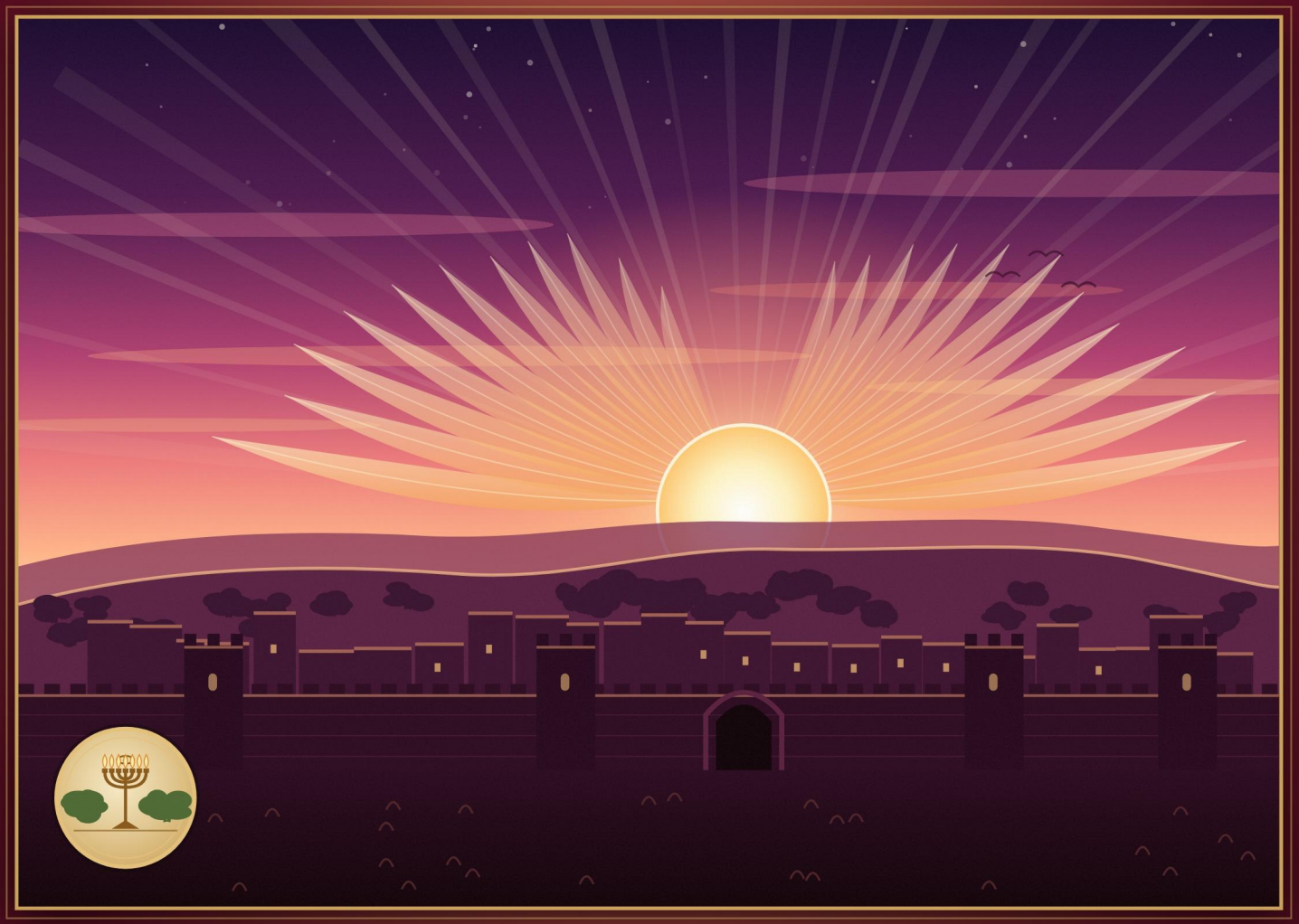
NAHUM TO MALACHI

BIBLE STUDY

A Verse-by-Verse Study of Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi



A proud city falls, a prophet waits on his watchtower,
and a King is coming to His people

ANDREW DOMINGUEZ

TRINFINITY
Enterprises

Nahum to Malachi Bible Study

A Verse-by-Verse Study of Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi

Andrew Dominguez

Trinfinity Enterprises

Nahum to Malachi Bible Study: A Verse-by-Verse Study of Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi

Copyright 2026 by Andrew Dominguez.

I own the copyright to everything in this book. I freely allow anyone to read, copy, print, quote, share, and teach from it, and to hand out or post copies, at no cost, as long as the text is not changed and this notice stays with it.

Publishing this book, meaning releasing it as an edition of your own in print or electronic form, whether sold or given away, requires my written permission first. Requests go to andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.

The full text can be read, printed and downloaded free at trinfinityenterprises.com.

Scripture quotations are taken from the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB), with familiar English forms of personal names, copyright 2026 Andrew Dominguez. The complete SLB is free to read at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb.

Independently published.

A note before you begin. This book is written to teach the Bible and encourage faith. It shares my understanding of Scripture and is offered for study and spiritual growth. It is not counseling, medical, legal, or financial advice. If you are facing a crisis, a health problem, or a legal or money problem, please reach out to a qualified professional as well as your pastor and church family. To the fullest extent the law allows, Andrew Dominguez, Trinfinity Enterprises, and Andrew Dominguez's heirs, estate, successors, and assigns accept no liability for how this material is used.

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.

Contents

Introduction....1
Overview of Nahum....6
Background of Nahum....8
Nahum 1: The LORD Is Slow to Anger and a Stronghold....10
Nahum 2: The Fall of Nineveh Foretold....17
Nahum 3: Woe to the City of Blood....22
Overview of Habakkuk....28
Background of Habakkuk....29
Habakkuk 1: How Long, O LORD?....30
Habakkuk 2: The Righteous Will Live by His Faithfulness....36
Habakkuk 3: Habakkuk's Prayer of Trust....43
Overview of Zephaniah....50
Background of Zephaniah....52
Zephaniah 1: The Great Day of the LORD Is Near....54
Zephaniah 2: Seek the LORD Before the Day of Anger....61
Zephaniah 3: The LORD Rejoices Over His People....67
Overview of Haggai....75
Background of Haggai....77
Haggai 1: Build the House of the LORD....79
Haggai 2: The Greater Glory and the Signet Ring....85
Overview of Zechariah....93
Background of Zechariah....95
Zechariah 1: Return to Me and the Rider Among the Myrtles....97
Zechariah 2: The Man With the Measuring Cord....105
Zechariah 3: Joshua the High Priest and the Branch....110
Zechariah 4: The Lampstand and the Two Olive Trees....115
Zechariah 5: The Flying Scroll and the Woman in the Basket....121
Zechariah 6: The Four Chariots and the Crowning of Joshua....126
Zechariah 7: Fasting and True Obedience....132
Zechariah 8: The LORD Returns to Zion....138
Zechariah 9: Your King Comes to You....145
Zechariah 10: The LORD Gathers His People....152
Zechariah 11: The Rejected Shepherd....158
Zechariah 12: Jerusalem Saved and the One They Pierced....165
Zechariah 13: A Fountain for Sin and the Shepherd Struck....172
Zechariah 14: The LORD Will Be King Over All the Earth....178
Overview of Malachi....186
Background of Malachi....188
Malachi 1: I Have Loved You....190
Malachi 2: Faithless Priests and Broken Marriages....197
Malachi 3: The Messenger and the Refiner's Fire....205
Malachi 4: The Sun of Righteousness and Elijah the Prophet....213
Conclusion....219
Bibliography....221

Introduction

Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to work through this verse-by-verse study of the books of Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. 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.

These six short books close the Old Testament. Nahum announces the fall of Nineveh, the cruel capital of Assyria. Habakkuk brings his honest questions to God about evil and justice and learns to live by faith. Zephaniah warns of the day of the LORD and then sings of God rejoicing over His people. Haggai calls the families who came home from Babylon to finish God's house. Zechariah lifts their eyes to the coming King, riding on a donkey, pierced, and one day standing on the Mount of Olives. Malachi, the last prophet before four hundred years of silence, promises a messenger who would prepare the way of the Lord. I do not claim to be an authority on the Bible or on these prophets. I am simply someone like you who wants to grow closer to God and hear what He said through these men, who spoke to hard times and pointed past them to Jesus Christ. 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. Each prophet spoke to a real people at a real moment in history, and most of them tell us when. Nahum spoke while Assyria still ruled the world. Habakkuk spoke as Babylon was rising. Zephaniah spoke in the days of King Josiah, before Judah's last kings led it to ruin. Haggai and Zechariah spoke to a small, discouraged group of Jews standing beside an unfinished temple in 520 B.C. Malachi spoke about a hundred years after the return, when the people had grown cold. If we read these books as loose sayings with no setting, they can sound strange or harsh. If we read them in their place in Israel's story, they make sense, and we can see how God kept every word.

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 six books are real prophecy, given by God through real men, and this study takes them at their word. When Nahum said Nineveh would fall, it fell, in 612 B.C.

When Habakkuk said the Chaldeans were coming, they came. When Haggai said God would fill the second temple with glory, Jesus Christ walked in its courts. When Zechariah said Israel's King would come riding on a donkey, Jesus rode into Jerusalem that way (Matthew 21:5). Prophecy uses pictures and poetry, and the prophets often tell us when they are speaking in a figure, but the things they foretold are real events. Some of those words have already come true. Others, such as the great day of the LORD, Israel's full restoration and the Lord's feet standing on the Mount of Olives, are still ahead, and I read them as plainly as the ones already fulfilled. 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. These prophets often call Him "the LORD of armies," which some Bibles translate as the LORD of hosts. It means He is the Commander of all the armies of heaven and earth.

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 spoke, and why his message was given.

Why These Six Prophets Are Studied Together

In the Hebrew Bible, the twelve short prophets from Hosea to Malachi were written on one scroll and counted as one book, called the Twelve. We often call them the Minor Prophets. That does not mean they are less important than Isaiah or Jeremiah. It means their books are shorter. This study covers the last six of the Twelve.

These six belong together because they stand on both sides of the great dividing line in Israel's history, the exile to Babylon. Two of them spoke before the exile, while Judah still had a king: Nahum, who foretold the fall of Nineveh (612 B.C.), and Zephaniah, who preached in the days of King Josiah, about 640 to 625 B.C. One spoke near it, as Babylon rose to power and the first

captives were about to be carried away: Habakkuk, about 609 to 605 B.C. Three spoke after the return from exile, when Persia ruled the world: Haggai and Zechariah, who began in 520 B.C. and stirred the people to finish the temple, and Malachi, about 430 B.C., the last prophet of the Old Testament.

Read together, they tell one story. God judges proud nations, Assyria and then Babylon, just as He said. God judges His own people when they turn from Him, but He never casts them off. He keeps a remnant, brings them home, and calls them to put Him first. And again and again these prophets look past their own day to a greater day: the day of the LORD, when God will judge the whole earth, save His people Israel, and rule as King. They also point to the One who would bring it about. Habakkuk teaches that "the righteous will live by his faithfulness" (Habakkuk 2:4), which the New Testament uses to explain faith in Christ. Haggai sees the glory of a greater house. Zechariah sees the King, the Branch, the pierced One and the struck Shepherd. Malachi sees the messenger who prepares the way, and the Lord who comes suddenly to His temple. The Old Testament ends with these men looking forward, and the New Testament opens with John the Baptist and Jesus.

Using This Study With a Group

This study works for one person or for a group. Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah have three chapters each, Haggai has two, Zechariah has fourteen and Malachi has four (the SLB, like most English Bibles, divides Malachi into four chapters), twenty-nine chapters in all. Here are two ways a group can pace it:

- One chapter a week: twenty-nine weeks, about seven months. If you like, add a first meeting to read the Introduction and the Background of Nahum together, and a short time at the start of each new book to read its Overview and Background.
- Two chapters a week: about fifteen weeks. Some chapters pair well: Nahum 2 and 3 (the fall of Nineveh), Habakkuk 1 and 2 (the questions and God's answers), Zephaniah 2 and 3, Haggai 1 and 2, and many of Zechariah's night visions (chapters 1 and 2, 3 and 4, 5 and 6, 7 and 8). Take Habakkuk 3, Zechariah 12 to 14 and Malachi 3 more slowly if you can, because they cover a lot of ground.

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.

Some parts of these books are hard. Nahum speaks of God's vengeance and describes the fall of a city in war, and people sometimes ask how that fits with a loving God. Habakkuk asks why God lets evil go on and why He would use a crueler nation to judge His people, and some in your group may be asking that same question about their own lives. Zephaniah 1 describes the day of the LORD in strong words of judgment. Zechariah 12 to 14 looks ahead to the last days, a time of war around Jerusalem, Israel's mourning for the One they pierced, and the Lord's return, and good Bible teachers read these chapters in different ways. Malachi 2:16 speaks of divorce, and some in

your group may have been through one or grown up in a home that broke apart. The study handles each of these plainly and with care. 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 Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. 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 Nahum

Nahum is the thirty-fourth book of the Bible and the seventh of the twelve Minor Prophets. It comes right after Micah and right before Habakkuk. The whole book is about one city: Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian empire.

To understand Nahum, we have to remember Jonah. About a hundred years or more before Nahum, God sent Jonah to Nineveh to warn it of judgment. The people of Nineveh repented, from the king down, and God spared the city (Jonah 3:10). But the repentance did not last. In the years that followed, Assyria became the most feared power in the world. It destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel and carried its people away in 722 B.C. It invaded Judah, took many of its cities, and surrounded Jerusalem in 701 B.C., until the angel of the LORD struck the Assyrian army in one night (2 Kings 18 to 19). Assyria was known for its cruelty to the nations it conquered. By Nahum's day, Judah was still under its shadow.

Into that fear, God sent Nahum. His name means comfort. His message was simple: Nineveh will fall, and it will not rise again. The God who was patient with Nineveh in Jonah's day is still patient, but His patience has an end. He will punish the guilty, and He will protect those who trust in Him. For Judah, that was very good news.

Nahum is also a book of great poetry. It describes the LORD coming in the storm, the attack on Nineveh, the chariots in the streets, the river gates opened, and the lion's den left empty. The theme of the book is that the LORD is both just and good. He judges the proud and cruel, and He is a safe place for His people. The key verse is:

Nahum 1:7 (SLB)

"The LORD ***is*** good, a stronghold in a day of trouble; and He knows those who take refuge in Him."

Nahum has 3 chapters and 47 verses. Here is its structure:

Part One: Who the LORD Is (chapter 1)

- Nahum 1: The LORD Is Slow to Anger and a Stronghold

Part Two: How Nineveh Will Fall (chapter 2)

- Nahum 2: The Fall of Nineveh Foretold

Part Three: Why Nineveh Will Fall (chapter 3)

- Nahum 3: Woe to the City of Blood

Where this book points to Christ: Nahum 1:15 says, "Look, on the mountains the feet of one who brings good news, who proclaims peace!" Isaiah used almost the same words for the good news that God reigns and saves His people (Isaiah 52:7), and Paul quotes Isaiah's form of the saying for those who preach the gospel of Christ (Romans 10:15). The news that Nineveh had fallen meant peace for Judah. The news that Jesus died and rose again means peace with God for everyone who believes (Romans 5:1). Nahum also shows us the God of the cross. He "will certainly not leave ***the***

guilty unpunished" (1:3), and yet He is "a stronghold in a day of trouble" for those who come to Him (1:7). At the cross, God punished sin fully in His Son and opened a refuge for sinners.

Background of Nahum

Author: "Nahum the Elkoshite" (1:1). That is all we know about him. Scripture does not tell us his family, his work or how God called him. Elkosh was his hometown, but no one is sure where it was. Some old traditions place it in Galilee, others in southern Judah, and one places it near Nineveh itself. The town of Capernaum, whose name means village of Nahum, is sometimes linked to him, but that cannot be proved. Most scholars accept that Nahum wrote the book. A few have doubted that the poem in chapter 1 is his own, but there is no good reason to separate it from the rest.

Who it was written to: The people of Judah, who had suffered under Assyria for a long time (1:12-15). The book is also addressed to Nineveh in many places ("you" in 1:11, 14; 2:13; 3:5-19), but it was Judah who would read it and take comfort from it.

When it was written: Nahum speaks of the fall of Thebes, the great city of Egypt, as something that had already happened (3:8-10). The Assyrians took Thebes in 663 B.C. Nahum speaks of Nineveh's fall as still ahead, and Nineveh fell in 612 B.C. So the book was written sometime between 663 and 612 B.C. Many conservative scholars place it about 650 B.C., while Assyria was still strong, because Nahum speaks of Nineveh as "complete and thus many" (1:12). Others place it closer to 615 B.C., when Assyria was already weakening.

When the events happened: Nahum's prophecy came true in 612 B.C. An alliance of the Babylonians and the Medes, with others, besieged Nineveh and took it. The city was destroyed so completely that it was never rebuilt as a great city. Its ruins lay buried under mounds of earth for centuries, and they were not dug out until archaeologists worked there in the 1800s A.D. The last of the Assyrian army held out for a few more years farther west, and it was finally crushed in 609 to 605 B.C.

Setting: Assyria ruled from the Persian Gulf to Egypt. Its capital, Nineveh, stood on the east bank of the Tigris River, across from the modern city of Mosul in Iraq. It was a great city with high walls, palaces, temples and canals. The Assyrian kings boasted in their own records of the cities they burned and the people they killed. Judah had paid tribute to Assyria for years, and King Manasseh had even been taken to Babylon by the commanders of the king of Assyria (2 Chronicles 33:11). To the people of Judah, Assyria looked like it would last forever.

Nahum and Jonah: Jonah and Nahum are the two books of the Bible addressed to Nineveh. In Jonah, God shows mercy to a city that repents. In Nahum, God brings justice on a city that went back to its evil. Both books describe God with the words of Exodus 34:6-7: He is "slow to anger" (Jonah 4:2; Nahum 1:3). Jonah shows the first half of that verse, His mercy. Nahum shows the second half, that He will by no means clear the guilty. We need both books to see God as He really is.

Purpose: To comfort Judah by announcing that the LORD would bring down Assyria and Nineveh for their cruelty, pride and idolatry; to show that the LORD rules over all nations, even

the greatest; and to teach that God is patient but not careless about sin, and that He is a stronghold for everyone who takes refuge in Him (1:7).

Nahum 1: The LORD Is Slow to Anger and a Stronghold

Scripture

1:1-8 The oracle of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite. A jealous and avenging God ***is*** the LORD; avenging ***is*** the LORD, and a master of rage; avenging ***is*** the LORD on His adversaries, and He ***is*** keeping ***wrath*** for His enemies. The LORD ***is*** slow to anger and great in power, and He will certainly not leave ***the guilty*** unpunished. The LORD, in ***the*** whirlwind and in ***the*** storm ***is*** His way, and cloud ***is*** the dust of His feet. He rebukes the sea and makes it dry, and He dries up all the rivers; Bashan and Carmel wither, and the blossom of Lebanon withers. Mountains quake because of Him, and the hills melt; and the earth rises up before Him, and the world and all who dwell in it. Before His indignation who can stand? And who can rise up in the burning of His anger? His rage is poured out like fire, and the rocks are torn down by Him. The LORD ***is*** good, a stronghold in a day of trouble; and He knows those who take refuge in Him. And with a flood that passes over He will make a complete end of her place, and He will pursue His enemies ***into*** darkness.

1:9-15 Whatever you plot against the LORD, He ***is*** making a complete end; trouble will not rise up twice. For even ***like*** entangled thorns, and drunken like their drink, they will be consumed like stubble fully dry. From you has come out one who plots evil against the LORD, a counselor of worthlessness. Thus says the LORD: Though ***they are*** complete and thus many, even thus they will be cut down, and he will pass away. And I have afflicted you; I will not afflict you again. And now I will break his yoke bar from upon you, and I will tear apart your fetters. And the LORD has commanded concerning you: No ***one*** from your name will be sown again; from the house of your gods I will cut off carved image and molten image; I will make your grave, for you are contemptible. Look, on the mountains the feet of one who brings good news, who proclaims peace! Celebrate your festivals, O Judah; pay your vows; for ***the*** worthless ***one*** will not again pass through you; all of him is cut off.

Preview

Before Nahum says one word about how Nineveh will fall, he tells us who God is. The LORD is jealous for His people and avenges wrongs done against them. He is slow to anger, but He will not let the guilty go unpunished. When He comes in judgment, the sea dries up, the mountains shake and no one can stand before Him. And in the middle of this storm stands one of the sweetest verses in the Old Testament: "The LORD ***is*** good, a stronghold in a day of trouble."

The second half of the chapter turns between two audiences. To Nineveh, God says its plots against Him will come to nothing and its king's grave is ready. To Judah, He says the yoke of Assyria will be broken and the days of affliction are over. The chapter ends with a messenger running over the mountains with good news: peace has come, and the enemy is cut off.

Study

1:1 *The oracle of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.*

"The oracle of Nineveh." An oracle is a message from God, often a message of judgment. The Hebrew word comes from a root that means to lift up or carry, and some translate it as a burden. It was a heavy word to carry, and this one was against Nineveh, the capital of Assyria.

"The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite." Nahum's message came to him as a vision, something God showed him, and it was written down as a book. Nahum's name means comfort. His message would bring no comfort to Nineveh, but great comfort to Judah, the people Nineveh had crushed for so long.

1:2-3 *A jealous and avenging God **is** the LORD; avenging **is** the LORD, and a master of rage; avenging **is** the LORD on His adversaries, and He **is** keeping **wrath** for His enemies. The LORD **is** slow to anger and great in power, and He will certainly not leave **the guilty** unpunished. The LORD, in **the** whirlwind and in **the** storm **is** His way, and cloud **is** the dust of His feet.*

These two verses are the foundation of the whole book, and they can be hard for us to hear. "A jealous and avenging God ***is*** the LORD." Three times in verse 2 Nahum says the LORD is "avenging." He is "a master of rage." He is "keeping ***wrath*** for His enemies."

What does it mean that God is jealous? Human jealousy is often selfish and petty. God's jealousy is not. It is the right and holy zeal of a husband for his wife, or a father for his children. God loves His people, and He will not stand by forever while they are crushed or while they give His glory to idols (Exodus 20:5; 34:14).

What does it mean that He avenges? Vengeance in the Bible is not a bad temper or a personal grudge. It means God sets things right. He repays evil with justice. Assyria had burned cities, killed without mercy and carried whole nations into exile. If God never acted, it would mean that evil wins and the victims do not matter. God's vengeance means they do matter. This is also why God tells us not to take revenge ourselves. Paul tells us not to avenge ourselves, but to "give place to the wrath" of God, because God has said that vengeance is His and He will repay (Romans 12:19). We can leave justice in God's hands because He really will repay.

Then verse 3 adds the other side: "The LORD ***is*** slow to anger and great in power." These words come from God's own description of Himself to Moses in Exodus 34:6-7. Slow to anger means God is patient. He waits a long time before He acts in judgment. He had waited with Nineveh for well over a century since Jonah preached there and the city repented (Jonah 3:10). Peter says God is still patient today, "not wishing any to perish, but all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

But patience is not weakness, and it is not approval. "He will certainly not leave ***the guilty*** unpunished." That is also from Exodus 34:7. Some people think God's patience means He does not care about sin, or that He will never act. Nahum says otherwise. God is slow to anger because He is merciful. He is great in power, so when He does act, no one can stop Him.

So how do these fit together? Plainly put, God is both loving and just. He is patient with the sinner, and He will judge sin that is never repented of. These two truths meet at the cross. There God punished sin fully, in His Son, so that He could forgive everyone who believes (Romans 3:26). For anyone who has turned to Christ, God's justice is no longer a threat. It has been satisfied.

"The LORD, in ***the*** whirlwind and in ***the*** storm ***is*** His way, and cloud ***is*** the dust of His feet." Nahum pictures God coming like a great storm. We kick up dust when we walk. The clouds are the dust kicked up by His feet. That is how great He is.

1:4-6 *He rebukes the sea and makes it dry, and He dries up all the rivers; Bashan and Carmel wither, and the blossom of Lebanon withers. Mountains quake because of Him, and the hills melt; and the earth rises up before Him, and the world and all who dwell in it. Before His indignation who can stand? And who can rise up in the burning of His anger? His rage is poured out like fire, and the rocks are torn down by Him.*

Now Nahum shows what happens when the LORD comes. "He rebukes the sea and makes it dry, and He dries up all the rivers." This calls to mind the Red Sea and the Jordan, which God dried up for Israel (Exodus 14; Joshua 3). The God who did that for His people can do anything.

"Bashan and Carmel wither, and the blossom of Lebanon withers." These were the richest, greenest places in the land. Bashan, east of the Sea of Galilee, was known for its cattle and oaks. Carmel was a fruitful ridge by the sea. Lebanon was famous for its cedars. If these wither at His word, nothing on earth can stand against Him.

"Mountains quake because of Him, and the hills melt." The things that look most solid and lasting to us shake like leaves before God.

Then come two questions: "Before His indignation who can stand? And who can rise up in the burning of His anger?" The answer is no one. Nineveh thought it was the strongest city on earth. It could not stand before God for a moment. "His rage is poured out like fire, and the rocks are torn down by Him."

These verses should make us tremble. Many people today think God would never judge anyone. Nahum says He is holy and powerful, and the right response is to run to Him. The next verse invites us to do just that.

1:7 *The LORD **is** good, a stronghold in a day of trouble; and He knows those who take refuge in Him.*

"The LORD ***is*** good." After all the thunder of the first six verses, this is where Nahum wants us to land. The same God who makes mountains quake is good. He is not good in a weak or soft way. He is good in the deepest sense: everything He is and everything He does is right, pure and kind. His anger against Nineveh does not cancel His goodness. It flows from it. A good God does not shrug at cruelty.

"A stronghold in a day of trouble." A stronghold was a fortress, a high and walled place where people ran when an enemy came. Judah knew all about enemies. For generations, Assyrian armies had marched through their land. Nahum says the LORD Himself is the fortress. When the

day of trouble comes, we do not have to find a wall to hide behind. We can run to Him. David said the same thing many times (Psalm 18:2), and the sons of Korah sang, "God ***is*** a refuge and strength for us, a help in troubles, found abundantly" (Psalm 46:1).

Notice that it says "in a day of trouble," not before it or instead of it. God does not promise that trouble will never come. He promises to be our stronghold when it does. Jesus told His disciples the same thing: "In the world you will have tribulation; but take courage, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

"And He knows those who take refuge in Him." To take refuge means to run to God for safety and to trust Him to protect you. The word "knows" here means much more than knowing facts about someone. It means He knows them personally, cares for them and watches over them. God knew every family in Judah who trusted Him. He knows you by name too, if you have run to Him. In the coming storm that would sweep away Nineveh, not one of His people would be forgotten.

That is the heart of Nahum. Judgment and refuge stand side by side. God's power is a terror to those who fight against Him, and a fortress to those who hide in Him. Which is He to you? The way in is open. Jesus said He gives His sheep eternal life, "and no one will snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:28).

1:8 *And with a flood that passes over He will make a complete end of her place, and He will pursue His enemies **into** darkness.*

"And with a flood that passes over He will make a complete end of her place." This is the first time Nahum points directly at Nineveh in the poem ("her place"). A flood would sweep it away. Many Bible teachers see this fulfilled in a literal way. Nineveh stood on the Tigris River, with canals and smaller rivers running through and around it. Ancient writers report that during the siege of 612 B.C., floodwaters broke down part of the city wall and let the attackers in. Nahum will mention the river gates again in 2:6.

"He will pursue His enemies ***into*** darkness." There would be no place to escape. Darkness here is the darkness of defeat and death. For those who reject God to the end, there is no stronghold.

1:9-11 *Whatever you plot against the LORD, He **is** making a complete end; trouble will not rise up twice. For even **like** entangled thorns, and drunken like their drink, they will be consumed like stubble fully dry. From you has come out one who plots evil against the LORD, a counselor of worthlessness.*

"Whatever you plot against the LORD, He ***is*** making a complete end." Nahum now speaks straight to Nineveh. Assyria had made plans against Judah, and in doing so it was plotting against the LORD Himself, because Judah was His people. Those plans would come to nothing.

"Trouble will not rise up twice." God would not need a second blow. When He struck Nineveh, it would be finished. And so it was. Nineveh fell in 612 B.C. and never rose again.

Verse 10 gives pictures of how easily Assyria would fall: like "entangled thorns" that burn all at once, like drunken men who cannot fight, and like dry stubble that goes up in a flash.

"From you has come out one who plots evil against the LORD, a counselor of worthlessness." The word "worthlessness" is the Hebrew belial, which means wickedness or good-for-nothing (later it became a name for Satan, 2 Corinthians 6:15). Nahum may have one Assyrian king in mind. Many think of Sennacherib, who invaded Judah and mocked the LORD before the walls of Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:13-35). Or it may mean the line of Assyrian kings as a whole. Either way, the man who plotted against God would answer to God.

1:12-13 *Thus says the LORD: Though **they are** complete and thus many, even thus they will be cut down, and he will pass away. And I have afflicted you; I will not afflict you again. And now I will break his yoke bar from upon you, and I will tear apart your fetters.*

"Thus says the LORD." Now God speaks in His own voice. "Though ***they are*** complete and thus many, even thus they will be cut down." The Assyrians were at full strength and great in number. It would not matter. They would be cut down like grass under a blade.

Then God turns to Judah: "And I have afflicted you; I will not afflict you again." God is honest with His people. Assyria had been His rod to discipline Judah for its sins (Isaiah 10:5). But the time of that discipline was ending. Assyria would never afflict Judah again. Babylon would come later, for Judah's later sins, but Assyria's day was over.

"And now I will break his yoke bar from upon you, and I will tear apart your fetters." A yoke bar was the wooden beam laid across the neck of an ox to make it pull a load. Fetters were chains on a prisoner's ankles or wrists. Judah had been like a work animal and a prisoner under Assyria, paying heavy tribute year after year. God promised to break the yoke and snap the chains.

Sin is a heavier yoke than Assyria ever was, and Jesus came to break it (Matthew 11:28-30).

1:14 *And the LORD has commanded concerning you: No **one** from your name will be sown again; from the house of your gods I will cut off carved image and molten image; I will make your grave, for you are contemptible.*

Now God speaks to the king of Assyria. "No ***one*** from your name will be sown again." His family line and dynasty would end. No son would carry on his name.

"From the house of your gods I will cut off carved image and molten image." A carved image was an idol cut from wood or stone. A molten image was an idol made of melted metal poured into a mold. Assyria's gods could not even protect their own temples.

"I will make your grave, for you are contemptible." The great king who thought himself above everyone would be made low. God Himself would dig his grave. Some Bible teachers point to Sennacherib, who was killed by his own sons while he worshiped in the house of his god (2 Kings 19:37), though that happened before Nahum wrote. More likely Nahum is speaking of the end of the whole royal house of Assyria, which came within a few years of Nineveh's fall.

1:15 *Look, on the mountains the feet of one who brings good news, who proclaims peace! Celebrate your festivals, O Judah; pay your vows; for **the** worthless **one** will not again pass through you; all of him is cut off.*

"Look, on the mountains the feet of one who brings good news, who proclaims peace!" Picture the hills around Jerusalem. A runner appears on the ridge, coming fast. This runner brings good news. Peace has come. Nineveh has fallen. The oppressor is gone.

"Celebrate your festivals, O Judah; pay your vows." When the danger passed, Judah was to go back to worship. The festivals were the feasts God gave Israel, such as Passover and Booths. Vows were promises made to God, often in times of trouble. Now it was time to keep them. When God answers our prayers, we should not forget to thank Him and keep our word.

"For ***the*** worthless ***one*** will not again pass through you; all of him is cut off." The same word belial from verse 11 appears again. The wicked oppressor would never march through Judah again.

Isaiah used almost the same words a few generations earlier, for the good news that the LORD reigns and has redeemed His people: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who makes peace heard" (Isaiah 52:7). Paul quotes Isaiah's form of the saying for those who preach the gospel (Romans 10:15). Why? Because the gospel is the greatest good news of all. The enemy that held us was not Assyria, but sin and death. Jesus Christ defeated them at the cross and rose again. The news of His victory still runs over the mountains, and every believer who tells it is one of those messengers. Who brought that good news to you? And who might you bring it to this week?

Summary

Nahum's oracle against Nineveh begins with who the LORD is. He is a jealous and avenging God, who will repay His enemies. He is slow to anger and great in power, and He will not leave the guilty unpunished. When He comes, He dries up seas and rivers, makes the richest lands wither, and shakes the mountains, and no one can stand before His anger. Yet the LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble, and He knows those who take refuge in Him. He would make a complete end of Nineveh with an overwhelming flood, and its plots against Him would fail. The one who plotted evil against the LORD would fall. Though Assyria was strong and many, it would be cut down, and God would break its yoke from Judah and never afflict His people by it again. The king of Assyria would have no descendants, his idols would be cut off, and God would make his grave. The chapter ends with a messenger on the mountains bringing good news of peace and calling Judah to keep its feasts and vows, because the wicked one is cut off forever.

Study Questions

1. What three words does Nahum use again and again to describe the LORD in verse 2? (1:2)

2. What does it mean that the LORD is "slow to anger," and what does verse 3 say He will certainly not do? (1:3; Exodus 34:6-7)

3. What happens to the sea, the rivers, the mountains and the richest lands when the LORD comes? (1:4-6)

4. How does verse 7 describe the LORD, and who does He know? (1:7)

5. What did God promise to do to Judah's yoke and fetters? (1:12-13)

6. What did the messenger on the mountains announce, and what was Judah told to do? (1:15)

7. How does Paul use the picture of the feet of the one bringing good news? (Romans 10:15)

8. Some people think a loving God would never judge anyone. How do verses 2 and 3 help us see God's love and His justice together?

9. When has God been "a stronghold in a day of trouble" for you? What does it look like to take refuge in Him right now?

10. Is there someone who has wronged you whom you need to leave in God's hands instead of seeking revenge? (Romans 12:19)

Nahum 2: The Fall of Nineveh Foretold

Scripture

2:1-13 One who scatters has come up against your face. Guard the fortification; watch the road; strengthen ***your*** loins; make ***your*** strength very firm. For the LORD will restore the majesty of Jacob like the majesty of Israel; for those who lay waste have laid them waste, and they have ruined their branches. The shield of his warriors ***is*** dyed red; the men of strength ***are*** clothed in scarlet; the chariotry ***is*** in ***the*** fire of steel on the day of his preparing, and the cypresses are made to quiver. In the streets the chariotry drives madly; they rush back and forth in the open places; their appearance ***is*** like the torches; like the lightning flashes they run about. He remembers his nobles; they stumble in their going; they hurry ***to*** her wall, and the covering is prepared. The gates of the rivers are opened, and the palace melts away. And it is fixed: she is uncovered, she is carried away; and her maidservants are moaning like the sound of doves, beating on their hearts. And Nineveh ***has been*** like a pool of water from the days ***that*** she ***existed***; and they are fleeing. Stop! Stop! And there is none who turns back. Plunder silver! Plunder gold! And there is no end to the supply, wealth from every desirable article. Emptiness, and empty waste, and devastation! And ***the*** heart melts, and knees totter, and anguish ***is*** in all loins, and the faces of all of them gather paleness. Where ***is*** the dwelling of the lions, and it ***was*** a pasture for the young lions, where the lion walked, the lioness, the lion's cub there, and there was none who terrified ***them***? The lion tore enough for his cubs and strangled for his lionesses; and he filled his holes ***with*** prey, and his dens ***with*** torn flesh. Look, I ***am*** against you, declares the LORD of armies, and I will burn her chariotry in smoke, and ***the*** sword will consume your young lions; and I will cut off your prey from the earth, and the voice of your messengers will not be heard again.

