-10 *"For look, I **am** commanding, and I will shake the house of Israel among all the nations, as **grain** is shaken in the sieve, and not a pebble will fall **to the** earth. By the sword all the sinners of My people will die, who say, 'The calamity will not draw near and will not confront us.'*

"For look, I am commanding, and I will shake the house of Israel among all the nations, as grain is shaken in the sieve." When grain was sifted, it was shaken in a sieve so that the dirt and chaff fell through and the good grain stayed. Or the sieve held back the stones and let the grain through. Either way, the shaking separates. God would scatter Israel among the nations, and in the scattering He would separate the true from the false. "And not a pebble will fall to the earth." Not one would be lost by accident. God would keep track of every one.

"By the sword all the sinners of My people will die." Which ones? Those who say, "The calamity will not draw near and will not confront us." The ones who would die were those who were sure judgment would never come. They had heard Amos and laughed.

The Jewish people have been scattered among the nations for centuries, yet never lost as a people. That alone is a wonder.

9:11 *In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is falling, and I will wall up their breaches, and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as **in** the days of old,*

"In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is falling."

"In that day." Until now in Amos, "that day" has meant judgment (2:16; 8:3, 9, 13). Now it means restoration. The day of the LORD brings both.

"The booth of David." A booth is a simple shelter of branches, like the ones Israel lived in at the Feast of Booths. David's house, his royal line, had once been a great palace. God had promised David that his house and kingdom would stand forever, and that his throne would be established forever (2 Samuel 7:16). But after Solomon, the kingdom split, and by Amos's day David's line ruled only Judah. Later, Babylon would end the reign of David's sons altogether (2 Kings 25). God calls it a booth "that is falling," a hut about to collapse.

"And I will wall up their breaches, and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old." God Himself will rebuild it. "The days of old" are the days of David and Solomon, when all twelve tribes were one kingdom under one king. God will put back together what was broken.

Who will sit on David's throne? The prophets answer with one voice: the Messiah, the Son of David (Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5; Ezekiel 37:24). The angel told Mary that God would give her Son "the throne of David His father" and that "of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32-33). The fallen booth of David is rebuilt in Jesus Christ.

9:12 *so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations on whom My name is called," declares the LORD who does this.*

"So that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations on whom My name is called," declares the LORD who does this.

When David's house is rebuilt, its rule will reach beyond Israel. Edom, Israel's old enemy (1:11; Obadiah), stands first for the nations. "All the nations on whom My name is called" means nations that belong to the LORD. To have God's name called over you means to be His. So Amos sees Gentile nations belonging to the LORD under the rule of David's Son.

9:13 *"Look, days **are** coming," declares the LORD, "and the plowman will come near the reaper, and the treader of grapes the sower of the seed; and the mountains will drip sweet wine, and all the hills will melt.*

"Look, days are coming," declares the LORD, "and the plowman will come near the reaper, and the treader of grapes the sower of the seed." The harvests will be so big that the reapers will still be at work when the plowmen come to start the next season.

"And the mountains will drip sweet wine, and all the hills will melt." Joel used the same picture (Joel 3:18). The land that God struck with drought, blight and locusts (4:6-9) will overflow with plenty.

9:14-15 *And I will turn back the captivity of My people Israel, and they will build desolated cities and dwell **in them**, and they will plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they will make gardens and eat their fruit. And I will plant them on their land, and they will not be plucked up again from upon their land which I have given to them," says the LORD your God.*

"And I will turn back the captivity of My people Israel." To turn back the captivity means to bring the exiles home and restore their fortunes. Notice that God still calls them "My people Israel."

"And they will build desolated cities and dwell in them, and they will plant vineyards and drink their wine." This is the curse of 5:11 reversed. Then they built houses and would not live in them and planted vineyards and would not drink their wine. Now they will build and live in what they build, and plant and enjoy what they plant.

"And I will plant them on their land, and they will not be plucked up again from upon their land which I have given to them," says the LORD your God. This is the last promise in the book. God will plant Israel in her land, and she will never be uprooted again. "Their land which I have given to them." The land belongs to Israel because God gave it to Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 17:8).

How should we understand these promises of 9:11-15? I want to be careful here, because Bible teachers read them in different ways.

First, how did James use them? In Acts 15, the church in Jerusalem met to decide whether Gentile believers had to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses to be saved. Then James stood up and said that God had "first visited to take out of the Gentiles a people for His name" (Acts 15:14), and that "with this the words of the prophets agree" (Acts 15:15). He then quoted Amos 9:11-12: "After these things I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David which has fallen" (Acts 15:16), "so that the remnant of men may seek out the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom My name has been called upon them" (Acts 15:17).

James quoted from the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which reads "the remnant of men" (Acts 15:17) where the Hebrew has "the remnant of Edom." In Hebrew the words for Edom and for mankind (adam) are spelled almost the same. Either way, the point is the same. The prophets said Gentiles would belong to the LORD as Gentiles, called by His name, without first becoming Jews. So the council agreed not to put the Law of Moses on the Gentile believers.

Second, what does the promise mean for Israel? I believe Amos means what he says. God will really bring Israel back to her land, restore the kingdom of David under the Messiah, and plant Israel there forever. That has not yet happened in full. The return from Babylon in 538 B.C. was a real but partial return, and the Jews were uprooted again in A.D. 70. In our own time millions of Jews have returned to the land, which many teachers see as part of the setting God is preparing. But the full restoration, with David's Son on the throne and Israel never uprooted again, will come when Jesus Christ returns at the end of the Tribulation and sets up His thousand-year kingdom (Zechariah 14:4, 9; Revelation 20:4-6). Paul says, "so all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26). God has not cast away His people.

Notice James's words "After these things I will return" (Acts 15:16). Many dispensational teachers read James this way: first God takes out a people for His name from the Gentiles, the church; after that Christ returns and rebuilds David's house in His kingdom; and then the nations seek the Lord. Others, including some dispensational teachers, believe the rebuilding of David's house began when Jesus, the Son of David, rose and was exalted, and that the Gentiles coming in now is a first part of Amos's promise, with the full kingdom still ahead. Teachers who hold amillennial or covenant views read Amos 9 as fulfilled in the church, made up of Jews and Gentiles, with no future kingdom for Israel in the land.

I do not believe the church replaces Israel. James did not say the church was the rebuilt booth of David instead of Israel. He said that Gentiles being saved agrees with what the prophets said. Amos's promise of the land is still Israel's, and God will keep it, because "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29).

If you are a Gentile believer, this chapter is about you too. You are one of the nations called by His name, brought in by grace through faith in the Son of David. And the God who keeps His promises to Israel will keep His promises to you.

Summary

Amos saw the Lord standing on the altar and commanding it to fall on the worshipers. No one would escape, whether they dug into Sheol, climbed to heaven, hid on Carmel or sank to the floor of the sea. The Lord GOD of armies touches the earth and it melts. Israel's exodus did not make them safe in sin, for God also brought the Philistines from Caphtor and Syria from Kir. God would destroy the sinful kingdom, yet He would not utterly destroy the house of Jacob. He would shake Israel among the nations like grain in a sieve, and not a pebble would fall to the ground. In that day He would raise up the falling booth of David, repair its breaches and rebuild it as in the days of old, so that Israel would possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations called by His name, as

James quoted in Acts 15. The harvests would overflow, God would bring back His people Israel to rebuild and plant, and He would plant them in their land, never to be uprooted again.

Study Questions

1. Where did Amos see the Lord standing, and what did He command? (9:1)

2. List the places people might try to hide from God. What does that teach about Him? (9:2-4; Psalm 139:7-8)

3. Why does God compare Israel to the Cushites? Does this cancel His choice of Israel? (9:7; 3:2)

4. What is the turning point word in verse 8, and what does it promise? (9:8)

5. What does the picture of the sieve teach about God's care for His people? (9:9)

6. What is the "booth of David," and who will rebuild it? (9:11; Luke 1:32-33)

7. How did James use Amos 9:11-12 at the council in Jerusalem? (Acts 15:13-19)

8. What promises does God make about Israel and the land? Has the full promise come true yet? (9:14-15)

9. Is there any place in your life where you are trying to hide from God? What would it look like to run to Him instead?

10. If you are a Gentile believer, how does it feel to know the prophets saw you coming, called by His name? How can you thank God for His faithfulness to Israel and to you?

Overview of Obadiah

Obadiah is the thirty-first book of the Bible and the fourth of the twelve Minor Prophets. It comes right after Amos and right before Jonah. It is the shortest book in the Old Testament, only one chapter of twenty-one verses. But it carries a message as old as the book of Genesis: the long quarrel between two brothers, Jacob and Esau, and the nations that came from them.

Esau's descendants were the Edomites. They lived in the rugged red mountains south and east of the Dead Sea, in cities built high among the cliffs, where they thought no one could ever reach them. Jacob's descendants were Israel. Though the two nations were brothers, Edom was Israel's enemy for most of its history. Obadiah speaks of a day when Jerusalem was attacked and plundered by foreigners. Edom stood by and watched, gloated over Judah's ruin, joined in the looting, and caught the people who tried to escape and handed them over to the enemy.

Obadiah announces that God will bring proud Edom down from its mountain nest. What Edom did will come back on its own head. And then he widens the view: "the day of the LORD is near upon all the nations" (1:15). Edom stands for every nation that sets itself against God and His people. The book ends with Mount Zion delivered and holy, the house of Jacob back in its land, and the LORD as King.

The theme of Obadiah is that God brings down the proud and keeps His promises to His people. The key verse is the last one:

Obadiah 1:21 (SLB)

"And deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to judge Mount Esau, and the kingship will be the LORD's."

Obadiah has 1 chapter and 21 verses. Here is its structure:

Edom's Pride, Crimes and Judgment, and the LORD's Kingdom (verses 1 to 21)

- Obadiah 1: Edom's Pride and the LORD's Kingdom

Within the chapter, verses 1 to 9 announce Edom's fall, verses 10 to 14 name Edom's crimes against Judah, and verses 15 to 21 look ahead to the day of the LORD, Israel's deliverance and the kingdom.

Where this book points to Christ: the New Testament does not quote Obadiah. But its last words, "the kingship will be the LORD's" (1:21), look ahead to the day when "the kingdoms of the world have become those of our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign to the ages of the ages" (Revelation 11:15). The deliverers who go up on Mount Zion point to the great Deliverer, Jesus Christ, who will reign from Jerusalem when He returns (Zechariah 14:4, 9). And Obadiah's warning against pride sounds again in the New Testament: "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5).

Background of Obadiah

Author: The book opens, "The vision of Obadiah" (1:1). Obadiah means servant of the LORD, or worshiper of the LORD. It was a common name. There are about a dozen Obadiahs in the Old Testament, among them the man in charge of King Ahab's palace who hid a hundred prophets from Jezebel (1 Kings 18:3-4). But nothing ties any of them to this book. We know nothing about the prophet except his name and his message. Jewish and Christian tradition have always held that he wrote the book.

When it was written: Obadiah does not name a king or give a date, so good Bible teachers disagree. Verses 11 to 14 speak of a day when strangers carried off Jerusalem's wealth, entered its gates and cast lots over the city, and Edom joined in. The question is which attack this was. There are two main views.

The later view: Many conservative scholars today, and the SLB introduction, place Obadiah soon after the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C. That is the attack that best fits Obadiah's words. Scripture tells us plainly that Edom cheered at Jerusalem's fall. A psalm written after the exile says, "Remember, LORD, against the sons of Edom the day of Jerusalem" (Psalm 137:7). Lamentations and Ezekiel also condemn Edom for its part in that day (Lamentations 4:21-22; Ezekiel 25:12-14; 35:1-15). And Obadiah speaks of "the exiles of Jerusalem" (1:20), which fits the time after the captivity. This study follows this view as the most likely.

The early view: Other conservative scholars date Obadiah much earlier, about 848 to 841 B.C., in the reign of Jehoram king of Judah. In his day Edom rebelled against Judah (2 Kings 8:20-22), and Philistines and Arabs broke into Jerusalem and carried off the king's goods and his family (2 Chronicles 21:16-17). Those who hold this view point out that Obadiah does not mention Babylon, the temple's burning or the end of David's line, and that the book stands among the early prophets in the order of the Twelve.

Obadiah and Jeremiah: Obadiah 1-9 and Jeremiah 49:7-22 share many of the same words about Edom. Either Jeremiah used Obadiah's words, or Obadiah used Jeremiah's, or both drew on an older prophecy. The early view usually holds that Jeremiah quoted Obadiah. The later view often holds that the two prophets lived about the same time. Either way, God gave the same message to two prophets, and that makes it doubly sure.

Setting: Edom lived in the mountains of Seir, south and east of the Dead Sea. Its land was dry and rocky, cut by deep gorges, with towns perched on cliffs that were very hard to attack. Its chief cities included Bozrah, Teman and Sela, a name that means rock (2 Kings 14:7). Edom sat on the King's Highway, the great trade road from Arabia to Damascus, and grew rich from it. The quarrel between Edom and Israel went back to Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:22-34; 27:41). Edom refused to let Israel pass through on the way from Egypt (Numbers 20:14-21). Saul fought Edom, David conquered it, and it rebelled again and again in the days of the kings. Edom's final betrayal came when Jerusalem fell.

What became of Edom: Obadiah's words came true. Within a few centuries after Jerusalem's fall, Arab peoples, chiefly the Nabateans, pushed the Edomites out of their mountains. The Edomites moved west into southern Judah, which came to be called Idumea. In the second century B.C. the Jewish ruler John Hyrcanus conquered them and forced them to become Jews. Herod the Great, who tried to kill the baby Jesus, was an Idumean. After the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70, the Edomites disappear from history. "There will be no survivor to the house of Esau" (1:18).

Who it was written to: Obadiah's words are spoken to Edom, but they were written for Judah. To a people who had lost everything, while their brother laughed, God said: I have seen it. I will judge it. And I will give you back your land.

Purpose: Obadiah was written to announce God's judgment on Edom for its pride and its cruelty to its brother Jacob, to warn every nation that the day of the LORD is near, and to comfort God's people with the promise that Mount Zion will be holy, the house of Jacob will possess its land, and "the kingship will be the LORD's" (1:21).

Obadiah 1: Edom's Pride and the LORD's Kingdom

Scripture

1:1-9 The vision of Obadiah. Thus says the Lord GOD concerning Edom: We have heard a report from the LORD, and an envoy has been sent among the nations: "Arise, and let us arise against her for battle!" Look, I have made you small among the nations; you ***are*** greatly despised. The arrogance of your heart has deceived you, you who dwell in the clefts of ***the*** rock, ***in*** the height of his dwelling, who says in his heart, "Who will bring me down ***to the*** ground?" If you soar high like the eagle, and if your nest ***is*** set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, declares the LORD. If thieves came to you, if destroyers of ***the*** night (how you have been destroyed!), would they not steal ***only*** their fill? If grape gatherers came to you, would they not leave gleanings? How Esau has been searched out! His hidden treasures have been sought out! To the border all the men of your covenant have sent you away; they have deceived you, they have prevailed against you, the men of your peace; ***the men of*** your bread will set a trap under you. There is no understanding in him. Will it not ***be*** in that day, declares the LORD, and I will destroy the wise from Edom, and understanding from Mount Esau? And your warriors will be dismayed, Teman, so that every man will be cut off from Mount Esau by slaughter.

1:10-21 Because of the violence ***done to*** your brother Jacob, shame will cover you, and you will be cut off forever. On the day of your standing aloof, on the day strangers took captive his wealth, and foreigners came ***into*** his gates and cast a lot over Jerusalem, you also ***were*** like one of them. And do not look on the day of your brother, on the day of his misfortune; and do not rejoice over the sons of Judah on the day of their perishing; and do not make your mouth big on the day of trouble. Do not enter the gate of My people on the day of their disaster; do not look, you also, on his calamity on the day of his disaster; and do not stretch out ***your hand*** against his wealth on the day of his disaster. And do not stand at the crossroads to cut off his fugitives; and do not hand over his survivors on the day of trouble. For the day of the LORD ***is*** near upon all the nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your recompense will return on your own head. For as you have drunk on My holy mountain, all the nations will drink continually; and they will drink and swallow, and they will be as ***though*** they had not been. And on Mount Zion there will be deliverance, and it will be holy; and the house of Jacob will possess their possessions. And the house of Jacob will be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble; and they will burn among them and consume them, and there will be no survivor to the house of Esau, for the LORD has spoken. And the Negeb will possess Mount Esau, and the Shephelah the Philistines; and they will possess the field of Ephraim and the field of Samaria, and Benjamin the Gilead. And the exiles of this host of the sons of Israel who ***are among the*** Canaanites as far as Zarephath, and the exiles of Jerusalem who ***are*** in Sepharad, will possess the cities of the Negeb. And deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to judge Mount Esau, and the kingship will be the LORD's.

Preview

Obadiah's vision is about Edom, the nation that came from Esau. The LORD has sent word among the nations to rise up against her. Edom lived high in the rocky cliffs and said in her heart, "Who

will bring me down to the ground?" God answers: even if you nest among the stars, I will bring you down. Thieves leave something behind. Edom will be stripped bare, betrayed by her own allies, and her famous wise men and warriors will be cut off.

Why? Because of what Edom did to her brother Jacob. On the day Jerusalem fell, Edom stood aloof, then gloated, then joined in the looting, and finally stood at the crossroads to catch the refugees and hand them over. God says, "As you have done, it will be done to you." Then Obadiah looks beyond Edom to the day of the LORD on all the nations. Mount Zion will be delivered and holy, the house of Jacob will take back its land, the exiles will come home, and "the kingship will be the LORD's."

Study

1:1 *The vision of Obadiah. Thus says the Lord GOD concerning Edom: We have heard a report from the LORD, and an envoy has been sent among the nations: "Arise, and let us arise against her for battle!"*

"The vision of Obadiah." Obadiah, like Amos, saw his message. It was revealed to him by God. "Thus says the Lord GOD concerning Edom." Everything that follows is God's word, not Obadiah's opinion.

"We have heard a report from the LORD, and an envoy has been sent among the nations." An envoy is a messenger sent between nations. God has stirred up the nations around Edom to make war on her. "Arise, and let us arise against her for battle!" The nations think they are making their own plans, but the LORD has sent the call (Amos 6:14).

1:2 *Look, I have made you small among the nations; you **are** greatly despised.*

"Look, I have made you small among the nations; you are greatly despised." God speaks of it as already done, because when God says it, it is as good as done.

1:3-4 *The arrogance of your heart has deceived you, you who dwell in the clefts of **the** rock, **in** the height of his dwelling, who says in his heart, "Who will bring me down **to the** ground?" If you soar high like the eagle, and if your nest **is** set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, declares the LORD.*

"The arrogance of your heart has deceived you." This is the root of Edom's sin. Pride is a liar, and the first person it fools is the proud person himself.

"You who dwell in the clefts of the rock." Edom's land was a maze of red sandstone cliffs and narrow canyons. The word for rock, sela, was also the name of one of its cities (2 Kings 14:7). The famous rock city of Petra was later built in that region. A few men could hold off an army there. "In the height of his dwelling, who says in his heart, Who will bring me down to the ground?" Edom thought her mountains made her untouchable.

"If you soar high like the eagle, and if your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, declares the LORD." Build your nest among the stars, God says. I will still reach you.

This is the message of the whole Bible about pride. "Before breaking is pride, and before stumbling, haughtiness of spirit" (Proverbs 16:18). Jesus said, "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled" (Luke 14:11).

Where do we build our nests? In money, a career, our own cleverness? None of it is out of God's reach. The only safe place is low, in humble trust before Him.

1:5-6 *If thieves came to you, if destroyers of **the** night (how you have been destroyed!), would they not steal **only** their fill? If grape gatherers came to you, would they not leave gleanings? How Esau has been searched out! His hidden treasures have been sought out!*

"If thieves came to you, if destroyers of the night (how you have been destroyed!), would they not steal only their fill?" Thieves take what they want and leave the rest, and grape pickers leave a few bunches. Edom's enemies would leave nothing.

"How Esau has been searched out! His hidden treasures have been sought out!" Edom hid its trade wealth in its mountain caves. Every hiding place would be found (Amos 9:3).

1:7 *To the border all the men of your covenant have sent you away; they have deceived you, they have prevailed against you, the men of your peace; **the men of** your bread will set a trap under you. There is no understanding in him.*

"To the border all the men of your covenant have sent you away." Edom's allies would drive it out to the border. "The men of your bread will set a trap under you." Those who ate at Edom's table, its closest friends, would turn on it. Edom had betrayed its brother. Now it would be betrayed by its friends. This came true, many believe, when the Nabateans, Arab traders, moved in and took its land.

"There is no understanding in him." Edom would not even see it coming.

1:8-9 *Will it not **be** in that day, declares the LORD, and I will destroy the wise from Edom, and understanding from Mount Esau? And your warriors will be dismayed, Teman, so that every man will be cut off from Mount Esau by slaughter.*

"Will it not be in that day, declares the LORD, and I will destroy the wise from Edom, and understanding from Mount Esau?" Edom was famous for wisdom. Eliphaz, the oldest of Job's friends, came from Teman in Edom (Job 2:11). But wisdom without God cannot save a nation. "Mount Esau" is the mountain country of Edom.

"And your warriors will be dismayed, Teman, so that every man will be cut off from Mount Esau by slaughter." When God judges, human wisdom and strength fail together.

1:10 *Because of the violence **done to** your brother Jacob, shame will cover you, and you will be cut off forever.*

Now God tells why He will judge Edom. "Because of the violence done to your brother Jacob, shame will cover you, and you will be cut off forever."

Notice the word "brother." Esau and Jacob were twins (Genesis 25:24-26). God had told Israel not to hate the Edomites, "for he is your brother" (Deuteronomy 23:7). Esau and Jacob made peace (Genesis 33:4), but their descendants never did. Edom's violence was violence against family.

"And you will be cut off forever." Edom as a nation would disappear, and it did.

1:11 *On the day of your standing aloof, on the day strangers took captive his wealth, and foreigners came **into** his gates and cast a lot over Jerusalem, you also **were** like one of them.*

"On the day of your standing aloof, on the day strangers took captive his wealth, and foreigners came into his gates and cast a lot over Jerusalem." Foreigners broke into Jerusalem and cast lots to divide up the city and its people (Joel 3:3).

And what did Edom do? It stood aloof. It stood off to the side and watched. "You also were like one of them." God says that standing by and doing nothing while your brother is destroyed is the same as joining in.

Is it enough just not to do harm? Obadiah says no. The priest and the Levite in Jesus' story did not beat the man on the road. They just walked by (Luke 10:30-32). "To one who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).

1:12-14 *And do not look on the day of your brother, on the day of his misfortune; and do not rejoice over the sons of Judah on the day of their perishing; and do not make your mouth big on the day of trouble. Do not enter the gate of My people on the day of their disaster; do not look, you also, on his calamity on the day of his disaster; and do not stretch out **your hand** against his wealth on the day of his disaster. And do not stand at the crossroads to cut off his fugitives; and do not hand over his survivors on the day of trouble.*

Now God lists Edom's sins step by step in eight warnings, each beginning "do not," as though God stood beside Edom that day saying, Do not do this. Many translations read, You should not have. Either way they show Edom's sin growing worse.

"And do not look on the day of your brother, on the day of his misfortune." First, Edom looked, watching its brother's ruin with pleasure.