Preview

Chapter 1 told us who the LORD is and what He would do. Chapter 2 shows it happening. Nahum writes as if he is standing on the walls of Nineveh watching the attack. An enemy comes up against the city. Red shields flash. Chariots race through the streets. The river gates burst open, the palace gives way, and the people flee. The riches of the greatest city on earth are carried off.

Then Nahum looks at the ruins and asks a mocking question: where is the lion's den now? Assyria's kings had acted like lions, tearing the nations apart to feed themselves. Now the den is empty. The chapter closes with God's own reason: "Look, I ***am*** against you, declares the LORD of armies."

Study

2:1 *One who scatters has come up against your face. Guard the fortification; watch the road; strengthen* ***your*** *loins; make* ***your*** *strength very firm.*

"One who scatters has come up against your face." The attacker is called the one who scatters, because he would break Nineveh apart and send its people running. History tells us who he was. In 612 B.C. an alliance led by the Babylonians and the Medes besieged Nineveh and took it.

Then Nahum gives Nineveh four short orders: "Guard the fortification; watch the road; strengthen ***your*** loins; make ***your*** strength very firm." To strengthen the loins was to tighten your belt and get ready for hard work or battle. These sound like the commands of an officer on the wall, but there is a sad irony in them. Nineveh could do all of this, and it would not matter. When God is against a city, no wall is high enough.

2:2 *For the LORD will restore the majesty of Jacob like the majesty of Israel; for those who lay waste have laid them waste, and they have ruined their branches.*

In the middle of the battle scene, Nahum stops to tell us why this matters. "For the LORD will restore the majesty of Jacob like the majesty of Israel." Jacob and Israel are both names for God's people, from the patriarch Jacob, whom God renamed Israel (Genesis 32:28). Here they likely stand for the whole nation, the north and the south together. Assyria had destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel and stripped Judah. God would bring back their honor.

"For those who lay waste have laid them waste, and they have ruined their branches." Israel is often pictured as a vine (Psalm 80:8-16). Assyria had stripped the vine bare and broken its branches. That is why Nineveh's fall was good news. It was the first step in God's plan to restore His people.

The full restoration of all Israel is still ahead. The prophets say God will one day gather His people from every nation, cleanse them and bring them home under their King (Ezekiel 37:21-22; Romans 11:26). The fall of Nineveh was a small down payment on a much greater promise.

2:3-4 *The shield of his warriors **is** dyed red; the men of strength **are** clothed in scarlet; the chariotry **is** in **the** fire of steel on the day of his preparing, and the cypresses are made to quiver. In the streets the chariotry drives madly; they rush back and forth in the open places; their appearance **is** like the torches; like the lightning flashes they run about.*

Now we see the attacking army. "The shield of his warriors ***is*** dyed red; the men of strength ***are*** clothed in scarlet." Some shields were covered with leather dyed red, and the soldiers wore red or purple garments. In the sunlight the army looked like a wave of fire.

"The chariotry ***is*** in ***the*** fire of steel on the day of his preparing." The metal parts of the chariots flashed like fire as they were made ready. "The cypresses are made to quiver." This likely means the spears, made from cypress wood, were being shaken and waved as the soldiers prepared to charge.

"In the streets the chariotry drives madly; they rush back and forth in the open places; their appearance ***is*** like the torches; like the lightning flashes they run about." The battle reaches the streets and squares. Chariots race in every direction, flashing like torches and lightning.

Some popular teachers in the past said these verses describe modern cars on a highway. That is not what Nahum meant. He was describing the war chariots of his own day, in the battle for Nineveh. Reading modern machines into the text is a good example of eisegesis, reading our own ideas into Scripture. We are on safer ground when we let Nahum tell us what he saw.

2:5-6 *He remembers his nobles; they stumble in their going; they hurry **to** her wall, and the covering is prepared. The gates of the rivers are opened, and the palace melts away.*

"He remembers his nobles; they stumble in their going." "He" is most likely the king of Nineveh, calling up his best officers to defend the city. But they stumble as they go. They are confused, perhaps drunk, perhaps in panic. "They hurry ***to*** her wall, and the covering is prepared." The covering was a large shield or shelter. It may have been put up by the defenders on the wall, or by the attackers, who built such shelters to protect the men working to break through.

"The gates of the rivers are opened, and the palace melts away." This is one of the most striking lines in the book. Nineveh stood on the Tigris, and the Khosr River ran through the city. Canals and dams controlled the water, and gates in the walls let the rivers in and out. Nahum says those gates would be opened, and the palace would melt away, as if dissolved by water. In 1:8 he spoke of an overwhelming flood. Ancient writers report that during the siege, a flood broke down part of the wall and opened the way for the enemy. Whether by flood or by the enemy seizing the water gates, the city that trusted in its rivers was undone by them.

2:7-8 *And it is fixed: she is uncovered, she is carried away; and her maidservants are moaning like the sound of doves, beating on their hearts. And Nineveh **has been** like a pool of water from the days **that** she **existed**; and they are fleeing. Stop! Stop! And there is none who turns back.*

"And it is fixed: she is uncovered, she is carried away." The first words mean the matter is settled. God has decreed it, and it will happen. "She" is likely the city itself, pictured as a woman stripped of her honor and led away captive. Some think it refers to the queen, or to the statue of Nineveh's goddess carried off by the conquerors. The point is the same. Nineveh's glory was gone.

"And her maidservants are moaning like the sound of doves, beating on their hearts." Beating the chest was a sign of deep grief. The mourning of the doves was a low, sad sound. The city that had made so many others weep now weeps itself.

"And Nineveh ***has been*** like a pool of water from the days ***that*** she ***existed***." For centuries Nineveh had been like a great pool, full and calm, gathering people and wealth from all over the world. Now the pool drains away. "And they are fleeing. Stop! Stop! And there is none who turns back." The officers shout for the people to stand and fight, but no one listens. Everyone runs.

2:9-10 *Plunder silver! Plunder gold! And there is no end to the supply, wealth from every desirable article. Emptiness, and empty waste, and devastation! And **the** heart melts, and knees totter, and anguish **is** in all loins, and the faces of all of them gather paleness.*

"Plunder silver! Plunder gold! And there is no end to the supply." Now the attackers call to each other to grab the treasure. Nineveh had grown rich by robbing every nation it conquered. Its storehouses were full of the wealth of the world: "wealth from every desirable article." Now all of it was taken, just as Nineveh had taken it from others. God's justice often works this way. What we take by force is taken from us (Habakkuk 2:8).

"Emptiness, and empty waste, and devastation!" In Hebrew these three words sound alike, almost like a drumbeat. Nahum makes us hear how completely the city is emptied.

"And ***the*** heart melts, and knees totter, and anguish ***is*** in all loins, and the faces of all of them gather paleness." Fear takes over. Hearts give way, knees shake, bodies double over in pain, and faces go white. The proud people of Nineveh had made others feel this way for generations. Now it was their turn.

There is a warning here for us. Riches, power and strong walls cannot protect anyone on the day God acts. Jesus told of a rich man who built bigger barns and said to himself that he had plenty laid up for many years. God called him a fool, because his life was required of him that very night (Luke 12:16-21). What are we building our security on?

2:11-12 *Where **is** the dwelling of the lions, and it **was** a pasture for the young lions, where the lion walked, the lioness, the lion's cub there, and there was none who terrified **them**? The lion tore enough for his cubs and strangled for his lionesses; and he filled his holes **with** prey, and his dens **with** torn flesh.*

Nahum now uses a picture everyone in his day would understand. "Where ***is*** the dwelling of the lions?" The Assyrian kings loved to picture themselves as lions. They hunted lions for sport, and they filled their palace walls with carvings of lion hunts. They ruled like lions, hunting down weaker nations.

"The lion tore enough for his cubs and strangled for his lionesses; and he filled his holes ***with*** prey, and his dens ***with*** torn flesh." This is how Assyria built its wealth. Like a lion bringing home kills to its den, the king of Assyria brought back the spoils of other nations to fill Nineveh. The lion's family was well fed, and "there was none who terrified ***them***." No one dared to challenge them.

But now Nahum stands at the empty den and asks: where is it? The lions are gone. The den is silent. The most feared power on earth has vanished.

2:13 *Look, I **am** against you, declares the LORD of armies, and I will burn her chariotry in smoke, and **the** sword will consume your young lions; and I will cut off your prey from the earth, and the voice of your messengers will not be heard again.*

"Look, I ***am*** against you, declares the LORD of armies." This is the reason for everything in the chapter. The Medes and the Babylonians were only tools. It was God who was against Nineveh. That is the most frightening thing anyone can hear. If God is for us, who can be against us (Romans 8:31)? But if God is against us, who can be for us?

"I will burn her chariotry in smoke." The chariots that raced through the streets would burn. "And ***the*** sword will consume your young lions." The young warriors would fall. "And I will cut off your prey from the earth." Assyria would never again hunt down another nation.

"And the voice of your messengers will not be heard again." Assyria's messengers had once stood outside Jerusalem shouting threats and mocking the LORD (2 Kings 18:17-35). Those voices would be silenced forever. Notice the contrast with 1:15. There, a messenger of good news runs over the mountains to Judah. Here, the messengers of Nineveh are silent. The voice of the enemy fades, and the voice of good news goes out.

That is still how God works. The voices that mock Him and threaten His people will not have the last word. Jesus Christ will. One day every knee will bow to Him (Philippians 2:10-11). Until then, God's people can live without fear, because the LORD of armies is not against us. Through Christ, He is for us.

Summary

Nahum describes the attack on Nineveh as if he sees it happening. One who scatters comes against the city, and Nineveh is told to guard its walls and brace for battle, though it will do no good. The LORD will restore the majesty of Jacob and Israel, whom Assyria had laid waste. The attacking army comes with red shields and scarlet clothing, and chariots flash like fire and race through the streets like lightning. The king calls his nobles, but they stumble. The river gates are opened and the palace melts away. The city is stripped and carried off, and its maidservants mourn like doves. Nineveh, once like a full pool, drains away as its people flee and no one turns back. Its silver and gold are plundered, the city is emptied, and every heart melts in fear. Nahum asks where the lion's den is now, the den Assyria filled with prey from the nations. The LORD of armies declares that He is against Nineveh: He will burn its chariots, its young lions will fall, its prey will be cut off, and the voice of its messengers will never be heard again.

Study Questions

1. What four orders does Nahum give to Nineveh at the start of the chapter, and why would they not help? (2:1)

2. What does the LORD promise to do for Jacob and Israel, and why? (2:2)

3. How does Nahum describe the attacking army and its chariots? (2:3-4)

4. What happens to the gates of the rivers and the palace? (2:6)

5. What picture does Nahum use for Nineveh in verse 8, and what happens to its people? (2:8)

6. What did the Assyrian "lion" bring back to its den, and what has happened to the den now? (2:11-12)

7. Who does the LORD say is really against Nineveh, and what will happen to the voice of its messengers? (2:13; compare 1:15)

8. Nineveh trusted in its walls, its rivers and its riches. What are some things people today trust in for security instead of God?

9. Why do you think it matters so much whether God is for us or against us? How does Romans 8:31 answer that for a believer?

10. Nineveh took from others, and then it was taken from. Is there any area of your life where you are gaining at someone else's expense?

Nahum 3: Woe to the City of Blood

Scripture

3:1-7 Woe, city of blood! All of her ***is*** full of lying ***and*** plunder; prey does not depart. The sound of a whip, and the sound of the rattling of a wheel, and a galloping horse, and a jolting chariot; a horseman mounting, and the flame of a sword, and the flash of a spear, and a multitude of slain, and a weight of corpses; and there is no end to the bodies; they stumble over their bodies, because of the multitude of the prostitutions of the prostitute, good in grace, mistress of sorceries, who sells nations by her prostitutions, and clans by her sorceries. Look, I ***am*** against you, declares the LORD of armies, and I will uncover your skirts over your face, and I will show nations your nakedness, and kingdoms your shame. And I will throw detestable things on you, and I will treat you with contempt, and I will make you like a spectacle. And it will be ***that*** all who see you will flee from you and say, "Nineveh is devastated; who will show sympathy to her?" From where shall I seek comforters for you?

3:8-19 Are you better than Thebes, who dwelt among the canals, water all around her, whose rampart ***was the*** sea, from ***the*** sea her wall? Cush ***was*** her strength, and Egypt, and there was no end; Put and the Libyans were your help. Also she went to the exile; she went into the captivity; also her infants were dashed in pieces at the head of all the streets; and for her honored ***men*** they cast a lot, and all her great ***men*** were bound with the fetters. Also you will be drunk; you will be hidden; also you will seek a stronghold from the enemy. All your fortifications ***are*** fig trees with first-ripe fruit; if they are shaken, they fall on the mouth of the eater. Look, your people ***are*** women in your midst; to your enemies the gates of your land have been opened wide; fire has consumed your bars. Draw for yourself water ***for the*** siege; strengthen your fortifications; go into the clay and trample on the mortar; take hold of the brick mold. There fire will consume you; ***the*** sword will cut you off; it will consume you like the young locust. Make yourself many like the young locust; make yourself many like the locust. You have increased your traders more than the stars of the heavens; the young locust strips and flies away. Your princes ***are*** like the locust, and your officials like swarms of grasshoppers, which encamp in the walls on a day of cold; the sun rises, and it flees away, and its place is not known. Where ***are*** they? Your shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria; your nobles settle down; your people are scattered on the mountains, and there is none who gathers ***them***. There is no relief for your fracture; your wound ***is*** severe. All who hear the report of you clap a palm over you; for over whom has your evil not passed continually?

Preview

Chapter 2 showed how Nineveh would fall. Chapter 3 tells us why. Nahum begins with a cry of woe over the "city of blood," a city full of lies and plunder. He gives a short, sharp picture of the battle in its streets, and then names Nineveh's sins: violence, deceit, and luring the nations into its power like a seducer and a sorcerer. God says He will expose Nineveh's shame before the whole world.

Then Nahum points to Thebes, the great city of Egypt, which Assyria itself had destroyed. Thebes had water all around and powerful allies, and it still fell. Nineveh would be no different. Its forts

would drop like ripe figs, its soldiers would lose heart, and its leaders would vanish like locusts in the sun. The book ends with the whole world clapping at the news of Assyria's fall, because everyone had felt its cruelty.

Study

3:1-3 *Woe, city of blood! All of her **is** full of lying **and** plunder; prey does not depart. The sound of a whip, and the sound of the rattling of a wheel, and a galloping horse, and a jolting chariot; a horseman mounting, and the flame of a sword, and the flash of a spear, and a multitude of slain, and a weight of corpses; and there is no end to the bodies; they stumble over their bodies,*

"Woe, city of blood!" Woe is a cry of grief and doom, the sound people made at a funeral. Nineveh is called a city of blood because its power was built on killing. The Assyrian kings boasted in their own records about the cities they destroyed and the cruelty they showed to the people they conquered. "All of her ***is*** full of lying ***and*** plunder." Assyria lied in its treaties and robbed in its wars. "Prey does not depart." There was always another victim.

Then Nahum gives a quick, broken series of sounds and sights, as if we are standing in the street: the crack of a whip, the rattle of wheels, galloping horses, jolting chariots, flashing swords and spears. And then the cost: "a multitude of slain," so many that "they stumble over their bodies."

Nahum does not linger here, and neither will we. The point is not to dwell on the horror of war. The point is that Nineveh would suffer what it had done to so many others. Jesus said, "all who take a sword will perish by a sword" (Matthew 26:52). Nineveh had lived by the sword for centuries. Now the sword turned back on it. War is terrible, and Scripture never pretends otherwise. But God sees every life taken by cruel men, and He will hold them to account.

3:4 *because of the multitude of the prostitutions of the prostitute, good in grace, mistress of sorceries, who sells nations by her prostitutions, and clans by her sorceries.*

Why would this happen? "Because of the multitude of the prostitutions of the prostitute." Nahum pictures Nineveh as a prostitute, "good in grace," that is, attractive and charming, and "mistress of sorceries." Sorceries were magic arts, spells and dealings with evil spirits, which were common in Assyria.

What does it mean? Nineveh drew other nations in with promises of safety, trade and wealth, the way a seductive woman lures a man. Then it used them and enslaved them. "Who sells nations by her prostitutions, and clans by her sorceries." Small kingdoms made alliances with Assyria and ended up paying heavy tribute or being carried away. Judah itself had done this. King Ahaz paid Assyria to rescue him, and Judah became its servant (2 Kings 16:7-8).

This is how sin often works. It looks attractive and promises what we want, but it takes far more than it gives. The world still offers its charms, and they still end in bondage. Only God gives freely and sets us free.

3:5-7 *Look, I **am** against you, declares the LORD of armies, and I will uncover your skirts over your face, and I will show nations your nakedness, and kingdoms your shame. And I will throw detestable things on you, and I will treat you with contempt, and I will make you like a spectacle. And it will be **that** all who see you will flee from you and say, "Nineveh is devastated; who will show sympathy to her?" From where shall I seek comforters for you?*

"Look, I ***am*** against you, declares the LORD of armies." For the second time Nahum repeats God's words from 2:13. Then God says He will publicly shame Nineveh. The picture is of a guilty woman exposed before everyone, which was a way of disgracing someone in that culture. The meaning is that Nineveh's real character would be shown to the whole world. The city that looked so grand and charming would be seen for what it was. "I will show nations your nakedness, and kingdoms your shame."

"And I will throw detestable things on you, and I will treat you with contempt, and I will make you like a spectacle." Nineveh had made a spectacle of others. Now it would be the spectacle, something people stare at and turn away from.

"All who see you will flee from you." They will say, "Nineveh is devastated; who will show sympathy to her?" No one would mourn for Nineveh. It had no friends left, only victims.

"From where shall I seek comforters for you?" This is a wordplay on Nahum's own name, which means comfort. There would be no comfort for Nineveh. The comfort of this book was for Judah.

Here is a sober truth. Sin can hide for a long time behind wealth, power and charm. But God sees it, and one day He will bring it into the light (Luke 12:2-3). The only way to be ready for that day is to bring our sin to Him now, confess it, and let Christ cover it with His righteousness (1 John 1:9).

3:8-10 *Are you better than Thebes, who dwelt among the canals, water all around her, whose rampart **was the** sea, from **the** sea her wall? Cush **was** her strength, and Egypt, and there was no end; Put and the Libyans were your help. Also she went to the exile; she went into the captivity; also her infants were dashed in pieces at the head of all the streets; and for her honored **men** they cast a lot, and all her great **men** were bound with the fetters.*

"Are you better than Thebes?" Thebes was the great capital of southern Egypt, on the Nile, with huge temples to the god Amon (the remains are near the modern city of Luxor). It "dwelt among the canals, water all around her," with the Nile and its canals as natural defenses. Its "rampart" and "wall" were water, the very thing Nineveh also trusted in.

Thebes also had strong allies. "Cush ***was*** her strength, and Egypt, and there was no end; Put and the Libyans were your help." Cush was the land south of Egypt (often called Ethiopia in older Bibles), whose kings ruled Egypt at that time. Put was likely in Libya or along the African coast.

And yet Thebes fell. In 663 B.C. the army of Assyria, under King Ashurbanipal, captured and plundered it. "Also she went to the exile; she went into the captivity." Nahum says even the little children suffered, and the city's leaders were divided by lot and bound in chains. Assyria did these things itself. Nahum's point is simple and pointed: Nineveh, you did this to Thebes. Do you think you are any safer?

Scripture records the suffering of children in war plainly and with grief, never with approval. It reminds us how terrible sin and war are, and how much God's judgment on cruel nations is deserved. It also reminds us that God will one day end war forever (Isaiah 2:4). I believe little children who die are safe with God (2 Samuel 12:23).

3:11-13 *Also you will be drunk; you will be hidden; also you will seek a stronghold from the enemy. All your fortifications **are** fig trees with first-ripe fruit; if they are shaken, they fall on the mouth of the eater. Look, your people **are** women in your midst; to your enemies the gates of your land have been opened wide; fire has consumed your bars.*

"Also you will be drunk; you will be hidden." Nineveh would drink the cup of God's judgment and stagger like a drunk man (see Habakkuk 2:16). It would look for a place to hide. "Also you will seek a stronghold from the enemy." What a contrast with 1:7. The LORD is a stronghold for those who trust Him. Nineveh would look for a stronghold and find none.

"All your fortifications ***are*** fig trees with first-ripe fruit; if they are shaken, they fall on the mouth of the eater." The first figs of the season are so ripe that if you shake the tree, they drop right into your mouth. Nineveh's forts would fall that easily. The enemy would hardly have to work.

"Look, your people ***are*** women in your midst." This is not an insult to women. In battle in that day, it meant soldiers who had lost the will and strength to fight. Assyria's feared army would lose its courage. "To your enemies the gates of your land have been opened wide; fire has consumed your bars." The bars were the heavy beams that locked the city gates. They would burn, and the gates would stand open.

3:14-17 *Draw for yourself water **for the** siege; strengthen your fortifications; go into the clay and trample on the mortar; take hold of the brick mold. There fire will consume you; **the** sword will cut you off; it will consume you like the young locust. Make yourself many like the young locust; make yourself many like the locust. You have increased your traders more than the stars of the heavens; the young locust strips and flies away. Your princes **are** like the locust, and your officials like swarms of grasshoppers, which encamp in the walls on a day of cold; the sun rises, and it flees away, and its place is not known. Where **are** they?*

Now Nahum mocks Nineveh's preparations. "Draw for yourself water ***for the*** siege; strengthen your fortifications; go into the clay and trample on the mortar; take hold of the brick mold." Store up water. Make more bricks to repair the walls. Work hard. It will not help.

"There fire will consume you; ***the*** sword will cut you off." Fire and sword would destroy the city right there, in the middle of all its work. Archaeologists who dug at Nineveh found signs of the fire that burned the city.

Then comes a picture of locusts. "It will consume you like the young locust." A swarm of locusts can strip a field bare in hours. Nineveh had been like a locust swarm itself. "You have increased your traders more than the stars of the heavens." Its merchants were everywhere, gathering wealth from every land. But "the young locust strips and flies away." Merchants follow money. When the city fell, they would leave.

"Your princes ***are*** like the locust, and your officials like swarms of grasshoppers, which encamp in the walls on a day of cold." On a cold day, locusts settle in the cracks of walls and do not move. "The sun rises, and it flees away, and its place is not known." When the day warms up, they fly off and are gone. Nineveh's leaders would disappear the same way. "Where ***are*** they?" No one would be able to find them.

3:18-19 *Your shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria; your nobles settle down; your people are scattered on the mountains, and there is none who gathers **them**. There is no relief for your fracture; your wound **is** severe. All who hear the report of you clap a palm over you; for over whom has your evil not passed continually?*

The book ends with a direct word to the king. "Your shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria; your nobles settle down." Shepherds was a common word for rulers and leaders. They are asleep, which here means dead or helpless. "Your people are scattered on the mountains, and there is none who gathers ***them***." A people without leaders are like sheep without a shepherd.

"There is no relief for your fracture; your wound ***is*** severe." Assyria's wound could not be healed. It never recovered. Within a few years the empire was gone, and the city was buried so completely that later travelers walked over the mounds without knowing what lay beneath.

"All who hear the report of you clap a palm over you." When the news spread, the nations clapped their hands for joy. Why? "For over whom has your evil not passed continually?" Every nation had suffered under Assyria. No one grieved its fall.

This is a hard ending, but it is a just one. God is patient, as Nahum said at the start (1:3), but He keeps His word. The book that began with "The LORD ***is*** slow to anger" ends with the fall of those who never turned back to Him. Compare that with Jonah, where the same city repented and God spared it. The difference was not in God. It was in Nineveh's response to Him.

That is the choice before every person. God offers mercy to all who repent. Jesus Christ took God's judgment on Himself so that we would not have to bear it. Those who come to Him find Him "a stronghold in a day of trouble" (1:7). Those who refuse Him will one day face the same justice Nineveh did. Nahum's last question still echoes: over whom has evil not passed? None of us is innocent. But none of us is beyond God's mercy if we come to Him in Christ.

Summary

Nahum pronounces woe on Nineveh, the city of blood, full of lies and plunder, where there was always another victim. In a quick picture of battle, he shows chariots, horsemen, flashing weapons and the many who fall. The reason is Nineveh's cunning and cruelty: like a charming prostitute and a sorceress, it lured nations in and enslaved them. The LORD of armies declares that He is against Nineveh. He will expose its shame before the nations and make it a spectacle, and no one will comfort it. Nineveh is no better than Thebes, which had water for its wall and strong allies, yet went into captivity. Nineveh too will stagger and look for a refuge. Its forts will fall like ripe figs, its soldiers will lose heart, and its gates will burn. Its preparations for siege will not save it; fire and sword will consume it. Its merchants and officials will vanish like locusts in

the sun. The king's leaders sleep, his people are scattered, and his wound cannot be healed. All who hear the news clap their hands, because everyone had felt Assyria's evil.

Study Questions

1. What does Nahum call Nineveh in verse 1, and what was the city full of? (3:1)

2. What picture does Nahum use for the way Nineveh drew in and enslaved the nations? (3:4)

3. What did God say He would do to Nineveh before the nations, and who would comfort her? (3:5-7)

4. What city does Nahum compare Nineveh to, and what happened to it? (3:8-10)

5. How easily would Nineveh's fortifications fall? (3:12)

6. What picture does Nahum use for Nineveh's princes and officials? (3:17)

7. How did the nations react when they heard Assyria had fallen, and why? (3:19)

8. Nineveh was spared in Jonah's day and destroyed in Nahum's. What made the difference?

9. Sin often looks attractive and promises good things before it enslaves us (3:4). Where have you seen that happen, in your own life or around you?

10. Nineveh looked for a stronghold and found none (3:11). Where do you run when trouble comes, and how does Nahum 1:7 speak to that?

Overview of Habakkuk

Habakkuk is the thirty-fifth book of the Bible and the eighth of the twelve Minor Prophets. It comes right after Nahum and right before Zephaniah. Nahum spoke about the fall of Assyria. Habakkuk spoke as the next great power, Babylon, was rising to take its place.

Habakkuk is different from most of the prophets. Most prophets speak for God to the people. Habakkuk speaks to God about the people, and about God Himself. The first two chapters are a conversation. Habakkuk looks at the violence and injustice in Judah and asks God how long He will let it go on. God answers that He is raising up the Chaldeans, the Babylonians, to judge Judah. That answer only raises a harder question. How can a holy God use a nation more wicked than Judah to punish it? Habakkuk takes his stand on the watchtower and waits. God answers again: the proud will fall, but the righteous will live by faith. The book ends with a prayer and a song. Habakkuk remembers what God did in the past, trembles at what is coming, and then says that even if every crop fails, he will rejoice in the LORD.

So the book moves from questions to faith, and from faith to worship. It begins with "How long, O LORD" (1:2) and ends with "GOD ***the*** Lord ***is*** my strength" (3:19). It is a book for anyone who has looked at the world, or at their own life, and asked God why. The key verse is the one the New Testament quotes three times:

Habakkuk 2:4 (SLB)

"Look, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him; and the righteous will live by his faithfulness."

Habakkuk has 3 chapters and 56 verses. Here is its structure:

Part One: Habakkuk's Questions and God's Answers (chapters 1 and 2)

- Habakkuk 1: How Long, O LORD?
- Habakkuk 2: The Righteous Will Live by His Faithfulness

Part Two: Habakkuk's Prayer and Song (chapter 3)

- Habakkuk 3: Habakkuk's Prayer of Trust

Where this book points to Christ: Habakkuk 2:4 is one of the most important verses in the Old Testament for the gospel. Paul quotes it in Romans 1:17 to show that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel "from faith to faith," and again in Galatians 3:11 to show that no one is made right with God by keeping the law. Hebrews 10:38 quotes it to call believers to keep trusting God until Christ returns. God declares a person righteous not because of what they have done, but because they trust Him, and since the coming of Christ that means trusting in Him and His death and resurrection for us (Romans 4:5). Habakkuk 1:5, God's "work in your days" that people would not believe, is also quoted by Paul in Acts 13:41 as a warning to those who reject the gospel. And the promise that "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD" (2:14) will be fully kept when Christ reigns on the earth.

Background of Habakkuk

Author: "Habakkuk the prophet" (1:1; 3:1). That is all the book tells us about him. His name may come from a Hebrew word meaning to embrace, and some have said he embraced his people in prayer, or held on to God in his struggle. The note at the end of chapter 3, "To the choirmaster, on my stringed instruments" (3:19), and the musical words in 3:1 and 3:3, have led some to think he served among the temple singers, which would make him a Levite. Scripture does not say so. Later Jewish legends tell stories about him, but they are not part of the Bible and cannot be trusted.

Who it was written to: The book is first Habakkuk's own record of his questions and God's answers. But it was written down to be read (2:2), and chapter 3 was set to music for public worship (3:19). It was for the faithful in Judah who were troubled by the evil around them and afraid of what was coming.

When it was written: Habakkuk does not give a date. God says He is raising up the Chaldeans to do a work so amazing that the people would not believe it (1:5-6). That fits the years just before Babylon became the ruler of the region. Babylon had helped destroy Nineveh in 612 B.C., and in 605 B.C. it defeated Egypt at the battle of Carchemish and took the first captives from Jerusalem, Daniel among them (Daniel 1:1). The violence and injustice in Judah (1:2-4) fit the reign of King Jehoiakim, who came to the throne in 609 B.C. after his godly father Josiah was killed in battle. So most conservative scholars date Habakkuk about 609 to 605 B.C. Some date it a little earlier, late in Josiah's reign or even in the days of Manasseh.

Setting: Judah had gone through great swings in a short time. Under Manasseh it fell into deep idolatry (2 Kings 21). Under Josiah it turned back to God, and the Law was found and read (2 Kings 22 to 23). But Josiah died at Megiddo in 609 B.C., and his son Jehoiakim undid much of his work. Jeremiah, who preached in these same years, says Jehoiakim built his palace by injustice, shed innocent blood and oppressed the poor (Jeremiah 22:13-17). Meanwhile Assyria was gone, Egypt was trying to take its place, and Babylon was growing stronger every year.

The Chaldeans: The Chaldeans were a people of southern Mesopotamia who came to rule Babylon. Under Nabopolassar and then his son Nebuchadnezzar, they built the Neo-Babylonian empire. They were known for their speed, their power and their cruelty (1:6-11). They would destroy Jerusalem and the temple in 586 B.C. and carry Judah into exile for seventy years (Jeremiah 25:11).

Purpose: To show that God is not deaf to the cries of His people or blind to evil, even when He seems silent; to show that He is in control of the nations and will judge both Judah and Babylon in His time; to teach that the righteous live by trusting God, not by seeing everything worked out; and to lead God's people from fear and doubt into worship and joy in Him, whatever comes (3:17-19).

Habakkuk 1: How Long, O LORD?

Scripture

1:1-11 The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw. How long, O LORD, have I cried for help, and You do not hear? I cry out to You, "Violence!" and You do not save. Why do You make me see wickedness, and ***why*** do You look at trouble? And devastation and violence ***are*** before me; and there is strife, and contention rises up. Therefore ***the*** law grows numb, and justice never goes forth; for the wicked surrounds the righteous; therefore justice goes forth perverted. See among the nations, and look, and be astounded, be astonished; for ***I am*** working a work in your days ***that*** you will not believe if it is told. For look, I am raising up the Chaldeans, the bitter and impetuous nation, which goes to the broad places of the earth to take possession of dwellings ***that are*** not its own. It ***is*** terrifying and dreadful; from itself its justice and its dignity go forth. And its horses are swifter than leopards, and keener than wolves of ***the*** evening; and its steeds paw ***the ground***, and its horsemen come from far away; they fly like an eagle hurrying to devour. All of it comes for violence; the horde of their faces ***is*** eastward; and it gathers captives like the sand. And it scoffs at kings, and rulers ***are*** laughter to it; it laughs at every fortress, and it heaps up dust and captures it. Then he sweeps on ***like the*** wind and passes over, and he becomes guilty, this ***one*** whose strength ***is*** his god.

1:12-17 Are You not from of old, O LORD my God, my Holy One? We will not die. O LORD, You have appointed him for judgment; and, O Rock, You have established him to reprove. ***You are*** too pure of eyes to see evil, and You are not able to look at trouble; why do You look at the treacherous, ***and why*** are You silent when the wicked swallows up ***one*** more righteous than he? And You have made mankind like the fish of the sea, like moving things ***that have*** no ruler over them. He brings up all of them with a hook; he drags them away in his net and gathers them in his fishing net; therefore he rejoices and is glad. Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his fishing net; for by them his portion ***is*** fat, and his food ***is*** rich. Will he therefore empty his net, and continually kill nations ***and*** not spare?

Preview

Habakkuk opens with a complaint. He has been crying out to God about the violence and injustice in Judah, and nothing seems to change. The law is ignored, the wicked hem in the righteous, and justice is twisted. "How long, O LORD?"

God answers, but not in the way Habakkuk expected. He is about to do something so amazing that no one would believe it: He is raising up the Chaldeans, the Babylonians, a swift and terrible nation that laughs at kings and sweeps up captives like sand. They will be His tool to judge Judah. That answer troubles Habakkuk even more. In the second half of the chapter he asks God a harder question. You are holy and pure. How can You stay silent while a wicked nation swallows up people more righteous than itself? This chapter teaches us that we can bring our honest questions to God, and it shows us how a man of faith asks them.

Study

1:1 *The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw.*

"The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw." As in Nahum 1:1, an oracle is a weighty message from God, often a message of judgment. Habakkuk "saw" it. The word of God came to him as something he perceived, like a vision. A prophet was someone God called to receive His word and speak it to others.

1:2-4 *How long, O LORD, have I cried for help, and You do not hear? I cry out to You, "Violence!" and You do not save. Why do You make me see wickedness, and **why** do You look at trouble? And devastation and violence **are** before me; and there is strife, and contention rises up. Therefore **the** law grows numb, and justice never goes forth; for the wicked surrounds the righteous; therefore justice goes forth perverted.*

"How long, O LORD, have I cried for help, and You do not hear?" These are the first words of Habakkuk's prayer, and they are bold. He has been praying for a long time. He has cried out about "Violence!" and he says God does not save.

Is it wrong to talk to God this way? The Bible answers that question by including these words in Scripture. David prayed, "How long, LORD? Will You forget me forever?" (Psalm 13:1). Job, Jeremiah and many of the psalmists asked God hard questions. Jesus Himself cried out on the cross with the words of Psalm 22:1. God is not offended by honest questions from a heart that trusts Him. Notice that Habakkuk brings his complaint to God, not to his friends behind God's back. He calls Him "O LORD." He is struggling, but he is still talking to his God. That is the difference between the honest cry of faith and the bitter complaint of unbelief.

What was troubling him? "Why do You make me see wickedness, and ***why*** do You look at trouble?" Everywhere Habakkuk looked, he saw "devastation and violence," "strife, and contention." This was not in Assyria or Babylon. This was in Judah, among God's own people. The godly reforms of King Josiah had faded, and under his son Jehoiakim, the powerful were crushing the weak (Jeremiah 22:13-17).

"Therefore ***the*** law grows numb." God's Law had lost its grip on the nation. It was there, but no one felt it or obeyed it. "And justice never goes forth." The courts did not give fair rulings. "For the wicked surrounds the righteous." The few who wanted to do right were hemmed in on every side. "Therefore justice goes forth perverted." When justice did come out, it was twisted and bent.

Many of us have felt what Habakkuk felt. We see evil win. We see the innocent suffer and the guilty go free. We pray, and it seems nothing happens. What do we do? Habakkuk shows us. Take it to God. Tell Him plainly what you see and what you feel. And then, as we will see, wait for His answer.

1:5 *See among the nations, and look, and be astounded, be astonished; for **I am** working a work in your days **that** you will not believe if it is told.*

God answers. "See among the nations, and look, and be astounded, be astonished." Habakkuk had been looking at Judah. God tells him to look wider, at the nations. "For ***I am*** working a work in your days ***that*** you will not believe if it is told."

This is important. Habakkuk thought God was doing nothing. God says He is already at work, doing something so great that no one would believe it if they were told ahead of time. When God seems silent, He is often working in ways we cannot yet see.

Paul quoted this verse in his sermon at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:40-41). He warned the people not to be like those who scoffed at God's work in Habakkuk's day. In Paul's day, God's amazing work was the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the offer of forgiveness through Him. It is still the greatest work God has ever done, and many still do not believe it.

1:6-8 *For look, I am raising up the Chaldeans, the bitter and impetuous nation, which goes to the broad places of the earth to take possession of dwellings **that are** not its own. It **is** terrifying and dreadful; from itself its justice and its dignity go forth. And its horses are swifter than leopards, and keener than wolves of **the** evening; and its steeds paw **the ground**, and its horsemen come from far away; they fly like an eagle hurrying to devour.*

Here is the work: "For look, I am raising up the Chaldeans, the bitter and impetuous nation." The Chaldeans were the people who ruled Babylon. "Bitter" means fierce and cruel. "Impetuous" means hasty and reckless, rushing forward. God says He is the one raising them up. Babylon's rise was not an accident of history. It was in God's hands.

They go "to the broad places of the earth to take possession of dwellings ***that are*** not its own." They would conquer and take other people's land and homes.

"It ***is*** terrifying and dreadful; from itself its justice and its dignity go forth." Babylon made its own rules. It answered to no one. Its idea of what was right came from itself.

Then come pictures of its army: horses "swifter than leopards," "keener than wolves of ***the*** evening" (wolves that hunt at dusk after a hungry day), and horsemen who "fly like an eagle hurrying to devour." The Babylonian army was famous for moving fast and striking hard.

1:9-11 *All of it comes for violence; the horde of their faces **is** eastward; and it gathers captives like the sand. And it scoffs at kings, and rulers **are** laughter to it; it laughs at every fortress, and it heaps up dust and captures it. Then he sweeps on **like the** wind and passes over, and he becomes guilty, this **one** whose strength **is** his god.*

"All of it comes for violence." Habakkuk had complained about violence in Judah (1:2-3). Now God says He will answer violence with a violent nation. "The horde of their faces ***is*** eastward." Their faces are set forward, pressing on like a desert wind. "And it gathers captives like the sand." That is just what happened. Babylon carried Judah into exile in three waves, in 605, 597 and 586 B.C.

"It scoffs at kings, and rulers ***are*** laughter to it." No king could stand against Babylon. "It laughs at every fortress, and it heaps up dust and captures it." Armies of that day built ramps of earth against city walls to climb over them. Babylon could take any city that way.

"Then he sweeps on ***like the*** wind and passes over, and he becomes guilty, this ***one*** whose strength ***is*** his god." This last line is the key to God's answer. Babylon would be God's tool, but it would not be innocent. It would become guilty, because it worshiped its own power. It would be proud of what it did and give no glory to God. That is why God would later judge Babylon too, as chapter 2 shows.

God uses even the wicked to carry out His purposes, but He never approves their wickedness. He holds them fully responsible for it. Isaiah said the same of Assyria (Isaiah 10:5-15).

1:12 *Are You not from of old, O LORD my God, my Holy One? We will not die. O LORD, You have appointed him for judgment; and, O Rock, You have established him to reprove.*

God's answer raised a new problem for Habakkuk. So he begins his second complaint by holding on to what he knows about God. "Are You not from of old, O LORD my God, my Holy One?" God is eternal. He is Habakkuk's own God ("my God"). He is holy, set apart from all sin.

"We will not die." Because God is eternal and has made a covenant with His people, Habakkuk knows Judah will not be wiped out completely. Judgment is coming, but not destruction. God would keep a remnant.

"O LORD, You have appointed him for judgment; and, O Rock, You have established him to reprove." Habakkuk now understands that Babylon is God's tool to correct Judah, not to end it. He calls God "O Rock," a name that means He is solid, steady and safe (Deuteronomy 32:4). When our world is shaking, God is still our Rock.

This is wise. When we do not understand what God is doing, we start with what we do know about Him. He is eternal. He is holy. He is faithful. He is our Rock. Then we bring our questions from there.

1:13 ***You are*** *too pure of eyes to see evil, and You are not able to look at trouble; why do You look at the treacherous,* ***and why*** *are You silent when the wicked swallows up* ***one*** *more righteous than he?*

Now comes Habakkuk's hard question. "***You are*** too pure of eyes to see evil, and You are not able to look at trouble." God is so holy that He cannot approve evil or look on it with favor. Habakkuk knows this.

"Why do You look at the treacherous, ***and why*** are You silent when the wicked swallows up ***one*** more righteous than he?" Judah was sinful, yes. But Babylon was worse. How could a holy God use a more wicked nation to punish a less wicked one? Would it not look as if God was on the side of the wicked?

This is one of the hardest questions in the Bible, and many believers still ask it in their own way. Why does God allow evil people to prosper? Why does He seem silent when the innocent suffer? Habakkuk does not have the answer yet. But he does not let go of God while he asks. And God will answer him. The answer will not explain everything, but it will be enough: God will judge every proud and wicked nation in His time, and the righteous are to live by faith until then (2:2-4).

1:14-17 *And You have made mankind like the fish of the sea, like moving things **that have** no ruler over them. He brings up all of them with a hook; he drags them away in his net and gathers them in his fishing net; therefore he rejoices and is glad. Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his fishing net; for by them his portion **is** fat, and his food **is** rich. Will he therefore empty his net, and continually kill nations **and** not spare?*

Habakkuk now describes how Babylon treats people. "And You have made mankind like the fish of the sea, like moving things ***that have*** no ruler over them." To Babylon, people were like fish, with no one to protect them.

"He brings up all of them with a hook; he drags them away in his net and gathers them in his fishing net." This was a real picture of Babylon's way of war. Ancient carvings from that part of the world show captives led away on ropes fastened to hooks or rings in their lips, and a king holding his enemies in a great net. Babylon "rejoices and is glad" as it pulls in nation after nation.

"Therefore he sacrifices to his net and burns incense to his fishing net." Babylon worshiped the very tools of its success, its army and weapons. "For by them his portion ***is*** fat, and his food ***is*** rich." This is what it means that this is one "whose strength ***is*** his god" (1:11). People still do this. We may not burn incense to a net, but we can worship our job, our money, our skills or our own strength, and give them the credit God deserves.

"Will he therefore empty his net, and continually kill nations ***and*** not spare?" This is Habakkuk's final question. Will this go on forever? Will Babylon just keep filling its net, emptying it, and casting it again?

Habakkuk leaves the question hanging, and the chapter ends there. The answer comes in chapter 2. But the question itself teaches us something. We are allowed to ask God, "How long?" We are allowed to ask, "Why?" What we must not do is stop trusting Him or walk away from Him while we wait for His answer.

Summary

Habakkuk cries out to the LORD, asking how long he must cry for help about violence before God hears and saves. He sees wickedness, strife and contention in Judah: the law is numb, justice does not go forth, the wicked surround the righteous, and justice comes out twisted. God answers that He is doing a work so amazing that no one would believe it: He is raising up the Chaldeans, a fierce and hasty nation, terrifying and answerable to no one, with horses swifter than leopards and horsemen like eagles. They come for violence, gather captives like sand, laugh at kings and fortresses, and sweep on, guilty because their strength is their god. Habakkuk answers by holding to God: He is eternal, his Holy One, his Rock, and Judah will not die; God has appointed Babylon to

correct them. But he asks how a God too pure to look on evil can be silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than they. Babylon treats people like fish, hauls them in with hooks and nets, and worships its net. Habakkuk asks whether it will go on killing nations forever.

Study Questions

1. What was Habakkuk's first complaint to God, and what did he see in Judah? (1:2-4)

2. What did God say He was doing, and why would people not believe it? (1:5)

3. How does God describe the Chaldeans and their army? (1:6-10)

4. Why does God say the Chaldean will become guilty? (1:11)

5. What truths about God does Habakkuk hold on to before asking his second question? (1:12)

6. What is Habakkuk's second question, and why did it trouble him so much? (1:13)

7. What does it mean that Babylon "sacrifices to his net"? (1:16)

8. Habakkuk brought his hard questions straight to God. When you are troubled by evil or unanswered prayer, do you tend to take it to God, to others, or keep it to yourself?

9. God was already at work when Habakkuk thought He was silent (1:5). Have you ever looked back and seen that God was working when you could not see it?

10. What "nets" are people tempted to trust in or give credit to today instead of God? Is there one in your own life?

Habakkuk 2: The Righteous Will Live by His Faithfulness

Scripture

2:1-20 At my post I will stand, and I will station myself on the rampart, and I will watch to see what He will speak to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint. And the LORD answered me and said: Write a vision, and make ***it*** plain on the tablets, so that the one who reads it may run. For the vision ***is*** still for the appointed time, and it pants toward the end, and it will not lie; if it lingers, wait for it; for it will certainly come; it will not be late. Look, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him; and the righteous will live by his faithfulness. And moreover, because the wine is treacherous, an arrogant man does not stay at home; he enlarges his appetite like Sheol, and he ***is*** like death and is not satisfied, and he gathers to himself all the nations and assembles to himself all the peoples. Will not all these take up a proverb against him, and a mocking song, riddles about him, and say, "Woe ***to*** him who increases what ***is*** not his (how long?) and who makes himself heavy ***with*** pledges!" Will not those who bite you rise up suddenly, and those who make you tremble awake? And you will become plunder for them. Because you have plundered many nations, all the rest of the peoples will plunder you, because of the blood of mankind and the violence ***done to the*** land, ***the*** town, and all who dwell in it. Woe ***to*** him who gains evil unjust gain for his house, to set his nest on high, to deliver himself from the hand of evil! You have planned shame for your house by cutting off many peoples, and you have sinned ***against*** your soul. For a stone will cry out from the wall, and a rafter from the woodwork will answer it. Woe ***to*** him who builds a city with blood and establishes a town by injustice! Look, ***is it*** not from the LORD of armies that peoples labor only for fire, and nations weary themselves only for vanity? For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover over ***the*** sea. Woe ***to*** him who makes his neighbor drink, pouring out your rage, and even making ***him*** drunk, so as to look on their nakedness! You are satisfied ***with*** shame more than glory. Drink, you also, and be counted uncircumcised! The cup of the right hand of the LORD will come around to you, and utter disgrace ***will be*** on your glory. For the violence ***done to*** Lebanon will cover you, and the devastation of animals will terrify them, because of the blood of mankind and the violence ***done to the*** land, ***the*** town, and all who dwell in it. What does a carved image profit, that its fashioner has carved it, a molten image and a teacher of falsehood? For the fashioner of its form trusts in it, to make mute idols. Woe ***to*** him who says to the wood, "Wake up!" "Awake!" to a silent stone. Will it teach? Look, it ***is*** sheathed ***in*** gold and silver, and there is no breath at all within it. And the LORD ***is*** in His holy temple; hush before Him, all the earth!

Preview

Habakkuk has asked his hard question. Now he does something we often forget to do. He waits. Like a watchman on the city wall, he takes his post and looks for God's answer. And God answers. He tells Habakkuk to write the vision down plainly, because it will surely come at its appointed time, even if it seems slow. Then He gives the heart of His reply in one verse: the proud man is puffed up and not upright, "and the righteous will live by his faithfulness."

The rest of the chapter is a song of five woes against Babylon, sung by the very nations it crushed. Woe to the one who grabs what is not his. Woe to the one who builds his house by unjust gain.

Woe to the one who builds a city with blood. Woe to the one who shames his neighbor. Woe to the one who prays to idols of wood and stone. In the middle of the woes stands a promise of a coming day when "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD." And the chapter ends with God on His throne, and the whole earth called to be silent before Him.

Study

2:1 *At my post I will stand, and I will station myself on the rampart, and I will watch to see what He will speak to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint.*

"At my post I will stand, and I will station myself on the rampart." A watchman stood on the city wall, looking out for whoever was coming, friend or enemy. Habakkuk uses that picture for himself. He has brought his complaint to God, and now he will stand and watch for the answer.

"And I will watch to see what He will speak to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint." Habakkuk expects God to answer. He does not ask his question and walk away. He does not give up and decide God does not care. He waits, ready to listen, even ready to be corrected.

Many of us bring our questions to God and then fill the silence with our own answers. Prayer is also listening, often through His Word, and waiting.

2:2-3 *And the LORD answered me and said: Write a vision, and make **it** plain on the tablets, so that the one who reads it may run. For the vision **is** still for the appointed time, and it pants toward the end, and it will not lie; if it lingers, wait for it; for it will certainly come; it will not be late.*

"And the LORD answered me." God always hears, even when He seems slow to answer. "Write a vision, and make ***it*** plain on the tablets." Tablets of clay or wood, sometimes coated with wax, were used for public notices. God wanted this message written clearly, so it could be read and kept, "so that the one who reads it may run." This may mean that a reader could take it in at a glance as he ran by, or that a messenger could run with it to spread the news. Either way, God wanted His answer plain, clear and passed on.

"For the vision ***is*** still for the appointed time." God has set a time for what He will do, and He will not miss it. "It pants toward the end, and it will not lie." The vision is pictured like a runner hurrying toward the finish line. It will not fail.

"If it lingers, wait for it; for it will certainly come; it will not be late." To us, God's timing can seem slow. To Him, it is never late. The fall of Babylon came about seventy years later, in 539 B.C., when the Persians took the city in one night (Daniel 5:30-31).

The writer of Hebrews uses these words to point to the return of Christ: "For yet a very little while, ***and*** the One who is coming will come and will not delay" (Hebrews 10:37). We need the same patience as we wait for Jesus. He is not late.

2:4 *Look, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him; and the righteous will live by his faithfulness.*

This is one of the most important verses in the Bible. It is God's answer to Habakkuk's question, and it is the heart of the gospel.

"Look, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him." The first half describes the proud man. In the setting, this is the Babylonian, the one "whose strength ***is*** his god" (1:11). His soul is swollen with pride. He trusts in himself. He is not right inside, and he will not stand.

"And the righteous will live by his faithfulness." Here is the other kind of person. The righteous are those who are right with God. How do they live? Not by their own strength, like the proud man, but by faith in God.

The Hebrew word here is emunah. It means firmness, steadiness, faithfulness. It comes from the same root as the word amen, which means it is sure. It describes a person who leans on God and keeps leaning on Him. So the SLB translates it "by his faithfulness." The Greek translation of the Old Testament and the New Testament writers put it as "by faith." These do not contradict each other. Real faith is not a one-time feeling. It is trust in God that keeps on trusting. Faith is the root, and faithfulness is how it shows itself over a lifetime.

What does "will live" mean? For Habakkuk, it meant that when Babylon came and swept everything away, the righteous would survive the coming judgment by trusting God. But the New Testament shows us it means far more: eternal life.

Paul quotes this verse in Romans 1:17. He has just said that the gospel is God's power for salvation to everyone who believes (Romans 1:16). Why? Because in it the righteousness of God is revealed "from faith to faith," just as it is written, "And the righteous by faith will live." God's righteousness is not something we earn. It is something He gives to all who believe in Jesus Christ.

Paul quotes it again in Galatians 3:11: "The righteous by faith will live." He uses it to prove that no one is made right with God by keeping the Law. If the righteous live by faith, then they do not live by their own works. Abraham was counted righteous because he "believed in the LORD" (Genesis 15:6), long before the Law was given. Habakkuk teaches the same thing. Salvation in every age is by grace through faith.

Hebrews 10:38 quotes it a third time: "But the righteous will live by faith." Hebrews is speaking to believers who were tempted to give up under pressure and go back. It tells them to keep trusting God while they wait for Christ's return. Faith is not only how we begin with God. It is how we keep going.

Many Christians through history have said this verse changed their lives, because it showed them that God's righteousness is a gift received by faith, not a reward earned by good works.

What does this mean for you? It means you do not have to earn your way to God. You cannot. The proud man trusts in himself and falls. The righteous trust in God and live. Have you put your trust in Jesus Christ, who died for your sins and rose again? If so, God counts you righteous in Him

(2 Corinthians 5:21), and you will live. And it means that when life is hard, when you do not understand what God is doing, you keep trusting Him.

2:5 *And moreover, because the wine is treacherous, an arrogant man does not stay at home; he enlarges his appetite like Sheol, and he **is** like death and is not satisfied, and he gathers to himself all the nations and assembles to himself all the peoples.*

"Because the wine is treacherous, an arrogant man does not stay at home." God goes back to the proud man. He is like a drunk man who cannot be still. Wine makes promises it does not keep. So does pride. The arrogant man is restless. He always wants more.

"He enlarges his appetite like Sheol, and he ***is*** like death and is not satisfied." Sheol is the Hebrew word for the place of the dead, the grave. The grave is never full. It always has room for one more. Babylon was like that. It swallowed nation after nation and was never satisfied. "He gathers to himself all the nations and assembles to himself all the peoples."

Greed and pride work this way in every heart. They never say enough. Jesus warned, "Watch out and guard yourselves from covetousness, because even when anyone has abundance, his life is not from his possessions" (Luke 12:15).

2:6-8 *Will not all these take up a proverb against him, and a mocking song, riddles about him, and say, "Woe **to** him who increases what **is** not his (how long?) and who makes himself heavy **with** pledges!" Will not those who bite you rise up suddenly, and those who make you tremble awake? And you will become plunder for them. Because you have plundered many nations, all the rest of the peoples will plunder you, because of the blood of mankind and the violence **done to the** land, **the** town, and all who dwell in it.*

Now comes the first of five woes. A woe is a cry of grief and doom over someone headed for judgment. These woes are put into the mouths of the nations Babylon conquered. "Will not all these take up a proverb against him, and a mocking song?" The very people Babylon crushed would one day sing about its fall.

The first woe is against greed and robbery: "Woe ***to*** him who increases what ***is*** not his (how long?) and who makes himself heavy ***with*** pledges!" Pledges were items taken as security for a loan. Babylon was like a cruel lender who loaded himself down with what belonged to others.

"Will not those who bite you rise up suddenly?" The debtors would rise up against the lender. "And you will become plunder for them." Babylon would be robbed by the very people it had robbed.

"Because you have plundered many nations, all the rest of the peoples will plunder you." This is a principle that runs all through Scripture. What a person sows, he reaps (Galatians 6:7). Babylon had shed "the blood of mankind" and done "violence" to land and town. It would get back what it gave. And so it did. Persia took Babylon in 539 B.C., and the city later fell into ruins.

2:9-11 *Woe **to** him who gains evil unjust gain for his house, to set his nest on high, to deliver himself from the hand of evil! You have planned shame for your house by cutting off many peoples, and you have sinned **against** your soul. For a stone will cry out from the wall, and a rafter from the woodwork will answer it.*

The second woe is against building security by injustice. "Woe ***to*** him who gains evil unjust gain for his house, to set his nest on high, to deliver himself from the hand of evil!" Babylon wanted to be like an eagle with a nest high on a cliff, out of reach of any danger. It thought wealth and high walls would keep it safe.

"You have planned shame for your house by cutting off many peoples, and you have sinned ***against*** your soul." By destroying others, Babylon had really destroyed itself. Sin always harms the sinner.

"For a stone will cry out from the wall, and a rafter from the woodwork will answer it." The very stones and beams of Babylon's fine buildings, paid for with stolen wealth, would cry out as witnesses against it. Nothing is hidden from God. Even the walls testify.

2:12-14 *Woe **to** him who builds a city with blood and establishes a town by injustice! Look, **is it** not from the LORD of armies that peoples labor only for fire, and nations weary themselves only for vanity? For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover over **the** sea.*

The third woe is against building with blood. "Woe ***to*** him who builds a city with blood and establishes a town by injustice!" Babylon's great buildings were built by slave labor from conquered nations and paid for with plunder.

"Look, ***is it*** not from the LORD of armies that peoples labor only for fire, and nations weary themselves only for vanity?" Everything built by injustice is headed for the fire. Vanity means emptiness, something that comes to nothing. Jeremiah used the same words about Babylon (Jeremiah 51:58). All that work, all that suffering, and it would burn.

Then, in the middle of the woes, comes a bright promise: "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover over ***the*** sea." Babylon wanted to fill the earth with its own glory. It would fail. One day the whole earth will be filled with the knowledge of God's glory.

How full is the sea of water? Completely. Isaiah says almost the same thing about the reign of the Messiah, the Branch from Jesse (Isaiah 11:9). I believe this will be fully true when Jesus Christ returns to the earth and sets up His kingdom (Revelation 11:15; 20:1-6). Today, the gospel is going out to the nations, and many are coming to know God. But the day is coming when no one on earth will be ignorant of Him. Every proud empire will be gone, and only His kingdom will remain.

Every human empire falls. His glory fills the earth forever.

2:15-17 *Woe **to** him who makes his neighbor drink, pouring out your rage, and even making **him** drunk, so as to look on their nakedness! You are satisfied **with** shame more than glory. Drink, you also, and be counted uncircumcised! The cup of the right hand of the LORD will come around to you, and utter disgrace **will be** on your glory. For the violence **done to** Lebanon will cover you, and the devastation of animals will terrify them, because of the blood of mankind and the violence **done to the** land, **the** town, and all who dwell in it.*

The fourth woe is against shaming others. "Woe ***to*** him who makes his neighbor drink, pouring out your rage, and even making ***him*** drunk, so as to look on their nakedness!" Babylon is pictured as someone who gets his neighbor drunk to shame him. The meaning is that Babylon made the nations stagger under its power and then humiliated them.

"You are satisfied ***with*** shame more than glory." Babylon filled itself up, but with shame, not true glory. "Drink, you also." Now it would be Babylon's turn. "The cup of the right hand of the LORD will come around to you." In the prophets, the cup of the LORD is a picture of His judgment, poured out on the nations (Jeremiah 25:15). The cup Babylon passed to others would come back to it from God's own hand.

"For the violence ***done to*** Lebanon will cover you." Babylon had cut down the cedars of Lebanon and hunted its animals, and even that harm would be judged. Then the verse repeats the charge from verse 8: "the blood of mankind and the violence ***done to the*** land."

2:18-20 *What does a carved image profit, that its fashioner has carved it, a molten image and a teacher of falsehood? For the fashioner of its form trusts in it, to make mute idols. Woe **to** him who says to the wood, "Wake up!" "Awake!" to a silent stone. Will it teach? Look, it **is** sheathed **in** gold and silver, and there is no breath at all within it. And the LORD **is** in His holy temple; hush before Him, all the earth!*

The fifth woe is against idolatry. This time the question comes first: "What does a carved image profit?" A carved image was an idol cut from wood or stone. A molten image was made of melted metal. Habakkuk calls it "a teacher of falsehood." The man who makes it "trusts in it, to make mute idols." A man shapes something with his own hands and then trusts it to save him.

"Woe ***to*** him who says to the wood." He calls out to a piece of wood, "Wake up!" and to "a silent stone." "Will it teach? Look, it ***is*** sheathed ***in*** gold and silver, and there is no breath at all within it." It may look beautiful, covered in gold and silver, but there is nothing inside. No life, no voice, no power.

Then comes the great contrast, and the last line of the chapter: "And the LORD ***is*** in His holy temple; hush before Him, all the earth!" The idols are silent because they are dead. The LORD is alive, and He is on His throne. His holy temple here is His dwelling in heaven, where He rules over all (Psalm 11:4). Before Him, the whole earth is told to be silent.

Why silent? Because when we truly see who God is, our complaints, our boasts and our arguments fall away. This is not the silence of despair. It is the silence of awe and trust. God is in control. Babylon is not. The idols are not. We can stop striving and rest in Him (Psalm 46:10).

Today we may not bow to idols of wood and stone, but we still build idols: money, success, pleasure, relationships, even our own plans. They cannot speak, save or satisfy. Paul says, "flee from idolatry" (1 Corinthians 10:14). The living God is in His holy temple. Let us be still before Him.

Summary

Habakkuk takes his stand like a watchman to wait for God's answer. The LORD tells him to write the vision plainly, because it is for an appointed time and will surely come; if it seems slow, he is to wait. The proud man is puffed up and not upright, but the righteous will live by his faithfulness. The arrogant man is restless and never satisfied, gathering all nations like the grave. The nations he crushed will sing five woes against him: for grabbing what is not his, for building his house by unjust gain, for building a city with blood, for shaming his neighbor, and for calling on idols that have no breath. In the middle of the woes stands God's promise that the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. The LORD is in His holy temple, and all the earth is to be silent before Him.

Study Questions

1. What did Habakkuk do after asking his question, and what picture does he use for himself? (2:1)

2. Why did God tell Habakkuk to write the vision plainly, and what did He say about its timing? (2:2-3)

3. How does God describe the proud man, and how will the righteous live? (2:4)

4. How do Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:38 each use Habakkuk 2:4?

5. What five things does God pronounce woe on in this chapter? (2:6-19)

6. What promise does God give in the middle of the woes, and when do you believe it will be fully true? (2:14)

7. What is the difference between the idols in verses 18-19 and the LORD in verse 20?

8. Habakkuk waited for God's answer. When you pray about something hard, do you leave room to listen and wait, or do you fill the silence with your own answers?

9. What does it mean in your daily life to "live by faith" (2:4), especially when you do not understand what God is doing?

10. What "idols" are people tempted to trust today? What would it look like for you to "hush" before the LORD this week?

Habakkuk 3: Habakkuk's Prayer of Trust

Scripture

3:1-9 A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, on Shigionoth. O LORD, I have heard Your report; I fear. O LORD, Your work, in the midst of ***the*** years revive it; in the midst of ***the*** years make ***it*** known; in wrath remember to have compassion. God comes from Teman, and the Holy One from the mountain of Paran. Selah. His splendor has covered the heavens, and His praise has filled the earth. And ***His*** brightness is like the light; He has rays from His hand, and there ***is*** the hiding of His strength. Before Him goes pestilence, and lightning goes out at His feet. He stood and shook the earth; He looked and made nations jump; and the perpetual mountains were shattered; the everlasting hills bowed down; the everlasting ways ***are*** His. Under affliction I saw the tents of Cushan; the tent curtains of the land of Midian tremble. Did ***it*** burn against the rivers, O LORD? Or ***was*** Your anger against the rivers, or Your fury against the sea, that You ride on Your horses, Your chariots ***of*** salvation? Your bow is laid utterly bare; the oaths of ***the*** arrows ***were*** a word. Selah. You split the earth ***with*** rivers.

3:10-19 The mountains saw You; they writhe; a downpour of water passed over; the deep gave its voice; it lifted up its hands on high. ***The*** sun ***and*** moon stood still in ***their*** lofty abode; at the light of Your arrows they go, at the brightness of the lightning flash of Your spear. In indignation You march ***through the*** earth; in anger You thresh nations. You went out for the salvation of Your people, for the salvation of Your anointed; You shattered the head out of the house of the wicked, laying bare ***the*** foundation to ***the*** neck. Selah. You pierced with his own arrows the head of his warriors; they storm out to scatter me; their exultation ***is*** as if to devour the afflicted in secret. You trod on the sea ***with*** Your horses, a heap of many waters. I heard, and my belly trembled; at the sound my lips quivered; rottenness came into my bones, and in my place I tremble, that I will rest for the day of trouble, ***when he*** comes up against the people ***that*** will raid us. Though the fig tree does not bud, and there is no produce on the vines, the yield of the olive fails, and the fields do not make food, the flock is cut off from the fold, and there are no cattle in the stalls, and I, I will exult in the LORD; I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. GOD ***the*** Lord ***is*** my strength, and He makes my feet like the does, and He makes me tread on my high places. To the choirmaster, on my stringed instruments.

Preview

Habakkuk began his book with a complaint. He ends it with a song. Chapter 3 is a prayer, written to be sung in worship, with musical notes at the beginning and the end. Habakkuk has heard God's answer, and he is afraid. So he asks God to revive His work in the middle of the years, and in wrath to remember mercy.

Then he looks back. In a great poem, he remembers how God came from the south in the days of Moses and Joshua, shaking the earth, splitting the rivers, stopping the sun and moon, and marching out to save His people. Remembering what God did gives him courage for what is coming. The chapter ends with some of the most loved words in the Old Testament. Even if the fig

tree does not bloom and the fields fail and the flocks are gone, "I will exult in the LORD; I will rejoice in the God of my salvation."

Study

3:1 *A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, on Shigionoth.*

"A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, on Shigionoth." This chapter is set apart from the rest of the book. It is a prayer, and it is also a song. Shigionoth is a musical word. We do not know exactly what it meant. It may come from a word meaning to wander or reel, and some think it describes a song with strong feeling and changing rhythm. Psalm 7 has a similar title. The words "Selah" (3:3, 9, 13) and the note at the end, "To the choirmaster, on my stringed instruments" (3:19), show that this prayer was meant to be sung in public worship.

That tells us something. Habakkuk's struggle did not stay private. It became worship for God's people. Our honest wrestling with God, when it ends in trust, can strengthen others too.

3:2 *O LORD, I have heard Your report; I fear. O LORD, Your work, in the midst of **the** years revive it; in the midst of **the** years make **it** known; in wrath remember to have compassion.*

"O LORD, I have heard Your report; I fear." Habakkuk has heard what God said He would do: Babylon would come, and then Babylon would fall. The report filled him with fear. He knew how terrible the judgment would be.

"O LORD, Your work, in the midst of ***the*** years revive it." To revive means to bring to life again. Habakkuk knew the great works God had done in the past. He asks God to do them again in his own day, "in the midst of ***the*** years," in the middle of history, in the middle of this hard time. "In the midst of ***the*** years make ***it*** known." Let people see that it is You at work.

"In wrath remember to have compassion." This is the heart of his prayer. Habakkuk does not ask God to cancel the judgment. He knows Judah deserves it. He asks God to remember mercy while He judges. That is a prayer God loves to answer. In the end, God showed the greatest mercy of all in the middle of His wrath against sin, at the cross. Jesus took the wrath we deserved so that we could receive mercy (Isaiah 53:5; 1 Peter 2:24).

This is a good prayer for us too, for our nation, our church and our own lives. Lord, do Your work again. Make it known. And in wrath, remember mercy.

3:3-4 *God comes from Teman, and the Holy One from the mountain of Paran. Selah. His splendor has covered the heavens, and His praise has filled the earth. And **His** brightness is like the light; He has rays from His hand, and there **is** the hiding of His strength.*

Now Habakkuk begins to describe God coming in power, using pictures from Israel's early history. "God comes from Teman," Habakkuk says, and the Holy One comes from Paran. Teman was in Edom, to the south and east of Judah. Paran was the wilderness region between Sinai and Canaan. These places point back to the time when God came down on Mount Sinai and then led

Israel through the wilderness. Moses used the same picture in his last blessing: the LORD came from Sinai, rose from Seir and shone from Mount Paran (Deuteronomy 33:2).

"Selah." This word appears many times in the Psalms and three times in this chapter. Its exact meaning is not known. Most think it marks a pause, a place to stop and think, or a musical break.

"His splendor has covered the heavens, and His praise has filled the earth." The glory of God at Sinai filled the sky. "And ***His*** brightness is like the light; He has rays from His hand." Light seemed to flash from Him. "And there ***is*** the hiding of His strength." Even in all that brightness, His full power was still hidden. What people saw was only a small part of who He is.

3:5-7 *Before Him goes pestilence, and lightning goes out at His feet. He stood and shook the earth; He looked and made nations jump; and the perpetual mountains were shattered; the everlasting hills bowed down; the everlasting ways **are** His. Under affliction I saw the tents of Cushan; the tent curtains of the land of Midian tremble.*

"Before Him goes pestilence, and lightning goes out at His feet." When God came to judge His enemies, plague and fire went with Him. Habakkuk is thinking of the plagues on Egypt and the judgments in the wilderness.

"He stood and shook the earth; He looked and made nations jump." God only had to stand and look, and the nations trembled. "The perpetual mountains were shattered; the everlasting hills bowed down." The mountains seem to last forever. Before God, they crumble and bow. "The everlasting ways ***are*** His." His ways are older and more lasting than the hills.

"Under affliction I saw the tents of Cushan; the tent curtains of the land of Midian tremble." Cushan was likely another name for a people near Midian, in the desert regions through which Israel traveled. When God led His people through, the desert tribes were terrified (Exodus 15:14-16). Some also think of Gideon's victory over Midian (Judges 7).

3:8-10 *Did **it** burn against the rivers, O LORD? Or **was** Your anger against the rivers, or Your fury against the sea, that You ride on Your horses, Your chariots **of** salvation? Your bow is laid utterly bare; the oaths of **the** arrows **were** a word. Selah. You split the earth **with** rivers. The mountains saw You; they writhe; a downpour of water passed over; the deep gave its voice; it lifted up its hands on high.*

"Did ***it*** burn against the rivers, O LORD? Or ***was*** Your anger against the rivers, or Your fury against the sea?" Habakkuk asks a question that has an obvious answer. When God split the Red Sea and stopped the Jordan, was He angry at the water? No. He was making a way for His people. "That You ride on Your horses, Your chariots ***of*** salvation." God is pictured as a warrior riding out in His chariot, and His chariot brings salvation.

"Your bow is laid utterly bare." A warrior uncovered his bow and drew it out, ready for battle. "The oaths of ***the*** arrows ***were*** a word." These words are hard to translate. The sense seems to be that God's arrows were sent out in keeping with His sworn word. He fights to keep His promises. "Selah." Pause and think about that.

"You split the earth ***with*** rivers. The mountains saw You; they writhe." Floods poured out, and the mountains shook like someone in pain. "A downpour of water passed over; the deep gave its voice; it lifted up its hands on high." The great deep roared, its waves rising high like hands lifted up in surrender.

3:11-12 ***The*** *sun* ***and*** *moon stood still in* ***their*** *lofty abode; at the light of Your arrows they go, at the brightness of the lightning flash of Your spear. In indignation You march* ***through the*** *earth; in anger You thresh nations.*

"***The*** sun ***and*** moon stood still in ***their*** lofty abode." This calls to mind the day God made the sun and moon stand still for Joshua so Israel could finish its victory (Joshua 10:12-14). "At the light of Your arrows they go, at the brightness of the lightning flash of Your spear." God's arrows and spear, pictures of lightning, outshone the sun and moon.

"In indignation You march ***through the*** earth; in anger You thresh nations." Threshing was beating grain to separate it from the husk. God marched through Canaan in judgment on the nations who had filled the land with evil, and He gave it to His people (Genesis 15:16). God's anger is never out of control. It is His holy response to sin.

3:13-15 *You went out for the salvation of Your people, for the salvation of Your anointed; You shattered the head out of the house of the wicked, laying bare* ***the*** *foundation to* ***the*** *neck. Selah. You pierced with his own arrows the head of his warriors; they storm out to scatter me; their exultation* ***is*** *as if to devour the afflicted in secret. You trod on the sea* ***with*** *Your horses, a heap of many waters.*

"You went out for the salvation of Your people." This is why God marched out. Every picture of His power in this chapter has one purpose: to save His people. "For the salvation of Your anointed." The anointed one was the one God set apart for His service, usually the king. Here it may mean Israel's leader, or the whole people as God's chosen. The Hebrew word is mashiach, from which we get the word Messiah. God's saving work for His anointed points forward to the greatest Anointed One, Jesus Christ, through whom God saves His people completely.

"You shattered the head out of the house of the wicked, laying bare ***the*** foundation to ***the*** neck." God struck the leader of the wicked and tore his house down to the foundation. Many think of Pharaoh, whose army drowned in the Red Sea. It also points ahead to Babylon. And it reminds us of the first promise of the gospel, that the Seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15).