"And do not rejoice over the sons of Judah on the day of their perishing." Second, Edom rejoiced (Proverbs 24:17).

"And do not make your mouth big on the day of trouble." Third, Edom mocked and sneered.

"Do not enter the gate of My people on the day of their disaster." Fourth, Edom went in. Notice "My people." Edom was attacking God's own people.

"Do not look, you also, on his calamity on the day of his disaster; and do not stretch out your hand against his wealth on the day of his disaster." Fifth and sixth, Edom gloated again, then stole. It joined in the looting.

"And do not stand at the crossroads to cut off his fugitives." Seventh, Edom blocked the escape routes. Refugees ran for the roads south and east, and the Edomites were waiting. "And do not hand over his survivors on the day of trouble." Eighth, Edom caught them and handed them over to the Babylonians, to death or slavery.

Sin grew in Edom from looking to gloating, to mocking, to stealing, and finally to handing people over to death. Sin rarely starts with the worst act. It starts in the heart (James 1:15).

Notice too how often "the day" appears in these verses. Edom had its day against Jacob. Verse 15 says God's day is coming.

1:15 *For the day of the LORD **is** near upon all the nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your recompense will return on your own head.*

"For the day of the LORD is near upon all the nations."

Here the vision widens. Edom is not the only nation God will judge. "The day of the LORD" is the time when God steps into history to judge His enemies and save His people. It came for Edom in history. The prophets also speak of a final day of the LORD on "all the nations," which I believe includes the Tribulation and the return of Christ to judge the earth (Joel 3:2, 12-14; Zechariah 14:1-9; Revelation 19:11-16). Edom is a picture of every nation that sets itself against God and His people.

"As you have done, it will be done to you; your recompense will return on your own head." This is the principle of God's justice. What Edom did to Judah would be done to Edom. Paul says the same: "whatever a man sows, this he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7). God promised Abraham that He would curse the one who disdains his people (Genesis 12:3), and He keeps that promise.

Is this only bad news? For those who keep sowing evil, it is. But there is another way. On the cross, Jesus took the recompense our sins deserved, so that it would not come back on our own heads. Everyone who trusts Him is forgiven.

1:16 *For as you have drunk on My holy mountain, all the nations will drink continually; and they will drink and swallow, and they will be as **though** they had not been.*

"For as you have drunk on My holy mountain, all the nations will drink continually." This may mean that Edom, and the Babylonians with it, drank in celebration on Mount Zion after they took Jerusalem. Or "you" may be the people of Judah, who drank the cup of God's anger on His holy mountain when Jerusalem fell. Either way, the cup of God's wrath now passes to all the nations. In the Bible, God's judgment is often pictured as a cup of strong wine that makes the drinker stagger and fall (Jeremiah 25:15-16; Revelation 14:10). The nations that refuse God will be "as though they had not been."

1:17 *And on Mount Zion there will be deliverance, and it will be holy; and the house of Jacob will possess their possessions.*

"And on Mount Zion there will be deliverance, and it will be holy." Here is the great turn. Edom's mountain will fall, but Zion will be saved, as Joel also said (Joel 2:32). Jerusalem will be holy again, set apart for God (Joel 3:17).

"And the house of Jacob will possess their possessions." Israel will get back what was taken from it, the land God promised to Abraham.

1:18 *And the house of Jacob will be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble; and they will burn among them and consume them, and there will be no survivor to the house of Esau, for the LORD has spoken.*

"And the house of Jacob will be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble." The house of Jacob is Judah, and the house of Joseph is the northern tribes. All twelve tribes, reunited, will be like fire to Edom's dry straw. "And there will be no survivor to the house of Esau, for the LORD has spoken."

Edom as a people vanished in history. But I believe the full meaning waits for the day of the LORD. The reunion of Judah and Joseph has not yet happened in full. Ezekiel saw it too, two sticks made one under one king, David (Ezekiel 37:15-24).

1:19-20 *And the Negeb will possess Mount Esau, and the Shephelah the Philistines; and they will possess the field of Ephraim and the field of Samaria, and Benjamin the Gilead. And the exiles of this host of the sons of Israel who **are among the** Canaanites as far as Zarephath, and the exiles of Jerusalem who **are** in Sepharad, will possess the cities of the Negeb.*

Now Obadiah draws a map of the restored land. "And the Negeb will possess Mount Esau." The Negeb, the dry south of Judah, will spread into Edom's mountains. The Shephelah, the low hills to the west, will take the Philistine plain. The lands of Ephraim and Samaria, lost to Assyria, will be Israel's again, and Benjamin will spread across the Jordan into Gilead.

"And the exiles of this host of the sons of Israel who are among the Canaanites as far as Zarephath." Zarephath was a town on the coast of Phoenicia, between Tyre and Sidon, where Elijah stayed with a widow (1 Kings 17:9). "And the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad, will possess the cities of the Negeb." No one is sure where Sepharad was. Many think it was Sardis, in western Asia Minor, far from Jerusalem. In later Jewish tradition the name came to mean Spain, which is why Jews from Spain are called Sephardic Jews to this day.

From the farthest places God's people will come home, and every border He promised will be filled.

1:21 *And deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to judge Mount Esau, and the kingship will be the LORD's.*

"And deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to judge Mount Esau." Deliverers, or saviors, are leaders God raises up to rescue His people, like the judges of old, such as Othniel and Ehud (Judges 3:9, 15). They will go up to Mount Zion and rule over Mount Esau. The roles are reversed.

Who are these deliverers? I believe they point to the day when Christ, the great Deliverer, reigns from Jerusalem, and His people rule with Him (Revelation 20:4, 6). Paul says, "The One who delivers will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Romans 11:26).

"And the kingship will be the LORD's."

These last words are the point of the whole book. Edom thought it ruled its mountains. Babylon thought it ruled the world. In the end, the kingdom belongs to the LORD. This is what Zechariah saw: "And the LORD will be King over all the earth" (Zechariah 14:9). Heaven cries out the same in Revelation 11:15. I believe this will happen on the earth when Jesus Christ returns and sets up His thousand-year kingdom, and it will go on forever.

What does this mean for us? The proud and the cruel will not have the last word. Whoever has wronged you, God sees, and the kingdom is His. We do not need to take revenge (Romans 12:19). We need to make sure we are on the King's side, humble before Him, trusting His Son.

Summary

God gave Obadiah a vision concerning Edom. The nations were being called to battle against her, and God would make her small and despised. Edom's pride deceived her into thinking her cliffs made her safe, but even if she nested among the stars, God would bring her down. She would be stripped bare, her allies would betray her, and her wise men and warriors would be cut off. All this was because of her violence to her brother Jacob. On the day strangers looted Jerusalem, Edom stood aloof, then gloated, mocked, entered the gate, plundered, blocked the escape routes and handed over the survivors. But the day of the LORD is near on all the nations, and as Edom had done, it would be done to her. On Mount Zion there will be deliverance and holiness, the house of Jacob will possess its land and burn up Esau like stubble, the exiles will come home from far away, deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to judge Mount Esau, and the kingship will be the LORD's.

Study Questions

1. Who were the Edomites, and how were they related to Israel? (1:6, 10; Genesis 25:24-26)

2. What did Edom's pride tell her, and what did God answer? (1:3-4)

3. Who would turn against Edom? (1:7)

4. What did Edom do on the day Jerusalem fell? List the steps. (1:11-14)

5. What does God say about Edom "standing aloof"? (1:11)

6. What is the principle of verse 15? Where else does the Bible teach it? (1:15; Galatians 6:7)

7. What will happen on Mount Zion, and who will rule in the end? (1:17, 21)

8. Edom's sin began with looking and gloating. Have you ever been glad when someone you did not like had trouble? What does God say about that? (Proverbs 24:17)

9. Is there someone in need whom you have been "standing aloof" from? What could you do this week?

10. "The kingship will be the LORD's." How does knowing that God will have the last word help you when you have been wronged? (Romans 12:19)

Overview of Jonah

Jonah is the thirty-second book of the Bible and the fifth of the twelve Minor Prophets. It comes right after Obadiah and right before Micah. It is different from every other book of the prophets. The others are mostly the prophets' messages, with a little of their story. Jonah is mostly the prophet's story, with only one short message: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh will be overturned" (3:4). And the story is not flattering to the prophet.

God told Jonah to go to Nineveh, the great city of Assyria, and preach against it. Jonah got on a ship going the other way. God sent a storm, the sailors threw Jonah into the sea, and God appointed a great fish to swallow him. From inside the fish Jonah prayed, and God had the fish put him back on dry land. The second time God called, Jonah went. He preached, and the whole city, from the king down, repented in sackcloth. God spared them. And Jonah was furious, because this was exactly what he had been afraid of. The book ends with God asking Jonah a question, and we never hear Jonah's answer.

The theme of Jonah is God's mercy, which reaches even to the enemies of His people, and the smallness of our own hearts next to His. The key verse is Jonah's own complaint, which is one of the most beautiful descriptions of God in the Bible:

Jonah 4:2 (SLB)

"Please, LORD, was this not my word while I was still in my land? Therefore I hastened to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that You ***are*** a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in steadfast love, and ***One who*** relents concerning the evil."

Jonah has 4 chapters and 48 verses. Here is its structure:

Part One: Jonah Runs From God and Is Rescued (chapters 1 and 2)

- Jonah 1: Jonah Runs From God
- Jonah 2: Jonah's Prayer From the Fish

Part Two: Jonah Preaches and God Shows Mercy (chapters 3 and 4)

- Jonah 3: Nineveh Repents
- Jonah 4: Jonah's Anger and God's Mercy

Where this book points to Christ: Jesus Himself made the link. When the scribes and Pharisees asked Him for a sign, He said that no sign would be given "except the sign of Jonah the prophet. For just as Jonah was in the belly of the sea monster three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights" (Matthew 12:39-40). Jonah's coming up alive from the fish was a sign pointing to Jesus' rising from the dead. Jesus also said, "Ninevite men will stand up in the judgment with this generation and will condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and look, something greater than Jonah is here" (Matthew 12:41). Jonah was an unwilling prophet who ran from God's mercy to the nations. Jesus is the willing Savior who came to bring that mercy to the whole world.

Background of Jonah

Author: The book does not name its writer. It tells about Jonah in the third person ("And Jonah arose," 1:3), as Moses often wrote about himself. Jewish and Christian tradition have long held that Jonah wrote it, or that it was written from his own account. Only Jonah could have known what he prayed inside the fish or what he said to God outside Nineveh. Some modern scholars think the book was written centuries later by someone else. I take it as the true account of Jonah's own experience, whoever set down the final words.

Who Jonah was: "Jonah the son of Amittai" (1:1) appears in one other place in the Old Testament. In the reign of Jeroboam II, God restored Israel's northern border "according to the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, which He spoke by the hand of His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath-hepher" (2 Kings 14:25). Gath-hepher was a village in Galilee, in the tribe of Zebulun, a few miles north of Nazareth (Joshua 19:13). So Jonah was a prophet of the northern kingdom, a man whose earlier message had been good news for Israel. His name means dove.

When it happened: Jonah prophesied in the time of Jeroboam II, who reigned about 793 to 753 B.C. Most conservative scholars date his ministry about 785 to 760 B.C., which makes him an older contemporary of Amos and Hosea. The book was likely written down not long after the events.

Nineveh and Assyria: Nineveh stood on the east bank of the Tigris River, in what is now northern Iraq, across from the modern city of Mosul. It was one of the great royal cities of Assyria, and later its capital. Assyria was the most feared empire of its day. Its kings boasted in their own records of how they burned cities, skinned and impaled their enemies, and deported whole peoples. In Jonah's day Assyria was going through a weak period, troubled by revolts, plagues and an eclipse of the sun in 763 B.C., which some think may have made the people more ready to listen to a prophet's warning. Within about forty years after Jonah, Assyria rose again, and in 722 B.C. it destroyed Samaria and carried Israel away. More than a hundred years after Jonah, the prophet Nahum announced Nineveh's end, and in 612 B.C. it fell to the Babylonians and Medes.

Why Jonah ran: Jonah tells us himself. He did not run because he was afraid of the Assyrians. He ran because he knew God was gracious and would forgive them if they repented (4:2). Jonah loved his own people, and Assyria was their enemy. He did not want Nineveh spared.

Is Jonah history?: Some readers today treat Jonah as a parable or a fable, a story made up to teach a lesson, mainly because of the great fish. I believe it is history. The book is written as history, about a real prophet named in 2 Kings, a real city and a real king. And Jesus spoke of it as history. He did not say Jonah's story was a good illustration. He said Jonah "was in the belly of the sea monster three days and three nights" and that the men of Nineveh "repented at the preaching of Jonah" and would stand up at the judgment (Matthew 12:40-41). Real people do not stand up at the judgment for repenting in a parable. If God raised Jesus from the dead, He could keep Jonah alive in a fish.

Purpose: Jonah was written to show that "Salvation belongs to the LORD" (2:9), that God rules the sea, the storm, the fish, the plant and the worm, and that His compassion reaches beyond Israel to every nation that turns to Him. It was also written to search the hearts of God's people. Do we want God's mercy for ourselves but not for those we do not like? The book leaves that question open, so that every reader has to answer it.

Jonah 1: Jonah Runs From God

Scripture

1:1-17 And the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before Me." And Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from before the LORD; and he went down ***to*** Joppa, and he found a ship going ***to*** Tarshish; and he paid its fare, and he went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from before the LORD. And the LORD hurled a great wind to the sea, and there was a great storm on the sea, and the ship thought to be broken up. And the sailors were afraid, and they cried out, each man to his god; and they hurled the vessels that ***were*** in the ship into the sea to lighten ***it*** from upon them. And Jonah had gone down into the innermost parts of the ship, and he had lain down, and he had fallen fast asleep. And the chief of the sailors came near to him, and he said to him, "What ***is it*** to you, sleeper? Arise, call to your God; perhaps the God will give thought to us, and we will not perish." And they said, each man to his neighbor, "Come, and let us cast lots, so that we may know on whose account this evil ***has come*** to us." And they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. And they said to him, "Please tell us, on whose account ***has*** this evil ***come*** to us? What ***is*** your occupation? And from where do you come? What ***is*** your land? And from what people ***are*** you?" And he said to them, "I ***am*** a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of the heavens, who made the sea and the dry land." And the men feared a great fear, and they said to him, "What ***is*** this you have done?" For the men knew that he was fleeing from before the LORD, because he had told them. And they said to him, "What shall we do to you, so that the sea may become calm from upon us?" For the sea was growing more and more stormy. And he said to them, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea, and the sea will become calm from upon you; for I know that on my account this great storm ***is*** upon you." And the men rowed hard to bring ***it*** back to the dry land, and they were not able, for the sea was growing more and more stormy against them. And they called to the LORD, and they said, "Please, LORD, please let us not perish for the life of this man, and do not put innocent blood on us; for You, LORD, have done as You pleased." And they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea stopped from its raging. And the men feared the LORD ***with*** a great fear, and they sacrificed a sacrifice to the LORD, and they vowed vows. And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the inward parts of the fish three days and three nights.

Preview

The word of the LORD comes to Jonah: go to Nineveh, the great city, and call out against it. Jonah gets up, but he runs the other way, down to the port of Joppa and onto a ship bound for Tarshish, as far west as a man could go. The LORD hurls a great wind on the sea. The pagan sailors pray to their gods and throw the cargo overboard, while Jonah sleeps below deck.

The lot falls on Jonah, and he confesses: he is a Hebrew who fears the LORD, the God who made the sea, and he is running from Him. He tells them to throw him overboard. They try hard to row to shore, then pray to the LORD and throw him in, and the sea goes calm. The sailors fear the LORD and worship Him. And the LORD appoints a great fish to swallow Jonah, and he is inside it three days and three nights.

Study

1:1-2 *And the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before Me."*

"And the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai." This is the same Jonah who had told Jeroboam II that Israel's borders would be restored (2 Kings 14:25). He was a known prophet, used to good news for his own nation.

"Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before Me." Nineveh was one of the great cities of Assyria, about 500 miles northeast of Israel, and Assyria was the cruelest power of the day. God says its evil "has come up before Me," like the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:20-21). God sees what nations do. He judges Gentile nations, not only Israel, as Amos 1 and 2 showed. But notice that He sends a warning first. Why warn them at all, unless He was willing to show mercy?

1:3 *And Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from before the LORD; and he went down **to** Joppa, and he found a ship going **to** Tarshish; and he paid its fare, and he went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from before the LORD.*

"And Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from before the LORD." Jonah got up, as God said, but went the wrong way. Nineveh was east. Tarshish was far west, most likely Tartessus in Spain, at the far end of the known world. Jonah tried to get as far from Nineveh as he could.

Twice this verse says Jonah was running "from before the LORD." Did Jonah really think he could hide from God? He knew better (1:9). Most likely he meant to get away from his calling, to leave the land where God spoke to His prophets. We will learn his reason in 4:2. He knew God would be merciful to Nineveh, and he did not want that.

"And he went down to Joppa, and he found a ship going to Tarshish; and he paid its fare." Joppa was a port on the coast, near modern Tel Aviv. Notice the word "down." Jonah went down to Joppa, down into the ship, and soon down into its hold (1:5) and down into the sea (2:6). Running from God is always a downward road. And it costs. Jonah "paid its fare." Sin always has a price.

1:4-6 *And the LORD hurled a great wind to the sea, and there was a great storm on the sea, and the ship thought to be broken up. And the sailors were afraid, and they cried out, each man to his god; and they hurled the vessels that **were** in the ship into the sea to lighten **it** from upon them. And Jonah had gone down into the innermost parts of the ship, and he had lain down, and he had fallen fast asleep. And the chief of the sailors came near to him, and he said to him, "What **is it** to you, sleeper? Arise, call to your God; perhaps the God will give thought to us, and we will not perish."*

"And the LORD hurled a great wind to the sea." Jonah had his plans, but God has His. The word "hurled" is the same word used later when the sailors hurl the cargo and then Jonah into the sea. "And there was a great storm on the sea, and the ship thought to be broken up." The ship itself seemed to groan as though it were about to break apart.

"And the sailors were afraid, and they cried out, each man to his god." These were men from many nations, each with his own god. They prayed hard, and they did what sailors do in a storm: "they hurled the vessels that were in the ship into the sea to lighten it."

"And Jonah had gone down into the innermost parts of the ship, and he had lain down, and he had fallen fast asleep." While pagans prayed, the prophet of the true God slept. A heart running from God can become dull even in great danger.

"What is it to you, sleeper? Arise, call to your God." The captain's words echo God's command in verse 2: "Arise." A pagan sea captain had to tell a prophet to pray. "Perhaps the God will give thought to us, and we will not perish." He did not know the LORD, but he knew there must be a God who could save. How sad when unbelievers are more ready to pray than believers are.

1:7-8 *And they said, each man to his neighbor, "Come, and let us cast lots, so that we may know on whose account this evil **has come** to us." And they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. And they said to him, "Please tell us, on whose account **has** this evil **come** to us? What **is** your occupation? And from where do you come? What **is** your land? And from what people **are** you?"*

"Come, and let us cast lots, so that we may know on whose account this evil has come to us." Casting lots was like drawing straws. The sailors believed the storm was a punishment for someone's sin, and they wanted to find out whose. "And they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah." God controls even the lot (Proverbs 16:33).

Then the questions come one after another: "on whose account has this evil come to us? What is your occupation? And from where do you come? What is your land? And from what people are you?" Jonah could not hide any longer.

1:9-10 *And he said to them, "I **am** a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD, the God of the heavens, who made the sea and the dry land." And the men feared a great fear, and they said to him, "What **is** this you have done?" For the men knew that he was fleeing from before the LORD, because he had told them.*

"And he said to them, I am a Hebrew." Hebrew was the name foreigners used for the people of Israel. "And I fear the LORD, the God of the heavens, who made the sea and the dry land." This is a true confession, and in the middle of a storm at sea it is an alarming one. Jonah worshiped the God who made the very sea that was about to kill them. To fear the LORD means to honor and worship Him. Yet at that very moment Jonah was running from Him. His words were right, but his life did not match them.

"And the men feared a great fear." Now they were even more afraid, because they knew whose God was angry. "What is this you have done?" The pagans rebuked the prophet. "For the men knew that he was fleeing from before the LORD, because he had told them." Jonah had told them earlier, perhaps without thinking it mattered.

1:11-12 *And they said to him, "What shall we do to you, so that the sea may become calm from upon us?" For the sea was growing more and more stormy. And he said to them, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea, and the sea will become calm from upon you; for I know that on my account this great storm **is** upon you."*

"What shall we do to you, so that the sea may become calm from upon us? For the sea was growing more and more stormy." They knew Jonah's God had sent the storm. They asked Jonah what his God required.

"Pick me up and hurl me into the sea, and the sea will become calm from upon you; for I know that on my account this great storm is upon you." Jonah does not ask them to turn the ship toward Nineveh. He would rather die than go there. Yet there is also something honest here. Jonah owned his guilt, and he was willing to give his life so that the sailors would live.

1:13-14 *And the men rowed hard to bring **it** back to the dry land, and they were not able, for the sea was growing more and more stormy against them. And they called to the LORD, and they said, "Please, LORD, please let us not perish for the life of this man, and do not put innocent blood on us; for You, LORD, have done as You pleased."*

"And the men rowed hard to bring it back to the dry land, and they were not able." These pagan sailors showed more mercy to Jonah than Jonah wanted to show Nineveh. They did not want to throw him overboard. They rowed with all their strength, but the storm grew worse.

"And they called to the LORD." Not to their own gods this time, but to the LORD, Jonah's God. "Please, LORD, please let us not perish for the life of this man, and do not put innocent blood on us; for You, LORD, have done as You pleased." They begged God not to hold them guilty of murder, and they confessed that He was in control of all this. These men were learning faith in the middle of a storm, from a prophet who was running from God.

1:15-16 *And they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea stopped from its raging. And the men feared the LORD **with** a great fear, and they sacrificed a sacrifice to the LORD, and they vowed vows.*

"And they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea stopped from its raging." The moment Jonah hit the water, the storm stopped. There could be no doubt who had sent it, or who had stilled it. When Jesus calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee, His disciples "feared a great fear" and asked who He was, that the wind and the sea obeyed Him (Mark 4:41). The answer is that Jesus is the same LORD who stilled the sea for Jonah's sailors.

"And the men feared the LORD with a great fear, and they sacrificed a sacrifice to the LORD, and they vowed vows." Their fear changed. First they feared the storm (1:5). Then they feared Jonah's God (1:10). Now they "feared the LORD," which means they worshiped Him. They offered a sacrifice, perhaps when they reached land, and made promises to Him. Many teachers believe these sailors came to faith in the LORD that day. Even while Jonah was running from his mission to the Gentiles, God was saving Gentiles through him.

1:17 *And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the inward parts of the fish three days and three nights.*

"And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah."

This is the verse people stumble over. I want to be plain about what the text says and what it does not say.

First, "the LORD appointed." The word means to prepare, to assign. The same word is used of the plant, the worm and the wind in chapter 4. God was in charge of every one of them. The fish was not an accident or a monster out of a myth. It was a creature God sent for a purpose: not to destroy Jonah, but to save him from drowning.

Second, "a great fish." The Hebrew does not say what kind. It does not say a whale. Matthew's Greek word, which the SLB translates "sea monster" (Matthew 12:40), means a huge sea creature. Many people have suggested a large shark or a sperm whale, which can swallow very large prey. Scripture does not tell us, and we do not need to know. Whatever it was, keeping Jonah alive inside it for three days was a miracle.