"You pierced with his own arrows the head of his warriors." God turned the enemy's weapons against himself. "They storm out to scatter me." Habakkuk speaks as one of God's people, feeling the attack. "Their exultation ***is*** as if to devour the afflicted in secret." The enemy loved to pounce on the weak.

"You trod on the sea ***with*** Your horses, a heap of many waters." The poem ends where Israel's salvation began, at the Red Sea, when God made the water stand up in a heap and His people walked through on dry ground (Exodus 15:8).

3:16 *I heard, and my belly trembled; at the sound my lips quivered; rottenness came into my bones, and in my place I tremble, that I will rest for the day of trouble,* ***when he*** *comes up against the people* ***that*** *will raid us.*

Now Habakkuk comes back to the present. "I heard, and my belly trembled; at the sound my lips quivered." What he heard about the coming judgment shook him to the core. His stomach churned and his lips shook. "Rottenness came into my bones, and in my place I tremble." He felt weak, as if his bones were giving way.

Habakkuk is honest about his fear. Faith does not mean we never feel afraid. It means we bring our fear to God.

"That I will rest for the day of trouble, ***when he*** comes up against the people ***that*** will raid us." Here is the turn. In spite of his trembling, Habakkuk decides to wait quietly for the day of trouble. He will not panic. He will not run. He will wait for God to act, first in judgment on Judah through Babylon, and then in judgment on Babylon itself. That is what living by faith looks like (2:4). He has God's word. He will rest on it.

3:17-19 *Though the fig tree does not bud, and there is no produce on the vines, the yield of the olive fails, and the fields do not make food, the flock is cut off from the fold, and there are no cattle in the stalls, and I, I will exult in the LORD; I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. GOD* ***the*** *Lord* ***is*** *my strength, and He makes my feet like the does, and He makes me tread on my high places. To the choirmaster, on my stringed instruments.*

These three verses are the high point of the book and some of the greatest words of faith in all of Scripture.

"Though the fig tree does not bud, and there is no produce on the vines, the yield of the olive fails, and the fields do not make food, the flock is cut off from the fold, and there are no cattle in the stalls." Habakkuk lists everything a farmer in Judah depended on: figs, grapes, olives, grain, sheep and cattle. These were their food, their income, their savings and their future. When an army invaded, it stripped the land of all of them. Habakkuk is imagining losing everything.

What would that be for us? Our job, our savings, our health, our house, the people we love. Habakkuk pictures the worst that could happen, and then he says:

"And I, I will exult in the LORD; I will rejoice in the God of my salvation." Notice the "I, I." It is a personal, deliberate choice. Habakkuk does not say he will feel happy about losing everything. He says he will rejoice in the LORD. His joy does not depend on his circumstances. It depends on God. Crops can fail. God does not fail. Flocks can be taken. God cannot be taken from him. He is "the God of my salvation," and that is enough.

Think of how far Habakkuk has come. In chapter 1, he cried, "How long?" and "Why?" His circumstances have not changed. In fact, he knows they are about to get worse. But he has changed. He has heard from God. He has remembered what God has done. And he has learned to live by faith. Paul learned the same lesson and wrote from prison, "Rejoice in ***the*** Lord always; again I will say, rejoice" (Philippians 4:4).

"GOD ***the*** Lord ***is*** my strength." When the SLB prints GOD in capitals together with Lord, it stands for God's personal name joined with the word for master, Yahweh Adonai. Habakkuk does not say God gives him strength, though He does. He says God is his strength.

"He makes my feet like the does, and He makes me tread on my high places." A doe is a female deer. In the hills of Judah, deer could climb steep, rocky slopes without slipping. David used the same picture (Psalm 18:33). God does not always take us out of the rocky places. He gives us sure feet to walk on them, and He even lifts us up to stand on the heights.

"To the choirmaster, on my stringed instruments." This note was for the leader of the temple music. Habakkuk's prayer was to be sung by God's people. The man who began with a complaint ended by leading the people in a song of faith.

Where are you today? Maybe you are still at "How long?" That is all right. Bring it to God, as Habakkuk did. Wait for Him. Remember what He has done, most of all at the cross, where He gave His own Son for you (Romans 8:32). And then, even if the fig tree does not bud, you can say with Habakkuk, "I will rejoice in the God of my salvation."

Summary

Habakkuk's prayer, set to music, begins with fear at what he has heard and a plea that God would revive His work in the middle of the years and in wrath remember mercy. He remembers how God came from Teman and Mount Paran, His glory covering the heavens, with plague and lightning before Him. He shook the earth, made nations jump and shattered the ancient mountains, and the desert peoples trembled. He rode out in chariots of salvation, split the earth with rivers, and the sun and moon stood still at the flash of His arrows. He marched through the earth in anger, threshing nations, to save His people and His anointed, crushing the head of the wicked and treading the sea with His horses. Hearing this, Habakkuk trembled to his bones, yet he chose to wait quietly for the day of trouble. Though the fig tree, vine, olive, fields, flocks and herds all fail, he will exult in the LORD and rejoice in the God of his salvation. GOD the Lord is his strength, making his feet like a deer's and setting him on the heights.

Study Questions

1. What three things does Habakkuk ask of God in verse 2? (3:2)

2. What events from Israel's past does Habakkuk seem to remember in verses 3-15? Give a few examples.

3. According to verse 13, why did God march out in power? (3:13)

4. How did Habakkuk feel when he heard what was coming, and what did he decide to do? (3:16)

5. List the things Habakkuk imagines losing in verse 17. Why would these have mattered so much to a farmer in Judah? (3:17)

6. What does Habakkuk say he will do even if all these fail, and where does his joy come from? (3:18)

7. What does it mean that God makes his feet "like the does"? (3:19; Psalm 18:33)

8. Habakkuk began with "How long?" and ended with a song of joy, though his circumstances had not changed. What changed in him?

9. Try writing your own version of verse 17, naming the things you depend on most. What would it mean for you to rejoice in the LORD even then?

10. Habakkuk remembered what God had done in the past to find courage for the future. What has God done in your life, or in Scripture, that you can remember when you are afraid?

Overview of Zephaniah

Zephaniah is the thirty-sixth book of the Bible and the ninth of the twelve Minor Prophets. It comes right after Habakkuk and right before Haggai. Zephaniah is the last of the prophets in our Bible who spoke before the exile. After him come Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, who spoke after the return.

Zephaniah preached in the days of King Josiah, Judah's last godly king. Josiah came to the throne as a boy of eight, after more than fifty years of idolatry under his grandfather Manasseh and his father Amon. The land was full of Baal worship, star worship and priests of false gods. Zephaniah's message was blunt. The day of the LORD is near. God will sweep away the idols and the proud from Judah and Jerusalem, and His judgment will reach the nations around them and, in the end, the whole earth.

The day of the LORD is the main theme of the book. The phrase, or a short form of it like "that day," appears many times in these three chapters. In the prophets, the day of the LORD is a time when God steps into history to judge sin and to save His people. There were near days of the LORD, such as the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon in 586 B.C. And there is a final day of the LORD still ahead, which the New Testament connects with the return of Christ. Zephaniah often speaks of both at once, the near judgment on Judah and the great future day when God will judge all the earth. The key verse sounds the alarm:

Zephaniah 1:14 (SLB)

"Near ***is*** the great day of the LORD, near and hurrying exceedingly. The sound of the day of the LORD; bitter, a warrior is shouting there."

But Zephaniah does not end in darkness. He calls the humble to seek the LORD (2:3). And the last chapter turns from judgment to joy: God will purify the speech of the peoples, gather His scattered people, live in the midst of Israel as their King, and rejoice over them with singing (3:9-20).

Zephaniah has 3 chapters and 53 verses. Here is its structure:

Part One: The Day of the LORD on Judah (chapter 1)

- Zephaniah 1: The Great Day of the LORD Is Near

Part Two: Judgment on the Nations (chapters 2 to 3:8)

- Zephaniah 2: Seek the LORD Before the Day of Anger

Part Three: Jerusalem Judged and Restored (chapter 3)

- Zephaniah 3: The LORD Rejoices Over His People

Where this book points to Christ: Zephaniah 3:15 says, "The King of Israel, the LORD, ***is*** in your midst." When Jesus rode into Jerusalem, the crowds hailed Him as "the King of Israel" (John 12:13), and Nathanael called Him the same (John 1:49). The LORD who would dwell among

His people came in the flesh and "dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Jesus also spoke of the coming day of judgment (Matthew 24:29-31), and Paul calls it "the day of the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 5:2). I believe Zephaniah's picture of a gathered, cleansed and rejoicing Israel, with the LORD as King in their midst, will be fully kept when Jesus Christ returns and reigns from Jerusalem (Romans 11:26-27).

Background of Zephaniah

Author: "Zephaniah son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah" (1:1). His name means the LORD hides or the LORD has treasured, a fitting name for a man who told the humble that they might be "hidden on the day of the anger of the LORD" (2:3). No other prophet traces his family back four generations. The reason is most likely that the last name in the list is King Hezekiah, the godly king of Judah (about 715 to 686 B.C.). If so, Zephaniah was a great-great-grandson of Hezekiah and a distant relative of King Josiah, which may explain his close knowledge of the royal court and of Jerusalem (1:8-11). Scripture does not say plainly that this Hezekiah is the king, and some scholars think he was another man of the same name, but most accept that he was.

Who it was written to: The people of Judah and Jerusalem in the days of Josiah, especially its leaders, princes, judges, priests and prophets (1:8; 3:3-4), and the faithful "humble of the land" (2:3).

When it was written: "In the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah" (1:1). Josiah reigned about 640 to 609 B.C. Zephaniah speaks of Baal worship, worship of the stars and swearing by Milcom as still going on in Jerusalem (1:4-5), and he speaks of Nineveh as still standing (2:13), so he spoke before Nineveh fell in 612 B.C. Most conservative scholars place his preaching early in Josiah's reign, before the great reforms that followed the finding of the Book of the Law in the temple about 622 or 621 B.C. (2 Kings 22 to 23). So the book fits about 640 to 625 B.C., before those reforms. Zephaniah may even have helped prepare the way for those reforms.

Setting: Manasseh had reigned longer than any king of Judah, and he had filled the land and even the temple with idols (2 Kings 21:1-9). His son Amon followed him for two years and was murdered (2 Kings 21:19-24). Josiah was crowned at eight years old. When he was sixteen he began to seek the God of David, and at twenty he began to clear the idols out of Judah and Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 34:3). In his eighteenth year, while the temple was being repaired, the Book of the Law was found, and Josiah led the nation in a great return to the LORD (2 Kings 22:8-23:25). But the reforms did not reach every heart. After Josiah died in 609 B.C., Judah fell back quickly, and in 586 B.C. Jerusalem was destroyed, just as Zephaniah had warned. Jeremiah began to preach in Josiah's thirteenth year (Jeremiah 1:2), so the two prophets spoke in Jerusalem in some of the same years.

The day of the LORD: This phrase is used by many of the prophets, among them Isaiah, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Malachi and Zephaniah. It means a time when the LORD acts openly in judgment and in salvation, and everyone sees that He is God. The people of Amos's day thought it would be a day of light for Israel. Amos told them it would be darkness for those who were living in sin (Amos 5:18-20). Zephaniah says the same to Judah. In the New Testament, the day of the Lord refers to the time of God's judgment on the earth that comes after Christ takes His church to be with Him, the Tribulation, and ends with His return in glory (1 Thessalonians 5:1-9; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; 2 Peter 3:10).

Purpose: To warn Judah and the nations that the day of the LORD was near and that God would judge idolatry, pride, violence and indifference toward Him; to call the humble to seek the LORD, righteousness and humility (2:3); and to promise that after judgment God would cleanse a remnant, gather His scattered people Israel, and live among them as their King with joy (3:9-20).

Zephaniah 1: The Great Day of the LORD Is Near

Scripture

1:1-9 The word of the LORD which came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah. I will utterly bring to an end everything from upon the face of the ground, declares the LORD. I will bring to an end mankind and animal; I will bring to an end the flying things of the heavens and the fish of the sea, and the stumbling blocks with the wicked; and I will cut off mankind from upon the face of the ground, declares the LORD. And I will stretch out My hand against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off from this place the remnant of Baal, the name of the pagan priests with the priests, and those who bow down on the roofs to the host of the heavens, and those who bow down, those who swear to the LORD and those who swear by Milcom, and those who have turned back from after the LORD, and who have not sought the LORD and have not inquired of Him. Hush before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD ***is*** near; for the LORD has prepared a sacrifice; He has consecrated His invited ones. And it will be, on the day of the sacrifice of the LORD, and I will punish the princes and the sons of the king and all who wear foreign clothing. And I will punish everyone who leaps over the threshold on that day, those who fill the house of their lord ***with*** violence and deceit.

1:10-18 And it will be on that day, declares the LORD, the sound of a cry from the Fish Gate, and wailing from the Second Quarter, and a great crashing from the hills. Wail, inhabitants of the Mortar, for all the people of Canaan are destroyed; all those loaded with silver are cut off. And it will be at that time, I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are thickening on their dregs, who are saying in their heart, "The LORD will not do good, and He will not do harm." And their wealth will become plunder, and their houses a desolation; and they will build houses and not dwell ***in them***, and they will plant vineyards and not drink their wine. Near ***is*** the great day of the LORD, near and hurrying exceedingly. The sound of the day of the LORD; bitter, a warrior is shouting there. A day of fury ***is*** that day, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of cloud and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the high corners. And I will bring distress on mankind, and they will walk like the blind, for they have sinned against the LORD; and their blood will be poured out like dust, and their entrails like dung. Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to deliver them on the day of the fury of the LORD; and in the fire of His jealousy all the earth will be consumed; for a complete end, surely a terrifying ***one***, He will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.

Preview

Zephaniah's first words are some of the most severe in all the prophets. God says He will sweep away everything from the face of the ground, people and animals, birds and fish. Then He narrows His aim to Judah and Jerusalem: the worshipers of Baal, the priests of false gods, those who bow to the stars on their rooftops, those who swear by the LORD and by Milcom in the same breath, and those who simply do not care about God at all.

"Hush before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD ***is*** near." The LORD has prepared a sacrifice, and it is Judah. He will search Jerusalem with lamps and find the men who think He will do neither good nor harm. Then Zephaniah describes the great day of the LORD in words that ring like a bell: a day of fury, trouble and distress, darkness and gloom, trumpet and battle cry. Silver and gold will not save anyone. This chapter warns of a near judgment that came on Judah in 586 B.C., and it looks beyond it to a final day when God will judge the whole earth.

Study

1:1 *The word of the LORD which came to Zephaniah son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah.*

"The word of the LORD which came to Zephaniah." Like the other prophets, Zephaniah did not speak his own ideas. The word came to him from God.

He gives his family line back four generations, to "Hezekiah." Most Bible teachers believe this was King Hezekiah, the godly king who trusted the LORD when Assyria surrounded Jerusalem. If so, Zephaniah was of royal blood, a distant cousin of the king he served under.

"In the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah." Josiah reigned about 640 to 609 B.C. He was the last good king of Judah, and he led a great return to God. But as we will see, the idols were still standing when Zephaniah began to preach, and most likely his preaching came before Josiah's great reform of about 622 B.C.

1:2-3 *I will utterly bring to an end everything from upon the face of the ground, declares the LORD. I will bring to an end mankind and animal; I will bring to an end the flying things of the heavens and the fish of the sea, and the stumbling blocks with the wicked; and I will cut off mankind from upon the face of the ground, declares the LORD.*

"I will utterly bring to an end everything from upon the face of the ground, declares the LORD." These are startling words. God says He will sweep everything away. "Mankind and animal," "the flying things of the heavens and the fish of the sea." The list runs in the opposite order from creation in Genesis 1, where God made the fish and birds, then the animals, then man. It is as if God is saying He will undo what man has spoiled.

"And the stumbling blocks with the wicked." Stumbling blocks are things that make people fall into sin, here most likely the idols. God would remove the idols and the people who clung to them.

These verses speak of the whole earth, not just Judah. They look past the fall of Jerusalem to the great and final day of the LORD, when God will judge the whole world (1:18; 3:8). Then, in verse 4, Zephaniah turns to Judah. The prophets often do this. They see the near judgment and the final judgment together, like two mountain peaks that look close from far away, though there is a valley of many years between them.

1:4-6 *And I will stretch out My hand against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and I will cut off from this place the remnant of Baal, the name of the pagan priests with the priests, and those who bow down on the roofs to the host of the heavens, and those who bow down, those who swear to the LORD and those who swear by Milcom, and those who have turned back from after the LORD, and who have not sought the LORD and have not inquired of Him.*

"And I will stretch out My hand against Judah and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem." God's own people would not escape. Judgment begins at the house of God (1 Peter 4:17).

Zephaniah names the guilty. First, "the remnant of Baal." Baal was the Canaanite god of storm and fertility, whose worship Israel had fallen into again and again. A remnant means what is left. Some think this means Josiah had already begun to clear out Baal worship and only a remnant was left. Others think it means God would cut off Baal worship until nothing was left.

"The name of the pagan priests with the priests." The pagan priests were men appointed to serve idols (2 Kings 23:5). The priests here may be priests of the LORD who had joined in false worship. God would wipe out even the memory of their names.

"Those who bow down on the roofs to the host of the heavens." The host of the heavens means the sun, moon and stars. Flat roofs were used as places of prayer, and people went up there to worship the stars. Manasseh had built altars for the host of the heavens right in the temple courts (2 Kings 21:5).

"Those who swear to the LORD and those who swear by Milcom." Milcom was the god of the Ammonites, also called Molech. These people tried to have it both ways. They swore by the LORD and by Milcom. They wanted to keep God and their idol too.

"And those who have turned back from after the LORD, and who have not sought the LORD and have not inquired of Him." This last group did not bow to any idol. They simply stopped following God. They did not pray. They did not ask for His help or His will. They did not care.

That last group should make us stop and think. You do not have to bow to Baal to turn your back on God. You only have to stop seeking Him. Many people today are not hostile to God. They just live as if He does not matter.

1:7 *Hush before the Lord GOD! For the day of the LORD **is** near; for the LORD has prepared a sacrifice; He has consecrated His invited ones.*

"Hush before the Lord GOD!" When the SLB prints "Lord GOD," the word GOD in capitals stands for God's personal name, joined to the word for master. Habakkuk ended his second chapter the same way: "hush before Him, all the earth!" (Habakkuk 2:20). Be silent. No more excuses. God is about to act.

"For the day of the LORD ***is*** near." The day of the LORD is the time when God steps in openly to judge sin and to save His people. Here it was near. Within about forty years, Babylon would come.

"For the LORD has prepared a sacrifice; He has consecrated His invited ones." This is a shocking picture. In a sacrifice, an animal was killed, and then the meat was shared at a feast with invited guests. But here the sacrifice is Judah itself. The invited guests, "consecrated" or set apart for this task, are the enemy armies God would bring. Revelation uses a similar picture for the last battle, when the birds are called to "the supper of the great God" (Revelation 19:17).

1:8-9 *And it will be, on the day of the sacrifice of the LORD, and I will punish the princes and the sons of the king and all who wear foreign clothing. And I will punish everyone who leaps over the threshold on that day, those who fill the house of their lord* ***with*** *violence and deceit.*

"On the day of the sacrifice of the LORD, and I will punish the princes and the sons of the king." The leaders would be judged first, because they should have led the people in the right way. Josiah's sons and grandsons who reigned after him did evil, and three of them ended their lives as captives in Egypt or Babylon (2 Kings 23:31-25:7).

"And all who wear foreign clothing." This was more than fashion. Wearing the clothing of foreign nations showed that the leaders wanted to be like the pagan peoples around them, and some of it may have been clothing worn in foreign worship.

"And I will punish everyone who leaps over the threshold on that day." This may refer to a pagan custom of not stepping on the threshold of a temple, which began with the priests of the Philistine god Dagon (1 Samuel 5:5). Or it may describe servants who rushed into homes to rob them for their masters. The next line fits that second view: "those who fill the house of their lord ***with*** violence and deceit." The rich filled their houses with goods taken by force and fraud.

1:10-11 *And it will be on that day, declares the LORD, the sound of a cry from the Fish Gate, and wailing from the Second Quarter, and a great crashing from the hills. Wail, inhabitants of the Mortar, for all the people of Canaan are destroyed; all those loaded with silver are cut off.*

Now Zephaniah takes us on a walk through Jerusalem on the day of judgment. "The sound of a cry from the Fish Gate." The Fish Gate was on the north side of the city, where fish were brought in to sell. The north side was where enemies usually attacked. "And wailing from the Second Quarter." The Second Quarter was a newer part of the city, where the prophetess Huldah lived (2 Kings 22:14). "And a great crashing from the hills." The sound of walls and buildings falling.

"Wail, inhabitants of the Mortar." The Mortar was most likely a low, bowl-shaped area of the city, perhaps a market district. "For all the people of Canaan are destroyed." The word Canaan here likely means traders or merchants, since the Canaanites were famous for trade. "All those loaded with silver are cut off." The merchants with their bags of money would be the first to lose everything.

1:12-13 *And it will be at that time, I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are thickening on their dregs, who are saying in their heart, "The LORD will not do good, and He will not do harm." And their wealth will become plunder, and their houses a desolation; and they will build houses and not dwell* ***in them****, and they will plant vineyards and not drink their wine.*

"I will search Jerusalem with lamps." God would go through the city like a man searching every dark corner with a lamp. No one could hide.

"And I will punish the men who are thickening on their dregs." When wine was made, it was left on its dregs, the sediment at the bottom of the jar, for a time. If it was left too long, it became thick and syrupy. Jeremiah used the same picture for Moab, who had been "undisturbed on his lees" (Jeremiah 48:11). These were people who had grown comfortable, lazy and settled in their sin.

They are "saying in their heart," and what they say is this: "The LORD will not do good, and He will not do harm." These people did not deny that God existed. They just thought He would never do anything. He would not bless, and He would not judge. To them, God was far away and did not matter.

Many people today believe in God in a general way but live as if He will never hold them to account. "And their wealth will become plunder, and their houses a desolation." They would build houses and not live in them, and plant vineyards and not drink the wine. This was exactly what Moses had warned would happen if Israel turned from God (Deuteronomy 28:30, 39).

1:14-16 *Near* ***is*** *the great day of the LORD, near and hurrying exceedingly. The sound of the day of the LORD; bitter, a warrior is shouting there. A day of fury* ***is*** *that day, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of cloud and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the high corners.*

Now comes the heart of the chapter. "Near ***is*** the great day of the LORD, near and hurrying exceedingly." Zephaniah says it twice: near. It was coming fast. "The sound of the day of the LORD; bitter, a warrior is shouting there." Even the strongest soldier would cry out in bitter fear.

Then Zephaniah describes the day with a list that sounds like the tolling of a bell: "A day of fury that day, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of cloud and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the high corners." The high corners were the towers at the corners of the city walls, the strongest points of defense. They would not hold.

These words came true in part in 586 B.C., when the Babylonians broke through the walls of Jerusalem, burned the temple and carried the people away. That was a day of the LORD for Judah.

But the words reach further than 586 B.C. Verse 18 says "all the earth will be consumed," and 3:8 speaks of God gathering the nations for judgment. Like the other prophets, Zephaniah looks ahead to a final day of the LORD. The New Testament speaks of that day. Jesus said that before His return there would be "great tribulation, such as has not happened from ***the*** beginning of ***the*** world until now" (Matthew 24:21), and that the sun would be darkened (Matthew 24:29).

Revelation describes the people of the earth crying out that "the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (Revelation 6:17). Jeremiah calls it "a time of distress for Jacob" (Jeremiah 30:7).

I believe, with many Bible teachers, that this final day of the LORD includes the coming seven-year Tribulation and ends with the return of Jesus Christ to the earth. Before it begins, Christ will come for His church and take believers to be with Him. That is the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52). Paul says "God did not appoint us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:9), and Jesus promised to keep His church "from the hour of testing which is about to come upon the whole inhabited world" (Revelation 3:10). Then the Tribulation will come on the earth, a time of judgment on the nations and of great trouble for Israel, from which a remnant of Israel will be saved. At its end, Christ will return in glory, judge the nations and set up His kingdom (Matthew 24:29-31; Revelation 19:11-20:6).

Other Bible teachers read these verses differently. Some believe they were fulfilled only in 586 B.C. Some see them fulfilled in the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Others see only the final judgment at the end of the world, with no Tribulation period. The near day came just as Zephaniah said. I believe the far day will come just as surely.

Why does this matter for us? Because God's warnings are true. Jerusalem's people did not believe the day would come, and it did. The world today does not believe God will judge, and He will. But the same God who warns also makes a way of escape. Jesus Christ bore God's wrath for sin on the cross. Everyone who trusts Him is saved from the wrath to come (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

1:17-18 *And I will bring distress on mankind, and they will walk like the blind, for they have sinned against the LORD; and their blood will be poured out like dust, and their entrails like dung. Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to deliver them on the day of the fury of the LORD; and in the fire of His jealousy all the earth will be consumed; for a complete end, surely a terrifying* ***one****, He will make of all the inhabitants of the earth.*

"And I will bring distress on mankind, and they will walk like the blind." People would stagger around in confusion, unable to find their way. "For they have sinned against the LORD." This is the reason for everything. The judgment is not random. It is the result of sin.

The next words describe the many who would die. We do not need to dwell on the picture. We need to hear the warning.

"Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to deliver them on the day of the fury of the LORD." You cannot bribe God. Only His mercy can save.

"And in the fire of His jealousy all the earth will be consumed." God's jealousy, as in Nahum 1:2, is His holy zeal for His own glory and for His people. "For a complete end, surely a terrifying ***one***, He will make of all the inhabitants of the earth."

Is there any hope? Yes. The very next verses call the humble to seek the LORD (2:1-3), and the book ends with God singing over His people (3:17). Zephaniah's message of judgment is meant to

drive us to God, not away from Him. If you have never turned to Christ, this chapter is God's loving warning. The day is coming. Run to Him now.

Summary

The word of the LORD came to Zephaniah, a descendant of Hezekiah, in the days of King Josiah. God declared that He would sweep away everything from the face of the ground, along with the idols and the wicked. He would stretch out His hand against Judah and Jerusalem and cut off the worship of Baal and its priests, those who worshiped the stars, those who swore by both the LORD and Milcom, and those who no longer sought the LORD. The day of the LORD was near, and God had prepared a sacrifice. He would punish the princes and those who filled their masters' houses with violence and deceit. Cries would rise across the city as the merchants were cut off. God would search Jerusalem with lamps and punish the complacent who said He would do neither good nor harm. The great day of the LORD was coming fast: a day of fury, distress, darkness and battle cry. Silver and gold would not save anyone, and in the fire of His jealousy all the earth would be consumed.

Study Questions

1. Who was Zephaniah, and when did he prophesy? (1:1)

2. Which groups of people in Judah does God say He will cut off? (1:4-6)

3. What does "the day of the LORD" mean, and what picture does Zephaniah use for it in verse 7? (1:7)

4. What were the complacent people of Jerusalem saying in their hearts about God? (1:12)

5. List some of the words Zephaniah uses to describe the great day of the LORD. (1:14-16)

6. Why will silver and gold not help on that day? (1:18)

7. How did Zephaniah's warning come true in 586 B.C., and how do Matthew 24:21-29 and 1 Thessalonians 5:9 help us understand the final day of the LORD?

8. The last group in verse 6 did not worship idols; they simply stopped seeking God. Why do you think God takes that so seriously?

9. Are there ways you have tried to "swear to the LORD" and by something else at the same time, holding on to God and to something that competes with Him? (1:5)

10. This chapter is a warning meant to drive us to God. Who in your life needs to hear about the coming day, and the way of escape in Jesus Christ?

Zephaniah 2: Seek the LORD Before the Day of Anger

Scripture

2:1-15 Assemble yourselves together, and assemble, O nation not ashamed, before a decree gives birth (like chaff a day has passed), before the burning of the anger of the LORD comes upon you, before the day of the anger of the LORD comes upon you. Seek the LORD, all the humble of the land, who have done His justice; seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be hidden on the day of the anger of the LORD. For Gaza will be abandoned, and Ashkelon ***will become*** a desolation; Ashdod, at noon they will drive her out, and Ekron will be uprooted. Woe ***to*** the inhabitants of the region of the sea, the nation of ***the*** Kerethites! The word of the LORD ***is*** against you, O Canaan, land of ***the*** Philistines; and I will destroy you without an inhabitant. And the region of the sea will be pastures, meadows of shepherds, and folds of sheep. And the region will belong to the remnant of the house of Judah; on them they will graze; in the houses of Ashkelon in the evening they will lie down; for the LORD their God will visit them, and He will turn back their captivity. I have heard the reproach of Moab and the revilings of the sons of Ammon, who have reproached My people and have magnified themselves against their territory. Therefore, ***as*** I live, declares the LORD of armies, the God of Israel, surely Moab will be like Sodom, and the sons of Ammon like Gomorrah, a possession of nettles and a pit of salt and a desolation forever. The remnant of My people will plunder them, and the rest of My nation will inherit them. This ***will be*** to them in place of their pride, for they have reproached and have magnified themselves against the people of the LORD of armies. The LORD ***will be*** awesome against them, for He will make lean all the gods of the earth; and they will bow down to Him, each one from his place, all the coastlands of the nations. Also you, O Cushites, the slain of My sword ***are*** they. And let Him stretch out His hand against the north, and let Him destroy Assyria, and let Him make Nineveh a desolation, a dry place like the wilderness. And herds will lie down in her midst, every living thing of a nation; both the desert owl and the hedgehog will lodge on her capitals; a voice will sing in the window; desolation ***will be*** on the threshold; for He has laid bare the cedarwork. This ***is*** the jubilant city which dwells in security, which says in her heart, "I ***am***, and ***there is*** no one else besides me." How she has become a waste, a resting place for living things! Everyone who passes by her will hiss; he will shake his hand.

Preview

After the dark warnings of chapter 1, Zephaniah turns to his own people with an urgent call. Gather together before it is too late. Before the decree takes effect, before the burning anger of the LORD comes, seek Him. "Seek the LORD, all the humble of the land." Seek righteousness. Seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden on the day of His anger.

Then Zephaniah looks around Judah in every direction. To the west, the Philistine cities will be emptied, and their coast will become pasture for the remnant of Judah. To the east, Moab and Ammon, who mocked God's people, will become like Sodom and Gomorrah. To the south, the Cushites will fall by His sword. To the north, Assyria and its proud capital, Nineveh, will become a desert where wild animals live. The nations that thought they were safe will learn that the LORD rules over all the earth.

Study

2:1-2 *Assemble yourselves together, and assemble, O nation not ashamed, before a decree gives birth (like chaff a day has passed), before the burning of the anger of the LORD comes upon you, before the day of the anger of the LORD comes upon you.*

"Assemble yourselves together, and assemble, O nation not ashamed." Zephaniah calls Judah to gather, most likely for a solemn assembly of repentance, as Joel did in his day (Joel 2:15-17). He calls them a nation "not ashamed." They had sinned openly and felt no shame about it. That is a dangerous place for a person or a nation to be.

"Before a decree gives birth." God's decree of judgment had been made. Like a baby about to be born, it would soon come into the world. "Like chaff a day has passed." Chaff is the light husk blown away when grain is tossed in the wind. Time was blowing away like chaff. The days left were few.

"Before the burning of the anger of the LORD comes upon you, before the day of the anger of the LORD comes upon you." Zephaniah says "before" three times. There is still a window, but it is closing. God's warnings always come with time to respond. But that time does not last forever. Paul says, "Look, now ***is*** a well-accepted time; look, now ***is*** a day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

2:3 *Seek the LORD, all the humble of the land, who have done His justice; seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be hidden on the day of the anger of the LORD.*

This is the key verse of the chapter, and one of the key verses of the book. "Seek the LORD, all the humble of the land, who have done His justice." Zephaniah now speaks to a smaller group within the nation: the humble. These were people who were not proud, who knew their need of God, and who tried to do what He commanded. Not everyone in Judah had turned away. God always has a faithful remnant.

To seek the LORD means to turn to Him, pray to Him, look to His Word and want Him above everything else. Even the humble are told to keep seeking. Seeking God is not a one-time event. It is the direction of a whole life.

"Seek righteousness, seek humility." Righteousness means doing what is right in God's sight. Humility means a lowly heart that bows before God and does not exalt itself. These are the opposite of the pride and violence Zephaniah condemned in chapter 1.

"Perhaps you will be hidden on the day of the anger of the LORD." Remember that Zephaniah's name means the LORD hides. Why does he say "perhaps"? Not because God is unwilling to save. It is a humble way of speaking. The humble do not presume on God. They do not say God owes them. They cast themselves on His mercy. Also, when judgment fell on Judah in 586 B.C., even the righteous suffered in the national disaster, as Jeremiah and Daniel did. But God watched over them in it. Jeremiah was protected, and Daniel was carried to Babylon, where God used him greatly.

For believers today, there is no "perhaps" about being saved from God's wrath. "***There is*** therefore now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). And I believe the church will be kept from the coming hour of wrath on the earth (1 Thessalonians 1:10; Revelation 3:10). But Zephaniah's call still applies. Seek the LORD. Seek righteousness. Seek humility. Jesus said, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

2:4-7 *For Gaza will be abandoned, and Ashkelon **will become** a desolation; Ashdod, at noon they will drive her out, and Ekron will be uprooted. Woe **to** the inhabitants of the region of the sea, the nation of **the** Kerethites! The word of the LORD **is** against you, O Canaan, land of **the** Philistines; and I will destroy you without an inhabitant. And the region of the sea will be pastures, meadows of shepherds, and folds of sheep. And the region will belong to the remnant of the house of Judah; on them they will graze; in the houses of Ashkelon in the evening they will lie down; for the LORD their God will visit them, and He will turn back their captivity.*

Zephaniah now turns to the nations, beginning in the west with the Philistines. Why? Because if God judges the nations around Judah, Judah should realize it will not escape either. And the remnant of Judah can take hope, because God will judge their enemies.

"For Gaza will be abandoned, and Ashkelon ***will become*** a desolation; Ashdod, at noon they will drive her out, and Ekron will be uprooted." These were four of the five main cities of the Philistines, who lived along the coast and had been Israel's enemies since the days of the judges. "At noon" may mean in a surprise attack in the heat of the day, when armies usually rested. In Hebrew, there are wordplays here: Gaza sounds like the word for abandoned, and Ekron sounds like the word for uprooted.

"Woe ***to*** the inhabitants of the region of the sea, the nation of ***the*** Kerethites!" The Kerethites were a people linked with the Philistines, likely from the island of Crete, where the Philistines may have come from. "O Canaan, land of ***the*** Philistines." The coast would be emptied "without an inhabitant."

Then a promise: "And the region of the sea will be pastures, meadows of shepherds, and folds of sheep." The busy cities would become quiet fields. "And the region will belong to the remnant of the house of Judah." The remnant would graze their flocks there and rest in the empty houses of Ashkelon.

Why? "For the LORD their God will visit them, and He will turn back their captivity." This is a surprising word. Zephaniah has not yet said Judah will go into captivity, but here he promises it will be turned back. God's judgment on His people would not be the end. He would bring them back. That began with the return from Babylon in 538 B.C. The full fulfillment awaits the day when God gathers all Israel to their land (3:20).

2:8-11 *I have heard the reproach of Moab and the revilings of the sons of Ammon, who have reproached My people and have magnified themselves against their territory. Therefore,* ***as*** *I live, declares the LORD of armies, the God of Israel, surely Moab will be like Sodom, and the sons of Ammon like Gomorrah, a possession of nettles and a pit of salt and a desolation forever. The remnant of My people will plunder them, and the rest of My nation will inherit them. This* ***will be*** *to them in place of their pride, for they have reproached and have magnified themselves against the people of the LORD of armies. The LORD* ***will be*** *awesome against them, for He will make lean all the gods of the earth; and they will bow down to Him, each one from his place, all the coastlands of the nations.*

Next Zephaniah turns east to Moab and Ammon, Israel's relatives through Lot (Genesis 19:36-38) and its longtime enemies. "I have heard the reproach of Moab and the revilings of the sons of Ammon, who have reproached My people and have magnified themselves against their territory." They had mocked God's people and boasted, and they had tried to take Israel's land.

God heard every word. When people mock God's people, they are mocking God Himself. Jesus said the same to Saul of Tarsus, who was persecuting the church: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" (Acts 9:4).

"Therefore, ***as*** I live, declares the LORD of armies, the God of Israel, surely Moab will be like Sodom." God swears by His own life. Moab and Ammon would become like Sodom and Gomorrah, the cities near their land that God destroyed in Abraham's day (Genesis 19). The land would become "a possession of nettles and a pit of salt and a desolation forever." The region around the Dead Sea is still known for its salt pits. "The remnant of My people will plunder them, and the rest of My nation will inherit them."

"This ***will be*** to them in place of their pride." Pride was the root of their sin. "The LORD ***will be*** awesome against them, for He will make lean all the gods of the earth." To make lean means to starve. The idols would waste away, with no one to worship them or bring them offerings. "And they will bow down to Him, each one from his place, all the coastlands of the nations."

This is the first glimpse of what chapter 3 will develop. One day, all the nations will worship the LORD, each from its own place. That began when the gospel went out to the Gentiles after Jesus rose from the dead. It will be complete when Christ reigns over the whole earth (Zechariah 14:9, 16).

2:12 *Also you, O Cushites, the slain of My sword* ***are*** *they.*

"Also you, O Cushites, the slain of My sword ***are*** they." Now Zephaniah looks far to the south. Cush was the land south of Egypt, often called Ethiopia in older Bibles. For a time, kings from Cush had ruled Egypt, so this may also include Egypt. The verse is short and blunt. Even the farthest nation would fall by God's sword. History records that Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt about 568 B.C. (see Ezekiel 30:4-5, where Cush falls with Egypt).

But God's judgment on Cush is not His last word. In 3:10 Zephaniah says that from beyond the rivers of Cush, God's worshipers will bring Him offerings. In Acts 8, an official of the queen of the Ethiopians heard the gospel and believed (Acts 8:26-39).

2:13-15 *And let Him stretch out His hand against the north, and let Him destroy Assyria, and let Him make Nineveh a desolation, a dry place like the wilderness. And herds will lie down in her midst, every living thing of a nation; both the desert owl and the hedgehog will lodge on her capitals; a voice will sing in the window; desolation* ***will be*** *on the threshold; for He has laid bare the cedarwork. This* ***is*** *the jubilant city which dwells in security, which says in her heart, "I* ***am****, and* ***there is*** *no one else besides me." How she has become a waste, a resting place for living things! Everyone who passes by her will hiss; he will shake his hand.*

Finally, Zephaniah turns north, to the greatest power of all. "And let Him stretch out His hand against the north, and let Him destroy Assyria, and let Him make Nineveh a desolation, a dry place like the wilderness." When Zephaniah spoke, Nineveh was still the capital of the mightiest empire on earth. He said it would become a desert. Nahum said the same thing. In 612 B.C., it happened.

"And herds will lie down in her midst." Where palaces stood, flocks would graze. "Both the desert owl and the hedgehog will lodge on her capitals." The capitals are the carved tops of columns, now lying in the ruins. "A voice will sing in the window." Perhaps a bird singing in an empty window. "Desolation ***will be*** on the threshold; for He has laid bare the cedarwork." The fine cedar paneling would be stripped away and left open to the weather.

"This ***is*** the jubilant city which dwells in security." It "says in her heart," and here is what it says: "I ***am***, and ***there is*** no one else besides me." Nineveh spoke as if it were God. Only the LORD can truly say there is no one else besides Him (Isaiah 45:5, 21). Nineveh's pride was a kind of claim to be God, and that is the oldest sin there is.

"How she has become a waste, a resting place for living things! Everyone who passes by her will hiss; he will shake his hand." People passing the ruins would hiss and wave their hands in scorn and amazement. The city that thought it would last forever became a byword.

We live in a world that still talks this way. Proud nations, proud people, even proud hearts in the church. Zephaniah's message is simple. The LORD alone is God. Every proud thing will fall. The humble who seek Him will be hidden on the day of His anger.

Summary

Zephaniah called the shameless nation of Judah to gather before God's decree took effect and the day of the LORD's anger came. He urged the humble of the land, who did God's justice, to seek the LORD, righteousness and humility, so that perhaps they would be hidden on that day. Then he announced judgment on the nations around Judah. The Philistine cities of Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod and Ekron would be emptied, and the coast would become pastures for the remnant of Judah, whose captivity the LORD would turn back. Moab and Ammon, who had mocked God's people and boasted against their land, would become like Sodom and Gomorrah, a place of nettles

and salt, and God's remnant would inherit them. The LORD would starve the gods of the earth, and all the coastlands would bow to Him. The Cushites would fall by His sword. Assyria would be destroyed, and Nineveh, the proud city that said there was no one besides her, would become a dry wasteland where flocks and wild creatures lived and passersby hissed in scorn.

Study Questions

1. What does Zephaniah call Judah in verse 1, and what does he urge them to do before the day of the LORD's anger? (2:1-2)

2. Who are the humble of the land, and what three things are they told to seek? (2:3)

3. Why do you think Zephaniah says "perhaps you will be hidden"? (2:3)

4. What will happen to the Philistine cities, and who will live in their land? (2:4-7)

5. Why did God judge Moab and Ammon? (2:8-10)

6. What does verse 11 say all the nations will one day do? (2:11)

7. What did Nineveh say in her heart, and what happened to her? (2:15)

8. Zephaniah calls Judah a "nation not ashamed" (2:1). What are some sins our culture no longer feels shame about? Are there any in your own life?

9. What does it look like for you to "seek the LORD," "seek righteousness" and "seek humility" this week?

10. Nineveh said there was "no one else besides me." In what ways are we tempted to put ourselves at the center instead of God?

Zephaniah 3: The LORD Rejoices Over His People

Scripture

3:1-8 Woe ***to*** the filthy and defiled ***one***, the oppressing city! She has not listened to a voice; she has not accepted correction; in the LORD she has not trusted; to her God she has not drawn near. Her princes in her midst ***are*** roaring lions; her judges ***are*** evening wolves; they do not reserve ***anything*** for the morning. Her prophets ***are*** reckless, men of treachery; her priests have profaned ***what is*** holy; they have done violence to ***the*** law. The LORD ***is*** righteous in her midst; He does not do injustice. In the morning, in the morning He gives His justice to the light; it is not lacking. And ***the*** unjust does not know shame. I have cut off nations; their corners are desolate; I have devastated their streets, without one passing by; their cities have been laid waste, without a man, without an inhabitant. I said, "Surely you will fear Me; you will accept correction; and her dwelling will not be cut off, all that I have appointed for her." Nevertheless they rose early; they corrupted all their deeds. Therefore wait for Me, declares the LORD, for the day of My rising up for prey; for My judgment ***is*** to gather nations, to gather together kingdoms, to pour out on them My indignation, all the burning of My anger; for in the fire of My jealousy all the earth will be consumed.

3:9-20 For then I will turn to peoples a purified lip, for all of them to call on the name of the LORD, to serve Him ***with*** one shoulder. From beyond the rivers of Cush My worshipers, the daughter of My scattered ones, will bring My offering. On that day you will not be ashamed because of all your deeds by which you have transgressed against Me; for then I will remove from your midst the exultant ones of your pride, and you will not continue to be haughty anymore on the mountain of My holiness. And I will leave in your midst a people afflicted and poor, and they will take refuge in the name of the LORD. The remnant of Israel will not do injustice, and they will not speak a lie, and a tongue of deceit will not be found in their mouth; for they will graze and lie down, and ***there will be*** no one who makes ***them*** tremble. Shout for joy, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all ***your*** heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The LORD has removed your judgments; He has cleared away your enemy. The King of Israel, the LORD, ***is*** in your midst; you will not fear evil anymore. On that day it will be said to Jerusalem, "Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands drop. The LORD your God ***is*** in your midst, a warrior ***who*** will save. He will rejoice over you with joy; He will be silent in His love; He will be glad over you with a shout of joy." Those grieving away from the appointed feast I will gather; they were from you, a burden upon her, a reproach. Look, I ***am*** dealing with all who afflict you at that time; and I will save the lame, and the outcast I will gather together; and I will make them a praise and a name in all the earth ***where*** their shame ***was***. At that time I will bring you, and at the time of My gathering you together; for I will make you a name and a praise among all the peoples of the earth when I turn back your captivities before your eyes, says the LORD.

Preview

Zephaniah has pronounced woe on the nations around Judah. Now he turns back to Jerusalem, and the words are just as sharp. Woe to the filthy, oppressing city. It would not listen, would not accept correction, would not trust the LORD or draw near to Him. Its princes and judges were like

lions and wolves, its prophets were reckless and its priests profaned what was holy. In the middle of it all stood the LORD, righteous, giving His justice every morning. But the city would not learn. So God says: wait for Me, for the day when I gather the nations for judgment.

Then, at verse 9, everything changes. After the fire of judgment, God will purify the lips of the peoples so they can all call on His name. He will leave in Jerusalem a humble remnant who do no wrong and tell no lies. And the book ends with a song. Shout for joy, daughter of Zion! The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst. He will rejoice over you with joy, and be glad over you with a shout of joy. He will gather the lame and the outcast, bring His people home, and make them a name and a praise among all the peoples of the earth.

Study

3:1-2 *Woe **to** the filthy and defiled **one**, the oppressing city! She has not listened to a voice; she has not accepted correction; in the LORD she has not trusted; to her God she has not drawn near.*

"Woe ***to*** the filthy and defiled ***one***, the oppressing city!" Zephaniah does not name the city at first. His listeners might have thought he was still speaking of Nineveh (2:13-15). But the next verse makes it clear. This is Jerusalem.

"She has not listened to a voice; she has not accepted correction." God had sent prophet after prophet. Jerusalem did not listen. God had disciplined her again and again. She did not learn. "In the LORD she has not trusted; to her God she has not drawn near."

These four failures describe a heart that has drifted from God. Not listening. Not accepting correction. Not trusting. Not drawing near. Do any of them describe us? James says, "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you" (James 4:8).

3:3-4 *Her princes in her midst **are** roaring lions; her judges **are** evening wolves; they do not reserve **anything** for the morning. Her prophets **are** reckless, men of treachery; her priests have profaned **what is** holy; they have done violence to **the** law.*

Zephaniah names the leaders who had failed. "Her princes in her midst ***are*** roaring lions." The rulers who should have protected the people preyed on them. "Her judges ***are*** evening wolves; they do not reserve ***anything*** for the morning." Like hungry wolves that eat everything at night and leave nothing, the judges devoured all they could get.

"Her prophets ***are*** reckless, men of treachery." These were false prophets, who spoke their own ideas and told the people what they wanted to hear (Jeremiah 23:16-17). "Her priests have profaned ***what is*** holy; they have done violence to ***the*** law." The priests were supposed to teach God's Law and guard what was holy. Instead they treated holy things as common and twisted the Law.

Every group that should have led the people toward God led them away. Leaders in every age, in government, in the church and in the home, will answer to God for how they led (James 3:1; Hebrews 13:17).

3:5 *The LORD **is** righteous in her midst; He does not do injustice. In the morning, in the morning He gives His justice to the light; it is not lacking. And **the** unjust does not know shame.*

Now comes a sharp contrast. "The LORD ***is*** righteous in her midst; He does not do injustice." The corrupt leaders were in her midst, but so was the LORD. His temple stood in Jerusalem. He was right there, seeing everything.

"In the morning, in the morning He gives His justice to the light; it is not lacking." In those days, judges often heard cases in the morning. Every morning, God's justice was on display, faithful and steady.

"And ***the*** unjust does not know shame." In spite of God's faithful presence, the unjust felt no shame. That is how hard sin can make a heart.

3:6-7 *I have cut off nations; their corners are desolate; I have devastated their streets, without one passing by; their cities have been laid waste, without a man, without an inhabitant. I said, "Surely you will fear Me; you will accept correction; and her dwelling will not be cut off, all that I have appointed for her." Nevertheless they rose early; they corrupted all their deeds.*

God reminds Jerusalem of what He had already done to other nations. "I have cut off nations; their corners are desolate." The corners are the corner towers of city walls. God had brought down kingdom after kingdom. Judah had watched the northern kingdom of Israel fall to Assyria.

God says, "Surely you will fear Me; you will accept correction." He hoped Jerusalem would learn from what it saw. If it would fear Him, "her dwelling will not be cut off." But "nevertheless they rose early; they corrupted all their deeds." They got up early, not to seek God, but to sin. They were eager to do wrong.

Paul says such things were written as warnings for us (1 Corinthians 10:11).

3:8 *Therefore wait for Me, declares the LORD, for the day of My rising up for prey; for My judgment **is** to gather nations, to gather together kingdoms, to pour out on them My indignation, all the burning of My anger; for in the fire of My jealousy all the earth will be consumed.*

"Therefore wait for Me, declares the LORD, for the day of My rising up for prey." God tells the faithful to wait. The day was coming when He would rise up like a hunter.

"For My judgment ***is*** to gather nations, to gather together kingdoms, to pour out on them My indignation." This verse goes far beyond Jerusalem. God will gather all nations for judgment. Joel says the same thing (Joel 3:2), and so does Zechariah, who says God will gather all the nations against Jerusalem for battle, and then the LORD will go out and fight against them (Zechariah 14:2-3). Revelation names the place Armageddon (Revelation 16:14-16).

"For in the fire of My jealousy all the earth will be consumed." This repeats 1:18. Zephaniah is speaking again of the final day of the LORD. I believe this points to the end of the coming Tribulation, when the nations gather against Israel and Jesus Christ returns to judge them (Revelation 19:11-21).

But notice the very next word: "For then." The fire of judgment is followed by something new. Judgment is not God's last word.

3:9-10 *For then I will turn to peoples a purified lip, for all of them to call on the name of the LORD, to serve Him **with** one shoulder. From beyond the rivers of Cush My worshipers, the daughter of My scattered ones, will bring My offering.*

"For then I will turn to peoples a purified lip." A lip here means speech. God will cleanse the speech of the nations. Remember that at the tower of Babel, God confused the language of all the earth and scattered the peoples (Genesis 11:9). Here He reverses Babel.

Why? "For all of them to call on the name of the LORD." "To serve Him ***with*** one shoulder." This is a picture of people working shoulder to shoulder, pulling together under one yoke, united in serving God.

Does this mean one language for the whole world? Some Bible teachers think so, at least in the coming kingdom. Others think it means pure, united worship in many languages. We got a taste of it at Pentecost, when people from many nations heard the apostles speak of the great works of God in their own languages (Acts 2:5-11). Today, "everyone who calls on the name of ***the*** Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13), from every nation. John saw that great multitude from every nation and tongue before the throne (Revelation 7:9).

"From beyond the rivers of Cush My worshipers, the daughter of My scattered ones, will bring My offering." Cush was the farthest land to the south that the people of Judah knew (2:12). Even from there, God's worshipers would come. "The daughter of My scattered ones" most likely means God's own scattered people, the Jews, coming home from the ends of the earth with offerings for Him. It may also include Gentiles who worship Him (Isaiah 66:20).

3:11-13 *On that day you will not be ashamed because of all your deeds by which you have transgressed against Me; for then I will remove from your midst the exultant ones of your pride, and you will not continue to be haughty anymore on the mountain of My holiness. And I will leave in your midst a people afflicted and poor, and they will take refuge in the name of the LORD. The remnant of Israel will not do injustice, and they will not speak a lie, and a tongue of deceit will not be found in their mouth; for they will graze and lie down, and **there will be** no one who makes **them** tremble.*

"On that day you will not be ashamed because of all your deeds by which you have transgressed against Me." God now speaks to Jerusalem. The shameful past would be gone, forgiven and removed. "For then I will remove from your midst the exultant ones of your pride." The proud would be taken away. "And you will not continue to be haughty anymore on the mountain of My holiness." That is Mount Zion, where the temple stood.

"And I will leave in your midst a people afflicted and poor, and they will take refuge in the name of the LORD." This is the remnant. A remnant is the part that is left after a judgment. They would be humble, lowly people, not proud. And they would trust in the LORD. This is what Zephaniah

called the humble to be in 2:3. Jesus said, "Blessed ***are*** the meek, for they will inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5).

"The remnant of Israel will not do injustice, and they will not speak a lie, and a tongue of deceit will not be found in their mouth." What a change from 3:3-4. The city whose leaders were lions, wolves and liars will be full of people who do right and tell the truth. Only God can make a change like that. He will do it by giving them a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

"For they will graze and lie down, and ***there will be*** no one who makes ***them*** tremble."

3:14-16 *Shout for joy, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all **your** heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The LORD has removed your judgments; He has cleared away your enemy. The King of Israel, the LORD, **is** in your midst; you will not fear evil anymore. On that day it will be said to Jerusalem, "Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands drop.*

Now the tone becomes pure joy. "Shout for joy, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all ***your*** heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!" Daughter of Zion is a tender name for Jerusalem and its people. Four times Zephaniah calls them to rejoice: shout for joy, shout, rejoice, exult. And with all their heart.

Why? "The LORD has removed your judgments; He has cleared away your enemy." The punishment is over. The enemy is gone. "The King of Israel, the LORD, ***is*** in your midst; you will not fear evil anymore." Israel's kings had failed. Now the LORD Himself would be their King, living among them.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem, the crowds cried out, "Blessed ***is*** the ***One*** coming in ***the*** name of ***the*** Lord, the King of Israel!" (John 12:13). Nathanael said to Him, "You are the King of Israel!" (John 1:49). The King came. But His own nation as a whole did not receive Him (John 1:11), and He was crucified with the sign above His head, King of the Jews. The day Zephaniah describes, when Israel rejoices with all its heart because its King is in its midst, is still ahead. It will come when Jesus returns, Israel looks on Him whom they pierced (Zechariah 12:10), and "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26).

On that day Jerusalem will hear, "Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands drop." Hands that drop are a picture of discouragement.

3:17 *The LORD your God **is** in your midst, a warrior **who** will save. He will rejoice over you with joy; He will be silent in His love; He will be glad over you with a shout of joy."*

This is one of the most beautiful verses in the Old Testament. "The LORD your God ***is*** in your midst." Zephaniah says it again, because it is the heart of everything. God is not far away. He is with His people.

"A warrior ***who*** will save." The Hebrew word means a mighty man, a champion. The same God who marched out in judgment in chapter 1 now stands among His people as their defender. His power, which is terrifying to His enemies, is their protection. He "will save." Saving is what He does.

"He will rejoice over you with joy." Stop and think about that. We often think of God as putting up with us, or as disappointed in us. Zephaniah says God rejoices over His people. He is glad about them. The joy here is like the joy of a bridegroom over his bride. Isaiah uses that very picture: "***with*** the joy of a bridegroom over a bride your God will rejoice over you" (Isaiah 62:5). Jesus said there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7).

"He will be silent in His love." This line is hard to translate, and Bibles render it in different ways. The SLB gives it plainly: "silent in His love." It may mean that God's love is so deep that it is beyond words, the way a parent sits quietly holding a sleeping child. Or it may mean He will no longer bring up their sins, because His love has covered them. Some translations take it to mean that He will quiet His people by His love, calming their fears. Each of these is true of God. His love does not need many words. It rests.

"He will be glad over you with a shout of joy." Now the silence breaks into song. God Himself sings and shouts for joy over His people. In verse 14 the people shout for joy. Here God shouts for joy over them.

This promise is spoken first to Israel, the daughter of Zion, and I believe it will be fully kept for Israel in the day of its restoration. God has not given up on His people (Romans 11:1-2, 29). But it also shows us the heart of the same God toward everyone who belongs to Him through Jesus Christ. If you are in Christ, God is not merely tolerating you. He is in your midst. He is mighty to save. He rejoices over you. He rests in His love for you. And He sings over you.

Many believers carry so much shame that they cannot imagine God being glad over them. But the joy is not based on how good we are. It is based on what He has done. "The LORD has removed your judgments" (3:15). In Christ, our judgment was taken at the cross. What is left is His love.

3:18-20 *Those grieving away from the appointed feast I will gather; they were from you, a burden upon her, a reproach. Look, I **am** dealing with all who afflict you at that time; and I will save the lame, and the outcast I will gather together; and I will make them a praise and a name in all the earth **where** their shame **was**. At that time I will bring you, and at the time of My gathering you together; for I will make you a name and a praise among all the peoples of the earth when I turn back your captivities before your eyes, says the LORD.*

"Those grieving away from the appointed feast I will gather." The appointed feasts were the great festivals God gave Israel, such as Passover and Booths. In exile, God's people could not keep them, and they grieved. "They were from you, a burden upon her, a reproach." Their exile had been a weight and a shame. God would gather them.

"Look, I ***am*** dealing with all who afflict you at that time; and I will save the lame, and the outcast I will gather together." God would deal with Israel's enemies. And He would gather the weakest, the lame and the outcast, like a shepherd gathering his injured and scattered sheep (Micah 4:6). No one would be left behind. "And I will make them a praise and a name in all the earth ***where*** their shame ***was***."

"At that time I will bring you, and at the time of My gathering you together." The book closes with God's promise repeated. He will bring His people home. "For I will make you a name and a praise among all the peoples of the earth when I turn back your captivities before your eyes, says the LORD."

The return from Babylon in 538 B.C. was a real beginning of this promise. But most of the Jews stayed scattered. Zephaniah looks beyond it to the day when God will gather Israel from all the nations, cleanse them, and live among them as King. I believe that day is still ahead, after the Tribulation, when Christ returns and sets up His kingdom on the earth. God made promises to Abraham, to David and to Israel, and "the gifts and the calling of God ***are*** irrevocable" (Romans 11:29).

Zephaniah began with the words "I will utterly bring to an end everything" (1:2). He ends with "I will bring you." The same God who judges is the God who gathers. His last word to His people is not destruction but home.

Summary

Zephaniah pronounced woe on Jerusalem, the oppressing city that would not listen, accept correction, trust the LORD or draw near to Him. Its princes were like lions, its judges like evening wolves, its prophets reckless and its priests profane, though the righteous LORD was in her midst, giving His justice every morning. God told the faithful to wait for the day when He would gather the nations for judgment. Then He would purify the lips of the peoples so they could call on His name and serve Him together. He would remove the proud from Jerusalem and leave a humble remnant who would trust Him, do no wrong and tell no lies. Zion is called to sing, for the LORD has taken away her judgment, and the King of Israel, the LORD, is in her midst. He is a warrior who saves, who rejoices over His people, is silent in His love, and is glad over them with a shout of joy. He will gather the lame and the outcast and make His people a name and a praise among all the peoples of the earth.

Study Questions

1. What four things had Jerusalem failed to do? (3:2)

2. How does Zephaniah describe Jerusalem's princes, judges, prophets and priests? (3:3-4)

3. What does verse 5 say about the LORD in the middle of that corrupt city? (3:5)

4. What will God do for the peoples "then," after His judgment, and why? (3:9)

5. What will the remnant of Israel be like? (3:12-13)

6. Why is the daughter of Zion told to shout for joy? (3:14-15)

7. List the things verse 17 says the LORD will do for His people. (3:17)

8. When do you believe the promises of verses 14-20 will be fully kept for Israel, and why? (Romans 11:26-29)

9. Of the four failures in verse 2 (not listening, not accepting correction, not trusting, not drawing near), which do you struggle with most?

10. Do you find it easy or hard to believe that God rejoices over His people? How does 3:17 change the way you think about God's attitude toward you in Christ?

Overview of Haggai

Haggai is the thirty-seventh book of the Bible and the tenth of the twelve Minor Prophets. It comes right after Zephaniah and right before Zechariah. It is the second shortest book in the Old Testament, after Obadiah. It is also the first of the three prophets who spoke after the exile, when the Jews had come home from Babylon.

Zephaniah had warned that the day of the LORD was near. It came. In 586 B.C. Babylon burned Jerusalem and the temple and carried the people away. Seventy years after the first captives were taken, God kept His promise through Jeremiah. Babylon fell to Persia, and in 538 B.C. King Cyrus let the Jews go home to rebuild the house of the LORD (Ezra 1:1-4). About fifty thousand went back. They built the altar, kept the feasts and laid the foundation of the temple with shouts of joy and weeping (Ezra 3). Then the trouble started. The peoples around them opposed the work, frightened the builders and hired counselors to stop them. For about sixteen years, from about 536 to 520 B.C., nothing more was done on God's house (Ezra 4:4-5, 24).

In 520 B.C., God sent Haggai. In four short, dated messages over less than four months, he stirred the people to finish the work. His first message was blunt: you have time to build your own paneled houses, but God's house lies in ruins. Set your heart on your ways. The people listened, and twenty-three days later they were back at work. His later messages encouraged them. This house may look like nothing compared to Solomon's, but God is with you, and its latter glory will be greater than the former. From this day I will bless you. And to Zerubbabel, the governor from the line of David, God said: I have chosen you, and I will make you like a signet ring. Ezra tells us how the story ended. "Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo" prophesied to the Jews (Ezra 5:1), the building began again, and the temple was finished in 516 B.C. (Ezra 6:14-15).

The theme of Haggai is putting God first. When God's people put their own comfort ahead of His work, nothing satisfies. When they put Him first, He is with them and He blesses them. The key verse is the LORD's word through Haggai:

Haggai 1:13 (SLB)

"And Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke by the message of the LORD to the people, saying, "I ***am*** with you, declares the LORD.""

Haggai has 2 chapters and 38 verses. Here is its structure:

Part One: The Call to Rebuild (chapter 1)

- Haggai 1: Build the House of the LORD

Part Two: Encouragement for the Builders (chapter 2)

- Haggai 2: The Greater Glory and the Signet Ring

Where this book points to Christ: Haggai promises that God will shake the heavens and the earth, that "the desire of all the nations" will come (2:7), and that "Great will be the glory of this house, the latter more than the former" (2:6-9). The temple Haggai's people built, later enlarged by

Herod, was the temple Jesus walked into. He was presented there as a baby (Luke 2:22-32), taught there as a boy and as a man, and cleansed it. God's glory came to that house in His own Son (John 1:14). Hebrews 12:26-28 quotes Haggai 2:6 and says God will shake everything once more, so that only His unshakable kingdom remains. And Zerubbabel, God's chosen signet ring (2:23), is named in the family line of Jesus in both Matthew 1:12-13 and Luke 3:27. Through his line God kept His promise to David, and the true King came.

Background of Haggai

Author: "Haggai the prophet" (1:1). Ezra names him twice, with Zechariah (Ezra 5:1; 6:14). His name means festive or my feast, and some think he was born on a feast day. Nothing else is known about his family. Some have thought, from 2:3, that Haggai was an old man who had seen Solomon's temple before 586 B.C., which would make him over seventy, but the text does not say so. The book speaks of him in the third person ("by the hand of Haggai the prophet," 1:1), so it may be a record of his messages written down by Haggai himself or by someone close to him at the time.

Who it was written to: Zerubbabel the governor of Judah, Joshua the high priest, and "all the remnant of the people" (1:12, 14; 2:2), the Jews who had returned from Babylon and were living in and around Jerusalem. Joshua is the same man Ezra calls Jeshua (Ezra 3:2; 5:2). The two names are two forms of the same Hebrew name.

When it was written: Haggai dates each message to the day, in "the second year of Darius the king" (1:1). This was Darius I, the great king of Persia (522 to 486 B.C.), and his second year was 520 B.C. The four messages came on:

- The first day of the sixth month (late August, 520 B.C.): the call to build (1:1-11). The people began work on the twenty-fourth day of that month, in September (1:15).
- The twenty-first day of the seventh month (October): the greater glory of this house (2:1-9).
- The twenty-fourth day of the ninth month (December): from this day I will bless you (2:10-19).
- The same day: the word to Zerubbabel, the signet ring (2:20-23).

Zechariah began to prophesy in the eighth month of the same year, between Haggai's second and third messages (Zechariah 1:1).

Setting: Judah was a small province of the Persian empire, much smaller than the old kingdom. Jerusalem was still largely in ruins. The returned exiles were poor, harvests had failed, and enemies around them had opposed the temple work for years. The foundation of the temple had been laid about 536 B.C., but nothing had been built on it since. The people had decided that the time was not right (1:2). They were not openly rebelling against God. They had simply put Him last. Ezra 5 and 6 tell how, after Haggai and Zechariah began to preach, the Persian governor Tattenai questioned the work, Darius found Cyrus' decree in the royal archives, and the king ordered that the temple be finished and paid for from his own taxes.

Zerubbabel: Zerubbabel was the grandson of King Jehoiachin (also called Jeconiah and Coniah), the king of Judah taken to Babylon in 597 B.C. (1 Chronicles 3:17-19; Matthew 1:12). That made him the heir of the royal line of David. He was not a king. He was a governor under Persia. But God's word to him in 2:20-23 shows that God had not forgotten His promise to David's house.

Purpose: To call the returned exiles to stop putting their own comfort first and finish building the house of the LORD; to explain that their poor harvests were God's discipline for neglecting

Him; to encourage them that God was with them and that the glory of this humble temple would be greater than Solomon's; and to assure them, through Zerubbabel, that God would keep His promise to David's line and one day shake the nations and set up His kingdom.

Haggai 1: Build the House of the LORD

Scripture

1:1-15 In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying, "Thus says the LORD of armies, saying, 'This people has said, "***It is*** not a time to come, the time for the house of the LORD to be built."'" And the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, saying, "***Is it*** a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this house ***is*** desolate? And now, thus says the LORD of armies: Set your heart on your ways. You have sown much and brought in little; you have eaten, and there is no satisfaction; you have drunk, and there is no drunkenness; you have dressed, and there is no warmth for him; and he who earns wages earns wages into a pierced bag. Thus says the LORD of armies: Set your heart on your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house, and let Me take pleasure in it, and let Me be glorified, says the LORD. You looked for much, and look, ***it came*** to little; and you brought ***it*** home, and I blew on it. Because of what? declares the LORD of armies. Because of My house which is desolate, while you run, each one to his own house. Therefore over you the heavens have withheld dew, and the land has withheld its produce. And I called for a drought on the land and on the mountains and on the grain and on the new wine and on the fresh oil and on what the ground brings forth, and on mankind and on livestock, and on all the toil of hands." And Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, and Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all the remnant of the people, listened to the voice of the LORD their God and to the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him; and the people feared before the LORD. And Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke by the message of the LORD to the people, saying, "I ***am*** with you, declares the LORD." And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of armies, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth ***month***, in the second year of Darius the king.

Preview

It is late summer in 520 B.C. The Jews have been home from Babylon for about eighteen years. The foundation of the temple was laid long ago, but nothing has been built on it since. The people say the time has not come yet. Meanwhile, they have built fine houses for themselves.

God sends Haggai with a pointed question: "***Is it*** a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this house ***is*** desolate?" Twice God tells them, "Set your heart on your ways." Look at your lives. You plant much and harvest little. You eat and are still hungry. You earn wages and put them into a bag with holes. Why? Because My house lies in ruins while each of you runs to his own house. This chapter is also a story of a wonderful response. The leaders and the people listen, they fear the LORD, and God says, "I ***am*** with you." He stirs their spirits, and in twenty-three days they are back at work.

Study

1:1 *In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month, the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying,*

"In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, on the first day of the month." Haggai dates his message to the very day. Darius I was king of Persia from 522 to 486 B.C., so this was 520 B.C. The sixth month, Elul, fell in August and September. The first day of the month was the day of the new moon, a day when people gathered for worship (Numbers 28:11). It was a good day to get their attention.

Notice that a prophet of Israel dates his message by the reign of a foreign king. There was no king in Judah. God's people were living under Persia. But God had not stopped speaking.

"The word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet." Haggai was God's messenger. The message was sent "to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest." Zerubbabel was the grandson of King Jehoiachin, from the royal line of David (Matthew 1:12). Joshua was the grandson of Seraiah, the last high priest before the exile (1 Chronicles 6:14-15). Ezra calls him Jeshua (Ezra 3:2). The high priest was the chief of the priests, the one who went into the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement. God spoke first to the two leaders, the civil leader and the religious leader, because the people would follow their lead.

1:2 *"Thus says the LORD of armies, saying, 'This people has said, "**It is** not a time to come, the time for the house of the LORD to be built."'"*

"Thus says the LORD of armies." God's title, the LORD of armies, appears many times in this short book. It reminds a small, weak people that their God commands all the armies of heaven and earth. They had nothing to fear from their enemies.

God says, "This people has said," and then gives their words: "***It is*** not a time to come, the time for the house of the LORD to be built." Notice that God calls them "this people," not "My people." There is distance in that word. They had not refused to build. They had just said it was not the right time. Maybe they pointed to the enemies around them (Ezra 4:4-5), or to the poor harvests, or to the lack of money. Maybe some said Jeremiah's seventy years were not finished yet. There was always a reason to wait.

Does that sound familiar? Not now. When things settle down. When I have more time, or more money. Delay is one of the most common ways God's people disobey Him without ever saying no.

1:3-4 *And the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, saying, "**Is it** a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this house **is** desolate?*

"And the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet." Here is the message: "***Is it*** a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this house ***is*** desolate?" God answers their excuse with a question. You say it is not time to build My house. Is it time for you to live in paneled houses?

Paneled houses were houses with walls or ceilings lined with wood. In a land where wood was costly, that was a sign of comfort, even luxury. Solomon had paneled the temple with cedar (1 Kings 6:9). Now the people had paneled their own homes, while God's house was "desolate," a ruin with weeds growing on its foundation.

The problem was not that they had nice homes. The problem was priorities. They had found time, money and energy for themselves, but not for God. They had put Him last.

1:5-6 *And now, thus says the LORD of armies: Set your heart on your ways. You have sown much and brought in little; you have eaten, and there is no satisfaction; you have drunk, and there is no drunkenness; you have dressed, and there is no warmth for him; and he who earns wages earns wages into a pierced bag.*

"And now, thus says the LORD of armies: Set your heart on your ways." Many of us know this as consider your ways. To set your heart on something means to think hard about it, to pay close attention. Stop and look honestly at your life. What has been happening?

Then God shows them what they should have noticed. "You have sown much and brought in little." They planted plenty of seed, but the harvest was small. "You have eaten, and there is no satisfaction." They had food, but never enough. "You have drunk, and there is no drunkenness." Here it means they never had enough wine to be filled. "You have dressed, and there is no warmth for him." Their clothes did not keep them warm. "And he who earns wages earns wages into a pierced bag." They worked hard and got paid, but the money ran out as if their purse had holes in it.

Have you ever felt that way? You work and work, but there is never enough. You get more, and it still does not satisfy. God says this was not bad luck. It was a sign. Moses had warned Israel that if they turned from God, they would plant much seed and gather little (Deuteronomy 28:38). God was getting their attention.

We need to be careful here. Haggai is not teaching that every money problem is a punishment for sin, or that if we give to God He will make us rich. Job suffered, and he was righteous. Paul was often hungry and cold, and he was faithful (2 Corinthians 11:27). God was speaking to a specific people in a specific covenant, under the blessings and curses of the Law of Moses. But the heart of the message applies to us all. When we put ourselves first and God last, nothing truly satisfies. Jesus said, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). The emptiness many people feel is often a sign that they have built their lives around the wrong center.

So set your heart on your ways. Where is your time going? Your money? Your energy? Is God first, or is He getting what is left over?

1:7-8 *Thus says the LORD of armies: Set your heart on your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house, and let Me take pleasure in it, and let Me be glorified, says the LORD.*

"Thus says the LORD of armies: Set your heart on your ways." God says it a second time. It was that important.