Third, "and Jonah was in the inward parts of the fish three days and three nights." Is this real history? I believe it is, for two reasons. The book is written as history, about a real prophet (2 Kings 14:25). And Jesus treated it as history. He said, "For just as Jonah was in the belly of the sea monster three days and three nights, so the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights" (Matthew 12:40). Jesus put Jonah's time in the fish right beside His own death and burial. If Jonah's story were only a tale, the sign would be only a tale too. Some teachers read Jonah as a parable or an allegory of Israel, mostly because a fish swallowing a man seems impossible. But the God who made the sea and the dry land (1:9) can do as He pleases. If we believe He raised Jesus from the dead, a great fish is not too hard for Him.

How was Jonah in the fish "three days and three nights" when Jesus was in the tomb from Friday evening to Sunday morning? The Jews counted any part of a day as a day. "Three days and three nights" was a way of saying three days, counting parts (compare Esther 4:16 and 5:1). Jesus also said He would rise "on the third day" (Matthew 16:21).

What does the fish mean for us? It shows that God does not give up on His people even when they run. Jonah was sinking to his death because of his own sin, and God sent the fish to rescue him. It also points us to the gospel. Jesus went down into death, not for His own sin, but for ours, and on the third day He came up alive. That is "the sign of Jonah" (Matthew 12:39), and it is the greatest sign God has given.

Summary

The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai to go to Nineveh, the great city, and call out against it, because its evil had come up before God. Jonah ran the other way, down to Joppa and onto a ship for Tarshish. The LORD hurled a great storm on the sea. The sailors cried to their gods and threw the cargo overboard, while Jonah slept below until the captain woke him to pray. The

lot fell on Jonah, and he confessed that he was a Hebrew who feared the LORD, the God who made the sea and the dry land, and that he was fleeing from Him. He told them to throw him into the sea. The sailors rowed hard to reach land and could not, so they prayed to the LORD not to hold them guilty and threw Jonah in. The sea stopped raging, and the men feared the LORD, sacrificed to Him and made vows. And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and he was in it three days and three nights.

Study Questions

1. What did God tell Jonah to do, and why? (1:2)

2. Where did Jonah go instead? What does the repeated word "down" show? (1:3, 5)

3. What were the sailors doing during the storm, and what was Jonah doing? (1:5-6)

4. What did Jonah confess about himself and his God? How did his life not match his words? (1:9-10)

5. How did the sailors show mercy to Jonah? (1:13-14)

6. How did the sailors' fear change through the chapter? (1:5, 10, 16)

7. What did the LORD appoint, and why? What did Jesus say about it? (1:17; Matthew 12:39-40)

8. Is there something God has asked you to do that you have been running from? What has it cost you?

9. A pagan captain had to tell a prophet to pray. Are there times you have been asleep spiritually while others around you were in trouble?

10. Jesus went down into death and rose on the third day. What does "the sign of Jonah" (Matthew 12:39) mean to you personally?

Jonah 2: Jonah's Prayer From the Fish

Scripture

2:1-10 And Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the inward parts of the fish. And he said, "I called out of my distress to the LORD, and He answered me; from the belly of Sheol I cried for help; You heard my voice. And You threw me ***into the*** deep, into the heart of ***the*** seas, and ***the*** current surrounded me; all Your breakers and Your waves passed over me. And I said, 'I have been driven away from before Your eyes; yet I will again look to Your holy temple.' Waters encompassed me to ***the*** neck; ***the*** deep surrounded me; weeds ***were*** wrapped around my head. To the bases of ***the*** mountains I went down; the earth, its bars ***were*** behind me forever. And You brought up my life from the pit, LORD my God. When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to You, to Your holy temple. Those who pay regard to vanities of emptiness abandon their steadfast love. And I, with a voice of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to You; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation ***belongs*** to the LORD." And the LORD said to the fish, and it vomited out Jonah onto the dry land.

Preview

Inside the fish, Jonah finally prays. His prayer is a psalm of thanks. He tells how he called to the LORD out of his distress, sinking into the deep with the waves over him and seaweed around his head, down to the roots of the mountains, as good as dead. He thought he had been driven from God's sight. But he looked again toward God's holy temple, and the LORD brought his life up from the pit.

Jonah ends with a promise to give thanks and keep his vows, and with one of the great sentences of the Bible: "Salvation belongs to the LORD." Then the LORD speaks to the fish, and it puts Jonah out on dry land. The man who ran from God has been brought back by God, not by his own strength, but by grace.

Study

2:1 *And Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the inward parts of the fish.*

"And Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the inward parts of the fish." Jonah would not pray on the ship, even when the captain begged him (1:6). Now, in the dark, inside a living creature at the bottom of the sea, he prays. Sometimes God has to bring us very low before we will look up. And notice: "the LORD his God." Jonah had run, but the LORD was still his God. God had not let him go.

Can a person pray anywhere? Jonah's prayer was heard from inside a fish. There is no place so dark or so far that God cannot hear.

2:2 *And he said, "I called out of my distress to the LORD, and He answered me; from the belly of Sheol I cried for help; You heard my voice.*

"I called out of my distress to the LORD, and He answered me." Jonah begins with the end of the story. He prayed, and God answered. This is a prayer of thanks, and he is giving it while still inside the fish. He already knew that God had saved him from drowning, because he was alive. He trusted that God would finish what He had begun.

"From the belly of Sheol I cried for help; You heard my voice." Sheol is the place of the dead. Jonah means that he was as good as dead, already at death's door, when he cried out. David used words like these in his psalms (Psalm 18:4-6; 30:3).

Some teachers believe Jonah actually died in the fish and was raised to life, which would make the sign of Jonah closer still to the death and resurrection of Christ. Most read Jonah's words as a poetic picture of being at the edge of death. Scripture does not settle it. Either way, Jonah was saved from death by God alone.

2:3 *And You threw me **into the** deep, into the heart of **the** seas, and **the** current surrounded me; all Your breakers and Your waves passed over me.*

"And You threw me into the deep, into the heart of the seas." The sailors had thrown Jonah overboard, but Jonah says, "You threw me." He knew who was really behind it. "And the current surrounded me; all Your breakers and Your waves passed over me." These are God's waves. The same words appear in Psalm 42:7. Jonah knew the Psalms, and when he was drowning, the Scriptures came back to him.

This is one reason to fill our minds with God's Word. When trouble comes, the Word we have learned will be there to help us pray.

2:4 *And I said, 'I have been driven away from before Your eyes; yet I will again look to Your holy temple.'*

Jonah said, "I have been driven away from before Your eyes." Jonah had run "from before the LORD" (1:3). Now he felt that God had driven him away. He got what he had asked for, and it was terrible.

"Yet I will again look to Your holy temple." Here is the turning point. In the middle of despair, Jonah turned his face toward the temple in Jerusalem, where God had promised to hear the prayers of His people. When Solomon dedicated the temple, he asked God to hear anyone who prayed toward it from a far land or in trouble (1 Kings 8:38-39, 48-49). Jonah held on to that promise.

2:5-6 *Waters encompassed me to **the** neck; **the** deep surrounded me; weeds **were** wrapped around my head. To the bases of **the** mountains I went down; the earth, its bars **were** behind me forever. And You brought up my life from the pit, LORD my God.*

"Waters encompassed me to the neck; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped around my head." Jonah describes what it was like to drown. The water closed over him, and the seaweed wrapped around him like grave clothes.

"To the bases of the mountains I went down." The Hebrews pictured the roots of the mountains at the bottom of the sea. Jonah had gone down as far as anyone could go. This is the last "down" in Jonah's downward road (1:3, 5). "The earth, its bars were behind me forever." The earth was like a city whose gates had locked behind him. There was no way back.

"And You brought up my life from the pit, LORD my God." Here is the great word "And You." Jonah went down, and God brought him up. The pit means the grave. Jonah could not save himself. God reached down and lifted him out.

This is the story of every person God saves. We go down by our own sin, and we cannot climb out. God reaches down and brings us up (Psalm 40:2; Ephesians 2:1-5).

2:7 *When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to You, to Your holy temple.*

"When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD." Jonah was at the end of himself, about to lose consciousness, and in that moment he remembered God. "And my prayer came to You, to Your holy temple." His prayer reached God's temple. That may mean the temple in Jerusalem, or God's temple in heaven, where He sits enthroned (Psalm 11:4). Jonah's prayer, from the bottom of the sea, got through.

2:8 *Those who pay regard to vanities of emptiness abandon their steadfast love.*

"Those who pay regard to vanities of emptiness abandon their steadfast love." Vanities of emptiness are idols, false gods that are nothing. Steadfast love is hesed, God's loyal covenant love. Those who hold on to idols turn away from the only One who could show them mercy. Some read "their steadfast love" as the mercy God would have shown them, which they throw away.

Jonah may be thinking of the sailors, who prayed to their gods in vain (1:5), though they turned to the LORD in the end. There is a hard irony here. Jonah himself had turned from God's will, and the pagans had turned to God. And soon Jonah would be angry that God showed hesed to Nineveh, a city of idol worshipers who repented. Jonah was right about idols. He had not yet learned how far God's mercy would reach.

2:9 *And I, with a voice of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to You; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation* ***belongs*** *to the LORD."*

"And I, with a voice of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to You; what I have vowed I will pay." The sailors had sacrificed and made vows (1:16). Now Jonah promises the same. He will thank God and keep his promises, most likely the promise to obey.

"Salvation belongs to the LORD."

This is the high point of the book. Salvation is not something we can earn, buy or work our way into. It belongs to God. He gives it to whom He will. Jonah could not save himself from the sea. The sailors could not save him by rowing. Only God could. And the same is true of every person's salvation from sin. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves; the gift is of God" (Ephesians 2:8).

Notice that Jonah does not say salvation belongs to Israel. It belongs to the LORD. That means God can give it to the sailors, and to Nineveh too. Jonah had just spoken the truth that would lead to the rest of the book. Did he understand what he had said?

2:10 *And the LORD said to the fish, and it vomited out Jonah onto the dry land.*

"And the LORD said to the fish, and it vomited out Jonah onto the dry land." God spoke, and the fish obeyed. In this book everything obeys God: the wind, the sea, the lot, the fish, and soon a plant, a worm and a scorching wind. Everything except, for a while, God's prophet.

The fish put Jonah out "onto the dry land." It is a humbling picture. Jonah came back not as a hero but as one who had been rescued, a prophet thrown up on the beach. We are not told where. It does not matter. What matters is that he was alive, by the grace of God, and that God was about to give him a second chance.

Jesus said this was a sign of His own resurrection (Matthew 12:40). Jonah went down into the sea for his own disobedience and came up alive after three days. Jesus went down into death for our disobedience and rose on the third day. Jonah's rescue was a miracle of mercy. Christ's resurrection is the miracle that saves the world. "He was buried, and that He has been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:4).

Summary

From inside the fish, Jonah prayed to the LORD his God. He thanked God that when he called out of his distress, from the belly of Sheol, God heard him. God had thrown him into the deep, and all His waves passed over him. Jonah thought he had been driven from God's sight, yet he looked again toward God's holy temple. The waters closed over him, seaweed wrapped his head, and he sank to the roots of the mountains, but God brought his life up from the pit. When his soul fainted, he remembered the LORD, and his prayer reached God's holy temple. Those who cling to empty idols forsake the steadfast love that could be theirs, but Jonah promised to sacrifice with thanks and pay his vows, for "Salvation belongs to the LORD." Then the LORD spoke to the fish, and it put Jonah out on dry land.

Study Questions

1. Where was Jonah when he prayed, and what does that tell you about where God can hear prayer? (2:1)

2. Jonah says God answered him, though he was still in the fish. What does that show about his faith? (2:2)

3. Who does Jonah say threw him into the sea? Why does that matter? (2:3; 1:15)

4. What did Jonah do when he felt driven away from God? (2:4; 1 Kings 8:48-49)

5. Find the words in Jonah's prayer that come from the Psalms. How did God's Word help Jonah pray? (2:3; Psalm 42:7)

6. What does Jonah say about people who cling to idols? (2:8)

7. What does "Salvation belongs to the LORD" mean, and why is it the center of this book? (2:9; Ephesians 2:8)

8. Have you ever had to hit bottom before you would turn to God? What did He teach you there?

9. What Scripture do you know well enough that it would come back to you in a crisis? What could you begin to memorize this week?

10. Jonah got a second chance by God's grace. Is there someone in your life who needs you to give them a second chance?

Jonah 3: Nineveh Repents

Scripture

3:1-10 And the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second ***time***, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and call out to it the proclamation that I ***am*** speaking to you." And Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD. And Nineveh was a great city to God, a journey of three days. And Jonah began to go into the city a journey of one day, and he called out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh will be overturned." And the men of Nineveh believed in God, and they called a fast, and they put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them and to the least of them. And the word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he removed his robe from upon him, and he covered ***himself with*** sackcloth, and he sat on the ashes. And he had ***it*** cried out, and he said in Nineveh, by the decree of the king and his great ones, saying, "Let man and livestock, the herd and the flock, not taste anything; let them not graze, and let them not drink water. And let them cover themselves ***with*** sackcloth, man and livestock, and let them call to God with strength, and let them turn back, each man from his evil way and from the violence that ***is*** in their palms. Who knows? God may turn back and relent, and turn back from the burning of His anger, and we will not perish." And God saw their deeds, that they turned back from their evil way; and God relented concerning the evil which He had spoken of doing to them, and He did not do ***it***.

Preview

The word of the LORD comes to Jonah a second time, with the same command: arise, go to Nineveh. This time Jonah goes. Nineveh is a great city, three days' journey across. Jonah walks one day into it and cries out his message: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh will be overturned."

What happens next is one of the greatest revivals in history. The people of Nineveh believe God. From the greatest to the least, they fast and put on sackcloth. The king himself gets up from his throne, takes off his robe, sits in ashes and sends out a decree: let everyone, even the animals, fast, cry to God, and turn from evil and violence. Who knows? God may relent. And God sees what they do, that they turn from their evil way, and He relents from the disaster He had spoken of. He does not do it.

Study

3:1-2 *And the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second* ***time****, saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and call out to it the proclamation that I* ***am*** *speaking to you."*

"And the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time." These may be some of the most hopeful words in the Bible. Jonah had run. He had disobeyed, and he had nearly died for it. And God came to him again. God is the God of the second chance. Peter denied Jesus three times, and Jesus restored him and sent him out again (John 21:15-17). If you have failed God, His word can still come to you a second time.

"Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and call out to it the proclamation that I am speaking to you." The command is the same as before (1:2). God did not change the mission because Jonah did not like it. And notice: Jonah is to preach what God tells him, nothing more and nothing less. A preacher's job is to give God's message, not his own.

3:3 *And Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD. And Nineveh was a great city to God, a journey of three days.*

"And Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD." This time "arose" is followed by obedience. Jonah went east, the way God said.

"And Nineveh was a great city to God, a journey of three days." "A great city to God" may simply mean an exceedingly great city. It may also mean that Nineveh was great in God's eyes, that it mattered to Him. Chapter 4 will show that it did (4:11).

What does "a journey of three days" mean? In its later days, under Sennacherib, the walls of Nineveh itself were about seven or eight miles around. Many think the phrase includes the whole district of greater Nineveh, with its surrounding towns. Others think it means it took three days to go through the city's streets and squares, preaching as you went. Either way, it was a huge city, and Jonah was one man.

3:4 *And Jonah began to go into the city a journey of one day, and he called out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh will be overturned."*

"And Jonah began to go into the city a journey of one day, and he called out and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh will be overturned." Jonah's message has only five words in Hebrew. There is no call to repent in it, no promise of mercy. Just a warning: forty days, and then destruction. Forty in the Bible is often a time of testing and waiting, like the forty days of the flood rains and Israel's forty years in the wilderness.

"Overturned" is the word used for the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:25; Amos 4:11). Nineveh would be destroyed like Sodom. But the same Hebrew word can also mean to be turned around, changed. Jonah meant the first. God did the second. Nineveh was overturned, not by fire from heaven, but by repentance.

Why was there no offer of mercy in the message? Because a warning is itself an offer. If God had meant only to destroy, He would not have sent a prophet forty days ahead. The Ninevites understood that.

3:5 *And the men of Nineveh believed in God, and they called a fast, and they put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them and to the least of them.*

"And the men of Nineveh believed in God." This is the heart of the chapter. They did not only believe Jonah. They believed God. The same words are used of Abraham: "he believed in the LORD" (Genesis 15:6). It was faith in God that led them to repent.

"And they called a fast, and they put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them and to the least of them." Fasting and sackcloth were signs of grief and humility before God (Joel 1:13-14). Everyone joined in, rich and poor, powerful and common, even before the king had spoken.

Why would a pagan city believe a foreign prophet so quickly? Scripture does not give every reason. The Ninevites may have heard what happened to Jonah at sea. Jesus said, "just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so also the Son of Man will be to this generation" (Luke 11:30). Jonah himself, a man brought back from the sea, may have been part of the sign. Some also point to the troubles Assyria was going through in those years, which may have made the people afraid. But in the end, it was God who opened their hearts.

3:6-9 *And the word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he removed his robe from upon him, and he covered **himself with** sackcloth, and he sat on the ashes. And he had **it** cried out, and he said in Nineveh, by the decree of the king and his great ones, saying, "Let man and livestock, the herd and the flock, not taste anything; let them not graze, and let them not drink water. And let them cover themselves **with** sackcloth, man and livestock, and let them call to God with strength, and let them turn back, each man from his evil way and from the violence that **is** in their palms. Who knows? God may turn back and relent, and turn back from the burning of His anger, and we will not perish."*

"And the word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he removed his robe from upon him, and he covered himself with sackcloth, and he sat on the ashes." Picture the king of the most feared empire on earth taking off his royal robe and sitting in the dust. The king does not tell us his name. What matters is what he did. He humbled himself.

"Let man and livestock, the herd and the flock, not taste anything." The fast was to include even the animals. That may seem strange to us, but in that part of the world animals were sometimes included in mourning. The whole city, every living thing, would cry out together.

"And let them call to God with strength, and let them turn back, each man from his evil way and from the violence that is in their palms." Here is true repentance. It is not only fasting and sackcloth. It is crying out to God and turning from sin. The king named their sin: violence, the very thing Assyria was known for. "In their palms" means the violence their own hands had done.

"Who knows? God may turn back and relent, and turn back from the burning of His anger, and we will not perish." The king did not presume on God's mercy. He did not say, God must forgive us now. He said, Who knows? Joel used the same words (Joel 2:14). That is the humble heart God loves. True repentance does not make demands. It throws itself on God's mercy.

Notice the word "turn back." The people would turn back from evil, and they hoped God would turn back from His anger. That is how repentance works.

3:10 *And God saw their deeds, that they turned back from their evil way; and God relented concerning the evil which He had spoken of doing to them, and He did not do* ***it****.*

"And God saw their deeds, that they turned back from their evil way." God did not see only their sackcloth. He saw that they turned from their evil way. Their repentance showed up in what they did.

"And God relented concerning the evil which He had spoken of doing to them, and He did not do it." The word evil here means the disaster, the destruction He had warned of. To relent means to turn back from judgment He had announced. The Hebrew word is nacham, the same word used when the LORD relented after Amos prayed (Amos 7:3, 6).

Did God change His mind? Did He not know what would happen? God knew. And God does not change. "God is not a man, that He should lie, and a son of mankind, that He should relent" (Numbers 23:19). But God Himself has told us how He deals with nations: "that nation turns back from its evil, concerning which I had spoken against it, and I will relent concerning the calamity which I had planned to do to it" (Jeremiah 18:8). God's warnings carry an unspoken "unless": unless you repent. When Nineveh turned, God did exactly what He always said He would do. His character never changed. Nineveh's did. Joel said God is "relenting over the harm" (Joel 2:13). It is His nature to show mercy.

Some ask, Then was Jonah a false prophet, since his word did not come true? No. His message did what God sent it to do. A warning that brings repentance has succeeded. God would rather spare than destroy. "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked man, but in a wicked man turning back from his way" (Ezekiel 33:11).

Nineveh was spared that day. More than a hundred years later it had gone back to its cruelty, and Nahum announced its end. It fell in 612 B.C. Repentance must be passed on to each new generation.

What does this mean for us? No one is too far gone. Nineveh was the cruelest city on earth, and when it turned, God forgave it. God "is patient toward us, not wishing any to perish, but all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). If He would forgive Nineveh, He will forgive you. And Jesus said the men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment and condemn those who heard Him and did not repent, for "something greater than Jonah is here" (Matthew 12:41). We have heard more than Nineveh ever heard. What will we do with it?

Summary

The word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time, and this time he went to Nineveh, a great city of three days' journey. He went a day's walk into it and called out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh will be overturned." The people of Nineveh believed God, called a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least. The king rose from his throne, took off his robe, put on sackcloth and sat in ashes, and decreed that man and beast should fast, cry mightily to God and turn from their evil way and the violence of their hands, for who knows whether God might relent. God saw their

deeds, that they turned from their evil way, and God relented from the disaster He had said He would bring, and He did not do it.

I have received a second time from God after failing Him many, many times. Jonah got a second word from God. So have I. Every second chance is a reason to obey this time.

Study Questions

1. What came to Jonah "a second time"? What does that tell you about God? (3:1)

2. How was Jonah's response different this time? (3:3; 1:3)

3. What was Jonah's message, and what was missing from it? (3:4)

4. What did the people of Nineveh do, and who joined in? (3:5)

5. What did the king do, and what did he order? (3:6-8)

6. What sin did the king name, and what did true repentance look like? (3:8)

7. What did God see, and what did He do? How can God relent and still never change? (3:10; Jeremiah 18:7-8; Numbers 23:19)

8. Have you received a "second time" from God after failing Him? How did you respond?

9. Is there someone you have thought was too far gone for God to save? What does Nineveh say to that?

10. Jesus said "something greater than Jonah is here" (Matthew 12:41). What have you done with the message of Jesus?

Jonah 4: Jonah's Anger and God's Mercy

Scripture

4:1-11 And it was evil to Jonah, a great evil, and he burned ***with anger***. And he prayed to the LORD, and he said, "Please, LORD, was this not my word while I was still in my land? Therefore I hastened to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that You ***are*** a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in steadfast love, and ***One who*** relents concerning the evil. And now, LORD, please take my life from me, for my death ***is*** better than my life." And the LORD said, "Do you do well to burn ***with anger***?" And Jonah went out from the city, and he sat east of the city; and he made a booth for himself there, and he sat under it in the shade, until he would see what would be in the city. And the LORD God appointed a plant, and it went up over Jonah to be a shade over his head, to deliver him from his evil. And Jonah rejoiced over the plant ***with*** a great joy. And God appointed a worm when the dawn came up on the next day, and it struck the plant, and it withered. And it was, when the sun rose, and God appointed a scorching east wind; and the sun struck on the head of Jonah, and he became faint; and he asked ***for*** his soul to die, and he said, "My death ***is*** better than my life." And God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to burn ***with anger*** over the plant?" And he said, "I do well to burn ***with anger***, to death." And the LORD said, "You had compassion on the plant, for which you did not toil, and which you did not make grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night. And I, should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city, in which there are more than one hundred twenty thousand people who do not know ***the difference*** between their right hand and their left, and much livestock?"