Then He tells them what to do. "Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house." The commands are simple and practical. There was stone already, much of it from the old temple. What they needed was timber, from the hills around Jerusalem. Get up, go get it and build.

Why? "And let Me take pleasure in it, and let Me be glorified, says the LORD." God did not need a house. He fills heaven and earth (1 Kings 8:27). But the temple was the place He had chosen to put His name and meet with His people. Building it would please Him and bring Him glory. That is the reason for all our work for God. Not to impress people. Not to earn His love. But to please Him and give Him glory (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Notice what God did not say. He did not say it had to be as grand as Solomon's temple. He said, go and build. God is pleased with willing obedience, even when what we bring seems small.

1:9-11 *You looked for much, and look, **it came** to little; and you brought **it** home, and I blew on it. Because of what? declares the LORD of armies. Because of My house which is desolate, while you run, each one to his own house. Therefore over you the heavens have withheld dew, and the land has withheld its produce. And I called for a drought on the land and on the mountains and on the grain and on the new wine and on the fresh oil and on what the ground brings forth, and on mankind and on livestock, and on all the toil of hands."*

"You looked for much, and look, ***it came*** to little; and you brought ***it*** home, and I blew on it." When they did bring in a harvest, God blew it away, like chaff in the wind. "Because of what? declares the LORD of armies." God asks the question so they will think about it. Then He answers: "Because of My house which is desolate, while you run, each one to his own house."

That phrase is striking. They ran to their own houses. They were busy, hurrying, eager about their own affairs. But for God's house, there was no hurry at all.

"Therefore over you the heavens have withheld dew, and the land has withheld its produce." In the dry summers of Judah, the morning dew was important for the crops. God held it back. "And I called for a drought on the land and on the mountains and on the grain and on the new wine and on the fresh oil." Grain, new wine and fresh oil were the three main crops of the land, the staples of every home. The drought reached "on mankind and on livestock, and on all the toil of hands." Everything they worked at was touched.

God was not being cruel. He was being kind, the way a father disciplines a child he loves (Hebrews 12:6). He was making their empty way of life feel empty, so they would turn back to Him. Sometimes God lets our self-centered plans fail so that we will stop and set our hearts on our ways.

1:12 *And Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, and Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all the remnant of the people, listened to the voice of the LORD their God and to the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him; and the people feared before the LORD.*

Now comes one of the best responses to a prophet in the whole Old Testament. "And Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, and Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all the remnant of the people, listened to the voice of the LORD their God and to the words of Haggai the prophet."

Many prophets preached for years and saw little response. Haggai preached once, and the whole community listened. The leaders led the way, and "all the remnant of the people" followed. The remnant means those who were left, the small group who had come back from exile.

They listened "as the LORD their God had sent him." They understood that Haggai's words were God's words. "And the people feared before the LORD." This was not terror. It was a holy reverence, a sober awareness that they had been wrong and that God is God. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). True repentance starts here: we hear God's Word, we take it as His Word, and we fear Him.

1:13 *And Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke by the message of the LORD to the people, saying, "I **am** with you, declares the LORD."*

"And Haggai, the messenger of the LORD, spoke by the message of the LORD to the people." He said, "I ***am*** with you, declares the LORD." This is the shortest message in the book, and maybe the sweetest.

Haggai is called "the messenger of the LORD." The Hebrew word is malak, the same word used for angels and for the messenger promised in Malachi 3:1. A prophet was God's messenger to His people.

As soon as the people turned back, God did not lecture them more. He did not list their failures again. He encouraged them. "I am with you." That was all they needed. Their enemies were still there. Their harvests had not yet recovered. Their temple was still a ruin. But God was with them.

That is the promise God has given every believer in Christ. Jesus said, "look, I am with you all the days, until the consummation of the age" (Matthew 28:20). And Hebrews says, "I will certainly not leave you, nor will I ever forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). When God calls you to do something hard, His presence is the greatest help He can give.

1:14-15 *And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of armies, their God, on the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth **month**, in the second year of Darius the king.*

"And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people." To stir up the spirit means to wake someone up inside, to fill them with fresh energy and desire. This is God's work. He had stirred the spirit of Cyrus to send them home (Ezra 1:1). Now He stirred His own people to build. When we obey God, He gives us the will and the strength to keep obeying (Philippians 2:13).

"And they came and did work in the house of the LORD of armies, their God." Notice the words "their God." In verse 2 God called them "this people." Now, after they repent, they are back in close relationship with "their God."

"On the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth ***month***, in the second year of Darius the king." From Haggai's first message on the first day to the start of the work on the twenty-fourth day was just over three weeks. That time was likely spent gathering timber, clearing the site and planning the work. They did not wait another sixteen years. They did not form a committee to study it. They obeyed.

Is there something God has been telling you to do, and you have been saying, not now? Haggai's people show us the way. Listen. Fear the LORD. Hear Him say, "I am with you." And get to work.

Summary

On the first day of the sixth month in the second year of King Darius, the word of the LORD came through Haggai to Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest. The people were saying it was not yet time to build the LORD's house. God asked whether it was time for them to live in paneled houses while His house lay in ruins. He told them twice to set their heart on their ways: they sowed much and harvested little, ate and drank without being satisfied, dressed without being warm, and earned wages that vanished as if into a bag with holes. He told them to go to the hills, bring wood and build the house, so that He could take pleasure in it and be glorified. Their harvests had failed, and God had sent drought on the land, because His house lay desolate while each of them ran to his own house. Zerubbabel, Joshua and all the remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the LORD and the words of Haggai, and they feared the LORD. Haggai, the LORD's messenger, told them, "I am with you, declares the LORD." The LORD stirred up the spirit of the leaders and of all the people, and on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month they came and began working on the house of the LORD of armies, their God.

Study Questions

1. When did Haggai's first message come, and to whom was it spoken? (1:1)

2. What excuse were the people giving for not building God's house? (1:2)

3. What question did God ask them about their own houses? (1:4)

4. What did God tell them to do twice, and what had been happening in their lives? (1:5-7)

5. Why did God say their harvests had failed? (1:9-11)

6. How did the leaders and the people respond to Haggai's message? (1:12)

7. What did God say to the people after they obeyed, and what did He do in their spirits? (1:13-14)

8. The people never refused to build; they just said, not now. Is there something God has been calling you to do that you have been putting off?

9. Set your heart on your ways: where are your time, money and energy going right now? Is God first, or getting what is left over?

10. God's first word after the people obeyed was "I am with you." How does knowing God is with you change the way you face a hard task?

Haggai 2: The Greater Glory and the Signet Ring

Scripture

2:1-9 In the seventh ***month***, on the twenty-first ***day*** of the month, the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, saying, "Say, please, to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, saying, 'Who ***is*** left among you who saw this house in its former glory? And how do you see it now? ***Is*** it not, like it ***is***, as nothing in your eyes? And now be strong, O Zerubbabel, declares the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all people of the land, declares the LORD; and work, for I ***am*** with you, declares the LORD of armies, ***according to*** the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt; and My Spirit is standing in your midst; do not fear. For thus says the LORD of armies: Yet once ***more***, it ***is*** a little ***while***, and I ***am*** shaking the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry ground. And I will shake all the nations, and they will come, the desire of all the nations; and I will fill this house ***with*** glory, says the LORD of armies. The silver ***is*** Mine, and the gold ***is*** Mine, declares the LORD of armies. Great will be the glory of this house, the latter more than the former, says the LORD of armies; and in this place I will give peace, declares the LORD of armies.'"

2:10-23 On the twenty-fourth ***day*** of the ninth ***month***, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Haggai the prophet, saying, "Thus says the LORD of armies: Ask, please, the priests ***for*** instruction, saying, 'Look, ***if*** a man carries holy flesh in the corner of his garment, and he touches with his corner the bread or the cooked food or the wine or oil or any food, will it become holy?'" And the priests answered and said, "No." And Haggai said, "If one unclean ***by*** a dead person touches any of these, will it become unclean?" And the priests answered and said, "It will become unclean." And Haggai answered and said, "So ***is*** this people, and so ***is*** this nation before Me, declares the LORD, and so ***is*** all the work of their hands; and what they offer there, it ***is*** unclean. And now, set your heart, please, from this day and upward: from before a stone was placed on a stone in the temple of the LORD, from when they were, one came to a heap of twenty ***measures***, and there were ten; one came to the wine vat to draw off fifty ***measures from the*** winepress, and there were twenty. I struck you with blight and with mildew and with hail, all the work of your hands; and you ***did*** not ***return*** to Me, declares the LORD. Set your heart, please, from this day and upward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth ***month***, from the day when the temple of the LORD was founded; set your heart: ***Is*** the seed still in the granary? And as yet the vine and the fig tree and the pomegranate and the olive tree have not borne. From this day I will bless." And the word of the LORD came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth ***day*** of the month, saying, "Say to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, 'I ***am*** shaking the heavens and the earth. And I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations; and I will overthrow chariotry and its riders, and horses and their riders will go down, each one by the sword of his brother. On that day, declares the LORD of armies, I will take you, O Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, My servant, declares the LORD, and I will make you like the signet ring; for I have chosen you, declares the LORD of armies.'"

Preview

The work on the temple has been going for about a month. Then discouragement sets in. The older people remember Solomon's temple, with its gold and cedar, and what they are building now looks like nothing next to it. So God sends Haggai again. Be strong, and work, for I am with you. My Spirit is standing in your midst. Do not fear. Then comes a great promise: God will shake the heavens and the earth and all the nations, "the desire of all the nations" will come, and He will fill this house with glory. "Great will be the glory of this house, the latter more than the former."

Two months later, Haggai brings two more messages on the same day. In the first, he asks the priests a question about what is clean and unclean, to show the people that their past disobedience had made everything they did unclean. But from this day, God says, I will bless you. In the second, God speaks to Zerubbabel, the governor from the line of David. When God shakes the kingdoms of the world, He will make Zerubbabel like a signet ring, because He has chosen him. That promise looks forward to Jesus Christ, the Son of David, who will one day rule all the nations.

Study

2:1-2 *In the seventh **month**, on the twenty-first **day** of the month, the word of the LORD came by the hand of Haggai the prophet, saying, "Say, please, to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to the remnant of the people, saying,*

"In the seventh ***month***, on the twenty-first ***day*** of the month." This was in October of 520 B.C. It was the last day of the Feast of Booths, the week-long harvest festival when Israel lived in shelters to remember God's care in the wilderness (Leviticus 23:33-43). Solomon had dedicated the first temple at this same feast (1 Kings 8:2), so it was a natural time to compare the two temples. And with the poor harvests (1:6, 11), there was not much to celebrate.

God sent His word to the leaders and "to the remnant of the people." All of them needed encouragement.

2:3 *'Who **is** left among you who saw this house in its former glory? And how do you see it now? **Is** it not, like it **is**, as nothing in your eyes?*

"Who ***is*** left among you who saw this house in its former glory?" Solomon's temple had been destroyed sixty-six years earlier. When the foundation of this new temple was laid sixteen years before, the old men who had seen the first house wept aloud (Ezra 3:12).

"And how do you see it now? ***Is*** it not, like it ***is***, as nothing in your eyes?" God says what they feel. Next to Solomon's gold and cedar, this building looked plain.

Have you ever felt that way? Maybe your church is small, or your service for God seems tiny. Zechariah, who preached in these same months, asked, "For who has despised the day of small things?" (Zechariah 4:10).

2:4-5 *And now be strong, O Zerubbabel, declares the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all people of the land, declares the LORD; and work, for I **am** with you, declares the LORD of armies, **according to** the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt; and My Spirit is standing in your midst; do not fear.*

"And now be strong, O Zerubbabel, declares the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all people of the land." Three times God says, "be strong." God said the same to Joshua son of Nun (Joshua 1:6-9), and David to Solomon before he built the first temple (1 Chronicles 28:20).

"And work, for I ***am*** with you, declares the LORD of armies." The reason to be strong is not that the work looks good, but that God is with them (1:13).

"***According to*** the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt." When God brought Israel out of Egypt, He promised to dwell among them and be their God (Exodus 29:45-46). A covenant is a binding agreement, and God keeps His.

"And My Spirit is standing in your midst; do not fear." The Spirit who led Israel in the wilderness (Isaiah 63:11-14) was still among them. Zechariah gave the same message to Zerubbabel: the work would be done "not by strength and not by power, but by My Spirit" (Zechariah 4:6).

God's work is still done by His Spirit, who lives in every believer (1 Corinthians 3:16).

2:6-7 *For thus says the LORD of armies: Yet once **more**, it **is** a little **while**, and I **am** shaking the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry ground. And I will shake all the nations, and they will come, the desire of all the nations; and I will fill this house **with** glory, says the LORD of armies.*

"For thus says the LORD of armies: Yet once ***more***, it ***is*** a little ***while***, and I ***am*** shaking the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry ground."

God had shaken the earth once before, at Mount Sinai, when He gave the Law (Exodus 19:18). He would do it again. "And I will shake all the nations." Persia, Greece and Rome would rise and fall.

The book of Hebrews quotes this verse: "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven." Then Hebrews explains that these words signify "the removal of the things being shaken, as of things that have been made, so that the things not being shaken may remain" (Hebrews 12:26-27). Only God's unshakable kingdom will be left (Hebrews 12:28).

So the shaking has a near meaning, as God moved the nations in the centuries before Christ was born, and a far meaning, when He shakes heaven and earth at Christ's return.

"And they will come, the desire of all the nations." Good Bible teachers read this in two main ways.

The first takes "the desire of all the nations" as a Person, the Messiah. He is the One all nations long for, even if they do not know it. Many older Christian teachers read it this way.

The second takes it as the desirable things of all the nations, their treasures and wealth. In Hebrew, the verb "come" here is plural, which fits better with many things than with one person.

The next verse speaks of silver and gold, and Isaiah says that "the wealth of nations will come to you" (Isaiah 60:5). On this reading, God would move the nations to bring their riches to His house, as Darius did (Ezra 6:8).

Both readings point to Christ in the end. The glory that would fill this house was not gold. "And I will fill this house ***with*** glory, says the LORD of armies." The glory of God once filled the tabernacle and Solomon's temple as a cloud (Exodus 40:34; 1 Kings 8:10-11). There is no record of the cloud in the second temple, but God's glory came to it in a greater way. Jesus Christ, of whom John says, "we beheld His glory" (John 1:14), was brought to that temple as a baby and called "a light for revelation of ***the*** Gentiles, and glory of Your people Israel" (Luke 2:32). He said, "***One*** greater than the temple is here" (Matthew 12:6).

2:8-9 *The silver **is** Mine, and the gold **is** Mine, declares the LORD of armies. Great will be the glory of this house, the latter more than the former, says the LORD of armies; and in this place I will give peace, declares the LORD of armies.'"*

"The silver ***is*** Mine, and the gold ***is*** Mine, declares the LORD of armies." The people did not have Solomon's riches. God reminds them that all the silver and gold in the world are His. His work never depends on how much money His people have.

"Great will be the glory of this house, the latter more than the former, says the LORD of armies." Notice that God speaks of one house, with a former and a latter glory. How could its latter glory be greater, when it looked like nothing? Solomon's temple had gold. The second temple had the Son of God walking in its courts.

"And in this place I will give peace, declares the LORD of armies." The Hebrew word is shalom. It means wholeness and peace with God. Jesus made peace by the blood of His cross (Colossians 1:20). Paul says, "For He Himself is our peace" (Ephesians 2:14).

There is also a future glory still to come. I believe that when Christ returns and reigns, Jerusalem will once again be the center of worship for all nations, and God's glory will dwell among His people in a way the world has never seen (Ezekiel 43:1-7; Zechariah 14:16). Its fullest glory and peace will come in the kingdom of the Prince of Peace.

2:10-13 *On the twenty-fourth **day** of the ninth **month**, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Haggai the prophet, saying, "Thus says the LORD of armies: Ask, please, the priests **for** instruction, saying, 'Look, **if** a man carries holy flesh in the corner of his garment, and he touches with his corner the bread or the cooked food or the wine or oil or any food, will it become holy?'" And the priests answered and said, "No." And Haggai said, "If one unclean **by** a dead person touches any of these, will it become unclean?" And the priests answered and said, "It will become unclean."*

"On the twenty-fourth ***day*** of the ninth ***month***, in the second year of Darius." This was in December of 520 B.C., three months after the work began (1:15).

God told Haggai to ask the priests a question about the Law. Part of a priest's job was to teach God's Law and to tell the people what was holy and what was common, what was clean and what

was unclean (Leviticus 10:10-11). Clean and unclean meant fit or unfit to come before God in worship.

First question: "Look, ***if*** a man carries holy flesh in the corner of his garment, and he touches with his corner the bread or the cooked food or the wine or oil or any food, will it become holy?" Holy flesh was meat from a sacrifice. The priests answered, "No." Holiness does not pass by touch.

Second question: "If one unclean ***by*** a dead person touches any of these, will it become unclean?" Touching a dead body made a person unclean (Numbers 19:11-13). The priests answered, "It will become unclean." Uncleanness does spread by touch.

The lesson is simple. A healthy person does not make a sick person well by touching him, but a sick person can make a healthy person sick.

2:14 *And Haggai answered and said, "So **is** this people, and so **is** this nation before Me, declares the LORD, and so **is** all the work of their hands; and what they offer there, it **is** unclean.*

"And Haggai answered and said," and here is his answer: "So ***is*** this people, and so ***is*** this nation before Me, declares the LORD." Now Haggai applies the lesson. The altar stood and sacrifices were offered (Ezra 3:3), but being near holy things did not make the people holy. Their years of neglecting God had made them unclean, and that uncleanness spread to "all the work of their hands."

"And what they offer there, it ***is*** unclean." Their sacrifices were unclean because their hearts were far from obedience. God had said long before that "to listen ***is*** better than sacrifice" (1 Samuel 15:22).

This is a hard truth for us too. Going to church does not make us holy, and religious activity cannot clean a heart living in disobedience. Only God can make us clean, through the blood of Jesus Christ (1 John 1:7).

2:15-17 *And now, set your heart, please, from this day and upward: from before a stone was placed on a stone in the temple of the LORD, from when they were, one came to a heap of twenty **measures**, and there were ten; one came to the wine vat to draw off fifty **measures from the** winepress, and there were twenty. I struck you with blight and with mildew and with hail, all the work of your hands; and you **did** not **return** to Me, declares the LORD.*

"And now, set your heart, please, from this day and upward." These are the words of 1:5 and 1:7. "From before a stone was placed on a stone in the temple of the LORD." God asks them to remember what life was like before they started building again.

"One came to a heap of twenty ***measures***, and there were ten." "One came to the wine vat to draw off fifty ***measures from the*** winepress, and there were twenty." Year after year they got half or less of what they expected.

"I struck you with blight and with mildew and with hail, all the work of your hands." Blight was a scorching wind, and mildew a disease that turned grain yellow. Moses had warned of these in the covenant curses (Deuteronomy 28:22), and Amos used almost the same words (Amos 4:9).

"And you ***did*** not ***return*** to Me, declares the LORD." That was the saddest part, until Haggai came.

2:18-19 *Set your heart, please, from this day and upward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth* ***month****, from the day when the temple of the LORD was founded; set your heart:* ***Is*** *the seed still in the granary? And as yet the vine and the fig tree and the pomegranate and the olive tree have not borne. From this day I will bless."*

"Set your heart, please, from this day and upward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth ***month***, from the day when the temple of the LORD was founded." The foundation had been laid long before (Ezra 3:10). Here "founded" most likely means the day when the work on the foundation was renewed and the rebuilding was properly begun.

"***Is*** the seed still in the granary?" The seed for the next harvest had just been sown, or was still waiting to be sown. "And as yet the vine and the fig tree and the pomegranate and the olive tree have not borne." There was no visible sign that things would change.

"From this day I will bless." God made the promise before there was any proof. The people would have to believe Him and wait for the harvest. That is how faith works.

This is not a promise of riches for anyone who gives to God. It was God's promise to restore the covenant blessings to Israel in their land, now that they had turned back to Him. But it shows us God's heart. He is eager to bless those who turn to Him (Luke 15:20).

2:20-22 *And the word of the LORD came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth* ***day*** *of the month, saying, "Say to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, 'I* ***am*** *shaking the heavens and the earth. And I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations; and I will overthrow chariotry and its riders, and horses and their riders will go down, each one by the sword of his brother.*

"And the word of the LORD came a second time to Haggai on the twenty-fourth ***day*** of the month." This message was for Zerubbabel alone.

"Say to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah." The message is, "I ***am*** shaking the heavens and the earth." God repeats the promise of 2:6. "And I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations." Persia looked like it would last forever. It would not.

"And I will overthrow chariotry and its riders, and horses and their riders will go down, each one by the sword of his brother." This sounds like the Red Sea, where God threw horse and rider into the sea (Exodus 15:1), and like the days of Gideon, when the enemy armies turned their swords on each other (Judges 7:22).

This shaking reaches to the end of the age, when God sets up the kingdom Daniel saw (Daniel 2:44): "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).

2:23 *On that day, declares the LORD of armies, I will take you, O Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, My servant, declares the LORD, and I will make you like the signet ring; for I have chosen you, declares the LORD of armies.'"*

"On that day, declares the LORD of armies, I will take you, O Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, My servant." "My servant" was a title of honor God gave to David (2 Samuel 7:5) and to the Messiah (Isaiah 42:1; Ezekiel 34:23-24).

"And I will make you like the signet ring." A signet ring was a ring with a carved seal. A king pressed it into wax or clay to seal his documents, and it carried his full authority. Pharaoh gave his to Joseph (Genesis 41:42), and the king of Persia gave his to Mordecai (Esther 8:2).

This promise has a special meaning. About eighty years before, God had said of Zerubbabel's grandfather, King Jehoiachin, also called Coniah: "though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, were a signet ring on My right hand, yet from there I would pull you off" (Jeremiah 22:24). It looked as if God had thrown away the royal line of David. Now God says to Jehoiachin's grandson that He will make him like a signet ring. God was putting the ring back on His hand.

"For I have chosen you, declares the LORD of armies." Zerubbabel never became a king, and Scripture says nothing more about him after the temple was built. The promise was kept through his descendants. Zerubbabel is named in the family line of Jesus in both Matthew's Gospel (Matthew 1:12-13) and Luke's (Luke 3:27). God kept the royal line alive through him until the true King came.

Jesus Christ is the Son of David, the One God has chosen. The angel told Mary that "***the*** Lord God will give Him the throne of David His father" and that "of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32-33). When God finally shakes the heavens and the earth, Jesus will return and reign with the full authority of God.

So Haggai ends not with a finished building but with a promise about a King, and a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

Summary

In the seventh month, Haggai admitted that the new temple looked like nothing next to the first. God told Zerubbabel, Joshua and all the people to be strong and work, because He was with them as He had promised when they came out of Egypt, and His Spirit was standing among them. In a little while He would shake the heavens, the earth and all nations, the desire of all the nations would come, and He would fill this house with glory. The silver and gold were His, the latter glory of this house would be greater than the former, and in this place He would give peace. In the ninth month, the priests confirmed that holiness does not pass by touch but uncleanness does, so the

people's work and offerings had been unclean, and God had struck their crops, yet they did not return to Him. But from this day He would bless them. On the same day God told Zerubbabel that when He overthrows the kingdoms of the nations, He will make him like a signet ring, because He has chosen him.

Study Questions

1. Why might the people have been discouraged on the twenty-first day of the seventh month? (2:1-3; Ezra 3:12)

2. What three things did God tell the leaders and the people to do, and why? (2:4-5)

3. What did God say He would shake, and what would fill His house? (2:6-7)

4. What are the two main ways Bible teachers read "the desire of all the nations"? (2:7)

5. How was the latter glory of this house greater than the former? (2:9; Luke 2:32; Matthew 12:6)

6. What two questions did Haggai ask the priests, and what lesson did he draw from their answers? (2:11-14)

7. What did God promise "from this day," even before any crops had grown? (2:18-19)

8. What is a signet ring, and why was God's promise to Zerubbabel so meaningful after Jeremiah 22:24? (2:23)

9. Have you ever felt that your service for God looked small or like nothing? How does God's word in 2:4-5 speak to you?

10. Haggai's lesson is that being near holy things does not make us holy (2:12-14). In what ways might we rely on religious activity instead of a clean heart before God?

Overview of Zechariah

Zechariah is the thirty-eighth book of the Bible and the eleventh of the twelve Minor Prophets. It comes right after Haggai and right before Malachi. It is the longest of the Minor Prophets, and many Bible teachers say it is also the most Messianic. That means it says more about the coming Messiah than any other of the twelve. The word Messiah means Anointed One, the King God promised to send from the family of David. In Greek the same word is Christ.

Zechariah began to preach in 520 B.C., just two months after Haggai's first message. The two men spoke to the same people at the same time, the small group of Jews who had come home from Babylon and stood beside an unfinished temple. Ezra names them together: "Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo" (Ezra 5:1) prophesied to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem, and the work went forward (Ezra 5:1; 6:14). Haggai was the plain, practical preacher: get up and build. Zechariah was the visionary. He lifted the people's eyes from the small stone walls in front of them to everything God was going to do, in their day and far beyond it.

The book opens with a call to come back to God. Then, in one night, Zechariah sees eight visions: horses patrolling the earth, horns and craftsmen, a man measuring Jerusalem, the high priest in filthy clothes, a golden lampstand fed by two olive trees, a flying scroll, a woman in a basket, and four chariots. Each one carries a message of comfort. God has not forgotten Jerusalem. He will judge the nations that crushed her. He will cleanse His people, finish His house and dwell among them. The visions end with a crown set on the head of Joshua the high priest, a picture of the coming Branch who will be both Priest and King.

The later chapters look further ahead. Zechariah sees Israel's King coming to Jerusalem, "lowly and riding on a donkey" (9:9). He sees a shepherd rejected and valued at thirty pieces of silver (11:12-13). He sees a day when the nations gather against Jerusalem, when Israel will look on the One they pierced and mourn (12:10), when a fountain will be opened to wash away sin (13:1), and when the LORD's feet will stand on the Mount of Olives and He will be King over all the earth (14:4, 9).

The theme of Zechariah is that God is jealous for His people and will finish what He began. He calls them to return to Him, He cleanses them, and He sends them their King. The key verse is the prophecy Jesus fulfilled when He rode into Jerusalem:

Zechariah 9:9 (SLB)

"Rejoice exceedingly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Look, your King comes to you; He ***is*** righteous and saved, lowly and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, a son of female donkeys."

Zechariah has 14 chapters and 211 verses. Here is its structure:

Part One: A Call to Return and the Night Visions (chapters 1-6)

- Zechariah 1: Return to Me and the Rider Among the Myrtles

- Zechariah 2: The Man With the Measuring Cord
- Zechariah 3: Joshua the High Priest and the Branch
- Zechariah 4: The Lampstand and the Two Olive Trees
- Zechariah 5: The Flying Scroll and the Woman in the Basket
- Zechariah 6: The Four Chariots and the Crowning of Joshua

Part Two: Fasting and Future Joy (chapters 7-8)

- Zechariah 7: Fasting and True Obedience
- Zechariah 8: The LORD Returns to Zion

Part Three: The Coming King and the Rejected Shepherd (chapters 9-11)

- Zechariah 9: Your King Comes to You
- Zechariah 10: The LORD Gathers His People
- Zechariah 11: The Rejected Shepherd

Part Four: The Final Victory of the LORD (chapters 12-14)

- Zechariah 12: Jerusalem Saved and the One They Pierced
- Zechariah 13: A Fountain for Sin and the Shepherd Struck
- Zechariah 14: The LORD Will Be King Over All the Earth

Where this book points to Christ: the New Testament quotes or points to Zechariah again and again in the last week of Jesus' life. He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, and Matthew and John both quote Zechariah 9:9 (Matthew 21:5; John 12:15). He was betrayed for thirty pieces of silver, and the money was used to buy the potter's field (Zechariah 11:12-13; Matthew 27:9-10). On the night of His arrest He quoted Zechariah 13:7: the Shepherd would be struck and the sheep scattered (Matthew 26:31). On the cross a soldier pierced His side, and John wrote, "They will look on Him whom they pierced" (John 19:37; Zechariah 12:10). Zechariah also calls the Messiah the Branch, the One who will build the temple of the LORD and sit as a priest on His throne (3:8; 6:12-13). Jesus is our great High Priest now (Hebrews 4:14), and He will be King over all the earth when He returns (14:9; Revelation 19:16). Some of Zechariah's words were fulfilled at His first coming. Others wait for His second.

Background of Zechariah

Author: "Zechariah son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, the prophet" (1:1). His name means the LORD remembers, a fitting name for a man whose message was that God had not forgotten His people. Berechiah was his father and Iddo his grandfather. Ezra calls him "Zechariah the son of Iddo" (Ezra 5:1; 6:14), naming him by his better known grandfather, which was common when a father died young or the grandfather was the head of the family. Nehemiah 12:4 lists Iddo among the priests who came home from Babylon with Zerubbabel, and Nehemiah 12:16 says that a generation later Zechariah was the head of Iddo's priestly family. So Zechariah was both a priest and a prophet, like Jeremiah and Ezekiel before him. He was likely a young man when he began (2:4 calls him "this young man"), and he may have been born in Babylon.

Who it was written to: The Jews who had returned from Babylon and were living in Jerusalem and Judah, together with their leaders, Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest. These were the same people Haggai spoke to. The later chapters speak to Israel as a whole, the house of Judah and the house of Joseph (10:6), looking ahead to the day when God would gather all His scattered people.

When it was written: Zechariah dates his first three messages by the reign of Darius I, king of Persia (522 to 486 B.C.):

- The eighth month of Darius' second year (October and November, 520 B.C.): the call to return (1:1-6).
- The twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, Shebat, in the same year (February, 519 B.C.): the eight night visions and the crowning of Joshua (1:7-6:15).
- The fourth day of the ninth month, Kislev, in Darius' fourth year (December, 518 B.C.): the question about fasting and God's answer (7:1-8:23).

Chapters 9 to 14 are not dated. Their setting and tone are different, and many conservative scholars believe Zechariah gave them later in his life, perhaps after 480 B.C., when Greece had become a rising power in Persia's world (9:13). The temple was finished in 516 B.C. (Ezra 6:15), so Zechariah lived to see his promise fulfilled: "The hands of Zerubbabel have founded this house, and his hands will finish ***it***" (4:9).

Setting: Judah was a small, poor province of the Persian empire. The foundation of the temple had been laid about 536 B.C., but the work had stopped for some sixteen years. In 520 B.C., under the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah, the people began to build again. Jerusalem still had no walls (those were not rebuilt until Nehemiah came in 445 B.C.). The people were few, their enemies were many, and the great promises of the earlier prophets about a glorious Jerusalem and a King from David's line seemed far away. Many of them wondered if God had finished with them. Zechariah's answer was no. God was still jealous for Jerusalem, and He would keep every promise.

The unity of the book: The traditional view, held by Jewish and Christian readers for most of history and by most conservative scholars today, is that Zechariah wrote the whole book. The book bears his name, and the New Testament quotes from both halves of it as Scripture. Many

modern critical scholars believe chapters 9 to 14 were written by one or more later, unknown prophets, sometimes called Second Zechariah (and some speak of a Third Zechariah for chapters 12 to 14). They point to the change in style, the lack of dates and names, and the mention of Greece in 9:13, and some date these chapters as late as the third century B.C. I take the book as one work by one prophet. A change in style fits a change in subject and in the prophet's age. Visions given in one night in 520 B.C. would not sound like messages given many years later about the far future. Greece was already known and feared in Persia's day, since the Persians fought the Greeks in 490 and 480 B.C. And the same themes run through both halves: God's jealous love for Jerusalem, the cleansing of His people, the coming King and the gathering of the nations to worship the LORD.

How to read this book: Zechariah uses many pictures: horses, horns, lampstands, scrolls, baskets and chariots. In the night visions, the prophet asks what the pictures mean, and an angel explains them. That helps us. We do not have to guess. We read the pictures by the explanation the text gives, and where the text does not explain a detail, we should hold our ideas loosely. The prophecies about real people and real events, such as the King on a donkey, the thirty pieces of silver, the pierced One and the Mount of Olives, I read as plainly as they are written. Some came true at Christ's first coming. The rest will come true when He returns.

Purpose: To call God's people to return to Him so that He would return to them; to encourage them to finish the temple by showing them that God was still jealous for Jerusalem and would judge the nations that oppressed them; to promise that God would cleanse His people and dwell among them; and to point them to the coming Branch, the King who would come first in humility and later in glory, be pierced and mourned, and one day rule over all the earth from Jerusalem.

Zechariah 1: Return to Me and the Rider Among the Myrtles

Scripture

1:1-6 In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, the prophet, saying, "The LORD was angry with your fathers ***with*** anger. And you will say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of armies: Return to Me, declares the LORD of armies, that I may return to you, says the LORD of armies. Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets proclaimed, saying, "Thus says the LORD of armies: Return, please, from your evil ways and your evil deeds," and they did not listen and did not pay attention to Me, declares the LORD. Your fathers, where ***are*** they? And the prophets, do they live forever? Surely My words and My statutes which I commanded My servants the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers? And they returned and said, "Just as the LORD of armies planned to do to us, according to our ways and according to our deeds, so He has done with us."'"

1:7-21 On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, it ***is*** the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, the prophet, saying: I saw ***in*** the night, and look, a man riding on a red horse, and he ***was*** standing between the myrtle trees that ***were*** in the ravine; and behind him ***were*** horses, red, sorrel, and white. And I said, "What ***are*** these, my lord?" And the angel who was speaking with me said to me, "I will show you what these ***are***." And the man who was standing between the myrtle trees answered and said, "These ***are those*** whom the LORD has sent to go about on the earth." And they answered the angel of the LORD who was standing between the myrtle trees and said, "We have gone about on the earth, and look, all the earth is sitting and at rest." And the angel of the LORD answered and said, "O LORD of armies, until when will You not have compassion on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, with which You have been indignant these seventy years?" And the LORD answered the angel who was speaking with me ***with*** good words, comforting words. And the angel who was speaking with me said to me, "Proclaim, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of armies: I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion ***with*** great jealousy. And ***with*** great anger I ***am*** angry with the nations that are at ease; for I was angry a little, and they helped for evil. Therefore thus says the LORD: I have returned to Jerusalem with compassion; My house will be built in her, declares the LORD of armies, and a measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem.' Again proclaim, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of armies: My cities will again overflow with good, and the LORD will again comfort Zion and will again choose Jerusalem.'" And I lifted up my eyes and saw, and look, four horns. And I said to the angel who was speaking with me, "What ***are*** these?" And he said to me, "These ***are*** the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem." And the LORD showed me four craftsmen. And I said, "What ***are*** these coming to do?" And he said, saying, "These ***are*** the horns which scattered Judah, so that no man lifted up his head; and these have come to terrify them, to throw down the horns of the nations who lifted up a horn against the land of Judah to scatter it."

Preview

It is the fall of 520 B.C. The people have just started building the temple again after Haggai's first message. Now God sends a second prophet, a young priest named Zechariah. His first word is a call to come home to God: "Return to Me," and God promises, "I may return to you." Do not be like your fathers, who would not listen to the prophets. God's words caught up with them, just as He said.

Three months later, Zechariah sees the first two of eight visions in a single night. In the first, a man on a red horse stands among myrtle trees in a ravine, and riders report that the whole earth is at rest. The nations are at ease while Jerusalem lies in ruins. The angel of the LORD asks how long God will wait to show mercy, and God answers with comforting words: I am jealous for Jerusalem, I have returned to her, and My house will be built. In the second vision, Zechariah sees four horns, the powers that scattered God's people, and four craftsmen who come to throw them down.