Preview

Nineveh is spared, and Jonah is furious. Now he tells us why he ran to Tarshish in the first place. He knew God is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abundant in steadfast love, and relents from disaster. He did not want God to be that way with Nineveh. He asks God to take his life. God answers with a question: "Do you do well to burn with anger?"

Jonah goes out east of the city, builds a shelter and waits to see what will happen. God appoints a plant to shade him, and Jonah is very glad. Then God appoints a worm to kill the plant and a scorching east wind, and Jonah, faint in the sun, again wants to die. God asks him again whether he does well to be angry, this time over the plant. Then God gives the last word. Jonah pitied a plant he never worked for. Should God not pity Nineveh, with its more than a hundred twenty thousand people and its many animals? The book ends with that question.

Study

4:1 *And it was evil to Jonah, a great evil, and he burned **with anger**.*

"And it was evil to Jonah, a great evil, and he burned with anger." The Hebrew plays on the word "evil." Nineveh turned from its evil (3:10), and God turned from the evil He had threatened. And now it was evil to Jonah. What God saw as good, Jonah saw as a great evil. When our hearts are angry at what pleases God, we are out of step with Him.

4:2 *And he prayed to the LORD, and he said, "Please, LORD, was this not my word while I was still in my land? Therefore I hastened to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that You **are** a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in steadfast love, and **One who** relents concerning the evil.*

"And he prayed to the LORD." Jonah still prays. But listen to what he says. "Please, LORD, was this not my word while I was still in my land? Therefore I hastened to flee to Tarshish." Now we know why Jonah ran. It was not fear of the Assyrians. It was not laziness. It was that he knew God too well.

"For I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in steadfast love, and One who relents concerning the evil."

These words come from God's own description of Himself to Moses on Mount Sinai: "The LORD, the LORD, a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and great in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Exodus 34:6). Joel used them to call Judah to return (Joel 2:13). Psalm after psalm repeats them. They are the heart of who God is.

Let us look at each part. "Gracious" means God gives what we do not deserve. "Compassionate" means He feels for us the way a mother feels for her child. The Hebrew word is related to the word for womb. "Slow to anger" means God's patience is long. He does not strike at the first sin, or the hundredth. "Abundant in steadfast love" means His hesed, His loyal covenant love, overflows. "One who relents concerning the evil" means He is willing to turn back from the judgment He has warned of when people repent.

Every one of those words is good news. And Jonah said them as a complaint. He knew the truth about God and was angry about it. Why? Because he wanted God's grace for Israel and God's judgment for Nineveh. Assyria was Israel's enemy. Jonah may even have known, as Hosea and Amos would soon say, that God would use Assyria against Israel (Hosea 11:5; Amos 6:14). From Jonah's point of view, sparing Nineveh meant endangering his own people.

It is easy to look down on Jonah. But are we so different? It is one thing to love God's mercy for ourselves. It is another to be glad when God shows the same mercy to someone who hurt us, or to a people we fear or dislike. The older brother in Jesus' parable was angry when his father welcomed the prodigal home (Luke 15:25-32). Jonah is that older brother. The question the book asks is whether we are too.

God's mercy to Nineveh does not mean sin does not matter. God was ready to destroy the city. He spared it because it repented. And His mercy always has a cost. For us, the cost was paid at the cross, where God's justice and mercy met in Christ (Romans 3:25-26).

4:3 *And now, LORD, please take my life from me, for my death **is** better than my life."*

"And now, LORD, please take my life from me, for my death is better than my life." Jonah would rather die than live in a world where God forgives Nineveh. Elijah once prayed a prayer like this under a broom tree (1 Kings 19:4), but Elijah was worn out from serving God. Jonah was angry because God was merciful.

It is a serious thing when anger at others makes us want to give up on life itself. God does not answer this prayer with judgment. He answers it with a question.

4:4 *And the LORD said, "Do you do well to burn **with anger**?"*

"And the LORD said, Do you do well to burn with anger?" God does not shout at Jonah. He asks him to think. Is your anger right? God is patient with His angry prophet, just as He was patient with Nineveh. "Slow to anger" applies to Jonah too.

Jonah does not answer. He walks away.

4:5 *And Jonah went out from the city, and he sat east of the city; and he made a booth for himself there, and he sat under it in the shade, until he would see what would be in the city.*

"And Jonah went out from the city, and he sat east of the city." East was away from the way home, on the side where he could watch the whole city. "And he made a booth for himself there, and he sat under it in the shade, until he would see what would be in the city." A booth was a rough shelter of branches. Jonah sat and waited. Perhaps he hoped God would change His mind again and destroy the city after all. Perhaps he was waiting out the forty days. Either way, he was sitting outside, watching, while God's mercy went on inside.

4:6 *And the LORD God appointed a plant, and it went up over Jonah to be a shade over his head, to deliver him from his evil. And Jonah rejoiced over the plant **with** a great joy.*

"And the LORD God appointed a plant." Again God "appointed," as He did with the fish (1:17). The plant grew up quickly, perhaps a castor-oil plant or a vine with large leaves. "And it went up over Jonah to be a shade over his head, to deliver him from his evil." His booth's branches would have dried out in the sun. The plant gave real shade. "To deliver him from his evil" may mean his discomfort, or his bad mood. God was being kind to Jonah even while Jonah was sulking.

"And Jonah rejoiced over the plant with a great joy." This is the only time in the book Jonah is glad. He was greatly angry over Nineveh's salvation and greatly glad over a little shade. That shows what his heart was set on: his own comfort.

4:7-8 *And God appointed a worm when the dawn came up on the next day, and it struck the plant, and it withered. And it was, when the sun rose, and God appointed a scorching east wind; and the sun struck on the head of Jonah, and he became faint; and he asked **for** his soul to die, and he said, "My death **is** better than my life."*

"And God appointed a worm when the dawn came up on the next day, and it struck the plant, and it withered." The God who appointed a great fish now appoints a small worm. He is sovereign over the large and the small.

"And it was, when the sun rose, and God appointed a scorching east wind." The east wind blew off the desert, hot and dry. It is still known in that part of the world. "And the sun struck on the head of Jonah, and he became faint; and he asked for his soul to die, and he said, My death is better than my life."

God was teaching Jonah with a living picture. Jonah had been glad for something good he did not earn, and angry when it was taken away. Now he was about to learn what that meant.

4:9 *And God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to burn **with anger** over the plant?" And he said, "I do well to burn **with anger**, to death."*

"And God said to Jonah, Do you do well to burn with anger over the plant?" It is the same question as in verse 4, now about the plant.

"And he said, I do well to burn with anger, to death." This time Jonah answers, and his answer is honest and shocking. Yes, I have a right to be angry, angry enough to die. Jonah is not hiding his heart anymore. That at least gives God something to work with.

4:10 *And the LORD said, "You had compassion on the plant, for which you did not toil, and which you did not make grow, which came into being in a night and perished in a night.*

"And the LORD said, You had compassion on the plant, for which you did not toil, and which you did not make grow." Jonah did nothing for that plant. He did not plant it, water it or tend it. "Which came into being in a night and perished in a night." It was here one day and gone the next. And yet Jonah grieved for it. He had compassion on it, or at least on what it did for him.

God takes Jonah's own feelings and uses them to make His point.

4:11 *And I, should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city, in which there are more than one hundred twenty thousand people who do not know **the difference** between their right hand and their left, and much livestock?"*

"And I, should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city, in which there are more than one hundred twenty thousand people who do not know the difference between their right hand and their left, and much livestock?"

This is how the book ends: with God's question. It is an argument from the lesser to the greater. If Jonah felt pity for a plant that he did not make and that lived one night, how much more should God feel pity for a city of people He made and had cared for all their lives?

"More than one hundred twenty thousand people who do not know the difference between their right hand and their left." Some take this to mean the young children of Nineveh, too young to tell right from left, which would make the whole city much larger. Others take it to mean the whole population, people who did not know right from wrong in God's eyes, because no one had taught them His law. Either way, God sees them as people lost and helpless, not as an enemy to be wiped out. Jesus looked at the crowds the same way. "He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and thrown down, like sheep not having a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36).

"And much livestock." God even cares about the animals. Not a sparrow falls without the Father (Matthew 10:29). If God cares for cows in Nineveh, how much more does He care for people?

Why does the book end with a question and no answer? Because the question is not only for Jonah. It is for Israel, who thought God's love was only for them. And it is for us. We do not know how Jonah answered. Perhaps the fact that the book was written, with Jonah's own failures told so honestly, shows that in the end he learned. We are not told.

What we are told is that God loves people we might never love. He loved Nineveh. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His Son, the only begotten, so that everyone who believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Jesus told His followers to make disciples of all the nations (Matthew 28:19). Is there a Nineveh in your life, a person or a people you would rather see judged than saved? God's question to Jonah is His question to you: Should I not have compassion?

Summary

When God spared Nineveh, Jonah was greatly displeased and angry. He told the LORD that this was why he had fled to Tarshish, because he knew God is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abundant in steadfast love and relenting from disaster, and he asked God to take his life. The LORD asked, "Do you do well to burn with anger?" Jonah went out east of the city, made a shelter and waited to see what would happen. God appointed a plant to shade him, and Jonah was very glad. Then God appointed a worm that killed the plant and a scorching east wind, and Jonah grew faint and wished to die. God asked again whether he did well to be angry over the plant, and Jonah said he did, even to death. Then the LORD said that Jonah had pity on a plant he did not labor for, which came and went in a night. Should God not have compassion on Nineveh, with more than a hundred twenty thousand people who did not know their right hand from their left, and much livestock?

Study Questions

1. How did Jonah feel when God spared Nineveh? (4:1)

2. Why did Jonah say he ran to Tarshish? (4:2)

3. What five things does Jonah say about God? Where did these words first come from? (4:2; Exodus 34:6)

4. How did God answer Jonah's request to die? (4:3-4)

5. What three things did God appoint in this chapter, and why? (4:6-8)

6. What point did God make with the plant? (4:10-11)

7. What does God's last question show about how He sees Nineveh, its people and even its animals? (4:11; Matthew 9:36)

8. Jonah loved God's mercy for himself but not for his enemies. Is there anyone you would rather see judged than forgiven?

9. Jonah was greatly angry over Nineveh and greatly glad over a little shade. What does it show about our hearts when our comfort matters more to us than people?

10. The book ends with God's question unanswered. How would you answer it?

Overview of Micah

Micah is the thirty-third book of the Bible and the sixth of the twelve Minor Prophets. It comes right after Jonah and right before Nahum. Micah came from Moresheth, a small farming town in the low hills of Judah, and he preached in the days of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. He lived at the same time as Isaiah. Isaiah was a man of the city who spoke to kings. Micah was a man of the countryside who spoke for the small farmers being pushed off their land by the rich and powerful in Jerusalem.

Micah saw the northern kingdom fall. He warned that Samaria would become a heap of ruins, and in 722 B.C. it did. Then he warned that Judah was following the same road. Its leaders took bribes, its priests taught for pay, its prophets said "Peace" to anyone who fed them, and they all said, The LORD is with us, nothing bad can happen. Micah told them Zion would be plowed like a field. A hundred years later, the elders of Judah remembered his words, and they saved Jeremiah's life because of them (Jeremiah 26:18-19).

But Micah is also one of the most hopeful books in the Bible. Again and again it turns from judgment to promise. God will gather the remnant of Israel like sheep. In the last days the mountain of the LORD's house will be raised up, the nations will stream to it, and they will beat their swords into plowshares. A ruler will come from little Bethlehem, whose goings out are from of old. And the book ends with a song of praise: "Who is a God like You, forgiving iniquity and passing over transgression?" (7:18).

The theme of Micah is that God judges the injustice and empty religion of His people, and that He will keep His promises through the coming King and His own forgiving love. The key verse is one of the best known in the Old Testament:

Micah 6:8 (SLB)

"He has told you, O man, what ***is*** good; and what does the LORD require from you but to do justice, and to love steadfast love, and to walk humbly with your God?"

Micah has 7 chapters and 105 verses. Here is its structure:

Part One: Judgment on Samaria and Judah (chapters 1 and 2)

- Micah 1: The LORD Comes Against Samaria and Judah
- Micah 2: False Prophets and the Promise of a Shepherd

Part Two: Corrupt Leaders and the Coming Kingdom (chapters 3 to 5)

- Micah 3: Corrupt Leaders and Zion Plowed Like a Field
- Micah 4: The Mountain of the LORD in the Last Days
- Micah 5: The Ruler From Bethlehem

Part Three: The LORD's Case and Micah's Hope (chapters 6 and 7)

- Micah 6: What the LORD Requires
- Micah 7: Who Is a God Like You?

Where this book points to Christ: when wise men came to Jerusalem asking where the King of the Jews had been born, the chief priests and scribes told Herod, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for thus it has been written through the prophet," and they quoted Micah 5:2 (Matthew 2:5-6). Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the city of David (Luke 2:4-11). The crowds in Jerusalem knew it too: "the Christ comes out of the seed of David, and from Bethlehem" (John 7:42). Micah says the One from Bethlehem will "stand and shepherd in the strength of the LORD" (5:4), and Jesus called Himself the good Shepherd (John 10:11). Micah's picture of the nations coming to Zion to learn God's ways and of peace among the nations (4:1-5) looks ahead to Christ's reign when He returns. And Jesus quoted Micah 7:6 when He warned that following Him would divide families (Matthew 10:35-36).

Background of Micah

Author: The book opens, "The word of the LORD which came to Micah the Morashtite" (1:1). Micah's name is a short form of Micaiah, which means Who is like the LORD? He plays on his own name at the end of the book: "Who is a God like You?" (7:18). Moresheth, also called Moresheth-gath (1:14), was a town in the Shephelah, the low hills between Judah's mountains and the Philistine plain, about twenty-five miles southwest of Jerusalem. Jewish and Christian tradition have always held that Micah wrote the book. Many modern scholars think only chapters 1 to 3 come from Micah and that the hopeful sections and the mention of Babylon (4:10) were added much later. I take the book as Micah's own. The prophets regularly joined warning and hope, and the same God who named Cyrus through Isaiah (Isaiah 45:1) could name Babylon through Micah.

When he preached: Micah 1:1 names Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Using Thiele's dates, as in Hosea and Amos, Jotham reigned about 750 to 732 B.C., Ahaz about 735 to 715 B.C. and Hezekiah about 715 to 686 B.C. Micah's ministry most likely ran about 735 to 700 B.C. He prophesied the fall of Samaria before it happened in 722 B.C. (1:6), and Jeremiah tells us he preached in the days of Hezekiah (Jeremiah 26:18).

Setting: In Micah's day Assyria was on the march. Tiglath-pileser III took much of Israel about 732 B.C., Shalmaneser V and Sargon II took Samaria in 722 B.C., and in 701 B.C. Sennacherib invaded Judah, took forty-six of its walled cities, besieged Lachish in Micah's own region, and surrounded Jerusalem, until the angel of the LORD struck his army (2 Kings 18:13-19:36). At home, Ahaz had brought pagan altars into Jerusalem and even made his son pass through the fire (2 Kings 16:3-4, 10-16). Hezekiah later led a great reform (2 Kings 18:1-7). Through all of it, the rich in Jerusalem were taking the land of small farmers, and the courts, priests and prophets were for sale.

Who it was written to: To both kingdoms: "concerning Samaria and Jerusalem" (1:1). Most of the book speaks to Judah and its capital, Jerusalem, and especially to its leaders: "heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel" (3:1).

Micah and Isaiah: Micah 4:1-3 and Isaiah 2:2-4 are almost word for word the same. Either one prophet used the other's words, or both drew on a prophecy already known in Jerusalem. The two men lived and preached at the same time, so God may have given the same promise to both. It is no accident that a promise this great is written twice.

Micah's effect: About a hundred years after Micah, Jeremiah warned that the temple would be destroyed, and the priests and prophets wanted him put to death. Some of the elders of the land stood up and reminded the people that Micah had said the same thing, "Zion will be plowed as a field," and that King Hezekiah had not killed him but had feared the LORD and sought His favor, and the LORD had relented (Jeremiah 26:17-19). Micah's preaching helped bring the revival under Hezekiah.

Purpose: Micah was written to expose the sins of God's people, especially their leaders, to warn of the judgment that would fall on Samaria and Jerusalem, to show what the LORD really

requires, and to give hope: a remnant gathered, a King from Bethlehem, a kingdom of peace in the last days, and a God who "delights in steadfast love" (7:18).

Micah 1: The LORD Comes Against Samaria and Judah

Scripture

1:1-16 The word of the LORD which came to Micah the Morashtite in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, ***and*** Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. Hear, peoples, all of them; pay attention, earth, and what fills it; and let the Lord GOD be a witness against you, the Lord from His holy temple. For look, the LORD ***is*** going forth from His place, and He will come down and tread on the high places of ***the*** earth. And the mountains will melt under Him, and the valleys will split open, like wax before the fire, like waters poured down on a slope. All this ***is*** for the transgression of Jacob, and for the sins of the house of Israel. Who ***is*** the transgression of Jacob? ***Is it*** not Samaria? And who ***are*** the high places of Judah? ***Is it*** not Jerusalem? And I will make Samaria into a heap of ruins of the field, into plantings of a vineyard; and I will pour down her stones into the valley, and I will uncover her foundations. And all her carved images will be crushed, and all her hires will be burned with fire, and all her idols I will make a desolation; for from the hire of a prostitute she gathered ***them***, and to the hire of a prostitute they will return. On account of this I will lament and wail; I will go barefoot and naked; I will make a lament like the jackals, and a mourning like the daughters of ***the*** ostrich. For her wounds ***are*** incurable; for it has come to Judah; it has reached to the gate of my people, to Jerusalem. In Gath do not tell ***it***; do not weep at all; in Beth-le-aphrah roll yourself ***in*** dust. Pass on for yourselves, inhabitant of Shaphir, ***in*** nakedness ***and*** shame; the inhabitant of Zaanan has not come out; the lament of Beth-ezel will take from you its standing place. For the inhabitant of Maroth waits anxiously for good, for evil has come down from the LORD to the gate of Jerusalem. Harness the chariot to the steed, inhabitant of Lachish; she ***was*** the beginning of sin for the daughter of Zion, for in you were found the transgressions of Israel. Therefore you will give parting gifts to Moresheth-gath; the houses of Achzib ***will become*** a deception to the kings of Israel. Again I will bring the one who takes possession to you, inhabitant of Mareshah; to Adullam the glory of Israel will come. Make yourself bald and shear ***yourself*** for the sons of your delights; make your baldness large like the eagle, for they have gone into exile from you.

Preview

Micah's book opens like a courtroom. All the peoples of the earth are called to listen, because the Lord GOD is coming out of His holy temple as a witness. He comes down and treads on the high places, and the mountains melt like wax. Why? Because of the sins of Jacob and Israel. Samaria, the capital of the north, is the root of Israel's sin, and Jerusalem has become the root of Judah's. God will make Samaria a heap of ruins and smash its idols.

Then Micah weeps. He goes barefoot like a mourner, because the wound has spread to Judah and reached the gate of Jerusalem. In a lament full of wordplays, he names the towns of his own home region, one after another, as the enemy marches through them. The chapter ends with a call to mourn as for children taken into exile.

Study

1:1 *The word of the LORD which came to Micah the Morashtite in the days of Jotham, Ahaz,* ***and*** *Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.*

"The word of the LORD which came to Micah the Morashtite." Micah was from Moresheth, a town in the low hills of Judah southwest of Jerusalem (1:14). He prophesied "in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah," that is, about 735 to 700 B.C. "Which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem." Like Amos, Micah "saw" God's word. And it concerned both capitals, Samaria in the north and Jerusalem in the south.

Micah does not name any king of Israel. He was a man of Judah, and the northern kingdom's days were nearly over.

1:2 *Hear, peoples, all of them; pay attention, earth, and what fills it; and let the Lord GOD be a witness against you, the Lord from His holy temple.*

"Hear, peoples, all of them; pay attention, earth, and what fills it." Micah begins by calling the whole world to listen. What God is about to do to Israel and Judah is a lesson for every nation. "And let the Lord GOD be a witness against you, the Lord from His holy temple." God is not only the Judge. He is also the witness who has seen everything. The holy temple may be His temple in heaven, from which He comes down.

1:3-4 *For look, the LORD* ***is*** *going forth from His place, and He will come down and tread on the high places of* ***the*** *earth. And the mountains will melt under Him, and the valleys will split open, like wax before the fire, like waters poured down on a slope.*

"For look, the LORD is going forth from His place, and He will come down and tread on the high places of the earth." The LORD steps out of heaven and walks on the mountaintops (Amos 4:13). The high places were also the hilltop shrines where Israel and Judah worshiped idols. God was coming to tread on them.

"And the mountains will melt under Him, and the valleys will split open, like wax before the fire, like waters poured down on a slope." The mountains, the most solid things on earth, melt like candle wax. Valleys split open like water rushing down a hillside. This is the language of the LORD's coming in power, as at Sinai, when the mountain shook (Exodus 19:18). Nothing can stand before Him.

Will this happen in fact? The prophets use such pictures for God's judgments in history. But Zechariah says that when the Lord returns, His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives and it will split in two (Zechariah 14:4). I believe the final coming of the LORD will shake the earth in fact, not only in poetry.

1:5 *All this **is** for the transgression of Jacob, and for the sins of the house of Israel. Who **is** the transgression of Jacob? **Is it** not Samaria? And who **are** the high places of Judah? **Is it** not Jerusalem?*

"All this is for the transgression of Jacob, and for the sins of the house of Israel." Why would the LORD come down like this? Because of His people's sin. Jacob and Israel here mean all of God's people, north and south.

"Who is the transgression of Jacob? Is it not Samaria? And who are the high places of Judah? Is it not Jerusalem?" Micah points to the capitals. Samaria, where Israel's kings lived, was the center of the north's rebellion. And Jerusalem, the city of God's own temple, had become the center of Judah's idol worship. When Ahaz was king, he put a pagan altar in the temple courts and offered on the high places (2 Kings 16:4, 10-16). Sin spreads from the top down. When the leaders go wrong, the whole nation follows.

1:6-7 *And I will make Samaria into a heap of ruins of the field, into plantings of a vineyard; and I will pour down her stones into the valley, and I will uncover her foundations. And all her carved images will be crushed, and all her hires will be burned with fire, and all her idols I will make a desolation; for from the hire of a prostitute she gathered **them**, and to the hire of a prostitute they will return.*

"And I will make Samaria into a heap of ruins of the field, into plantings of a vineyard." Samaria stood on a hill, a proud, walled city. God would turn it into a field of rubble, the kind of place where farmers plant vines. "And I will pour down her stones into the valley, and I will uncover her foundations." The walls would be pushed down the hillside until the foundations lay bare. Assyria took Samaria in 722 B.C. Archaeologists digging there have since uncovered its foundations.

"And all her carved images will be crushed, and all her hires will be burned with fire." Her "hires" were the gifts brought to her idols. Micah calls them a prostitute's pay, just as Hosea did (Hosea 2:12; 9:1). Israel had been unfaithful to the LORD, her true husband, and had sold herself to false gods. "For from the hire of a prostitute she gathered them, and to the hire of a prostitute they will return." The gold and silver that decorated her idols would be carried off by Assyrian soldiers and given to their own gods.