Study

1:1 *In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, the prophet, saying,*

"In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius." This was Darius I, king of Persia, and the date is October or November of 520 B.C. Haggai had preached his first two messages that summer and fall (Haggai 1:1; 2:1). Zechariah's first word came between Haggai's second and third messages. God sent two prophets at once to a small, discouraged people.

"The word of the LORD came to Zechariah son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, the prophet." Zechariah's name means the LORD remembers. Berechiah means the LORD blesses, and Iddo means His appointed time. Some have noticed that the names together make a little sermon: the LORD remembers, the LORD blesses, at His appointed time. Whether or not his family meant it that way, it is the message of the whole book. Zechariah was from a priestly family that had come home from Babylon (Nehemiah 12:4, 16). He was a priest called to be a prophet.

A prophet was a person God chose to speak His words to His people. He did not make up his message. "The word of the LORD came" to him.

1:2-3 *"The LORD was angry with your fathers **with** anger. And you will say to them, 'Thus says the LORD of armies: Return to Me, declares the LORD of armies, that I may return to you, says the LORD of armies.*

"The LORD was angry with your fathers ***with*** anger." God begins with history. The people listening to Zechariah had grown up hearing the story. Their grandparents had seen Jerusalem burned and the temple destroyed in 586 B.C. Why did it happen? Because the LORD was very angry with their fathers' sin. The Hebrew repeats the word anger for force.

Then comes the heart of the message. "Thus says the LORD of armies: Return to Me, declares the LORD of armies, that I may return to you, says the LORD of armies." Three times in one verse God

uses His title, the LORD of armies. He is the Commander of all the armies of heaven and earth, and He is the One calling them.

To return means to turn around, to repent. Repentance is not just feeling sorry. It is turning from sin and turning back to God. The people had come back to the land. They had even started building the temple. But God wanted more than their work. He wanted their hearts.

And look at the promise: "that I may return to you." When we turn back to God, we find that He has been waiting for us. James says the same: draw near to God, and He will draw near to you (James 4:8). The father of the prodigal son saw him coming a long way off and ran to meet him (Luke 15:20). That is the heart of God.

1:4-6 *Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets proclaimed, saying, "Thus says the LORD of armies: Return, please, from your evil ways and your evil deeds," and they did not listen and did not pay attention to Me, declares the LORD. Your fathers, where **are** they? And the prophets, do they live forever? Surely My words and My statutes which I commanded My servants the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers? And they returned and said, "Just as the LORD of armies planned to do to us, according to our ways and according to our deeds, so He has done with us."'"*

"Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets proclaimed." The former prophets were the men God sent before the exile: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Amos, Micah and others. Their message was the same: "Return, please, from your evil ways and your evil deeds." But "they did not listen and did not pay attention to Me, declares the LORD."

Then God asks two pointed questions. "Your fathers, where ***are*** they? And the prophets, do they live forever?" The fathers were dead. So were the prophets. Both generations had passed away. But something had not passed away. "Surely My words and My statutes which I commanded My servants the prophets, did they not overtake your fathers?" God's word outlived the men who spoke it and the men who rejected it. It caught up with them like a pursuer catching a runaway.

"And they returned and said," and here is what they said: "Just as the LORD of armies planned to do to us, according to our ways and according to our deeds, so He has done with us." In exile, the fathers finally admitted it. God did exactly what He said He would do. We see that kind of confession in Daniel 9:4-14 and Lamentations 2:17.

This is a sober lesson. People come and go. Preachers come and go. God's Word stands. Jesus said, "The heaven and the earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (Matthew 24:35). Every warning He has given will come true, and so will every promise. The wise thing is to listen now, not later.

1:7-8 *On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, it **is** the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of the LORD came to Zechariah son of Berechiah, son of Iddo, the prophet, saying: I saw **in** the night, and look, a man riding on a red horse, and he **was** standing between the myrtle trees that **were** in the ravine; and behind him **were** horses, red, sorrel, and white.*

"On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, it ***is*** the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius." This was in February of 519 B.C., three months after Zechariah's first message, and exactly five months after the people began rebuilding (Haggai 1:15). That same day, God gave Zechariah eight visions, one after another, through a single night. They run from 1:7 to 6:8.

"I saw ***in*** the night, and look, a man riding on a red horse." He was "standing between the myrtle trees that ***were*** in the ravine." Myrtles are low, sweet-smelling evergreen shrubs that grew in the valleys around Jerusalem. A ravine is a low place, a hollow. Many see in this a picture of Israel at that time: lowly, small, out of sight, but still green and alive. That fits the vision well, though the angel does not explain it.

"And behind him ***were*** horses, red, sorrel, and white." Sorrel is a reddish brown. Behind the man stood other horses, likely with riders, waiting to report to him. The colors are not explained here. The horses are scouts, as the next verses show.

1:9-11 *And I said, "What **are** these, my lord?" And the angel who was speaking with me said to me, "I will show you what these **are**." And the man who was standing between the myrtle trees answered and said, "These **are those** whom the LORD has sent to go about on the earth." And they answered the angel of the LORD who was standing between the myrtle trees and said, "We have gone about on the earth, and look, all the earth is sitting and at rest."*

Zechariah asks, "What ***are*** these, my lord?" Someone answers: "the angel who was speaking with me." This angel appears all through the night visions. Bible teachers often call him the interpreting angel. His job is to explain the visions to Zechariah.

"And the man who was standing between the myrtle trees answered and said," and his answer was, "These ***are those*** whom the LORD has sent to go about on the earth." The horsemen are God's patrol. They have been sent out to look over the whole earth and report.

Now verse 11 tells us who the man on the red horse is. "And they answered the angel of the LORD who was standing between the myrtle trees." The man among the myrtles is the angel of the LORD. In the Old Testament, the angel of the LORD is a special figure. He speaks as God, is called God and receives worship, and yet he is also distinct from the LORD (Genesis 16:10-13; 22:11-18; Exodus 3:2-6; Judges 13:18-22). Many Bible teachers believe the angel of the LORD is the Son of God appearing before He was born as a man. Those who hold this view point out that Zechariah gives good reason for it, as we will see in the next verse and in chapter 3.

The report was this: "We have gone about on the earth, and look, all the earth is sitting and at rest." That sounds like good news. It was not. Darius had put down the revolts that troubled his first years, and the nations were quiet and comfortable. But Jerusalem was still in ruins and God's people were still weak. The proud nations were at ease, and God's city was not.

1:12-13 *And the angel of the LORD answered and said, "O LORD of armies, until when will You not have compassion on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, with which You have been indignant these seventy years?" And the LORD answered the angel who was speaking with me* ***with*** *good words, comforting words.*

"And the angel of the LORD answered and said," and he prayed, "O LORD of armies, until when will You not have compassion on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, with which You have been indignant these seventy years?" This is wonderful. The angel of the LORD prays for Jerusalem. He intercedes, which means he speaks to God on behalf of others.

Seventy years was the time Jeremiah had foretold for Judah's punishment (Jeremiah 25:11-12; 29:10). The first captives were taken in 605 B.C. and the people came home in 538 B.C. The temple was destroyed in 586 B.C. and would be finished in 516 B.C., also about seventy years. The time was up. How long would God wait?

Here we see the angel of the LORD speaking to the LORD of armies. One is distinct from the other, and yet elsewhere the angel speaks as God Himself. That fits what the New Testament teaches about the Son, who is God and yet is with God (John 1:1). And it reminds us of what Jesus does for us now. Hebrews says He is "always living to intercede for them" (Hebrews 7:25). Before He came as a man, He was already praying for His people.

"And the LORD answered the angel who was speaking with me ***with*** good words, comforting words." God did not scold the question. He answered with comfort.

1:14-15 *And the angel who was speaking with me said to me, "Proclaim, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of armies: I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion* ***with*** *great jealousy. And* ***with*** *great anger I* ***am*** *angry with the nations that are at ease; for I was angry a little, and they helped for evil.*

The interpreting angel tells Zechariah to proclaim God's answer. "I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion ***with*** great jealousy." Zion was the hill in Jerusalem where the temple stood, and the name often stands for the whole city and its people. God's jealousy is not the petty envy we feel. It is the burning, protective love of a husband for his wife. God loves Jerusalem and will not let anyone else have her.

"And ***with*** great anger I ***am*** angry with the nations that are at ease." The nations were comfortable, but God was angry with them. Why? "For I was angry a little, and they helped for evil." God used Babylon and others to discipline His people. But they went far beyond what God intended. They were cruel, proud and greedy, and they enjoyed it. God would hold them accountable (Isaiah 47:6; Habakkuk 1:6-11).

This answers a question many people ask. When God uses a wicked nation to discipline His people, does He approve of that nation? No. He uses it, and then He judges it for its own sin.

1:16-17 *Therefore thus says the LORD: I have returned to Jerusalem with compassion; My house will be built in her, declares the LORD of armies, and a measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem.' Again proclaim, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of armies: My cities will again overflow with good, and the LORD will again comfort Zion and will again choose Jerusalem.'"*

"Therefore thus says the LORD: I have returned to Jerusalem with compassion." God had promised in verse 3 to return to them. Now He says He has done it. Three promises follow.

First, "My house will be built in her." The temple would be finished. It was, in 516 B.C. (Ezra 6:15).

Second, "a measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem." Builders stretch out a measuring line before they build. The city itself would be rebuilt. It was, in the days of Nehemiah, and chapter 2 will say more.

Third, "My cities will again overflow with good, and the LORD will again comfort Zion and will again choose Jerusalem." Notice the word "again" three times. God had not changed His mind about Jerusalem. He chose her long ago (Psalm 132:13), and He would choose her again.

These promises had a near fulfillment in the days after the exile. But I believe they reach further. Jerusalem has been destroyed and rebuilt again since then. Its greatest days are still ahead, when Christ returns and reigns there (14:9-11). God's choice of Jerusalem still stands.

1:18-19 *And I lifted up my eyes and saw, and look, four horns. And I said to the angel who was speaking with me, "What **are** these?" And he said to me, "These **are** the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem."*

"And I lifted up my eyes and saw, and look, four horns." This is the second vision. In the Bible, a horn is a picture of strength and power, because an animal fights with its horns. Horns often stand for kings or kingdoms (Daniel 7:24; 8:20-21).

Zechariah asks what they are. The angel says, "These ***are*** the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem." They are the powers that crushed God's people and carried them away.

Who are the four? Scripture does not name them here, and Bible teachers read them in a few ways. Some think of the nations that had attacked Israel and Judah up to that time, such as Assyria, Egypt, Babylon and Medo-Persia. Others think of the four empires in Daniel's visions, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome (Daniel 2 and 7), which ruled over Israel one after another. Others take the number four as a picture of completeness, the enemies from all four directions. Each of these fits. The main point is clear: every power that has ever scattered God's people is known to Him.

1:20-21 *And the LORD showed me four craftsmen. And I said, "What **are** these coming to do?" And he said, saying, "These **are** the horns which scattered Judah, so that no man lifted up his head; and these have come to terrify them, to throw down the horns of the nations who lifted up a horn against the land of Judah to scatter it."*

"And the LORD showed me four craftsmen." A craftsman is a skilled worker, such as a smith who works with metal or a carpenter who works with wood. Here they are workers who know how to cut horns down.

Zechariah asks, "What ***are*** these coming to do?" The answer: the horns had scattered Judah "so that no man lifted up his head." The people were so crushed that no one could even look up. But "these have come to terrify them, to throw down the horns of the nations who lifted up a horn against the land of Judah to scatter it."

For every horn, God has a craftsman. For every power that rises against His people, He has an answer ready. Babylon fell to Persia. Persia fell to Greece. Greece fell to Rome. And one day every kingdom of this world will fall before the kingdom of Christ (Daniel 2:44; Revelation 11:15).

What would this mean to the people building the temple? Their enemies looked strong. They had stopped the work once before (Ezra 4). But God was saying, I see them, and I have already prepared their end. That is still true. Whatever stands against God's people today will not stand forever.

Summary

In the eighth month of Darius' second year, the LORD called the people through Zechariah to return to Him so that He would return to them, and not to be like their fathers, who ignored the former prophets until God's words overtook them. Three months later, Zechariah saw a man on a red horse among myrtle trees in a ravine, with other horses behind him. They had patrolled the earth and found it at rest. The angel of the LORD asked how long the LORD would withhold mercy from Jerusalem after seventy years, and the LORD answered with comforting words. He was jealous for Jerusalem and angry with the nations at ease, who had added to the harm. He had returned to Jerusalem with mercy, His house would be built, and He would again comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem. Then Zechariah saw four horns that had scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem, and four craftsmen who came to throw them down.

Study Questions

1. When did the word of the LORD first come to Zechariah, and who were his father and grandfather? (1:1)

2. What did God call the people to do, and what did He promise if they did? (1:3)

3. What happened to the fathers who would not listen to the former prophets? (1:4-6)

4. What did Zechariah see standing among the myrtle trees, and what did the riders report? (1:8-11)

5. What did the angel of the LORD ask, and how did the LORD answer? (1:12-13)

6. Why was God angry with the nations that were at ease? (1:15)

7. What three things did God promise about Jerusalem? (1:16-17)

8. What did the four horns and the four craftsmen stand for? (1:18-21)

9. God says, "Return to Me," and promises, "that I may return to you." Is there an area of your life where you need to turn back to Him today?

10. The angel of the LORD prayed for Jerusalem, and Jesus still intercedes for His people. How does it help you to know that Christ is praying for you?

Zechariah 2: The Man With the Measuring Cord

Scripture

2:1-13 And I lifted up my eyes and saw, and look, a man, and in his hand a measuring cord. And I said, "Where ***are*** you going?" And he said to me, "To measure Jerusalem, to see how much ***is*** her breadth and how much ***is*** her length." And look, the angel who was speaking with me was going out, and another angel was going out to meet him. And he said to him, "Run, speak to this young man, saying, 'Jerusalem will remain ***as*** open villages because of the multitude of mankind and livestock in her midst. And I will be to her, declares the LORD, a wall of fire all around, and for glory I will be in her midst.'" Up, up! And flee from the land of the north, declares the LORD; for like the four winds of the heavens I have spread you out, declares the LORD. Up, O Zion! Escape, O inhabitant of the daughter of Babylon. For thus says the LORD of armies: After glory He has sent Me to the nations who plunder you, for he who touches you touches the pupil of his eye. For look, I ***am*** about to wave My hand against them, and they will be plunder for their servants; and you will know that the LORD of armies has sent Me. Shout for joy and rejoice, O daughter of Zion; for look, I ***am*** coming, and I will dwell in your midst, declares the LORD. And many nations will join themselves to the LORD on that day, and they will become a people for Me; and I will dwell in your midst, and you will know that the LORD of armies has sent Me to you. And the LORD will inherit Judah ***as*** His portion on the holy ground, and He will again choose Jerusalem. Hush, all flesh, before the LORD, for He has roused Himself from His holy dwelling place.

Preview

This is the third of Zechariah's night visions. He sees a man with a measuring cord going out to measure Jerusalem. But an angel stops him with a message: Jerusalem will be so full of people and animals that it will spill out beyond any walls, like open villages. And it will not need walls, because the LORD Himself will be a wall of fire around it and the glory in its midst.

Then the vision turns into a call. The exiles still living in Babylon are told to flee and come home. Whoever touches God's people touches the pupil of His eye. The chapter ends with a song: Shout for joy, O daughter of Zion, for the LORD is coming to dwell among you, and many nations will join themselves to Him on that day. In this chapter, someone sent by the LORD of armies speaks, and yet He is also the LORD who comes to dwell in Zion. Many Bible teachers see here a glimpse of the Son, sent by the Father.

Study

2:1-2 *And I lifted up my eyes and saw, and look, a man, and in his hand a measuring cord. And I said, "Where **are** you going?" And he said to me, "To measure Jerusalem, to see how much **is** her breadth and how much **is** her length."*

"And I lifted up my eyes and saw, and look, a man, and in his hand a measuring cord." A measuring cord was a long line used by builders and surveyors to mark out the size of a city or a

building. God had promised in 1:16 that "a measuring line will be stretched out over Jerusalem." Now Zechariah sees it happening.

Zechariah asks, "Where ***are*** you going?" The man answers, "To measure Jerusalem, to see how much ***is*** her breadth and how much ***is*** her length." He was going to mark out the city's walls, to plan how big the new Jerusalem would be.

The Bible does not say who this man is. Some think he is an angel, others think he is the angel of the LORD from chapter 1. What matters is what he was about to do and why he was stopped. It is a natural thing for people to plan by what they can see. The man was going to measure the city by its old walls. God had something much bigger in mind.

2:3-5 *And look, the angel who was speaking with me was going out, and another angel was going out to meet him. And he said to him, "Run, speak to this young man, saying, 'Jerusalem will remain **as** open villages because of the multitude of mankind and livestock in her midst. And I will be to her, declares the LORD, a wall of fire all around, and for glory I will be in her midst.'"*

"And look, the angel who was speaking with me was going out, and another angel was going out to meet him." The interpreting angel goes out, and a second angel comes with a message. "Run, speak to this young man." Many think "this young man" is Zechariah himself, who was likely young when he began to prophesy. Others think it is the man with the measuring cord. Either way, the message is urgent. Run.

Here it is: "Jerusalem will remain ***as*** open villages because of the multitude of mankind and livestock in her midst." Open villages were towns with no walls around them. Jerusalem would grow so large and so full that no wall could hold it. In Zechariah's day the city was small and nearly empty. Nehemiah later had to ask people to move into it (Nehemiah 11:1-2). That makes this promise all the more striking.

How can a city be safe without walls? "And I will be to her, declares the LORD, a wall of fire all around, and for glory I will be in her midst." God Himself would be her protection. Fire keeps enemies away, as it did when God's pillar of fire stood between Israel and the Egyptians (Exodus 14:19-20). And God would be her glory, living within her, as His glory once filled the tabernacle and the temple.

Did this happen after the exile? In part. God protected the small community, and Nehemiah did build walls. But Jerusalem has never yet been a city without walls, overflowing with people, with the LORD as her wall of fire and glory in her midst. I believe that waits for the kingdom of Christ, when Jerusalem will "dwell in security" (14:11).

For us today there is a lesson as well. We like walls we can see: money in the bank, a strong job, good health. Those are gifts. But our real safety is the Lord Himself. "A tower of strength ***is*** the name of the LORD" (Proverbs 18:10).

2:6-7 *Up, up! And flee from the land of the north, declares the LORD; for like the four winds of the heavens I have spread you out, declares the LORD. Up, O Zion! Escape, O inhabitant of the daughter of Babylon.*

"Up, up! And flee from the land of the north, declares the LORD." The land of the north was Babylon. Babylon lay east of Israel, but armies and travelers from Babylon came into Israel from the north, following the curve of the Fertile Crescent (Jeremiah 1:14; 6:22).

Why flee? Not every Jew had gone home in 538 B.C. Many had settled down in Babylon, built houses and made a living. They were comfortable. God calls them to leave. "For like the four winds of the heavens I have spread you out." God had scattered His people in every direction. That was His judgment. Now He calls them to gather.

"Up, O Zion! Escape, O inhabitant of the daughter of Babylon." Babylon was going to face more judgment (Isaiah 48:20; Jeremiah 51:6). God's people should not stay where judgment is coming. They belonged in Zion.

There is a word here for us. It is easy to settle down in the world and grow comfortable with it. God calls His people to come out and be separate (2 Corinthians 6:17; Revelation 18:4). Our home is with Him.

2:8-9 *For thus says the LORD of armies: After glory He has sent Me to the nations who plunder you, for he who touches you touches the pupil of his eye. For look, I **am** about to wave My hand against them, and they will be plunder for their servants; and you will know that the LORD of armies has sent Me.*

"For thus says the LORD of armies: After glory He has sent me to the nations who plunder you." Notice who is speaking. The LORD of armies says that "He has sent me." Someone is speaking who has been sent by the LORD of armies, and yet His words are the LORD's words.

"After glory" is a hard phrase. It may mean that the speaker was sent to win glory for God by judging the nations. Or it may mean that He was sent after the glory, the glory of God that will dwell in Jerusalem (2:5). Either way, the One sent comes against the nations that plundered God's people.

Then come some of the tenderest words in the prophets. "For he who touches you touches the pupil of his eye." The pupil of the eye is the most tender part of the body, the part we protect most quickly. Many of us know the phrase as the apple of his eye. To harm God's people is to poke God in the eye. He feels it, and He will act.

"For look, I ***am*** about to wave My hand against them, and they will be plunder for their servants." The nations that plundered Israel would become plunder for those they had enslaved. One wave of His hand is enough.

"And you will know that the LORD of armies has sent me." When it happens, the people will know the speaker was truly sent by God.

2:10-11 *Shout for joy and rejoice, O daughter of Zion; for look, I **am** coming, and I will dwell in your midst, declares the LORD. And many nations will join themselves to the LORD on that day, and they will become a people for Me; and I will dwell in your midst, and you will know that the LORD of armies has sent Me to you.*

"Shout for joy and rejoice, O daughter of Zion." The daughter of Zion is a tender name for Jerusalem and her people. Why rejoice? "For look, I ***am*** coming, and I will dwell in your midst, declares the LORD." The LORD Himself is coming to live among His people.

Now look closely at verse 11. "And many nations will join themselves to the LORD on that day, and they will become a people for Me; and I will dwell in your midst, and you will know that the LORD of armies has sent me to you." The One speaking is the LORD who will dwell in Zion. And He is also the One the LORD of armies has sent. How can both be true? The New Testament gives us the answer. Jesus Christ is God the Son, sent by God the Father. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). He was sent, and He is the LORD. Many Bible teachers see this as one of the clearest pictures in the Old Testament of the Father sending the Son.

Jesus came once and lived among His people, and Gentiles from many nations have joined themselves to the Lord through Him (Acts 15:14-17). But the full promise is still ahead. When Christ returns, He will dwell in Jerusalem, and the nations will come to worship Him there (8:20-23; 14:16). "Look, the tabernacle of God ***is*** with men, and He will tabernacle with them" (Revelation 21:3).

Notice too what God says about the nations: "they will become a people for Me." That does not mean Israel is set aside. The nations join themselves to the LORD, and He still dwells in Zion's midst. God keeps His promises to Israel and opens His arms to the world.

2:12-13 *And the LORD will inherit Judah **as** His portion on the holy ground, and He will again choose Jerusalem. Hush, all flesh, before the LORD, for He has roused Himself from His holy dwelling place.*

"And the LORD will inherit Judah ***as*** His portion on the holy ground." An inheritance is a portion of land passed down in a family. Judah is the LORD's own portion, His share. This is the only place in the Bible where the land is called "the holy ground" in this way. It is holy because the holy God dwells there. "And He will again choose Jerusalem." For the third time in two chapters, God says it (1:17; 2:12; see 3:2). He has not given up on His city.

The chapter ends with a call for silence. "Hush, all flesh, before the LORD, for He has roused Himself from His holy dwelling place." All flesh means all people everywhere. When a king rises from his throne to act, everyone in the room goes silent. The nations had been at ease (1:11). Now God was rising to act, and the whole world should be quiet before Him (Habakkuk 2:20; Zephaniah 1:7).

How should we respond when God speaks and acts? Sometimes the best answer is to stop talking, let go and know that He is God (Psalm 46:10).

Summary

In his third vision, Zechariah saw a man with a measuring cord going to measure Jerusalem's breadth and length. The interpreting angel went out, and another angel came to meet him and told him to run and tell the young man that Jerusalem would be inhabited like open villages without walls because of the great number of people and animals in it. The LORD Himself would be a wall of fire around her and the glory in her midst. The LORD called His people to flee from the land of the north, where He had scattered them like the four winds, and told Zion to escape from Babylon. The LORD of armies had sent His messenger against the nations that plundered them, because whoever touches them touches the pupil of His eye. He would wave His hand against those nations, and they would become plunder for their own servants. The daughter of Zion was told to shout for joy, because the LORD was coming to dwell among her. Many nations would join themselves to the LORD on that day and become His people, and they would know the LORD of armies had sent Him. The LORD would inherit Judah as His portion in the holy land and again choose Jerusalem. All flesh was told to be silent before the LORD, for He had risen from His holy dwelling.

There were things in the world I had grown comfortable with. We even moved away to a different area. Zechariah called God's people to leave Babylon. Sometimes leaving is part of obeying.

Study Questions

1. What did the man with the measuring cord set out to do? (2:1-2)

2. Why would Jerusalem be like open villages without walls? (2:4)

3. What did the LORD promise to be for Jerusalem? (2:5)

4. Who did God call to flee from the land of the north, and why? (2:6-7)

5. What does God say about anyone who touches His people? (2:8)

6. Why was the daughter of Zion told to shout for joy? (2:10)

7. What will many nations do on that day? (2:11)

8. In verses 9 to 11 the speaker is sent by the LORD of armies and yet is the LORD who dwells in Zion. How does this point to Jesus?

9. What walls do you lean on for safety? What would it look like to trust the Lord as your wall of fire?

10. God called His people to leave Babylon, where they had grown comfortable. Is there something in the world you have grown too comfortable with?

Zechariah 3: Joshua the High Priest and the Branch

Scripture

3:1-10 And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! And the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! ***Is*** this not a firebrand snatched from a fire?" And Joshua was clothed ***with*** filthy garments, and ***he was*** standing before the angel. And he answered and said to those who were standing before him, saying, "Remove the filthy garments from him." And he said to him, "See, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and ***I will*** clothe you ***with*** festal robes." And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." And they put the clean turban on his head and clothed him ***with*** garments; and the angel of the LORD ***was*** standing ***by***. And the angel of the LORD solemnly charged Joshua, saying, "Thus says the LORD of armies: If you will walk in My ways, and if you will keep My charge, then you also will judge My house and also keep My courts, and I will give you ***places of*** walking among these who are standing ***here***. Hear, please, O Joshua the high priest, you and your companions who sit before you, for they ***are*** men of portent; for look, I ***am*** bringing My servant the Branch. For look, the stone that I have set before Joshua: on one stone ***are*** seven eyes. Look, I ***am*** engraving its engraving, declares the LORD of armies, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. On that day, declares the LORD of armies, you will invite, each one his neighbor, to under a vine and to under a fig tree."

Preview

The fourth vision is set in a courtroom. Joshua the high priest stands before the angel of the LORD, dressed in filthy clothes. Satan stands at his right hand to accuse him. Joshua has nothing to say in his own defense. But the LORD rebukes Satan: this man is a burning stick pulled out of the fire. Then the filthy clothes are taken off, Joshua's iniquity is taken away, and he is dressed in festal robes with a clean turban on his head.

This is one of the clearest pictures of the gospel in the whole Old Testament. A guilty man is accused, God silences the accuser, takes away the sin and clothes him in clean garments. Then God gives a promise that reaches far past Joshua. Joshua and his fellow priests are a sign of something greater: "I ***am*** bringing My servant the Branch." God will remove the iniquity of the land in one day, and His people will live in peace, each one under his vine and fig tree.

Study

3:1 *And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.*

"And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD." Joshua was the high priest of the returned exiles, the grandson of Seraiah, the last high priest before the exile (1 Chronicles 6:14-15). Ezra calls him Jeshua (Ezra 3:2). The high priest was the chief of the priests. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, he went into the Most Holy Place to make

atonement for the sins of the whole nation (Leviticus 16). Atonement means covering or removing sin so that people can be at peace with God. So Joshua stood for the whole people before God.

"Standing before" was a phrase for serving as a priest, and also for standing trial. Here it seems to be both. Joshua stands before the angel of the LORD, who is the Judge.

"And Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him." In Hebrew, satan means adversary or accuser. Here it has the word "the" in front of it, the accuser, the same as in Job 1-2. He is the devil, the enemy of God and of God's people. In a courtroom of that day, the accuser stood at the right hand of the one on trial. The New Testament calls Satan "the accuser of our brothers," who accuses them before God day and night (Revelation 12:10).

What would Satan say against Joshua? He did not have to make anything up. Joshua's clothes told the story.

3:2 *And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! And the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you!* ***Is*** *this not a firebrand snatched from a fire?"*

"And the LORD said to Satan," and here are His words: "The LORD rebuke you, O Satan!" Notice who speaks: "the LORD said." In verse 1 the angel of the LORD was presiding. Now "the LORD" speaks, and He speaks of "the LORD" in the third person. Here again we see the angel of the LORD speaking as the LORD, and yet calling on the LORD. Many see here the Son speaking with the Father. Jude 9 tells us that even Michael the archangel did not dare bring a charge against the devil on his own, but said, "May ***the*** Lord rebuke you!" To rebuke is to sharply silence and correct.

"And the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you!" Why does God silence the accuser? Not because Joshua was innocent. He was not. God rebuked Satan because God had chosen Jerusalem. The basis was God's choice and God's grace, not Joshua's goodness.

"***Is*** this not a firebrand snatched from a fire?" A firebrand is a burning stick. Joshua, and the whole people he stood for, had been in the fire of the exile. They were scorched and blackened, but God had pulled them out (Amos 4:11). Would God snatch them from the fire only to let Satan throw them back in? Never.

That is our hope too. Paul asks, "Who will bring a charge against ***the*** elect of God? God ***is*** the One who justifies" (Romans 8:33). When the accuser points at our sin, our answer is not that we are good. Our answer is that God has chosen us in Christ and pulled us out of the fire.

3:3-5 *And Joshua was clothed* ***with*** *filthy garments, and* ***he was*** *standing before the angel. And he answered and said to those who were standing before him, saying, "Remove the filthy garments from him." And he said to him, "See, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and* ***I will*** *clothe you* ***with*** *festal robes." And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." And they put the clean turban on his head and clothed him* ***with*** *garments; and the angel of the LORD* ***was*** *standing* ***by****.*

"And Joshua was clothed ***with*** filthy garments, and ***he was*** standing before the angel." The Hebrew word for filthy here is a strong one, the word for something soiled with human waste. A

high priest was supposed to wear holy garments, clean and beautiful (Exodus 28:2). Joshua stood before God in the worst clothes imaginable. That is how sin looks before a holy God. Isaiah said that all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment (Isaiah 64:6).

Then the angel speaks "to those who were standing before him," likely the angels who served him. "Remove the filthy garments from him." And to Joshua he says, "See, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and ***I will*** clothe you ***with*** festal robes." Iniquity means guilt and sin. The filthy clothes were his sin, and God took them off. Festal robes are rich, fine clothing, the kind worn on a feast day.

Notice that Joshua did nothing. He did not wash his own clothes. He did not promise to do better. God took the filth away and gave him clean robes. This is grace. It is what God does for every sinner who trusts in Christ. Our sin was put on Christ, and His righteousness is put on us (2 Corinthians 5:21). Isaiah sang, "He has clothed me ***with*** garments of salvation" (Isaiah 61:10).

Then Zechariah himself speaks up. "Let them put a clean turban on his head." He could not stay quiet. The high priest's turban had a gold plate on it engraved "Holiness to the LORD" (Exodus 28:36-38). It was the sign that he was set apart for God. "And they put the clean turban on his head and clothed him ***with*** garments; and the angel of the LORD ***was*** standing ***by***." The Judge stood there, watching it all and approving it.

3:6-7 *And the angel of the LORD solemnly charged Joshua, saying, "Thus says the LORD of armies: If you will walk in My ways, and if you will keep My charge, then you also will judge My house and also keep My courts, and I will give you* ***places of*** *walking among these who are standing* ***here****.*

"And the angel of the LORD solemnly charged Joshua." Grace comes first, and then the call to obey. That is always God's order. He does not say, obey and then I will cleanse you. He cleanses, and then He says, now walk with Me.

"If you will walk in My ways, and if you will keep My charge." To keep God's charge was to do the duties He had given, here the duties of a priest. Then come the promises. "You also will judge My house and also keep My courts." Joshua would rule over the temple and its courts. "And I will give you ***places of*** walking among these who are standing ***here***." That is, Joshua would have access to God, free to come and go among the angels who stand in God's presence.

For us, the order is the same. We are saved by grace, not by works, and then we are called to good works (Ephesians 2:8-10). And through Christ we have access to God, to come boldly to His throne (Hebrews 4:16).

3:8 *Hear, please, O Joshua the high priest, you and your companions who sit before you, for they* ***are*** *men of portent; for look, I* ***am*** *bringing My servant the Branch.*

"Hear, please, O Joshua the high priest, you and your companions who sit before you." Joshua's companions were his fellow priests. God says "they ***are*** men of portent." A portent is a sign of something to come. Joshua and the priests, cleansed and clothed, were a living picture pointing forward.

To what? "For look, I ***am*** bringing My servant the Branch." This is one of the great names of the Messiah in the prophets. Isaiah said "a shoot will come forth from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit" (Isaiah 11:1). Jeremiah said God would "raise up for David a righteous Branch; and He will reign ***as*** king" (Jeremiah 23:5; see also 33:15). The Branch is a new shoot growing out of the cut-down stump of David's family. When Zechariah spoke, there was no king in Judah. David's line looked like a dead stump. But God would bring a living Branch out of it.

He is also called "My servant." Isaiah spoke of the Servant of the LORD who would suffer and bear the sins of many (Isaiah 52:13-53:12). Here the two titles come together. The Branch is the King from David's line, and He is the Servant who takes away sin. That is Jesus Christ, born in the line of David (Luke 1:32), who "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life ***as*** a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

3:9 *For look, the stone that I have set before Joshua: on one stone **are** seven eyes. Look, I **am** engraving its engraving, declares the LORD of armies, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.*

"For look, the stone that I have set before Joshua: on one stone ***are*** seven eyes." This stone is hard to explain, and good Bible teachers read it in more than one way. Some think it was a real stone for the temple, perhaps the top stone or a foundation stone (4:7). Others see it as a picture of the Messiah, since Scripture often calls Him a stone (Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 28:16; 1 Peter 2:6). Since the verse sits right after the promise of the Branch, many prefer this second reading, but we should hold it loosely.

The "seven eyes" stand for full and perfect sight. Seven in the Bible often means complete. In 4:10 the seven are "the eyes of the LORD; they are roving through all the earth." In Revelation 5:6, the Lamb has "seven eyes."

"Look, I ***am*** engraving its engraving, declares the LORD of armies." God Himself will engrave the stone, like the gold plate on the high priest's turban.

"And I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day." What a promise. Not over many years of sacrifices, but in one day. The sacrifices on the altar were repeated year after year, and they could never take sin away (Hebrews 10:4, 11). But Christ "offered one sacrifice for sins for all time" (Hebrews 10:12). On one day, at the cross, He paid for sin. Many teachers see a second day in view as well, and this study reads it that way. Zechariah later says that "on that day" a fountain will be opened for the house of David and Jerusalem "for sin and for impurity" (13:1), when Israel as a nation turns to the One they pierced (12:10). The price was paid at the cross. The nation will receive it on the day of its turning.

3:10 *On that day, declares the LORD of armies, you will invite, each one his neighbor, to under a vine and to under a fig tree."*

"On that day, declares the LORD of armies, you will invite, each one his neighbor, to under a vine and to under a fig tree." To sit under your own vine and fig tree was a picture of peace and plenty.

It was how life was in Solomon's best days (1 Kings 4:25), and it is how Micah describes the kingdom to come (Micah 4:4). No enemies, no fear, and enough to share with your neighbor.

This is what follows forgiveness. When sin is taken away, peace comes: peace with God, and then peace between people. For Israel, I believe this promise will be fully kept in the kingdom of Christ. For every believer, the peace begins now. "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

Have you ever felt like Joshua, standing before God in filthy clothes, with an accuser pointing at you? That is exactly where grace meets us. We cannot clean ourselves up. But God can take the filth away, put clean robes on us and give us a place in His presence, all because of His Servant, the Branch.