1:8-9 *On account of this I will lament and wail; I will go barefoot and naked; I will make a lament like the jackals, and a mourning like the daughters of **the** ostrich. For her wounds **are** incurable; for it has come to Judah; it has reached to the gate of my people, to Jerusalem.*

"On account of this I will lament and wail; I will go barefoot and naked." Micah does not deliver this message coldly. He grieves. "Barefoot and naked" means stripped down to a loincloth, like a captive or a mourner. Isaiah did the same thing in these years, as a sign of the coming exile (Isaiah 20:2-4). "I will make a lament like the jackals, and a mourning like the daughters of the ostrich." Jackals howl at night, and ostriches make a mournful cry in the desert.

"For her wounds are incurable." Samaria's sin had gone too deep to heal. "For it has come to Judah; it has reached to the gate of my people, to Jerusalem." The disease had spread south. The same army that destroyed Samaria would come to the very gate of Jerusalem. And it did. In 701 B.C., Sennacherib of Assyria swept through Judah and surrounded Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:13-17).

God's people should never preach judgment without tears. Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). Do we grieve over sin, our own and our nation's, or only point at it?

1:10-12 *In Gath do not tell **it**; do not weep at all; in Beth-le-aphrah roll yourself **in** dust. Pass on for yourselves, inhabitant of Shaphir, **in** nakedness **and** shame; the inhabitant of Zaanan has not come out; the lament of Beth-ezel will take from you its standing place. For the inhabitant of Maroth waits anxiously for good, for evil has come down from the LORD to the gate of Jerusalem.*

Now Micah sings a lament over the towns of his own region, the low hills southwest of Jerusalem. This is the area Sennacherib's army marched through in 701 B.C. Almost every line plays on the sound or meaning of a town's name. English cannot show all of it, but the main ones can be explained.

"In Gath do not tell it." This echoes David's lament over Saul: "Do not tell it in Gath" (2 Samuel 1:20). Gath was a Philistine city. Do not let the enemy hear of Judah's shame and gloat. In Hebrew, "tell" sounds like "Gath."

"Do not weep at all; in Beth-le-aphrah roll yourself in dust." Beth-le-aphrah means house of dust. Its people would roll in the dust in grief.

"Pass on for yourselves, inhabitant of Shaphir, in nakedness and shame." Shaphir means beautiful or pleasant. The beautiful town would go into exile naked and ashamed.

"The inhabitant of Zaanan has not come out." Zaanan sounds like the word "come out." But its people would not dare to come out to fight. "The lament of Beth-ezel will take from you its standing place." Beth-ezel may mean house nearby. It would give no support.

"For the inhabitant of Maroth waits anxiously for good." Maroth means bitterness. They hoped for good and got bitterness. "For evil has come down from the LORD to the gate of Jerusalem." The disaster was not merely Assyria's doing. It came from the LORD.

1:13-16 *Harness the chariot to the steed, inhabitant of Lachish; she **was** the beginning of sin for the daughter of Zion, for in you were found the transgressions of Israel. Therefore you will give parting gifts to Moresheth-gath; the houses of Achzib **will become** a deception to the kings of Israel. Again I will bring the one who takes possession to you, inhabitant of Mareshah; to Adullam the glory of Israel will come. Make yourself bald and shear **yourself** for the sons of your delights; make your baldness large like the eagle, for they have gone into exile from you.*

"Harness the chariot to the steed, inhabitant of Lachish." Lachish was the strongest fortress city in Judah after Jerusalem. The word for steed, rekesh, sounds like Lachish. Hitch up your horses and run! Sennacherib besieged Lachish and took it, and he was so proud of it that he had the siege carved on the walls of his palace. "She was the beginning of sin for the daughter of Zion, for in you

were found the transgressions of Israel." Lachish may have been the place where the north's sins, perhaps its trust in horses and chariots or its idols, first came into Judah.

"Therefore you will give parting gifts to Moresheth-gath." This is Micah's own hometown. Moresheth sounds like the word for a bride promised in marriage. Parting gifts were given to a daughter when she left home to marry. Judah would have to say goodbye to Moresheth, as it was handed over to the enemy. "The houses of Achzib will become a deception to the kings of Israel." Achzib sounds like the word for deceptive, like a stream that dries up. Kings who trusted it for help would be disappointed.

"Again I will bring the one who takes possession to you, inhabitant of Mareshah." Mareshah sounds like possessor. Now a conqueror would possess it. "To Adullam the glory of Israel will come." Adullam was the cave where David hid when he was running from Saul (1 Samuel 22:1). Israel's glory, its leaders, would have to hide in caves again as David once did.

"Make yourself bald and shear yourself for the sons of your delights; make your baldness large like the eagle, for they have gone into exile from you." Shaving the head was a sign of mourning (Amos 8:10). The eagle here is probably the griffon vulture, whose head is bare. Judah would mourn for her children, the sons she delighted in, as they were carried away. Sennacherib boasted that he took more than two hundred thousand people from Judah. Later, Babylon would take Jerusalem's people too.

What does all this teach us? Sin has consequences, not just for individuals but for families, towns and nations. Micah watched his own hometown fall. And yet the God who sends judgment also weeps over it. He takes no pleasure in it (Ezekiel 33:11). That is why He warns first.

Summary

The word of the LORD came to Micah of Moresheth in the days of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. He called all peoples to hear, for the Lord GOD would be a witness against them from His holy temple. The LORD was coming down to tread on the high places, and the mountains would melt like wax, all because of the transgression of Jacob and the sins of Israel, which centered in Samaria and Jerusalem. God would make Samaria a heap of ruins, pour its stones into the valley and smash its idols, which had been gathered from a prostitute's pay. Micah lamented, going barefoot and naked, because Samaria's wound was incurable and had reached the gate of Jerusalem. He mourned over the towns of his home region with wordplays on their names, from Gath and Beth-le-aphrah to Lachish, Moresheth-gath and Adullam, and called Judah to shave its head in mourning for its children going into exile.

Study Questions

1. When did Micah prophesy, and about which two cities? (1:1)

2. Who is called to listen, and what is God's role in this courtroom? (1:2)

3. What happens when the LORD comes down? (1:3-4)

4. Why does Micah name Samaria and Jerusalem as the sin of Jacob and Judah? (1:5)

5. What would happen to Samaria, and when did it come true? (1:6-7)

6. How did Micah respond to the message he had to give? (1:8-9)

7. Pick two of the towns in verses 10 to 15. What do their names mean, and what would happen to them? (1:10-15)

8. Sin spread from the capitals to the whole nation. Where do you have influence over others? How does your example affect them?

9. Micah wept as he preached. Do you grieve over sin, your own and your nation's, or mostly point at it?

10. Micah watched trouble come to his own hometown. How can you pray for your own town or city this week?

Micah 2: False Prophets and the Promise of a Shepherd

Scripture

2:1-13 Woe ***to*** those who plan wickedness and do evil on their beds! In the light of the morning they do it, for ***it*** is in the power of their hand. And they covet fields and seize ***them***, and houses, and take ***them***; and they oppress a man and his house, and a man and his inheritance. Therefore thus says the LORD: "Look, I ***am*** planning against this family an evil from which you will not remove your necks, and you will not walk haughtily, for it ***will be*** an evil time. In that day one will lift up a saying against you, and wail a wailing, 'It is done!' He will say, 'We are utterly devastated! He exchanges the portion of my people; how he removes ***it*** from me! To an apostate he apportions our fields.' Therefore you will not have one who casts a measuring line by lot in the assembly of the LORD. 'Do not drip ***words***,' they drip ***words***. 'They must not drip ***words*** about these things; reproaches will not be turned back.' ***Is it*** said, house of Jacob, 'Is the Spirit of the LORD short? Or ***are*** these His deeds?' Do not My words do good with the one who walks uprightly? And yesterday My people rose up as an enemy; from in front of the garment you strip off the robe from those who pass by securely, those returning from war. The women of My people you drive out from the house of her delights; from upon her children you take away My glory forever. Arise and go, for this ***is*** not the resting place; because it has become unclean, it will destroy, and the destruction ***will be*** grievous. If a man walking ***in*** wind and falsehood lies, ***saying***, 'I will drip ***words*** to you of wine and of strong drink,' and he will be the one who drips ***words*** for this people. I will surely gather Jacob, all of you; I will surely assemble the remnant of Israel; together I will set it like sheep of a fold, like a flock in the midst of its pasture; they will make a commotion because of mankind. The one who breaks through has gone up before them; they have broken through, and they have passed through the gate, and they have gone out by it; and their king has passed on before them, and the LORD ***is*** at their head."

Preview

Micah turns to the powerful men of Judah who lie awake at night planning how to take other people's fields and houses, and in the morning go and do it, because they can. God says He is planning too: a disaster they cannot slip out of. The land they stole will be taken from them, and they will have no share when the land is divided in the assembly of the LORD.

They do not want to hear it. "Do not drip words," they tell Micah (2:6). In other words, stop preaching. They would rather have a prophet who preaches about wine and strong drink. But the chapter ends with a sudden promise. God will gather the remnant of Israel like sheep in a fold. One who breaks through will go up before them, their King will pass on before them, and the LORD will be at their head.

Study

2:1 *Woe **to** those who plan wickedness and do evil on their beds! In the light of the morning they do it, for **it** is in the power of their hand.*

"Woe to those who plan wickedness and do evil on their beds!" "Woe" is a cry of grief over someone headed for judgment. These men lay in bed at night, not sleeping, but scheming. The bed should be a place of rest and of meditating on God (Psalm 4:4; 63:6). For them it was a place to plan sin.

"In the light of the morning they do it, for it is in the power of their hand." As soon as it was light, they carried out their plans. Why? Because they could. They had the money, the lawyers and the judges. Having the power to do something does not make it right.

2:2 *And they covet fields and seize **them**, and houses, and take **them**; and they oppress a man and his house, and a man and his inheritance.*

"And they covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them." The tenth commandment says, "You shall not covet the house of your neighbor" (Exodus 20:17). Coveting starts in the heart, but it rarely stays there. These men coveted, and then they seized.

"And they oppress a man and his house, and a man and his inheritance." In Israel, land was more than property. God had given each family its share of the land, its inheritance, and it was to stay in that family forever (Leviticus 25:23; Numbers 36:7). When Ahab wanted Naboth's vineyard, Naboth said he would not give up "the inheritance of my fathers" (1 Kings 21:3). To take a family's land was to take its future. Isaiah, in the same years, cried woe on those who "make house touch house," adding field to field until there was no room left (Isaiah 5:8).

2:3 *Therefore thus says the LORD: "Look, I **am** planning against this family an evil from which you will not remove your necks, and you will not walk haughtily, for it **will be** an evil time.*

"Therefore thus says the LORD: Look, I am planning against this family an evil." They planned evil on their beds. God was planning too. The word "evil" here means disaster, judgment. "From which you will not remove your necks." The picture is of a yoke on an ox's neck. They would not be able to shake it off. "And you will not walk haughtily, for it will be an evil time." The men who strutted about would be bent low under a conqueror's yoke.

2:4-5 *In that day one will lift up a saying against you, and wail a wailing, 'It is done!' He will say, 'We are utterly devastated! He exchanges the portion of my people; how he removes **it** from me! To an apostate he apportions our fields.' Therefore you will not have one who casts a measuring line by lot in the assembly of the LORD.*

"In that day one will lift up a saying against you, and wail a wailing." A saying here is a mocking song. People would mock them by singing their own lament back to them. "We are utterly devastated! He exchanges the portion of my people; how he removes it from me! To an apostate he apportions our fields." The rich would cry that their fields were being taken and given to a

foreigner, an "apostate," one who did not belong to the LORD. That is exactly what they had done to the poor. Now the conqueror would do it to them.

"Therefore you will not have one who casts a measuring line by lot in the assembly of the LORD." When Joshua divided the land, it was measured out by line and assigned by lot (Joshua 14:1-2; 18:8-10). Micah says that when God's people gather to divide the land again, these men and their families will have no share. Those who stole an inheritance will lose their own.

2:6 *'Do not drip **words**,' they drip **words**. 'They must not drip **words** about these things; reproaches will not be turned back.'*

"Do not drip words," they drip words. To "drip" words is a Hebrew way of speaking of preaching, words falling like rain (Amos 7:16). The people, or their false prophets, tell Micah and the true prophets to stop preaching. "They must not drip words about these things; reproaches will not be turned back." They meant, Stop talking about judgment. Disgrace will never come on us.

People have always wanted preachers who do not mention sin. But a doctor who will not tell you about the disease cannot cure you.

2:7 ***Is it*** *said, house of Jacob, 'Is the Spirit of the LORD short? Or **are** these His deeds?' Do not My words do good with the one who walks uprightly?*

"Is it said, house of Jacob." What was being said? "Is the Spirit of the LORD short?" The people asked, Has God's patience run out? Is this really His doing? They were sure that a God of love would never judge them. "Or are these His deeds?" Would God really do such things?

God answers with His own question. "Do not My words do good with the one who walks uprightly?" God's word is not against everyone. It is good news to those who walk with Him. The only people who find God's word frightening are those who refuse to obey it.

2:8-9 *And yesterday My people rose up as an enemy; from in front of the garment you strip off the robe from those who pass by securely, those returning from war. The women of My people you drive out from the house of her delights; from upon her children you take away My glory forever.*

"And yesterday My people rose up as an enemy." God's own people had become an enemy, not of foreigners, but of their own neighbors. "From in front of the garment you strip off the robe from those who pass by securely, those returning from war." They robbed peaceful travelers of their cloaks, even men coming home from fighting for their country. The Law said a poor man's cloak was to be returned before night (Exodus 22:26-27). These men took it off his back.

"The women of My people you drive out from the house of her delights." They threw widows out of their homes. "From upon her children you take away My glory forever." The children lost their homes and their place in the land. God calls the land and the blessing that came with it "My glory." These men were robbing children of God's gift to them.

God is always the defender of widows and orphans (Deuteronomy 10:18; James 1:27). When His people harm them, He takes it personally.

2:10 *Arise and go, for this **is** not the resting place; because it has become unclean, it will destroy, and the destruction **will be** grievous.*

"Arise and go, for this is not the resting place." God turns the words of the oppressors back on them. They drove out the women and children. Now God tells them, Get up and go. The land was meant to be Israel's rest (Deuteronomy 12:9), but it would not be their rest any longer. "Because it has become unclean, it will destroy, and the destruction will be grievous." Their sin had defiled the land, and the land itself would throw them out (Leviticus 18:28).

For us there is a word here too. This world is not our final resting place (Hebrews 4:9; 13:14). We are travelers headed for a better country.

2:11 *If a man walking **in** wind and falsehood lies, **saying**, 'I will drip **words** to you of wine and of strong drink,' and he will be the one who drips **words** for this people.*

"If a man walking in wind and falsehood lies." What lie? "I will drip words to you of wine and of strong drink." Then "he will be the one who drips words for this people." This is the kind of preacher the people wanted: a man full of wind, telling lies, promising good times, plenty of wine and strong drink. He would be the perfect prophet for them.

Things have not changed. Paul warned Timothy of a time when people "will heap up teachers for themselves, being tickled in the hearing" (2 Timothy 4:3). Do we want a preacher who tells us the truth, or one who makes us feel good?

2:12 *I will surely gather Jacob, all of you; I will surely assemble the remnant of Israel; together I will set it like sheep of a fold, like a flock in the midst of its pasture; they will make a commotion because of mankind.*

"I will surely gather Jacob, all of you; I will surely assemble the remnant of Israel."

After all the judgment, here is a sudden promise. Some teachers think these are the words of the false prophets, promising easy safety. But in context, and in light of the rest of Micah (4:6-7; 5:7-8; 7:18-20), most teachers take this as God's own promise, and this study reads it that way. Micah often moves from judgment to hope without warning.

A remnant is the part that is left after judgment, the faithful few God keeps for Himself. God will gather them. "Together I will set it like sheep of a fold, like a flock in the midst of its pasture." The scattered sheep will be brought back into one fold. "They will make a commotion because of mankind." The fold will be so full of people that it will be noisy with them.

When will this happen? There was a first fulfillment when God brought the Jews back from Babylon. But "all of you," all Jacob, gathered together and led by their King, points to the future regathering of Israel when Christ returns (Isaiah 11:11-12; Ezekiel 37:21-22).

2:13 *The one who breaks through has gone up before them; they have broken through, and they have passed through the gate, and they have gone out by it; and their king has passed on before them, and the LORD* ***is*** *at their head."*

"The one who breaks through has gone up before them." Picture a flock of sheep penned in a fold. In the morning, someone breaks open a gap in the stone wall, and the sheep pour out after him. "They have broken through, and they have passed through the gate, and they have gone out by it."

Who is the One who breaks through? The verse tells us: "and their king has passed on before them, and the LORD is at their head." The Breaker, the King and the LORD go before the flock. Many Jewish and Christian teachers have seen the Messiah here, and this study reads it that way: Jesus Christ, the King who is also the LORD. He goes before His people. He breaks open the way that no one else could open, through sin, through death, out of every prison. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11), and that when He brings out His own sheep, "he goes before them" (John 10:4).

What does this mean for us? If you belong to Christ, you have a Shepherd who has gone ahead of you. Whatever wall stands in front of you, He has already broken through.

Summary

Micah pronounced woe on those who planned evil on their beds and carried it out in the morning because they had the power, coveting and seizing fields and houses and taking families' inheritances. God was planning a disaster for them that they could not escape. Their fields would be given to a foreigner, and they would have no share when the land was divided in the assembly of the LORD. They told the prophets to stop preaching and insisted that God would never do such things, but God's words do good to the upright. His people had robbed travelers of their cloaks and driven widows and children from their homes, so they themselves would be driven out, for the land was no longer their rest. They wanted a prophet who would preach about wine and strong drink. Yet God promised to gather all Jacob and the remnant of Israel like sheep in a fold. The one who breaks through would go up before them, their King would pass on before them, and the LORD would be at their head.

Study Questions

1. What were the powerful men doing on their beds and in the morning? (2:1-2)

2. Why was taking a family's land so serious in Israel? (2:2; 1 Kings 21:3)

3. What was God planning, and how does it match their sin? (2:3-5)

4. What did the people tell the prophets, and what kind of prophet did they want? (2:6, 11)

5. Who do God's words do good to? (2:7)

6. Who were the victims in verses 8 and 9? (2:8-9)

7. What does God promise in verses 12 and 13? Who goes before the flock? (2:12-13)

8. Have you ever wanted something that belonged to someone else so much that it shaped your plans? What does God say about coveting? (Exodus 20:17)

9. Do you want teaching that tells you the truth, even when it hurts? How do you respond when God's Word points out sin in your life?

10. Jesus goes before His sheep. What wall stands in front of you right now, and how can you trust Him to break through it?

Micah 3: Corrupt Leaders and Zion Plowed Like a Field

Scripture

3:1-12 And I said, "Hear, please, heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel: ***Is it*** not for you to know justice? ***You*** who hate good and love evil, who tear off their skin from upon them and their flesh from upon their bones, and who have eaten the flesh of my people, and have stripped their skin from upon them, and have broken their bones in pieces, and have chopped ***them*** up as in the pot, and like flesh in the midst of a caldron. Then they will cry out to the LORD, and He will not answer them; and He will hide His face from them at that time, because they have made their deeds evil." Thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who lead My people astray, who bite with their teeth and proclaim, "Peace," and whoever does not put ***anything*** into their mouth, they consecrate war against him: "Therefore ***it will be*** night to you, without vision, and it will grow dark to you, without divining; and the sun will go down on the prophets, and the day will be dark over them. And the seers will be ashamed, and the diviners will be abashed, and they will cover over ***their*** mustache, all of them, for there is no answer of God." But as for me, I am full of power with the Spirit of the LORD, and ***of*** justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin. Hear this, please, heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and make crooked all that is straight, who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with injustice. Her heads judge for a bribe, and her priests teach for a price, and her prophets divine for silver; and they lean on the LORD, saying, "***Is*** not the LORD in our midst? Evil will not come upon us." Therefore, on account of you, Zion will be plowed ***as*** a field, and Jerusalem will become heaps of ruins, and the mountain of the house ***will become*** high places of a forest.

Preview

Micah speaks to the leaders of God's people in three short messages. First the rulers: they should have known justice, but they hate good and love evil, and they treat the people like meat for the pot. When trouble comes, they will cry to the LORD, and He will not answer. Then the prophets: they cry "Peace" to anyone who feeds them and declare war on anyone who does not. Their light will go out, and God will give them no answer. Micah, by contrast, is full of power by the Spirit of the LORD to tell Israel its sin.

Last, Micah gathers all the leaders together, rulers, priests and prophets, who build Jerusalem with blood and sell justice, teaching and prophecy for money, and still say, "Is not the LORD in our midst?" Because of them, Zion will be plowed like a field and the temple hill will become a wooded hilltop. A century later, these words saved Jeremiah's life.

Study

3:1 *And I said, "Hear, please, heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel:* ***Is it*** *not for you to know justice?*

"And I said, Hear, please, heads of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel." The heads and rulers were the judges, elders and officials, the people responsible for justice. Jacob and Israel here mean

Judah, God's people, who carried the old names. "Is it not for you to know justice?" Of all people, they should have known what was right. That was their job. Knowing justice means more than knowing the law. It means loving what is right and doing it.

3:2-3 ***You*** *who hate good and love evil, who tear off their skin from upon them and their flesh from upon their bones, and who have eaten the flesh of my people, and have stripped their skin from upon them, and have broken their bones in pieces, and have chopped* ***them*** *up as in the pot, and like flesh in the midst of a caldron.*

"You who hate good and love evil." This is the exact opposite of what Amos called for: "Hate evil and love good" (Amos 5:15). These leaders had turned God's order upside down.

"Who tear off their skin from upon them and their flesh from upon their bones." Micah uses the shocking picture of a butcher. "And who have eaten the flesh of my people, and have stripped their skin from upon them, and have broken their bones in pieces, and have chopped them up as in the pot." The leaders were not cannibals. Micah is saying that they treated the people like animals to be butchered and eaten. They stripped them of land, money and dignity, and fed themselves on them. Notice that Micah calls them "my people." He stood with the poor.

God gives leaders, in government, at work, in the church and in the home, to protect those under them, not to feed on them. Ezekiel spoke of shepherds who ate the fat and clothed themselves with the wool but did not feed the flock (Ezekiel 34:2-3). Jesus is the opposite: the good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11).

3:4 *Then they will cry out to the LORD, and He will not answer them; and He will hide His face from them at that time, because they have made their deeds evil."*

"Then they will cry out to the LORD, and He will not answer them." When disaster comes, these leaders will finally pray. But God will not answer. "And He will hide His face from them at that time, because they have made their deeds evil." They would not hear the cries of the poor, so God would not hear their cries. Proverbs says, "He who shuts his ear from the cry of the poor, he also will call out and will not be answered" (Proverbs 21:13).

Does God refuse to hear anyone who calls on Him? No. He hears every sincere cry of repentance (Joel 2:32). But these men wanted rescue, not repentance. They wanted God to fix their trouble while they went on in their sin.

3:5 *Thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who lead My people astray, who bite with their teeth and proclaim, "Peace," and whoever does not put* ***anything*** *into their mouth, they consecrate war against him:*

"Thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who lead My people astray." Now God turns to the false prophets. "Who bite with their teeth and proclaim, Peace." As long as they had something to chew on, they preached peace and prosperity. "And whoever does not put anything into their mouth, they consecrate war against him." If you did not pay, they declared a holy war on you, pronouncing God's judgment. Their message depended on the fee. They were selling God's word.

3:6-7 *"Therefore **it will be** night to you, without vision, and it will grow dark to you, without divining; and the sun will go down on the prophets, and the day will be dark over them. And the seers will be ashamed, and the diviners will be abashed, and they will cover over **their** mustache, all of them, for there is no answer of God."*

"Therefore it will be night to you, without vision, and it will grow dark to you, without divining." The false prophets claimed to see visions. God says their visions will stop, and darkness will fall on them. "And the sun will go down on the prophets, and the day will be dark over them." Their day was over.

"And the seers will be ashamed, and the diviners will be abashed." Divining was a pagan practice, trying to learn the future by signs and omens, which the Law forbade (Deuteronomy 18:10-12). That Micah calls them diviners shows how far these prophets had fallen. "And they will cover over their mustache, all of them." Covering the mouth and beard was a sign of shame and mourning (Leviticus 13:45). "For there is no answer of God." They would have nothing to say, because God would not speak to them.

3:8 *But as for me, I am full of power with the Spirit of the LORD, and **of** justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin.*

"But as for me, I am full of power with the Spirit of the LORD, and of justice and might." Here Micah stands in contrast to the false prophets. They were full of their own appetites. Micah was full of the Spirit of the LORD. The Holy Spirit gave him power to speak, justice, a sense of what is right, and might, the courage to say it.

"To declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin." That is what the Spirit filled Micah to do. Not to tickle ears, not to say peace when there was no peace, but to tell God's people the truth about their sin. A true prophet tells people what they need to hear, not what they want to hear.

Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit came, He would "convict the world concerning sin and concerning righteousness and concerning judgment" (John 16:8). The same Spirit gives believers courage to speak the truth in love today (Acts 1:8; Ephesians 4:15).

3:9-10 *Hear this, please, heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and make crooked all that is straight, who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with injustice.*

"Hear this, please, heads of the house of Jacob and rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and make crooked all that is straight." The leaders hated justice. They took what was straight and bent it.

"Who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with injustice." In Micah's day there was building going on in Jerusalem. Kings and the wealthy built fine houses and public works. But they paid for it with blood and injustice, by cheating workers, seizing land and condemning the innocent. Jeremiah would later say the same of a king who built his house without righteousness and made his neighbor work for nothing (Jeremiah 22:13). Habakkuk cried woe on the one "who builds a city with blood" (Habakkuk 2:12).

3:11 *Her heads judge for a bribe, and her priests teach for a price, and her prophets divine for silver; and they lean on the LORD, saying, "**Is** not the LORD in our midst? Evil will not come upon us."*

Now Micah names all three groups of leaders at once.

"Her heads judge for a bribe." The judges sold their verdicts. The Law said, "you shall not take a bribe, for the bribe blinds the eyes" (Deuteronomy 16:19).

"And her priests teach for a price." The priests were supposed to teach God's law to the people freely (Malachi 2:7). They taught for whoever paid.

"And her prophets divine for silver." The prophets sold their visions.

"And they lean on the LORD, saying, Is not the LORD in our midst? Evil will not come upon us." This is the worst part. All of them were religious. They leaned on the LORD. They believed that because the temple was in Jerusalem, God would never let the city fall. They thought God was on their side no matter how they lived. Jeremiah heard the same false hope a century later: "The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD" (Jeremiah 7:4).

It is possible to be very religious and very wrong. God's presence is a blessing to those who walk with Him. It is no protection for those who use His name to cover their sin.

3:12 *Therefore, on account of you, Zion will be plowed **as** a field, and Jerusalem will become heaps of ruins, and the mountain of the house **will become** high places of a forest.*

"Therefore, on account of you, Zion will be plowed as a field."

"On account of you." Micah lays the blame squarely on the leaders. Their sin would bring down the whole city.

"Zion will be plowed as a field." Mount Zion, the hill where Jerusalem stood, would be so completely destroyed that farmers could plow it. "And Jerusalem will become heaps of ruins." The city would be rubble, as Samaria had become (1:6). "And the mountain of the house will become high places of a forest." The mountain of the house is the temple mount. The holy hill where God's temple stood would become an overgrown hilltop, covered with brush and trees.

This was a shocking word. No prophet before Micah had said so plainly that Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed. Everyone believed it could never happen.

Did it come true? Yes. In 586 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar burned the temple and broke down the walls of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:8-10). Lamentations mourns over Mount Zion lying desolate, with foxes prowling on it (Lamentations 5:18). And after the Romans destroyed the city again in A.D. 70, parts of the old city were left in ruins for many years.

But this verse has a second story. About a hundred years after Micah, Jeremiah stood in the temple and said that God would make it like Shiloh, destroyed, if the people did not repent. The priests and prophets wanted to kill him. Then some of the elders stood up and said, "Micah the Morashtite was prophesying in the days of Hezekiah the king of Judah," and they quoted this very

verse (Jeremiah 26:18). They went on: "Did Hezekiah the king of Judah and all Judah indeed put him to death? Did he not fear the LORD and entreat the face of the LORD, and the LORD relented concerning the calamity which He had spoken against them?" (Jeremiah 26:19). And Jeremiah's life was spared.

That tells us two things. First, Micah's preaching worked. King Hezekiah heard it, repented, and led Judah back to God (2 Kings 18:1-6), and God held back the disaster for more than a century. Second, God's warnings are not fate. When His people turn, He relents, just as He did with Nineveh (Jonah 3:10). But when they turn back to their sin, as Judah did under Manasseh, the warning stands. In the end, Zion was plowed as a field.

And then, right after this verse, Micah turns to hope. The very mountain that would become a wooded hilltop will one day be raised above all the mountains (4:1). God does not end with ruin.

Summary

Micah called on the heads and rulers of Jacob, who should have known justice, but hated good, loved evil and fed on the people like butchers. When disaster came they would cry to the LORD, and He would hide His face. The false prophets cried "Peace" for those who fed them and declared war on those who did not, so night would fall on them with no vision and no answer from God. But Micah was full of power by the Spirit of the LORD, and of justice and might, to declare to Israel its sin. Jerusalem's leaders built Zion with blood, judged for bribes, taught for a price and prophesied for silver, and still leaned on the LORD, saying, "Is not the LORD in our midst?" So on account of them Zion would be plowed as a field, Jerusalem would become heaps of ruins, and the temple mount a wooded height. A century later, the elders of Judah remembered these words, and that Hezekiah had repented, and spared Jeremiah's life.

Study Questions

1. Who does Micah speak to first, and what should they have known? (3:1)

2. What picture does Micah use for how the leaders treated the people? (3:2-3)

3. Why would God not answer the leaders when they cried out? (3:4)

4. How did the false prophets decide what to preach? (3:5)

5. How was Micah different from the false prophets? (3:8)

6. Name the three groups of leaders in verse 11 and what each one did for money. What did they all believe? (3:11)

7. What would happen to Zion, and how did Jeremiah 26:18-19 show that Micah's words made a difference? (3:12)

8. If you have any authority, at work, at church or at home, are you using it to protect those under you or to benefit yourself?

9. Micah was filled with the Spirit to tell the truth about sin. How can you speak the truth in love to someone who needs it? (Ephesians 4:15)

10. The leaders thought God's presence made them safe no matter how they lived. In what ways can church members fall into the same false confidence?

Micah 4: The Mountain of the LORD in the Last Days

Scripture

4:1-8 And it will be at the end of the days ***that*** the mountain of the house of the LORD will be established at the head of the mountains, and it will be lifted up above the hills; and peoples will stream to it. And many nations will 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 let Him teach us from His ways, and let us walk in His paths." For from Zion law will go out, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And He will judge between many peoples, and He will decide for mighty nations even far away; and they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning knives. Nation will not lift up a sword against nation, and they will not learn warfare again. And they will dwell, each man under his vine and under his fig tree, and there will be none who terrifies; for the mouth of the LORD of armies has spoken. For all the peoples walk, each man in the name of his god; and we will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever. In that day, declares the LORD, I will gather the limping one, and the banished one I will assemble, and ***the one*** whom I have harmed. And I will make the limping one into a remnant, and the one cast far off into a mighty nation; and the LORD will reign over them in the mountain of Zion from now and until forever. And you, O tower of the flock (Migdal-Eder), hill of the daughter of Zion, to you it will come; and the former dominion will come, a kingdom for the daughter of Jerusalem.

4:9-13 Now why do you shout a shout? Is there no king in you? Or has your counselor perished, that anguish has taken hold of you like ***a woman*** giving birth? Writhe in pain and burst forth, O daughter of Zion, like ***a woman*** giving birth; for now you will go out from ***the*** town, and you will dwell in the open country, and you will go to Babylon. There you will be delivered; there the LORD will redeem you from the hand of your enemies. And now many nations have been gathered against you, who are saying, "Let her be polluted, and let our eyes look on Zion." And they do not know the thoughts of the LORD, and they do not understand His counsel; for He has gathered them like cut grain to the threshing floor. Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion, for I will make your horn iron, and I will make your hooves bronze; and you will crush many peoples. And I will devote their unjust gain to the LORD, and their wealth to the Lord of all the earth.

Preview

Right after the word that Zion will be plowed like a field, Micah sees the same mountain lifted high. "At the end of the days" the mountain of the LORD's house will be raised above all mountains, and the nations will stream to it to learn God's ways. The LORD will judge between the nations, and they will beat their swords into plowshares and never learn war again. Every man will sit under his own vine and fig tree, and no one will make him afraid. Isaiah saw the same vision in almost the same words.

In that day God will gather the lame and the scattered and make them a strong nation, and the LORD will reign over them in Zion forever. But first, Zion must go through labor pains. She will go out from the city and go to Babylon, and there the LORD will redeem her. Many nations will

gather against her, not knowing that God has gathered them like sheaves for threshing. Then the daughter of Zion will rise and thresh them.

Study

4:1 *And it will be at the end of the days **that** the mountain of the house of the LORD will be established at the head of the mountains, and it will be lifted up above the hills; and peoples will stream to it.*

"And it will be at the end of the days." This phrase points to the last days, the time when God brings history to its goal. In the prophets it often means the days of the Messiah's kingdom (Hosea 3:5; Isaiah 2:2).

"That the mountain of the house of the LORD will be established at the head of the mountains." The mountain of the house is the temple mount in Jerusalem, the very hill Micah said would become a wooded height (3:12). In the last days, God will raise it up to be first among all mountains. Will it be raised up physically? Zechariah says that when the Lord returns, the land around Jerusalem will be changed and Jerusalem will be lifted up (Zechariah 14:4, 10). It may be both: lifted up in honor above every other place of worship, and lifted up in fact.

"And it will be lifted up above the hills; and peoples will stream to it." Rivers flow down. Here the peoples flow up. Something about this mountain will draw them like a river running uphill. That something is the presence of the LORD.

4:2 *And many nations will 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 let Him teach us from His ways, and let us walk in His paths." For from Zion law will go out, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*

"And many nations will come and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD and to the house of the God of Jacob." The nations are no longer coming to attack Jerusalem (4:11). They are coming to worship. And they encourage one another to come.

"And let Him teach us from His ways, and let us walk in His paths." They come to learn, and they come to obey. This is what God always wanted for the nations (Genesis 12:3).

"For from Zion law will go out, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem." Law here means teaching, God's instruction. The King will rule the world from Jerusalem, and His word will go out to every nation.

4:3 *And He will judge between many peoples, and He will decide for mighty nations even far away; and they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning knives. Nation will not lift up a sword against nation, and they will not learn warfare again.*

"And He will judge between many peoples, and He will decide for mighty nations even far away." The LORD Himself will settle the disputes between nations. No more endless wars over land, power or old grudges. The King's word will be final, and it will be just.

"And they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning knives." A plowshare is the blade of a plow. A pruning knife is a hooked blade for trimming vines. Weapons of war will be hammered into tools for farming. Joel saw the opposite before the end, when the nations beat plowshares into swords for the last battle (Joel 3:10). Micah sees what comes after it.

"Nation will not lift up a sword against nation, and they will not learn warfare again." There will be no more military schools, no more training for war. Peace will be the normal state of the world.

Words like these, from Isaiah 2:4, are carved on a wall in a small park across the street from the United Nations in New York. But no human organization can bring this about. The nations beat their swords into plowshares only after they come to the mountain of the LORD and He judges between them. Peace on earth comes when the Prince of Peace reigns (Isaiah 9:6-7).

4:4 *And they will dwell, each man under his vine and under his fig tree, and there will be none who terrifies; for the mouth of the LORD of armies has spoken.*

"And they will dwell, each man under his vine and under his fig tree, and there will be none who terrifies." This was a picture of peace and plenty in Israel. In Solomon's best days, Judah and Israel "dwelt in security, each man under his vine and under his fig tree" (1 Kings 4:25). Every family will have its own land, food and shade, and no one will take them away. That is the opposite of what the rich were doing in Micah's day (2:2). In the kingdom, the small farmer will be safe.

"For the mouth of the LORD of armies has spoken." This is not a dream. God has said it.

4:5 *For all the peoples walk, each man in the name of his god; and we will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever.*

"For all the peoples walk, each man in the name of his god; and we will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever." In Micah's day the nations around them each followed their own gods. Micah answers for God's faithful people: whatever others do, we will walk with the LORD. The remnant does not wait for the kingdom to come before they begin to live by it. They walk in His name now.

When will verses 1 to 5 come true? I want to explain how I understand these verses, and how others read them.

I believe Micah 4:1-5 describes the thousand-year reign of Jesus Christ on the earth, after He returns at the end of the Tribulation (Revelation 19:11-16; 20:1-6). Jerusalem will be the capital of the world, and Christ will rule the nations from there. The nations will come to worship, there will be real peace among nations, and Israel will live safely in her land. This has never happened yet. The world is still full of war. So I take these promises to be still ahead. God will keep His word to Israel, and through Israel's King He will bless the nations.

Isaiah 2:2-4 gives the same vision almost word for word. Both prophets lived in the same years. Either one used the other's words, or God gave the same message to both. Either way, it is doubly sure.

Other Bible teachers read these verses differently. Many who hold amillennial or postmillennial views believe they describe the church age, as people from every nation come to Christ and learn His ways through the gospel going out from Jerusalem (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). There is a truth in that. The gospel did go out from Jerusalem, and the nations are coming to Christ. But I do not believe the church replaces Israel, and I do not see nations giving up war in this age. I believe the full and literal fulfillment comes when the King Himself reigns from Zion.

4:6-7 *In that day, declares the LORD, I will gather the limping one, and the banished one I will assemble, and* ***the one*** *whom I have harmed. And I will make the limping one into a remnant, and the one cast far off into a mighty nation; and the LORD will reign over them in the mountain of Zion from now and until forever.*

"In that day, declares the LORD, I will gather the limping one, and the banished one I will assemble, and the one whom I have harmed." God pictures His people as a flock of sheep, some lame, some driven off, some hurt. The one "whom I have harmed" is Israel, whom God Himself had judged. The same God who scattered them will gather them. He does not leave the weak behind.

"And I will make the limping one into a remnant, and the one cast far off into a mighty nation." The weakest will become the core of a strong nation. That is how God works. He chooses the weak to shame the strong (1 Corinthians 1:27).

"And the LORD will reign over them in the mountain of Zion from now and until forever." The LORD Himself will be King. His kingdom will begin in that day and never end. The angel told Mary that her Son would reign over the house of Jacob, "and of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:33).

4:8 *And you, O tower of the flock (Migdal-Eder), hill of the daughter of Zion, to you it will come; and the former dominion will come, a kingdom for the daughter of Jerusalem.*

Verse 8 speaks to the "tower of the flock" (in Hebrew, Migdal-Eder). It was a watchtower near Bethlehem, where Jacob once camped after Rachel died (Genesis 35:19-21). Shepherds watched their flocks from such towers. Here it stands for Jerusalem, the watchtower over God's flock. "Hill of the daughter of Zion, to you it will come; and the former dominion will come, a kingdom for the daughter of Jerusalem." The kingdom of David and Solomon, the "former dominion," will come back to Jerusalem.

It is worth noticing that Micah ties this hope to a shepherd's tower near Bethlehem. In the next chapter he will name Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Ruler. Some Jewish tradition held that the Messiah would be revealed at the tower of the flock. And it was near Bethlehem that shepherds keeping watch over their flock at night heard that the Christ was born (Luke 2:8-11).

4:9-10 *Now why do you shout a shout? Is there no king in you? Or has your counselor perished, that anguish has taken hold of you like **a woman** giving birth? Writhe in pain and burst forth, O daughter of Zion, like **a woman** giving birth; for now you will go out from **the** town, and you will dwell in the open country, and you will go to Babylon. There you will be delivered; there the LORD will redeem you from the hand of your enemies.*

"Now why do you shout a shout? Is there no king in you? Or has your counselor perished, that anguish has taken hold of you like a woman giving birth?" Micah jumps back from the future to the near future. Jerusalem cries out in pain. Her king cannot help her. The pains are like labor pains.

"Writhe in pain and burst forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman giving birth." Labor pains are real pain, but they are not pointless. They lead to new life. Zion's suffering will lead to her new birth.

"For now you will go out from the town, and you will dwell in the open country, and you will go to Babylon." This is a remarkable prophecy. In Micah's day Assyria was the great power, and Babylon was a lesser city that sometimes rebelled against it. Yet Micah says Jerusalem's people will be carried off to Babylon. More than a hundred years later, in 586 B.C., that is exactly what happened (2 Kings 25:11).

"There you will be delivered; there the LORD will redeem you from the hand of your enemies." To redeem is to buy back, to set free by paying a price. In Babylon, of all places, God would rescue them. In 538 B.C. Cyrus of Persia, who had conquered Babylon, allowed the Jews to go home (Ezra 1:1-4). God named both the place of exile and the place of rescue long before either happened.

4:11-13 *And now many nations have been gathered against you, who are saying, "Let her be polluted, and let our eyes look on Zion." And they do not know the thoughts of the LORD, and they do not understand His counsel; for He has gathered them like cut grain to the threshing floor. Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion, for I will make your horn iron, and I will make your hooves bronze; and you will crush many peoples. And I will devote their unjust gain to the LORD, and their wealth to the Lord of all the earth.*

"And now many nations have been gathered against you." Again Micah looks at a time of attack. "Who are saying, Let her be polluted, and let our eyes look on Zion." The nations want to defile Jerusalem and gloat over her fall, as Edom did (Obadiah 12).

"And they do not know the thoughts of the LORD, and they do not understand His counsel; for He has gathered them like cut grain to the threshing floor." The nations think they have gathered to destroy Zion. In fact God has gathered them, like sheaves brought to the threshing floor, to be judged.

"Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion, for I will make your horn iron, and I will make your hooves bronze." In Israel, oxen threshed grain by walking over it on the threshing floor. Zion will be like an ox with iron horns and bronze hooves, crushing the nations. "And you will crush many

peoples. And I will devote their unjust gain to the LORD, and their wealth to the Lord of all the earth." The wealth the nations took by injustice will be given to God.

When does this happen? Some see a first fulfillment when God struck Sennacherib's army outside Jerusalem in 701 B.C. (2 Kings 19:35), or in the Maccabean victories. But "many nations" gathered against Zion and crushed by God points to the end of the age, when the nations gather against Jerusalem and the LORD fights for her (Joel 3:2, 12; Zechariah 12:2-9; 14:2-3). That is how I read it. "The Lord of all the earth" will win.

What does this mean for us? God's thoughts are not our thoughts. The nations did not understand His plan. Neither do we always understand what He is doing in our troubles. But the same God who turns labor pains into new life and enemies into sheaves for threshing is working out His plan, and He will win.

Summary

At the end of the days the mountain of the LORD's house will be established above all mountains, and peoples will stream to it. Many nations will go up to learn God's ways and walk in His paths, for His law will go out from Zion. The LORD will judge between nations, and they will beat their swords into plowshares and never learn war again. Each man will sit under his own vine and fig tree, unafraid, and God's people will walk in the name of the LORD forever. In that day God will gather the lame and the scattered and make them a strong nation, and the LORD will reign over them in Zion forever. The former dominion will come back to Jerusalem. But first Zion must writhe like a woman in labor and go to Babylon, and there the LORD will redeem her. Many nations will gather against Zion, not knowing that God has gathered them like sheaves to the threshing floor. Then the daughter of Zion will rise and thresh them, and their wealth will be devoted to the Lord of all the earth.

Study Questions

1. When will the mountain of the LORD's house be raised up, and what will the nations do? (4:1-2)

2. What will the nations want to learn, and where will God's word go out from? (4:2)

3. What will happen to the weapons of war, and why? (4:3)

4. What does "each man under his vine and under his fig tree" picture? How does it contrast with chapter 2? (4:4; 2:2)

5. Whom will God gather in that day, and what will He make of them? (4:6-7)

6. Where would Zion go into exile, and what would happen there? When did it come true? (4:10)

7. What did the nations not understand about God's plan? (4:11-12)

8. Micah's faithful people said, "we will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever," even before the kingdom came. How can you live by the King's ways now? (4:5)

9. God gathers "the limping one." Do you ever feel too weak or too wounded to be of use to God? What does this chapter say to you?

10. Zion's suffering was like labor pains leading to new life. How has God brought something good out of a painful time in your life?

Micah 5: The Ruler From Bethlehem

Scripture

5:1-9 Now you will gash yourself, O daughter of troops; he has laid a siege against us; with the rod they will strike the judge of Israel on the cheek. And you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, ***too*** little to be among the clans of Judah, from you for Me ***One*** will go out to be ruler over Israel; and His goings out ***are*** from of old, from ***the*** days of antiquity. Therefore He will give them up until ***the*** time ***that*** she who is giving birth has given birth; and the rest of His brothers will return to the sons of Israel. And He will stand and shepherd in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD His God; and they will dwell, for now He will be great to the ends of ***the*** earth. And this ***One*** will be peace. Assyria, when he comes into our land, and when he treads on our citadels, then we will raise against him seven shepherds and eight princes of mankind. And they will shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod at its entrances; and He will deliver ***us*** from Assyria when he comes into our land, and when he treads within our territory. And the remnant of Jacob will be in the midst of many peoples like dew from the LORD, like showers on vegetation, which does not look to a man, and does not wait for the sons of mankind. And the remnant of Jacob will be among the nations, in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the animals of ***the*** forest, like a young lion among flocks of sheep, which, if it passes through, tramples and tears, and there is none who delivers. Let your hand be lifted up over your adversaries, and let all your enemies be cut off.

5:10-15 And it will be in that day, declares the LORD, ***that*** I will cut off your horses from your midst, and I will destroy your chariots. And I will cut off the cities of your land, and I will tear down all your fortresses. And I will cut off sorceries from your hand, and soothsayers will not be yours. And I will cut off your carved images and your sacred pillars from your midst, and you will not bow down again to the work of your hands. And I will pluck up your Asherah ***poles*** from your midst, and I will destroy your cities. And I will do vengeance in anger and in rage on the nations that have not obeyed.

Preview

Jerusalem is under siege, and the judge of Israel is struck on the cheek. Then, in the middle of the humiliation, Micah turns to little Bethlehem, too small to count among the clans of Judah. Out of it will come One to be ruler over Israel for God, "and His goings out are from of old, from the days of antiquity." Seven hundred years later the chief priests and scribes quoted this verse to Herod when the wise men asked where the King of the Jews was born. Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

God will give Israel up until she who is in labor gives birth. Then the Ruler will stand and shepherd His flock in the strength of the LORD, and He will be great to the ends of the earth. He will be their peace. The remnant of Jacob will be like dew from the LORD among the nations, and like a lion among the flocks. And in that day God will cut away everything His people trusted instead of Him: horses and chariots, fortresses, sorcery, idols and sacred poles.

Study

5:1 *Now you will gash yourself, O daughter of troops; he has laid a siege against us; with the rod they will strike the judge of Israel on the cheek.*

"Now you will gash yourself, O daughter of troops." Jerusalem is pictured as a city full of soldiers, but helpless. People gashed themselves in grief, or in pagan ritual (1 Kings 18:28). "He has laid a siege against us." An enemy surrounds the city. In Micah's day that was Sennacherib of Assyria (701 B.C.). Later it would be Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (588 to 586 B.C.).

"With the rod they will strike the judge of Israel on the cheek." To strike a man on the cheek was a great insult. The judge of Israel is its king or ruler. Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, was captured by the Babylonians, his sons were killed before his eyes, and he was blinded and carried off in chains (2 Kings 25:6-7).

Many readers also think of Jesus, the true Judge of Israel, who was struck on the head with a reed by the soldiers (Matthew 27:30) and slapped in the high priest's house (John 18:22). The New Testament does not quote this verse, so I hold that only as a picture.

5:2 *And you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, **too** little to be among the clans of Judah, from you for Me **One** will go out to be ruler over Israel; and His goings out **are** from of old, from **the** days of antiquity.*

"And you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah."

Bethlehem was a small town about five miles south of Jerusalem. Ephrathah was the old name of the area, used to tell this Bethlehem apart from another Bethlehem in Zebulun (Joshua 19:15). Ruth and Boaz lived there, and above all it was the hometown of David, Israel's great king (1 Samuel 16:1, 18). It was a village, too small to supply a thousand men to Judah's army, which is what a "clan" usually meant.

"From you for Me One will go out to be ruler over Israel." God says, "for Me." This Ruler will rule on God's behalf, for God's purposes. Jerusalem's judge is struck, but Bethlehem's Ruler is coming.

"And His goings out are from of old, from the days of antiquity."

What does this mean? The Hebrew phrase translated "days of antiquity" (yeme olam) can mean ancient days, long ago, or days of eternity. Good Bible teachers read the line in three main ways.

Many read it as the eternal existence of the Son of God. The Ruler would "go out" from Bethlehem in time, when He was born there. But His "goings out" are from long before that, from eternity. He did not begin at Bethlehem. That fits what the New Testament says about Jesus: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Jesus said, "before Abraham came into being, I am" (John 8:58). He prayed to the Father for "the glory which I had with You before the world was" (John 17:5). Isaiah, Micah's partner in those years, called the child to be born "Mighty God, Father of Eternity" (Isaiah 9:6). This study reads the line this way: the One born in Bethlehem had no beginning.

Others read it as His ancient roots: His line goes back to David, and through David to God's promises of long ago (2 Samuel 7:12-16). The "days of antiquity" would then be the days of David. That is true, but "goings out" in the plural seem to say more than family history.

Some also see His "goings out" as His activity before He was born: as the Creator through whom all things were made (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16-17), and, many believe, in His appearances in the Old Testament as the Angel of the LORD. That fits with the first reading. And every reading agrees that the Ruler would come from Bethlehem.

Was this fulfilled in Jesus? Yes, plainly. When the wise men came looking for the newborn King of the Jews, Herod asked the chief priests and scribes where the Christ was to be born. They answered, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for thus it has been written through the prophet" (Matthew 2:5), and they quoted this verse: "for out of you will go forth One leading, who will shepherd My people Israel" (Matthew 2:6). Matthew's wording follows the sense and joins it with God's word to David about shepherding His people (2 Samuel 5:2). Even the crowds in Jerusalem knew it: "the Christ comes out of the seed of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was" (John 7:42).

Notice how it happened. Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth, far to the north. A Roman emperor ordered a census, and Joseph had to go to Bethlehem, "because of his being of the house and family of David" (Luke 2:4). God used a pagan ruler's census to bring Mary to the right town at the right time.

How could a prophet name a town seven centuries ahead? Micah did not guess. "The Lord GOD does not do a thing unless He has revealed His secret counsel to His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7).

What does this mean for us? God chooses small things. Bethlehem was too little to count, and it was the birthplace of the King of kings. If God can bring the Savior from a village no one noticed, He can use your small life too. And the Savior who came is no mere man. He is the eternal Son of God, whose goings out are from eternity, who became a baby in Bethlehem for us.

5:3 *Therefore He will give them up until **the** time **that** she who is giving birth has given birth; and the rest of His brothers will return to the sons of Israel.*

"Therefore He will give them up until the time that she who is giving birth has given birth." Because the Ruler is coming, but not yet, God will give Israel up for a time to her enemies. "She who is giving birth" goes back to 4:9-10, where Zion writhes like a woman in labor. Some see here the virgin who would give birth to Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14), and so the birth of Christ. Others see Israel herself, whose long labor pains end when the nation is reborn and turns to her Messiah (Isaiah 66:7-8; Revelation 12:1-5). Either way, there is a long time of being "given up" before the Ruler gathers His people.

"And the rest of His brothers will return to the sons of Israel." The Ruler's brothers are His fellow Israelites, scattered among the nations. They will come back and be joined with the rest of Israel. I believe this looks to the regathering of Israel in the last days (Isaiah 11:11-12; Romans 11:25-26).

5:4 *And He will stand and shepherd in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD His God; and they will dwell, for now He will be great to the ends of* ***the*** *earth.*

"And He will stand and shepherd in the strength of the LORD." The Ruler is a Shepherd-King, like David. He stands, steady and strong, and He feeds and guards His flock. He does it "in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD His God." He depends on the LORD and carries His name. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11), and He did nothing on His own but what He saw the Father doing (John 5:19).

"And they will dwell, for now He will be great to the ends of the earth." Under this Shepherd, His people will live in safety. And His greatness will not stop at Israel's borders. It will reach the whole earth, as the angel told Mary: "He will be great" (Luke 1:32).

5:5-6 *And this* ***One*** *will be peace. Assyria, when he comes into our land, and when he treads on our citadels, then we will raise against him seven shepherds and eight princes of mankind. And they will shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod at its entrances; and He will deliver* ***us*** *from Assyria when he comes into our land, and when he treads within our territory.*

"And this One will be peace." Not only will He bring peace. He will be peace. Isaiah called Him the "Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6), and Paul says, "He Himself is our peace" (Ephesians 2:14).

"Assyria, when he comes into our land, and when he treads on our citadels, then we will raise against him seven shepherds and eight princes of mankind." Assyria was the great enemy of Micah's day. Seven, and then eight, is a Hebrew way of saying more than enough, like the three and four of Amos 1. When the enemy comes, God will raise up all the leaders His people need.

"And they will shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod at its entrances." Nimrod founded the first cities of Babylon and Assyria (Genesis 10:8-12). The Ruler Himself will "deliver us from Assyria."

When does this happen? There was a taste of it when God struck Sennacherib's army in 701 B.C. (2 Kings 19:35). But the full deliverance comes with the Ruler from Bethlehem. Many teachers believe Assyria here stands for the last great enemy of God's people, who invades the land at the end of the age, and some see the Antichrist in the Assyrian of Isaiah and Micah. Scripture does not settle that detail. It does settle that no enemy will stand against the Ruler's people.

5:7-9 *And the remnant of Jacob will be in the midst of many peoples like dew from the LORD, like showers on vegetation, which does not look to a man, and does not wait for the sons of mankind. And the remnant of Jacob will be among the nations, in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the animals of* ***the*** *forest, like a young lion among flocks of sheep, which, if it passes through, tramples and tears, and there is none who delivers. Let your hand be lifted up over your adversaries, and let all your enemies be cut off.*

"And the remnant of Jacob will be in the midst of many peoples like dew from the LORD." Dew in that dry land watered the crops through the summer. It comes from God, quietly, without any man's help, "which does not look to a man, and does not wait for the sons of mankind." The remnant of Israel among the nations will be a blessing, refreshing like dew. That was God's

promise to Abraham: in you all the families of the earth will be blessed (Genesis 12:3). The Savior Himself came from Israel, and "salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22).

"And the remnant of Jacob will be among the nations, in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the animals of the forest." The same remnant that blesses will also be strong. Those who oppose it will be torn like sheep before a lion, "and there is none who delivers." God's people will be gentle as dew to those who receive them and strong as a lion against those who fight them.

"Let your hand be lifted up over your adversaries." God's people will win in the end.

5:10-11 *And it will be in that day, declares the LORD,* ***that*** *I will cut off your horses from your midst, and I will destroy your chariots. And I will cut off the cities of your land, and I will tear down all your fortresses.*

"And it will be in that day, declares the LORD, that I will cut off your horses from your midst, and I will destroy your chariots." Now the "you" is God's own people. Horses and chariots were the tanks of the ancient world. The Law told Israel's kings not to multiply horses (Deuteronomy 17:16), because God wanted them to trust Him. "These trust in chariotry and these in horses, and we, we will make mention of the name of the LORD our God" (Psalm 20:7).

"And I will cut off the cities of your land, and I will tear down all your fortresses." In that day God will take away everything His people relied on instead of Him. Their safety will be the Shepherd-King and the LORD.

5:12-14 *And I will cut off sorceries from your hand, and soothsayers will not be yours. And I will cut off your carved images and your sacred pillars from your midst, and you will not bow down again to the work of your hands. And I will pluck up your Asherah* ***poles*** *from your midst, and I will destroy your cities.*

"And I will cut off sorceries from your hand, and soothsayers will not be yours." Sorcery and fortune-telling were trying to get power or knowledge from spirits, which God strictly forbids (Deuteronomy 18:10-12). "And I will cut off your carved images and your sacred pillars from your midst, and you will not bow down again to the work of your hands." Sacred pillars were standing stones set up at pagan shrines.

"And I will pluck up your Asherah poles from your midst, and I will destroy your cities." Asherah was a Canaanite goddess, and wooden poles or trees set up in her honor stood at the high places. God will pull every one of them up by the roots.

This is God cleaning house. In the kingdom, Israel will never again trust in weapons, in walls, in magic or in idols. God will do it Himself. Paul says that when Israel turns to the Lord, "He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Romans 11:26).

What would God need to cut off in your life? What do you lean on instead of Him?

5:15 *And I will do vengeance in anger and in rage on the nations that have not obeyed.*

"And I will do vengeance in anger and in rage on the nations that have not obeyed." The chapter ends with a warning to the nations. The same day that purifies God's people brings judgment on the nations that refuse to obey Him. When Christ returns, He will judge the nations (Matthew 25:31-32; Revelation 19:15). The Ruler from Bethlehem is a Shepherd to those who come to Him and a Judge to those who will not.

Summary

Jerusalem was under siege, and the judge of Israel was struck on the cheek. But from Bethlehem Ephrathah, too small to count among Judah's clans, One would go out to rule over Israel for God, whose goings out are from of old, from the days of antiquity. The chief priests quoted this to Herod, and Jesus was born there. God would give Israel up until she who was in labor gave birth, and then the rest of the Ruler's brothers would return. He would stand and shepherd in the strength of the LORD, great to the ends of the earth, and He would be their peace and deliver them from Assyria. The remnant of Jacob would be like dew from the LORD among the nations and like a lion among the flocks. In that day God would cut off His people's horses, chariots, cities, fortresses, sorceries, idols, sacred pillars and Asherah poles, and He would take vengeance on the nations that did not obey.

Study Questions

1. What was happening to Jerusalem and its judge in verse 1? (5:1)

2. What was special about Bethlehem, and what was not? (5:2; 1 Samuel 16:1)

3. Who will come from Bethlehem, and for whom will He rule? (5:2)

4. What are the main ways of understanding "His goings out are from of old, from the days of antiquity"? Which New Testament verses speak of Christ before His birth? (5:2; John 1:1; 8:58)

5. How did the chief priests and scribes use this verse, and how did God bring Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem? (Matthew 2:4-6; Luke 2:1-7)

6. What will the Ruler do, and what does verse 5 call Him? (5:4-5; Ephesians 2:14)

7. What two pictures describe the remnant of Jacob among the nations? (5:7-8)

8. What will God cut off from His people, and why? (5:10-14)

9. God chose a town too small to count. When have you felt too small to matter to God? What does Bethlehem say to you?

10. What do you lean on instead of God: money, plans, people, something else? What would it mean to let Him cut it away?

Micah 6: What the LORD Requires

Scripture

6:1-8 Hear, please, what the LORD is saying: "Arise, contend with the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice." Hear, O mountains, the case of the LORD, and ***ỿou*** enduring ***ones***, foundations of ***the*** earth; for the LORD has a case with His people, and with Israel He will argue. O My people, what have I done to you? And how have I wearied you? Testify against Me. For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and from a house of slaves I ransomed you; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O My people, remember, please, what Balak king of Moab planned, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him, from Shittim to Gilgal, so as to know the righteous acts of the LORD. With what shall I come to meet the LORD, ***and*** bow myself down to the God of ***the*** height? Shall I come to meet Him with burnt offerings, with calves, sons of a year? Will the LORD take pleasure in thousands of rams, in tens of thousands of torrents of oil? Shall I give my firstborn ***for*** my transgression, the fruit of my belly ***for*** the sin of my soul? He has told you, O man, what ***is*** good; and what does the LORD require from you but to do justice, and to love steadfast love, and to walk humbly with your God?

6:9-16 The voice of the LORD calls out to the city, and sound wisdom will see Your name: Hear, O tribe, and whoever appointed it. Are there still ***in*** the house of the wicked treasures of wickedness, and the scant ephah ***that is*** accursed? Shall I be pure with balances of wickedness, and with a bag of weights of deceit? Whose rich ***ones*** are full of violence, and her inhabitants speak falsehood, and their tongue ***is*** deceit in their mouth. And I also have made ***ỿou*** sick ***bỿ*** striking you, making ***ỿou*** desolate because of your sins. You will eat and not be satisfied, and your emptiness ***will be*** in your midst; and you will carry away and not bring ***it*** to safety, and what you bring to safety I will give to the sword. You will sow and not reap; you will tread olives and not anoint yourself ***with*** oil, and new wine, and not drink wine. And the statutes of Omri are kept, and every deed of the house of Ahab, and you have walked in their counsels, so that I may make you a horror, and her inhabitants a hissing; and you will bear the reproach of My people.

Preview

Micah's third message is a court case. The LORD calls the mountains and the foundations of the earth as the jury and brings His case against His people. But He begins not with an accusation but with a question: "O My people, what have I done to you?" He reminds them of all He did: bringing them out of Egypt, sending Moses, Aaron and Miriam, and turning Balaam's curse into blessing.

The people answer with a question of their own. What should we bring to God? Burnt offerings? Thousands of rams? Rivers of oil? Our own firstborn child? Micah answers with one of the most loved verses in the Bible: God has already told you what is good, "to do justice, and to love steadfast love, and to walk humbly with your God." The rest of the chapter shows how far Jerusalem was from that: false scales, violence, lies, and the ways of Omri and Ahab. So they will eat and not be satisfied, sow and not reap.

Study

6:1-2 *Hear, please, what the LORD is saying: "Arise, contend with the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice." Hear, O mountains, the case of the LORD, and **you** enduring **ones**, foundations of **the** earth; for the LORD has a case with His people, and with Israel He will argue.*

"Hear, please, what the LORD is saying: Arise, contend with the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice." To contend means to argue a case in court. God tells Micah to stand up and present the case, with the mountains and hills listening.

"Hear, O mountains, the case of the LORD, and you enduring ones, foundations of the earth." Why the mountains? Because they have been there since the beginning. They saw everything: the exodus, the covenant at Sinai, the entry into the land. Moses called heaven and earth as witnesses when he gave Israel the covenant (Deuteronomy 30:19; 32:1). Now they are called back to testify. "For the LORD has a case with His people, and with Israel He will argue."

6:3 *O My people, what have I done to you? And how have I wearied you? Testify against Me.*

"O My people, what have I done to you? And how have I wearied you? Testify against Me."

This is one of the most tender verses in the prophets. God is the one bringing the case, but He speaks like a hurt husband or father. "O My people." They are still His. "What have I done to you?" Have I wronged you? Have I been a burden? "Testify against Me." If you have a complaint, say it.

Of course, they had none. God had never failed them. Why do people drift away from God? Not because He has wronged them. We grow tired of Him, not because He has been hard on us, but because our hearts wander. Jesus said, "My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:30).

6:4-5 *For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and from a house of slaves I ransomed you; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O My people, remember, please, what Balak king of Moab planned, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him, from Shittim to Gilgal, so as to know the righteous acts of the LORD.*

God answers His own question by reminding them of what He had done.

"For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and from a house of slaves I ransomed you." To ransom is to pay a price to set someone free. God had set them free from slavery. Far from wearying them, He had freed them.

"And I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam." He gave them leaders: Moses to lead and give the Law, Aaron to serve as priest, and Miriam the prophetess to lead the women in praise (Exodus 15:20-21).

"O My people, remember, please, what Balak king of Moab planned, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him." Balak hired the prophet Balaam to curse Israel. But every time Balaam opened his mouth, God turned the curse into a blessing (Numbers 22-24; Deuteronomy 23:5). "From Shittim to Gilgal." Shittim was Israel's last camp east of the Jordan, and Gilgal their first

camp in the promised land (Joshua 3:1; 4:19). Between the two, God parted the Jordan and brought them in.

"So as to know the righteous acts of the LORD." Remembering these things is how we come to know God. The "righteous acts" are His saving acts, when He kept His word and rescued His people.

Forgetfulness is the root of much sin. When we forget what God has done, we start to think He owes us. When we remember, we are thankful. What has God done for you? Have you forgotten?

6:6-7 *With what shall I come to meet the LORD, **and** bow myself down to the God of **the** height? Shall I come to meet Him with burnt offerings, with calves, sons of a year? Will the LORD take pleasure in thousands of rams, in tens of thousands of torrents of oil? Shall I give my firstborn **for** my transgression, the fruit of my belly **for** the sin of my soul?*

Now the people speak, or Micah speaks for them. "With what shall I come to meet the LORD, and bow myself down to the God of the height?" The God of the height is God Most High, enthroned above all. What could anyone bring Him?

"Shall I come to meet Him with burnt offerings, with calves, sons of a year?" A burnt offering was given wholly to God. Calves a year old were the best and most costly. "Will the LORD take pleasure in thousands of rams, in tens of thousands of torrents of oil?" Now the offers grow huge: not one ram, but thousands; not a jar of oil, but rivers of it.

"Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my belly for the sin of my soul?" This is the most terrible offer of all. The pagan nations sacrificed their children to their gods, and in Micah's own day King Ahaz of Judah had "made his son pass through the fire" (2 Kings 16:3). God had strictly forbidden it (Leviticus 18:21; Deuteronomy 12:31). The questioner is asking, What will it take? Do I have to give the most precious thing I have?

The questions show a heart that thinks God is a bargainer, who has to be paid off. More and more, bigger and bigger, until it ends in horror. Religion without God always goes this way. It never knows when it has done enough.

6:8 *He has told you, O man, what **is** good; and what does the LORD require from you but to do justice, and to love steadfast love, and to walk humbly with your God?*

"He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require from you but to do justice, and to love steadfast love, and to walk humbly with your God?"

"He has told you." The answer is not new. God had already said it in the Law and through the prophets (Deuteronomy 10:12-13). The people did not need a new revelation. They needed to do what they already knew. "O man" speaks to every human being, not only Israel.

"What does the LORD require from you?" Not thousands of rams. Not rivers of oil. Not your children. Three things.

First, "to do justice." Justice means treating people rightly: being honest, paying fairly, judging fairly, and standing up for those who cannot stand up for themselves. Micah has spent the whole book showing what injustice looks like: stolen fields, bought courts, false scales. God wants the opposite. Justice is something we do, not only something we talk about.

Second, "to love steadfast love." Steadfast love is hesed, God's own loyal, covenant love, the kindness that keeps its promises and goes beyond what is owed. God does not only want us to do kind things. He wants us to love doing them. Justice gives people what is right. Steadfast love gives people more than they deserve, the way God does for us.

Third, "to walk humbly with your God." To walk with God means to live each day in fellowship with Him, as Enoch and Noah did (Genesis 5:24; 6:9). To walk humbly means knowing our place: He is God, and we are not. We do not come to Him bargaining, as in verses 6 and 7. We come as people who depend on Him for everything.

Notice the order. Justice and love toward others, and humility toward God. These are not three separate things. A person who walks humbly with God will treat others justly and kindly. A person who treats others with justice and steadfast love shows that he walks with God.

Does this verse teach that we are saved by doing these things? No. No one has done them perfectly. That is why Micah's book ends with a God who forgives (7:18-19). We are made right with God by grace through faith, as Abraham was (Genesis 15:6; Ephesians 2:8-9). But this verse shows what a life made right with God looks like. Jesus said the Pharisees had neglected "the weightier matters of the law: the justice and the mercy and the faith" (Matthew 23:23), and He fulfilled this verse perfectly. He did justice, He loved mercy, and He walked humbly with His Father all the way to the cross.

What about the sacrifices? God had commanded them in the Law, and they pointed forward to Christ, the one sacrifice that takes away sin (Hebrews 10:4, 10-14). God never wanted sacrifice without a changed heart (1 Samuel 15:22; Hosea 6:6). The sacrifice was to lead to the walk, not replace it.

How does this verse speak to us? Sometimes we act like the questioner of verses 6 and 7. We think, What more do I have to do for God? More church, more giving, more service? God says, I have told you what is good. Treat people rightly. Love mercy. Walk humbly with Me. That is enough to fill a lifetime.

6:9-12 *The voice of the LORD calls out to the city, and sound wisdom will see Your name: Hear, O tribe, and whoever appointed it. Are there still **in** the house of the wicked treasures of wickedness, and the scant ephah **that is** accursed? Shall I be pure with balances of wickedness, and with a bag of weights of deceit? Whose rich **ones** are full of violence, and her inhabitants speak falsehood, and their tongue **is** deceit in their mouth.*

"The voice of the LORD calls out to the city." Now God turns from the courtroom to Jerusalem itself. "And sound wisdom will see Your name." A wise person will listen and fear the LORD.

"Hear, O tribe, and whoever appointed it." The Hebrew of this line is hard. It may mean, Listen to the rod of punishment and to the One who appointed it.

"Are there still in the house of the wicked treasures of wickedness, and the scant ephah that is accursed?" The scant ephah was a short measure for grain (Amos 8:5). God calls it accursed, under His curse.

"Shall I be pure with balances of wickedness, and with a bag of weights of deceit?" Merchants kept two sets of weights in their bags, one for buying and one for selling. God asks, Could I call that man innocent? No.

"Whose rich ones are full of violence, and her inhabitants speak falsehood, and their tongue is deceit in their mouth." The city's rich men were violent. Its people were liars. Here is the opposite of verse 8: injustice instead of justice, cruelty instead of steadfast love, and pride instead of humility.

6:13-15 *And I also have made **you** sick **by** striking you, making **you** desolate because of your sins. You will eat and not be satisfied, and your emptiness **will be** in your midst; and you will carry away and not bring **it** to safety, and what you bring to safety I will give to the sword. You will sow and not reap; you will tread olives and not anoint yourself **with** oil, and new wine, and not drink wine.*

"And I also have made you sick by striking you, making you desolate because of your sins." God had already begun to strike them. Now He tells them what the judgment will be like. These are the curses Moses had warned of (Leviticus 26:26; Deuteronomy 28:38-40).

"You will eat and not be satisfied, and your emptiness will be in your midst." There will be food, but never enough. "And you will carry away and not bring it to safety, and what you bring to safety I will give to the sword." Whatever they tried to save would be taken.

"You will sow and not reap; you will tread olives and not anoint yourself with oil, and new wine, and not drink wine." They would do all the work and never enjoy the harvest. That is what they had done to the poor. Now it would be done to them.

Is that not the emptiness of a life built on cheating? There is always more to get, and it never satisfies. Only God satisfies (Isaiah 55:2).

6:16 *And the statutes of Omri are kept, and every deed of the house of Ahab, and you have walked in their counsels, so that I may make you a horror, and her inhabitants a hissing; and you will bear the reproach of My people.*

"And the statutes of Omri are kept, and every deed of the house of Ahab." Omri and his son Ahab were kings of the northern kingdom, about 885 to 853 B.C. Omri built Samaria. Ahab married Jezebel, brought Baal worship into Israel, and stole Naboth's vineyard by having him killed on false charges (1 Kings 16:23-33; 21). Their names stood for idolatry and injustice. Judah, which should have kept the statutes of the LORD, was keeping the statutes of Omri.

"And you have walked in their counsels, so that I may make you a horror, and her inhabitants a hissing." People would hiss in shock when they saw what had become of Jerusalem. "And you will bear the reproach of My people." The shame that comes on a people who carry God's name and live like His enemies.

The contrast with verse 8 could not be sharper. God told them to walk humbly with Him. They walked in the counsels of Ahab.

Summary

The LORD called the mountains to hear His case against His people. He asked, "O My people, what have I done to you?" and reminded them that He had brought them out of Egypt, ransomed them from slavery, sent Moses, Aaron and Miriam, and turned Balaam's curse into blessing from Shittim to Gilgal. The people asked what they should bring to God: burnt offerings, calves, thousands of rams, rivers of oil, even their firstborn. But God had already told them what is good: to do justice, to love steadfast love, and to walk humbly with their God. Instead, Jerusalem was full of short measures, false weights, violence and lies. So God had begun to strike them, and they would eat and not be satisfied, sow and not reap, tread olives and grapes and not enjoy them, because they kept the statutes of Omri and the deeds of Ahab. They would become a horror and bear the reproach of God's people.

Study Questions

1. Who are the witnesses in God's court case, and why? (6:1-2)

2. What question does God ask His people, and how does it show His heart? (6:3)

3. What does God remind them of, and why does remembering matter? (6:4-5)

4. What offers does the questioner make to God? What do they show about how he thought of God? (6:6-7)

5. What three things does the LORD require? Explain each in your own words. (6:8)

6. Does verse 8 teach that we are saved by doing these things? Why or why not? (Ephesians 2:8-10)

7. How was Jerusalem living the opposite of verse 8? (6:10-12, 16)

8. Have you ever felt that God was a burden? How does God's question in verse 3 speak to that?

9. Which of the three requirements in verse 8 is hardest for you right now? What is one step you could take this week?

10. Do you ever act as if more religious activity will earn God's favor? What does it look like to "walk humbly with your God" instead?

Micah 7: Who Is a God Like You?

Scripture

7:1-10 Woe to me! For I have become like the gatherings of summer fruit, like the gleanings of the grape harvest; there is no cluster to eat; my soul craves an early fig. The godly ***one*** has perished from the land, and upright ***one*** among mankind there is none; all of them lie in wait for blood; each man hunts his brother ***with*** a net. On evil ***are*** both hands to do ***it*** well; the official asks, and the judge ***asks*** for the bribe; and the great ***man*** speaks the craving of his soul, he ***himself***, and they weave it. The best of them ***is*** like a brier, the upright ***one is worse*** than a thorn hedge. The day of your watchmen, your punishment, has come; now will be their confusion. Do not believe in a neighbor; do not trust in a close friend; from her who lies in your bosom guard the openings of your mouth. For a son treats a father with contempt, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; the enemies of a man ***are*** the men of his own house. And I, I will watch for the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me. Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy; when I have fallen, I will arise; when I sit in the darkness, the LORD ***is*** a light for me. I will bear the indignation of the LORD, for I have sinned against Him, until He pleads my case and does justice for me. He will bring me out to the light; I will look on His righteousness. And let my enemy see, and let shame cover her who says to me, "Where ***is*** He, the LORD your God?" My eyes will look on her; now she will become a trampling place, like the mud of the streets.

7:11-20 A day to build your walls! That day ***the*** boundary will be far away. ***It is*** that day, and to you ***they*** will come, from Assyria and the cities of Egypt, and from Egypt even to the River, and ***to*** sea from sea, and ***to*** mountain ***from*** the mountain. And the land will become a desolation because of its inhabitants, from the fruit of their deeds. Shepherd Your people with Your rod, the flock of Your inheritance, dwelling alone ***in*** a forest in the midst of a garden land; let them graze ***in*** Bashan and Gilead as ***in*** the days of antiquity. As ***in*** the days of your coming out from the land of Egypt, I will show him wonders. Nations will see and be ashamed of all their might; they will put a hand on ***their*** mouth; their ears will be deaf. They will lick dust like the serpent, like crawling things of ***the*** earth; they will quake out of their strongholds; to the LORD our God they will ***come*** in dread, and they will be afraid of You. Who ***is*** a God like You, forgiving iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of His inheritance? He does not hold on to His anger forever, for He delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; He will subdue our iniquities; and You will cast all their sins into the depths of ***the*** sea. You will give faithfulness to Jacob, steadfast love to Abraham, which You swore to our fathers from the days of old.

Preview

Micah's last chapter begins in grief. He is like a man who goes into an orchard after the harvest and finds not one fig left. The godly have vanished. Everyone lies in wait to harm someone. Officials and judges want bribes. You cannot trust a friend, or even your own family. But Micah does not give up. "And I, I will watch for the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me."

Then Zion speaks. She has fallen, but she will rise. She will bear God's anger because she has sinned, until He pleads her case and brings her into the light. The day will come to rebuild her walls, and people will come to her from every land. Micah prays for God to shepherd His flock as in the days of the exodus, and the nations will come trembling. And the book ends with one of the greatest songs of praise in the Bible: "Who is a God like You," forgiving iniquity, delighting in steadfast love, treading our sins underfoot and casting them into the depths of the sea, keeping the promises He swore to Abraham and Jacob.

Study

7:1-2 *Woe to me! For I have become like the gatherings of summer fruit, like the gleanings of the grape harvest; there is no cluster to eat; my soul craves an early fig. The godly* ***one*** *has perished from the land, and upright* ***one*** *among mankind there is none; all of them lie in wait for blood; each man hunts his brother* ***with*** *a net.*

"Woe to me! For I have become like the gatherings of summer fruit, like the gleanings of the grape harvest." Micah walks through a vineyard after the pickers have gone. "There is no cluster to eat; my soul craves an early fig."

"The godly one has perished from the land, and upright one among mankind there is none." This is what he is looking for: not fruit, but godly people. The word for godly comes from hesed, steadfast love. A godly person is one who shows loyal love to God and to others. Micah looked, and he could not find any. Elijah felt the same, though God had seven thousand faithful left (1 Kings 19:10, 18).

"All of them lie in wait for blood; each man hunts his brother with a net." People had become like hunters, and their prey was one another.

7:3-4 *On evil* ***are*** *both hands to do* ***it*** *well; the official asks, and the judge* ***asks*** *for the bribe; and the great* ***man*** *speaks the craving of his soul, he* ***himself****, and they weave it. The best of them* ***is*** *like a brier, the upright* ***one is worse*** *than a thorn hedge. The day of your watchmen, your punishment, has come; now will be their confusion.*

"On evil are both hands to do it well." They were skilled at doing evil, using both hands. "The official asks, and the judge asks for the bribe; and the great man speaks the craving of his soul, he himself, and they weave it." The powerful man names what he wants, and the paid-off officials weave the plan together. Corruption was a team effort.

"The best of them is like a brier, the upright one is worse than a thorn hedge." Even the best of them would scratch you if you came near. "The day of your watchmen, your punishment, has come." The watchmen are the prophets, who had warned of the day of judgment (Ezekiel 3:17). That day has come. "Now will be their confusion."

7:5-6 *Do not believe in a neighbor; do not trust in a close friend; from her who lies in your bosom guard the openings of your mouth. For a son treats a father with contempt, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; the enemies of a man **are** the men of his own house.*

"Do not believe in a neighbor; do not trust in a close friend; from her who lies in your bosom guard the openings of your mouth." You could not trust even your own wife with a secret.

"For a son treats a father with contempt, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; the enemies of a man are the men of his own house." When a society turns from God, it falls apart even at home. Families turn on themselves.

Jesus quoted this verse when He sent out His disciples. He warned that following Him would sometimes divide families: "For I came to divide a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and the enemies of the man will be the members of his household" (Matthew 10:35-36). Some who follow Christ know this pain. If that is you, you are not alone, and Jesus knew it would happen. He promised that no one who leaves family for His sake will lose out in the end (Mark 10:29-30).

7:7 *And I, I will watch for the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.*

"And I, I will watch for the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me."

This is the turning point of the chapter, and maybe of the whole book. "And I." Everyone else has failed. Micah cannot trust neighbor, friend or family. But he can trust God.

"I will watch for the LORD." The word watch is the same root as the watchmen of verse 4. Like a watchman on the wall looking for the dawn, Micah keeps his eyes on God.

"I will wait for the God of my salvation." To wait for God is not to sit idle. It is to keep hoping and trusting while God has not yet acted. Isaiah says, "those who wait for the LORD will renew power" (Isaiah 40:31). "The God of my salvation." It is personal.

"My God will hear me." That is faith. Micah does not see the answer yet. But he knows his God hears.

What do we do when people we trusted let us down and our nation seems to be rotting? What Micah did. We watch for the LORD, we wait for Him, and we trust that He hears. Is there something you are waiting on God for today? He is not deaf. He will answer, in His time.

7:8-10 *Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy; when I have fallen, I will arise; when I sit in the darkness, the LORD **is** a light for me. I will bear the indignation of the LORD, for I have sinned against Him, until He pleads my case and does justice for me. He will bring me out to the light; I will look on His righteousness. And let my enemy see, and let shame cover her who says to me, "Where **is** He, the LORD your God?" My eyes will look on her; now she will become a trampling place, like the mud of the streets.*

Now Zion speaks, God's people speaking as one person. "Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy; when I have fallen, I will arise." The enemy, perhaps Edom or Babylon, gloated over Jerusalem's fall (Obadiah 12). Zion says, I have fallen, but I will get up. "When I sit in the darkness, the LORD is a light for me." David said, "The LORD is my light and my salvation" (Psalm 27:1).

"I will bear the indignation of the LORD, for I have sinned against Him." Zion does not blame God or anyone else. She owns her sin and accepts His discipline. That is real repentance. "Until He pleads my case and does justice for me." The same God who brought the case against her (6:2) will one day take up her case. "He will bring me out to the light; I will look on His righteousness." His righteousness here means His faithful saving acts.

"And let my enemy see, and let shame cover her who says to me, Where is He, the LORD your God?" "My eyes will look on her; now she will become a trampling place, like the mud of the streets."

How do we live under God's discipline? Like Zion here: honest about our sin, patient under His hand, and sure that He will bring us out into the light (Hebrews 12:10-11).

7:11-13 *A day to build your walls! That day **the** boundary will be far away. **It is** that day, and to you **they** will come, from Assyria and the cities of Egypt, and from Egypt even to the River, and **to** sea from sea, and **to** mountain **from** the mountain. And the land will become a desolation because of its inhabitants, from the fruit of their deeds.*

"A day to build your walls!" Jerusalem's broken walls will be rebuilt. This happened in part under Nehemiah in 445 B.C. "That day the boundary will be far away." The boundary may mean Israel's borders, stretched far out, or a decree that limited her, now removed.

"It is that day, and to you they will come, from Assyria and the cities of Egypt, and from Egypt even to the River." The River is the Euphrates. From every direction, people will come to Zion. This may be Israel's scattered people coming home, or the nations coming to worship (4:1-2). Both will happen in the kingdom (Isaiah 11:11-12; Zechariah 8:20-23).

"And the land will become a desolation because of its inhabitants, from the fruit of their deeds." Before the restoration, the judgment must come. Or this may mean the lands of the nations that refused God. Either way, sin has its fruit.

7:14-15 *Shepherd Your people with Your rod, the flock of Your inheritance, dwelling alone **in** a forest in the midst of a garden land; let them graze **in** Bashan and Gilead as **in** the days of antiquity. As **in** the days of your coming out from the land of Egypt, I will show him wonders.*

Micah now prays. "Shepherd Your people with Your rod, the flock of Your inheritance." A shepherd's rod guided and protected the sheep (Psalm 23:4). Micah asks God to be Israel's Shepherd, as he promised the Ruler from Bethlehem would be (5:4). "Dwelling alone in a forest in the midst of a garden land." The flock is living in a thicket, surrounded by rich land it does not yet possess. "Let them graze in Bashan and Gilead as in the days of antiquity." Bashan and Gilead, east of the Jordan, were rich pasture lands, lost to Assyria in Micah's lifetime (2 Kings 15:29). He asks God to give them back.

God answers: "As in the days of your coming out from the land of Egypt, I will show him wonders." What God did at the exodus, the plagues, the Red Sea, manna and water from the rock, He will do again. The prophets often speak of a new exodus when God gathers His people at the end of the age (Isaiah 11:15-16; Jeremiah 23:7-8).

7:16-17 *Nations will see and be ashamed of all their might; they will put a hand on **their** mouth; their ears will be deaf. They will lick dust like the serpent, like crawling things of **the** earth; they will quake out of their strongholds; to the LORD our God they will **come** in dread, and they will be afraid of You.*

"Nations will see and be ashamed of all their might." When God acts, the proudest nations will see that their strength is nothing. "They will put a hand on their mouth; their ears will be deaf." They will be speechless, stunned.

"They will lick dust like the serpent, like crawling things of the earth." This is a picture of total defeat, bowing to the ground, and it echoes the curse on the serpent in Genesis 3:14. "They will quake out of their strongholds; to the LORD our God they will come in dread, and they will be afraid of You." The nations that once mocked, "Where is He, the LORD your God?" (7:10), will come trembling to Him. Every knee will bow (Philippians 2:10-11).

7:18 *Who **is** a God like You, forgiving iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of His inheritance? He does not hold on to His anger forever, for He delights in steadfast love.*

"Who is a God like You, forgiving iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of His inheritance?"

Micah's name means Who is like the LORD? And he ends his book by asking that very question. The answer is, No one. There is no god like Him. The gods of the nations were made of wood and stone. They could not forgive anyone. But the LORD is unlike any other, and what makes Him most unlike them is His forgiveness.

"Forgiving iniquity." The word forgive means to lift up and carry away. God lifts our sin off us. "And passing over transgression." God passes over it, the way the angel of death passed over the houses marked with the blood of the Passover lamb (Exodus 12:13). He does not hold it against us.

These are the very words God used to describe Himself to Moses: "forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Exodus 34:7).

"For the remnant of His inheritance." His inheritance is His people, the people who belong to Him. The remnant are those who have turned back to Him.

"He does not hold on to His anger forever, for He delights in steadfast love." God does get angry at sin. Micah's whole book has shown that. But His anger does not last forever. What He delights in is hesed, steadfast love. Mercy is His delight. "For a moment is in His anger, life is in His favor" (Psalm 30:5).

How does a holy God forgive guilty people without ignoring sin? Micah does not explain. The New Testament does. God passed over the sins of believers before Christ in His patience, and then He showed His justice at the cross, where Jesus took the punishment for them (Romans 3:25-26). God can forgive because Jesus paid.

7:19 *He will again have compassion on us; He will subdue our iniquities; and You will cast all their sins into the depths of* ***the*** *sea.*

"He will again have compassion on us." The God who struck will turn and show mercy again.

"He will subdue our iniquities." To subdue means to tread underfoot, as a conqueror tramples an enemy. Our sins are pictured as enemies that would destroy us, and God crushes them under His feet. Sin does not only need to be forgiven. Its power over us needs to be broken. God does both.

"And You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." Notice "all." Not some, not the small ones, but all. And where does He throw them? Into the depths of the sea, where no one can ever find them or fish them out again. "As the east is far from the west, He has removed our transgressions far from us" (Psalm 103:12).

Many believers still carry sins God has already thrown away. They keep diving to pull them back up. If you have confessed your sin and trusted Christ, God has thrown it into the depths. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous so that He may forgive us the sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Leave it there.

7:20 *You will give faithfulness to Jacob, steadfast love to Abraham, which You swore to our fathers from the days of old.*

"You will give faithfulness to Jacob, steadfast love to Abraham, which You swore to our fathers from the days of old."

Micah ends with God's promises. Faithfulness means God keeps His word. Steadfast love is His hesed. He swore to Abraham that He would give him the land, make him a great nation and bless all the families of the earth through him (Genesis 12:1-3; 15:18; 22:16-18), and He repeated it to Isaac and Jacob (Genesis 26:3-4; 28:13-15). God bound Himself with an oath (Hebrews 6:13).

Will God keep those promises to Jacob, the people of Israel? Yes. I believe God will keep every promise He made to Abraham and his descendants, including the land, when Christ returns and Israel turns to Him (Romans 11:26-29). The last word of Micah is God's oath, and God does not break His oath.

And through Abraham's Seed, Christ, the blessing has come to the nations too (Galatians 3:8, 16). Mary sang that God had helped Israel "to remember mercy, just as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed to the age" (Luke 1:54-55). Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, praised God for remembering "the oath which He swore to Abraham our father" (Luke 1:73). Micah's last verse was coming true in Bethlehem.

Who is a God like this? There is none. He judges sin, and He forgives sinners. He keeps His promises to Israel, and He opens His arms to the nations. And He has shown us all of this in His Son, born in Bethlehem, whose goings out are from of old.

Summary

Micah mourned like a man who finds no fruit after the harvest: the godly had vanished, everyone hunted his brother, officials and judges wove evil for bribes, and no one could trust a friend or even his own family. But Micah would watch for the LORD, wait for the God of his salvation, and trust that his God would hear him. Zion told her enemy not to rejoice, for though she had fallen she would rise, and the LORD would be her light. She would bear His anger for her sin until He pleaded her case and brought her into the light, and her mocking enemy would be trampled. A day would come to rebuild her walls, and people would come from Assyria to Egypt and from sea to sea. Micah prayed for God to shepherd His flock as in the days of old, and God promised wonders like the exodus, so that the nations would come trembling to Him. The book ends in praise: "Who is a God like You," forgiving iniquity and passing over transgression, delighting in steadfast love, treading down our iniquities and casting all our sins into the depths of the sea, keeping faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as He swore to the fathers.

Study Questions

1. What was Micah looking for, and what did he find? (7:1-2)

2. How did corruption work among the leaders? (7:3)

3. How bad had things become even in families? How did Jesus use these words? (7:5-6; Matthew 10:35-36)

4. What three things does Micah say he will do in verse 7? (7:7)

5. How does Zion respond to her sin and to her enemy? (7:8-10)

6. What does Micah ask God to do for His flock, and what does God promise? (7:14-15)

7. What does Micah say about God in verses 18 and 19? List each thing God does with sin. (7:18-19)

8. Who has let you down? How can Micah's words "my God will hear me" help you wait on God today?

9. Is there a sin you have confessed but keep pulling back up from the "depths of the sea"? What does 7:19 and 1 John 1:9 say to you?

10. Micah ends asking, "Who is a God like You?" How would you answer that question from your own life?

Conclusion

Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah spoke to different people in different years, but they spoke for the same God. A husband buying back his unfaithful wife. A land stripped bare by locusts. A shepherd from Tekoa roaring like a lion at Bethel. A proud nation in the clefts of the rock. A runaway prophet in a storm. A country preacher weeping over his hometown. In every one of these books, God's people had wandered from Him. They trusted Baal, their armies, their wealth, their rituals and their own cleverness. They cheated the poor and still sang in the temple. And in every one of these books, God told them the truth: He sees, He is holy, and judgment is coming.

As I said at the start of this study, the guiding principle throughout has been to read God's Word plainly, as it is written, and let Scripture explain Scripture. Read that way, these prophets show us a God whose judgment is never His last word. Hosea heard Him say, "I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely" (Hosea 14:4). Joel heard Him call, "even now" (Joel 2:12). Amos heard Him say, "Seek Me and live" (Amos 5:4). Jonah, against his will, watched Him spare the cruelest city on earth. And Micah ended his book with a question no other god could ever answer: "Who is a God like You, forgiving iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of His inheritance? He does not hold on to His anger forever, for He delights in steadfast love" (Micah 7:18).

These books also show us a God who keeps His promises. Samaria fell in 722 B.C., just as Hosea, Amos and Micah said. Nineveh was spared when it repented, and fell in 612 B.C. when it returned to its cruelty. Jerusalem was plowed like a field in 586 B.C., and its people came home from Babylon. Edom disappeared from history. And the Ruler from Bethlehem was born, just where Micah said He would be. I believe the promises still ahead are just as sure. God has not cast away His people Israel. He will gather them, pour out His Spirit on them, raise up the fallen booth of David, and plant them in their land, never to be uprooted again. The day of the LORD is coming, darkness for those who refuse Him and a refuge for those who belong to Him. And "the kingship will be the LORD's" (Obadiah 1:21).

I hope this study has done what I set out to do: bring you closer to God, help you grow in your walk with Him, and show you that the God of these prophets is the same God today. He still calls His people to return to Him. He still requires us "to do justice, and to love steadfast love, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). And He still shows His mercy to anyone who turns to Him, from the unfaithful wife to the people of Nineveh. All of it points to Jesus Christ. He is the Son God called out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:15), the One who poured out the Spirit Joel promised (Acts 2:33), the Son of David who rebuilds David's house (Acts 15:16), the King to whom the kingdom belongs, the One greater than Jonah who lay three days in the heart of the earth and rose again (Matthew 12:40-41), and the Ruler born in Bethlehem whose goings out are from of old (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:6). Jonah said it from the belly of the fish: "Salvation belongs to the LORD" (Jonah 2:9). The only thing required of us to spend eternity with God is to receive His Son, Jesus, as our Lord and Savior.

If you haven't yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, or if you want to deepen the one you already have with Him, I invite you to pray this prayer with me:

Lord Jesus, You are the Savior of the world, and You forgive all who come to You. I come before You to confess that I have sinned against You. I have rebelled against You and put myself first above You and all others. I want to have a deep, meaningful relationship with You where I can show others by my demeanor and character that You are first in my life. I am asking for Your forgiveness for all my sins. You died for me on the cross so that I could be forgiven and made right with God. Please help me not forget that You gave Your very life for me. I am asking that You take control of my life and make a new creature out of me and into the person You want me to be. I thank You, Lord, and I love You. Amen.

If you prayed this prayer, tell another believer, ask a pastor about being baptized, and find a church where you can grow in God's Word and learn, as Micah did, to watch for the LORD and wait for the God of your salvation (Micah 7:7).

Bibliography

The following source was consulted throughout this study. The commentary reflects my own study and convictions, and any direct quotation from an outside source is identified and cited at the point where it appears.

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