Summary

In his fourth vision, Zechariah saw Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, with Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. The LORD rebuked Satan, because the LORD had chosen Jerusalem, and Joshua was a burning stick snatched from the fire. Joshua was dressed in filthy garments, and the angel told those standing before him to take them off. He told Joshua that He had taken his iniquity away and would clothe him in festal robes. Zechariah asked that a clean turban be put on his head, and it was done while the angel of the LORD stood by. Then the angel charged Joshua that if he would walk in God's ways and keep His charge, he would rule God's house, keep His courts and have access among those standing there. Joshua and his fellow priests were men who were a sign, because God was bringing His servant the Branch. God had set a stone before Joshua with seven eyes on it, and He would engrave it and remove the iniquity of the land in one day. On that day, everyone would invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and fig tree.

Study Questions

1. Who stood at Joshua's right hand, and what was he doing there? (3:1)

2. On what basis did the LORD rebuke Satan? (3:2)

3. What was Joshua wearing, and what did those clothes stand for? (3:3-4)

4. What did God do for Joshua, and what did Joshua do to deserve it? (3:4-5)

5. What did God promise Joshua if he would walk in His ways? (3:7)

6. Whom did God say He was bringing, and what other prophets use that name? (3:8)

7. What did God promise to do in one day? (3:9)

8. How does this vision picture what Jesus has done for you?

9. When the accuser reminds you of your sin, what is your answer, according to this chapter and Romans 8:33-34?

10. God cleansed Joshua first and then called him to walk in His ways. Why does that order matter in your own walk with God?

Zechariah 4: The Lampstand and the Two Olive Trees

Scripture

4:1-14 And the angel who was speaking with me returned and roused me, like a man who is roused from his sleep. And he said to me, "What ***are*** you seeing?" And I said, "I see, and look, a lampstand of gold, all of it, and a bowl on its top, and its seven lamps on it, seven and seven pipes to the lamps which ***are*** on its top; and two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and one on its left." And I answered and said to the angel who was speaking with me, saying, "What ***are*** these, my lord?" And the angel who was speaking with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these ***are***?" And I said, "No, my lord." And he answered and said to me, saying, "This ***is*** the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel, saying, 'Not by strength and not by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of armies. Who ***are*** you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel ***you will become*** level ground; and he will bring forth the top stone ***with*** shoutings of 'Grace, grace to it!'" And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "The hands of Zerubbabel have founded this house, and his hands will finish ***it***; and you will know that the LORD of armies has sent me to you. For who has despised the day of small things? And they will rejoice and see the tin stone in the hand of Zerubbabel. These seven ***are*** the eyes of the LORD; they are roving through all the earth." And I answered and said to him, "What ***are*** these two olive trees on the right of the lampstand and on its left?" And I answered a second time and said to him, "What ***are*** the two clusters of the olive trees which ***are*** beside the two pipes of gold, which empty the gold from themselves?" And he said to me, saying, "Do you not know what these ***are***?" And I said, "No, my lord." And he said, "These ***are*** the two sons of the fresh oil who stand by the Lord of all the earth."

Preview

In the fifth vision, the angel wakes Zechariah as if from sleep and shows him a lampstand made all of gold. It has a bowl on top, seven lamps and many pipes, and on either side stands an olive tree, pouring its oil into the lamps. No one has to tend this lampstand. The oil flows by itself.

Zechariah asks what it means, and the answer is one of the best-known verses in the prophets: "Not by strength and not by power, but by My Spirit," says the LORD of armies. Zerubbabel, the governor, faced a mountain of trouble in rebuilding the temple. God says that mountain will become flat ground. The hands that laid the foundation will finish the house, and the people will shout, Grace, grace to it. And to everyone who looked down on the small beginnings, God asks, "For who has despised the day of small things?" The chapter ends with the two olive trees, the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of all the earth.

Study

4:1-3 *And the angel who was speaking with me returned and roused me, like a man who is roused from his sleep. And he said to me, "What **are** you seeing?" And I said, "I see, and look, a lampstand of gold, all of it, and a bowl on its top, and its seven lamps on it, seven and seven pipes to the lamps which **are** on its top; and two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and one on its left."*

"And the angel who was speaking with me returned and roused me, like a man who is roused from his sleep." Zechariah had seen four visions already. He seems to have been worn out, almost overwhelmed, and the angel had to wake him up. Seeing God's plans can be too much for a man to take in.

"What ***are*** you seeing?" Zechariah answers: "a lampstand of gold, all of it, and a bowl on its top, and its seven lamps on it." The tabernacle and Solomon's temple had golden lampstands (Exodus 25:31-40; 1 Kings 7:49). The lampstand in the tabernacle had seven lamps and had to be filled with oil and tended by the priests every evening and morning (Exodus 27:20-21). This lampstand was different. It had a bowl on top, a reservoir for the oil, and "seven and seven pipes to the lamps." The Hebrew is hard to picture, and it may mean seven pipes to each of the seven lamps. Either way, oil was flowing everywhere, keeping every lamp full.

"And two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and one on its left." The oil came straight from the trees. No one had to press olives, carry jars or fill lamps. The supply never ran out, and no human hand was needed.

What does a lampstand do? It gives light. Israel was meant to be a light to the nations (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6). The temple Zerubbabel was building was the place where that light would shine. But where would the oil come from?

4:4-6 *And I answered and said to the angel who was speaking with me, saying, "What **are** these, my lord?" And the angel who was speaking with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these **are**?" And I said, "No, my lord." And he answered and said to me, saying, "This **is** the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel, saying, 'Not by strength and not by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of armies.*

Zechariah asks, "What ***are*** these, my lord?" The angel answers with a question. "Do you not know what these ***are***?" And Zechariah says honestly, "No, my lord." There is no shame in saying we do not understand. That is how we learn.

Then the answer comes. "This ***is*** the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel." The vision was for the governor, the man responsible for the building. Here is the word: "Not by strength and not by power, but by My Spirit," says the LORD of armies.

Let us take this slowly, because it is one of the most important verses in the book.

"Not by strength." The Hebrew word here is often used for an army, or for wealth and force, the strength of numbers and resources. Zerubbabel had no army. Judah was a small province under

Persia. Its people were poor. The temple would not be built by military might or by a rich treasury.

"And not by power." This word means human ability, the strength of a man's own body, skill and effort. Zerubbabel and his workers would work hard. They had to. But in the end, their own effort would not be what finished the house.

"But by My Spirit." The Spirit of God was the oil in the lampstand. He was the supply that never ran dry. Haggai had told the same people, "My Spirit is standing in your midst; do not fear" (Haggai 2:5). The work would be done because God's Spirit was at work in them and for them. He would move the heart of the Persian king (Ezra 6:1-12), stir the spirit of the people (Haggai 1:14) and keep the lamps burning.

Notice the title at the end: "says the LORD of armies." The God who commands all the armies of heaven says His work does not depend on armies. He has all the power in the universe, and He chooses to work by His Spirit.

What does this mean for us? It does not mean we sit still and do nothing. Zerubbabel still had to build. But it means we stop trusting in our own strength and start trusting in God's. Jesus said, "apart from Me you are not able to do anything" (John 15:5). The church was born at Pentecost when the Spirit came (Acts 2), and the early believers turned the world upside down, not with armies or money, but by the Spirit. Paul said his preaching was "not in persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of ***the*** Spirit and of power" (1 Corinthians 2:4).

So when the job in front of you is too big, the family too broken, the habit too strong, or the church too small, remember this verse. God's work is done God's way, by His Spirit. That is both humbling and freeing. It is humbling because we cannot take the credit. It is freeing because we do not have to carry the whole load. Every believer in Christ has the Spirit living in him (Romans 8:9). Are you leaning on your own strength, or on His?

4:7 *Who **are** you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel **you will become** level ground; and he will bring forth the top stone **with** shoutings of 'Grace, grace to it!'"*

"Who ***are*** you, O great mountain?" God speaks to the problem as if it were a person. The great mountain was the mass of opposition and difficulty in front of Zerubbabel: enemies who had stopped the work (Ezra 4), letters to the king, poverty, discouragement and years of rubble. It looked impossible.

"Before Zerubbabel ***you will become*** level ground." The mountain would be flattened. Jesus used the same kind of picture when He said that faith could move mountains (Matthew 17:20). What is too big for us is not too big for God's Spirit.

"And he will bring forth the top stone ***with*** shoutings of 'Grace, grace to it!'" The top stone was the last stone laid, the finishing stone. Zerubbabel would see the temple finished, and when the last stone went in, the people would shout, Grace, grace. What does that mean? It is a cry of praise and blessing. The whole thing was by grace, God's favor that we do not deserve, from first to last. They would not shout, Look what we did. They would shout, Look what God's grace has done.

4:8-10 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "The hands of Zerubbabel have founded this house, and his hands will finish **it**; and you will know that the LORD of armies has sent me to you. For who has despised the day of small things? And they will rejoice and see the tin stone in the hand of Zerubbabel. These seven **are** the eyes of the LORD; they are roving through all the earth."*

"And the word of the LORD came to me," and God said, "The hands of Zerubbabel have founded this house, and his hands will finish ***it***." Zerubbabel had laid the foundation about 536 B.C. (Ezra 3:8-11). For sixteen years it had sat there. God promises that the same man will finish it. He did. The temple was completed in 516 B.C. (Ezra 6:14-15), about four years after this vision. "And you will know that the LORD of armies has sent me to you." When the temple was finished, everyone would know that Zechariah was a true prophet.

"For who has despised the day of small things?" This is one of Zechariah's best-loved questions. The day of small things was the time of small beginnings. The temple was smaller and plainer than Solomon's. The old men wept when they saw its foundation (Ezra 3:12; Haggai 2:3). Some looked at it and thought it was nothing. God asks, who are you to despise what I am doing? Small beginnings are not small to God.

God loves to start small. Israel began with one old man and his wife. David was the youngest son, out with the sheep. Jesus was born in a stable and grew up in a little town. He compared the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed, the smallest of seeds, which grows into a tree (Matthew 13:31-32). The church began with a handful of frightened disciples in an upper room. Do you feel your work for God is small? A Sunday school class of five children, a prayer group of three, one neighbor you are trying to reach? Do not despise the day of small things. God does not.

"And they will rejoice and see" the stone in Zerubbabel's hand. The word here most likely means a plumb line, a weight of tin or lead hanging on a cord, used by builders to make sure a wall is straight. The sight of Zerubbabel holding the plumb line, checking the walls as the building went up, would make the people glad. The work was really happening.

"These seven ***are*** the eyes of the LORD; they are roving through all the earth." The seven lamps, or the seven eyes on the stone in 3:9, stand for God's full and watchful care. Nothing escapes His sight. "For the LORD, His eyes are roving in all the earth to show Himself strong with ***those*** whose heart ***is*** complete toward Him" (2 Chronicles 16:9). The same God who watches over the whole earth was watching over a small building site in Jerusalem.

4:11-14 *And I answered and said to him, "What **are** these two olive trees on the right of the lampstand and on its left?" And I answered a second time and said to him, "What **are** the two clusters of the olive trees which **are** beside the two pipes of gold, which empty the gold from themselves?" And he said to me, saying, "Do you not know what these **are**?" And I said, "No, my lord." And he said, "These **are** the two sons of the fresh oil who stand by the Lord of all the earth."*

Zechariah still wants to know about the two olive trees. "What ***are*** these two olive trees on the right of the lampstand and on its left?" Then he asks more closely about "the two clusters of the olive trees which ***are*** beside the two pipes of gold, which empty the gold from themselves." The gold here is the golden oil, flowing through golden pipes.

Again the angel asks, "Do you not know what these ***are***?" And again Zechariah says, "No, my lord."

"These ***are*** the two sons of the fresh oil who stand by the Lord of all the earth." Sons of the fresh oil means anointed ones. In Israel, priests and kings were anointed with oil when they began their work (Exodus 29:7; 1 Samuel 16:13). In Zechariah's day, the two anointed leaders were Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the governor from David's line. God was pouring out His Spirit through these two men to keep His light burning in Jerusalem. Chapter 3 was about Joshua. This chapter is about Zerubbabel. Together they stood "by the Lord of all the earth," serving Him.

Many Bible teachers see the picture also looking ahead in two ways. First, the two offices of priest and king, held by two men here, will come together in one Person, the Branch, who will be "a priest on his throne" (6:13). That is Jesus Christ. Second, Revelation 11:3-4 speaks of two witnesses who will prophesy in Jerusalem during the Tribulation, and it calls them "the two olive trees and the two lampstands which stand before the God of the earth." John clearly draws on this vision. Just as God kept His light burning through two anointed men in Zechariah's day, He will do it again in the last days.

Notice the title, "the Lord of all the earth." To the people in Jerusalem, Persia seemed to rule the earth. But the real Lord of all the earth was the One they served. That is still true.

Summary

The angel woke Zechariah as if from sleep and showed him a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on top, seven lamps and pipes leading to the lamps, and two olive trees beside it, one on each side. Zechariah asked what they meant, and the angel said this was the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: not by strength and not by power, but by My Spirit, says the LORD of armies. The great mountain before Zerubbabel would become level ground, and he would bring out the top stone with shouts of grace to it. Zerubbabel's hands had laid the foundation of the house, and his hands would finish it, and the people would know the LORD of armies had sent His prophet. No one should despise the day of small things, for the people would rejoice to see the plumb line in Zerubbabel's hand. The seven were the eyes of the LORD roving through the whole earth. Zechariah asked about the two olive trees and the two branches beside the golden pipes that poured out golden oil, and the angel told him they were the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of all the earth.

Study Questions

1. What did Zechariah see in this vision, and how was this lampstand different from the one in the tabernacle? (4:2-3)

2. What was the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel? (4:6)

3. What did God say would happen to the great mountain before Zerubbabel? (4:7)

4. What would the people shout when the top stone was laid, and what does that shout mean? (4:7)

5. What did God promise about the hands of Zerubbabel, and did it come true? (4:9; Ezra 6:14-15)

6. Who were the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of all the earth? (4:14)

7. What do the seven eyes of the LORD tell us about Him? (4:10)

8. What task in your life right now are you trying to do by your own strength? What would it look like to do it by God's Spirit?

9. Have you ever looked down on a small beginning, in your church, your service, or yourself? What does "the day of small things" teach you?

10. The people would shout grace when the work was done. How can you give God the credit for what He has done through you?

Zechariah 5: The Flying Scroll and the Woman in the Basket

Scripture

5:1-11 And I lifted up my eyes again and saw, and look, a flying scroll. And he said to me, "What ***are*** you seeing?" And I said, "I ***am*** seeing a flying scroll; its length ***is*** approximately 30 feet (twenty cubits), and its breadth approximately 15 feet (ten cubits)." And he said to me, "This ***is*** the curse that is going out over the face of all the land; for everyone who steals will be purged out from here according to it, and everyone who swears will be purged out from here according to it. I will send it out, declares the LORD of armies, and it will enter into the house of the thief and into the house of the one who swears by My name falsely; and it will lodge in the midst of his house and consume it, both its timbers and its stones." And the angel who was speaking with me went out and said to me, "Lift up, please, your eyes and see what this ***is*** that is going out." And I said, "What ***is*** it?" And he said, "This ***is*** the ephah that is going out." And he said, "This ***is*** their eye in all the land." And look, a round lid of lead was lifted up, and this ***was*** a woman sitting in the midst of the ephah. And he said, "This ***is*** wickedness." And he threw her into the midst of the ephah, and he threw the stone of lead on its mouth. And I lifted up my eyes and saw, and look, two women going out, and wind ***was*** in their wings; and they had wings like the wings of the stork; and they lifted up the ephah between the earth and the heavens. And I said to the angel who was speaking with me, "Where ***are*** they taking the ephah?" And he said to me, "To build a house for her in the land of Shinar; and it will be prepared, and she will be set there on her base."

Preview

The sixth and seventh visions are about sin in the land. The earlier visions promised that God would judge the nations, rebuild Jerusalem, cleanse the high priest and finish the temple. But what about the sin of God's own people? A rebuilt temple in a land full of stealing and lying would not please God.

In the sixth vision Zechariah sees a huge scroll flying through the air, about thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide. It is God's curse, going out over the land against everyone who steals and everyone who swears falsely by God's name. It enters their houses and destroys them. In the seventh vision he sees a basket for measuring grain with a lead lid. Inside sits a woman called Wickedness. Two women with wings like a stork lift the basket and carry it away to the land of Shinar, which is Babylon, where a house is built for it. God will not only punish sin. He will remove it from His land and send it back where it belongs.

Study

5:1-2 *And I lifted up my eyes again and saw, and look, a flying scroll. And he said to me, "What **are** you seeing?" And I said, "I **am** seeing a flying scroll; its length **is** approximately 30 feet (twenty cubits), and its breadth approximately 15 feet (ten cubits)."*

"And I lifted up my eyes again and saw, and look, a flying scroll." In Zechariah's day, books were written on scrolls, long strips of leather or papyrus rolled up on sticks. This one was unrolled and flying through the air like a great banner, so that everyone could read it.

"Its length is approximately 30 feet (twenty cubits), and its breadth approximately 15 feet (ten cubits)." A cubit was about 18 inches, the length from a man's elbow to his fingertips. That is enormous for a scroll. A normal scroll was perhaps a foot wide. This one was the size of a large billboard. Some have noticed that these are the same measurements as the porch of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 6:3). If that is intended, the message may be that God's law and judgment go out from His house. But the angel does not explain the size, so we should not press it. The main point is plain. This message was huge, open and impossible to miss.

5:3-4 *And he said to me, "This **is** the curse that is going out over the face of all the land; for everyone who steals will be purged out from here according to it, and everyone who swears will be purged out from here according to it. I will send it out, declares the LORD of armies, and it will enter into the house of the thief and into the house of the one who swears by My name falsely; and it will lodge in the midst of his house and consume it, both its timbers and its stones."*

"This ***is*** the curse that is going out over the face of all the land." A curse is the opposite of a blessing. In the covenant at Sinai, God set blessings and curses before Israel: blessing if they obeyed, curse if they broke His covenant (Deuteronomy 28). The scroll was that curse, written out and sent out.

"For everyone who steals will be purged out from here according to it, and everyone who swears will be purged out from here according to it." Two sins are named, stealing and swearing falsely. Many have noticed that they come from the two tables of the Ten Commandments. "You shall not steal" (Exodus 20:15) is a sin against our neighbor. Swearing falsely by God's name is a sin against God (Exodus 20:7; Leviticus 19:12). The two may stand for the whole Law, both our duty to God and our duty to others. Purged out means cleared away, removed.

"I will send it out, declares the LORD of armies, and it will enter into the house of the thief and into the house of the one who swears by My name falsely." God's curse does not stay in the sky. It comes down to the very house where the sinner lives. "And it will lodge in the midst of his house and consume it, both its timbers and its stones." To lodge means to stay overnight, to settle in. The curse moves in and eats the house away from the inside, wood and stone alike.

This is sobering. Thieves and liars may think they have gotten away with it. Their houses may look solid. But God sees, and His word will find them. Sin carries its own destruction inside it.

Why would this be a comfort to the faithful? Because God was saying He would not let wickedness rule His land. The honest and the faithful would not be overrun by cheats and false swearers

forever. And for us, it is a warning to look at our own homes and hearts. "You shall not steal" still matters. Speaking the truth still matters (Ephesians 4:25, 28). And there is good news. Christ "redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). The curse that should have come to our house fell on Him.

5:5-6 *And the angel who was speaking with me went out and said to me, "Lift up, please, your eyes and see what this **is** that is going out." And I said, "What **is** it?" And he said, "This **is** the ephah that is going out." And he said, "This **is** their eye in all the land."*

"And the angel who was speaking with me went out and said to me," and his words were, "Lift up, please, your eyes and see what this ***is*** that is going out." A new vision begins. Zechariah asks, "What ***is*** it?" The angel says, "This ***is*** the ephah that is going out."

An ephah was a measure for grain, about three-fifths of a bushel, and the word also meant the basket or container that held that amount. It was a common thing, the kind of basket used every day in the market. That may be part of the point. Business and trade were where much of the people's sin showed up: false weights and dishonest baskets (Amos 8:5; Micah 6:10-11).

"This ***is*** their eye in all the land." That is, this is what they look like, this is their appearance in the whole land. The basket shows what the people's lives really looked like underneath. Some ancient translations read their iniquity in place of "their eye," which gives the same sense.

5:7-8 *And look, a round lid of lead was lifted up, and this **was** a woman sitting in the midst of the ephah. And he said, "This **is** wickedness." And he threw her into the midst of the ephah, and he threw the stone of lead on its mouth.*

"And look, a round lid of lead was lifted up, and this ***was*** a woman sitting in the midst of the ephah." Lead is very heavy. The lid was lifted for a moment so Zechariah could see what was inside, and there sat a woman.

"And he said," and here is what he said: "This ***is*** wickedness." The woman stands for wickedness itself, sin in all its forms. Why a woman? In Hebrew the word for wickedness is a feminine noun, so it is natural to picture it as a woman, just as Proverbs pictures wisdom as a woman (Proverbs 8-9). This is not a statement about women. It is a picture of sin.

"And he threw her into the midst of the ephah, and he threw the stone of lead on its mouth." She seems to try to get out, and the angel pushes her back down and slams the heavy lid shut. Wickedness is not a harmless thing to be left loose. It has to be shut up and held down. Only God can do that.

5:9-11 *And I lifted up my eyes and saw, and look, two women going out, and wind **was** in their wings; and they had wings like the wings of the stork; and they lifted up the ephah between the earth and the heavens. And I said to the angel who was speaking with me, "Where **are** they taking the ephah?" And he said to me, "To build a house for her in the land of Shinar; and it will be prepared, and she will be set there on her base."*

"And I lifted up my eyes and saw, and look, two women going out, and wind ***was*** in their wings." Two more women appear, with wings "like the wings of the stork." The stork is a large bird with strong, wide wings, able to fly great distances. "And they lifted up the ephah between the earth and the heavens." They carry the basket, with wickedness shut inside, high into the air.

Zechariah asks where they are going. "To build a house for her in the land of Shinar." Shinar is the old name for the land of Babylon. It is where men built the tower of Babel in pride against God (Genesis 11:1-9), and where Nebuchadnezzar carried the holy things from God's temple and put them in the house of his god (Daniel 1:2). Babylon is the home of rebellion against God from the very start of the Bible.

"And it will be prepared, and she will be set there on her base." A house will be built for wickedness in Babylon, and she will be set up there like an idol on a pedestal. Wickedness is removed from God's land and sent back to where it came from, where it is worshiped.

What does this teach? The flying scroll showed God punishing sinners. The basket shows God removing sin itself. He does not just judge sin. He takes it away. Psalm 103:12 says that as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. That is the work Christ did for us. "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). And it points ahead to the day when God will cleanse His land completely, and no sin will be left in Jerusalem (13:1-2; 14:20-21).

Many Bible teachers also connect this vision with Revelation 17-18, where Babylon appears again in the last days as the great center of the world's rebellion against God, "the mother of the prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth" (Revelation 17:5). In that reading, the wickedness sent to Shinar comes to full flower there, and God judges it once for all. Revelation tells God's people, "Come out of her, My people" (Revelation 18:4). We should hold that view loosely here, because the angel does not explain the house in Shinar further.

Summary

Zechariah saw a flying scroll thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide. The angel said it was the curse going out over the whole land: everyone who steals and everyone who swears falsely would be purged away according to what was written on it. The LORD of armies would send it into the house of the thief and the house of the one who swears falsely by His name, and it would stay there and consume the house, timbers and stones. Then the angel showed him an ephah, a measuring basket going out, which was the appearance of the people in all the land. A lead lid was lifted, and a woman was sitting inside. The angel said she was Wickedness, threw her back into the basket and put the lead weight on its mouth. Then two women with wind in their wings like

the wings of a stork lifted the basket between earth and heaven. They were taking it to the land of Shinar to build a house for it, where it would be set on its base.

Study Questions

1. How big was the flying scroll, and what was written on it? (5:2-3)

2. What two kinds of sinners would the curse purge from the land? (5:3)

3. What would the curse do when it entered the house of the thief and the false swearer? (5:4)

4. What did Zechariah see sitting inside the ephah, and what did the angel call her? (5:7-8)

5. Where did the two women carry the ephah, and what would be built there? (5:9-11)

6. Why is Shinar, the land of Babylon, a fitting place for wickedness to be sent? (Genesis 11:1-9)

7. How does the difference between the scroll and the basket show two sides of how God deals with sin?

8. Stealing and lying are named here. Are there small ways honesty slips in your work, your words or your money?

9. Galatians 3:13 says Christ became a curse for us. What does that mean to you personally?

10. God does not just punish sin, He takes it away. Is there a sin you need to bring to Him and let Him remove?

Zechariah 6: The Four Chariots and the Crowning of Joshua

Scripture

6:1-8 And I returned, and I lifted up my eyes, and I saw, and look, four chariots going out from between the two mountains, and the mountains ***were*** mountains of bronze. In the first chariot ***were*** red horses, and in the second chariot black horses, and in the third chariot white horses, and in the fourth chariot dappled, strong horses. And I answered and said to the angel who was speaking with me, "What ***are*** these, my lord?" And the angel answered and said to me, "These ***are*** the four winds of the heavens, going out from presenting themselves before the Lord of all the earth. The black horses which ***are*** in it ***are*** going out to the land of ***the*** north, and the white ***ones*** have gone out after them, and the dappled ***ones*** have gone out to the land of the south. And the strong ***ones*** went out, and they sought to go to walk about on the earth." And he said, "Go, walk about on the earth." And they walked about on the earth. And he cried out to me and spoke to me, saying, "See, those going out to the land of ***the*** north have caused my spirit to rest in the land of ***the*** north."

6:9-15 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Take from the exiles, from Heldai and from Tobijah and from Jedaiah, who have come from Babylon; and you yourself shall go on that day, and you shall go ***into the*** house of Josiah the son of Zephaniah. And you shall take silver and gold, and you shall make crowns, and you shall set ***them*** on the head of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest. And you shall say to him, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of armies, saying: Look, a man, Branch ***is*** his name; and he will sprout up from his place, and he will build the temple of the LORD. And he himself will build the temple of the LORD, and he himself will bear majesty, and he will sit and rule on his throne; and he will be a priest on his throne, and a counsel of peace will be between the two of them.' And the crowns shall be for Helem and for Tobijah and for Jedaiah and for Hen the son of Zephaniah, for a memorial in the temple of the LORD." And far-off ***ones*** will come, and they will build in the temple of the LORD, and you will know that the LORD of armies has sent me to you. And ***this*** will be, if you will surely listen to the voice of the LORD your God.

Preview

The last of the eight night visions brings us back to where the first began. In chapter 1, horses patrolled the earth and reported that the nations were at ease. Now four chariots, pulled by red, black, white and dappled horses, come out from between two mountains of bronze. They are the four winds of heaven, going out from the presence of the Lord of all the earth. They go north and south and through the whole earth, and the black horses that went north have given God's Spirit rest in the land of the north. God's judgment on Babylon is settled.

Then the visions end and Zechariah is given something to do. Some exiles have just come from Babylon with gifts of silver and gold. Zechariah is to take it, make a crown and set it on the head of Joshua the high priest. Then he is to say: "Look, a man, Branch ***is*** his name." This Branch will build the temple of the LORD, bear royal majesty, sit and rule on His throne, and be a priest on His

throne. In Israel, priests and kings were kept apart. Here they meet in one Man. This is one of the clearest pictures of Jesus Christ in the Old Testament, the Priest-King.

Study

6:1-3 *And I returned, and I lifted up my eyes, and I saw, and look, four chariots going out from between the two mountains, and the mountains **were** mountains of bronze. In the first chariot **were** red horses, and in the second chariot black horses, and in the third chariot white horses, and in the fourth chariot dappled, strong horses.*

"And I returned, and I lifted up my eyes, and I saw, and look, four chariots going out from between the two mountains." A chariot was a light, two-wheeled war cart pulled by horses. In the ancient world it was the strongest weapon an army had. Four chariots stand for God's power going out to act.

"And the mountains ***were*** mountains of bronze." The text does not explain the two mountains. Some think of Mount Zion and the Mount of Olives, with the valley between them. Others think of the two bronze pillars that stood at the door of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 7:15-22), as if the chariots come out from God's house. Bronze in the Bible is often linked with judgment, as with the bronze altar where sin was dealt with. All we can say for sure is that the chariots come from God's presence (6:5), strong and unshakable.

"In the first chariot ***were*** red horses, and in the second chariot black horses, and in the third chariot white horses, and in the fourth chariot dappled, strong horses." Dappled means spotted. The colors remind many readers of the four horsemen in Revelation 6, where white, red, black and pale horses bring conquest, war, famine and death. Zechariah's angel does not explain the colors, so we should be careful. The main point is that God has agents ready to go wherever He sends them.

6:4-5 *And I answered and said to the angel who was speaking with me, "What **are** these, my lord?" And the angel answered and said to me, "These **are** the four winds of the heavens, going out from presenting themselves before the Lord of all the earth.*

Zechariah asks, "What ***are*** these, my lord?" The angel answers, "These ***are*** the four winds of the heavens, going out from presenting themselves before the Lord of all the earth." The Hebrew word for winds can also mean spirits. They may be the winds as God's servants, or angels sent out by God. Psalm 104:4 says God "makes His messengers winds." Hebrews 1:14 calls angels "ministering spirits, sent forth for service."

They had been "presenting themselves before the Lord of all the earth." Like servants standing before a king, they had received their orders and were going out to obey. The same title, "the Lord of all the earth," was given in 4:14. Persia ruled a great empire, but God rules the whole earth, and every power in heaven and on earth answers to Him.

6:6-8 *The black horses which **are** in it **are** going out to the land of **the** north, and the white **ones** have gone out after them, and the dappled **ones** have gone out to the land of the south. And the strong **ones** went out, and they sought to go to walk about on the earth." And he said, "Go, walk about on the earth." And they walked about on the earth. And he cried out to me and spoke to me, saying, "See, those going out to the land of **the** north have caused my spirit to rest in the land of **the** north."*

"The black horses which ***are*** in it ***are*** going out to the land of ***the*** north, and the white ***ones*** have gone out after them." The land of the north is Babylon, as in 2:6. Two chariots go there. "And the dappled ***ones*** have gone out to the land of the south." The south was Egypt. Babylon and Egypt were the two great powers that had troubled God's people for centuries. The red horses are not mentioned here, and Scripture does not tell us why.

"And the strong ***ones*** went out, and they sought to go to walk about on the earth." They were eager to go. "And he said," and the order was, "Go, walk about on the earth." The command is given, "And they walked about on the earth." In chapter 1 the horsemen walked about the earth and found it at ease. Now chariots walk about it to carry out God's judgment.

"And he cried out to me and spoke to me," and he said, "See, those going out to the land of ***the*** north have caused my spirit to rest in the land of ***the*** north." The word spirit here likely means God's anger, as it sometimes does (Judges 8:3). God's anger against Babylon had been satisfied. His judgment was done there. In chapter 1 the nations were at ease and God was angry. Now His anger is at rest because justice has been carried out.

This is how the night visions end: God is in control of the whole earth. The nations that seemed so strong are under His hand. That would give the builders in Jerusalem courage to keep working.

6:9-11 *And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Take from the exiles, from Heldai and from Tobijah and from Jedaiah, who have come from Babylon; and you yourself shall go on that day, and you shall go **into the** house of Josiah the son of Zephaniah. And you shall take silver and gold, and you shall make crowns, and you shall set **them** on the head of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest.*

"And the word of the LORD came to me." Now the visions are over and God gives Zechariah a task, an acted message. "Take from the exiles, from Heldai and from Tobijah and from Jedaiah, who have come from Babylon." These three men had just arrived from Babylon, likely carrying gifts of silver and gold from the Jews still living there for the work in Jerusalem. "And you yourself shall go on that day, and you shall go ***into the*** house of Josiah the son of Zephaniah." They were staying at Josiah's house. Zechariah was to go that very day.

"And you shall take silver and gold, and you shall make crowns." The Hebrew word is plural, crowns, but it may mean one crown made of several rings or bands, a grand royal crown. "And you shall set ***them*** on the head of Joshua the son of Jehozadak, the high priest."

Here is something surprising. In Israel, the high priest wore a turban, not a crown. Crowns were for kings, and the king came from the tribe of Judah and the family of David. Priests came from

the tribe of Levi. The two offices were kept apart. When King Uzziah tried to burn incense in the temple, God struck him with leprosy (2 Chronicles 26:16-21). So why crown a priest? And why not crown Zerubbabel, who was from David's line? Because this was a sign. Joshua would stand for Someone else.

6:12-13 *And you shall say to him, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of armies, saying: Look, a man, Branch **is** his name; and he will sprout up from his place, and he will build the temple of the LORD. And he himself will build the temple of the LORD, and he himself will bear majesty, and he will sit and rule on his throne; and he will be a priest on his throne, and a counsel of peace will be between the two of them.'*

"And you shall say to him," and here is the message: "Thus says the LORD of armies, saying: Look, a man, Branch ***is*** his name." We met the Branch in 3:8: "My servant the Branch," the Messiah from David's line. Joshua is not the Branch. He is the sign of the Branch. The Branch is "a man," a real human being.

"And he will sprout up from his place." A branch sprouts. He would grow up out of humble ground, like a shoot from a stump. Isaiah said He would grow up "like the root from dry ground" (Isaiah 53:2). Jesus grew up in Nazareth, a small and looked-down-on town (John 1:46).

"And he will build the temple of the LORD. And he himself will build the temple of the LORD." God says it twice. Zerubbabel was building the temple in Jerusalem then (4:9). But this promise is about the Branch, and it reaches beyond the stone temple of 516 B.C. In one sense, Christ is building His church now, "a holy temple in ***the*** Lord" made of living stones (Ephesians 2:21; 1 Peter 2:5). In the fullest sense, I believe the Branch will build the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem in His kingdom, when He reigns on the earth (Ezekiel 40-48; Isaiah 2:2-3). Both are His work.

"And he himself will bear majesty." Majesty is royal splendor and honor, the glory of a king. "And he will sit and rule on his throne." The Branch is a King. "And he will be a priest on his throne." He is also a Priest, and He is a priest on His throne. One Man will hold both offices.

"And a counsel of peace will be between the two of them." Some read this as peace between the two offices, priest and king, united in one Person with no rivalry between them. Others read it as peace and agreement between the Branch and the LORD who sent Him. Either way, the result is peace.

Who is this Priest-King? There is only one answer. Psalm 110 speaks of the King at God's right hand and says, "You ***are*** a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:4). Melchizedek was both king of Salem and priest of God Most High (Genesis 14:18; Hebrews 7:1). Hebrews tells us Jesus is that Priest-King. He is from the tribe of Judah, not Levi, and yet He is our High Priest, "who sat down at ***the*** right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Hebrews 8:1). He offered Himself as the sacrifice, He prays for us now, and He will come again to reign.

What does this mean for us? We do not need two people to bring us to God, one to deal with our sin and another to rule our lives. We have one Savior who does both. He is the Priest who takes away our sin and the King who rules our hearts. Is He both to you?

6:14-15 *And the crowns shall be for Helem and for Tobijah and for Jedaiah and for Hen the son of Zephaniah, for a memorial in the temple of the LORD." And far-off **ones** will come, and they will build in the temple of the LORD, and you will know that the LORD of armies has sent me to you. And **this** will be, if you will surely listen to the voice of the LORD your God.*

"And the crowns shall be for Helem and for Tobijah and for Jedaiah and for Hen the son of Zephaniah, for a memorial in the temple of the LORD." Helem seems to be another name for Heldai (6:10), and Hen, which means grace or favor, seems to be another name for Josiah the son of Zephaniah. The crown was not to stay on Joshua's head. It was to be kept in the temple as a memorial, a reminder. Every time people saw it, they would remember the promise of the coming Branch, and the faithful men whose gifts had made it.

"And far-off ***ones*** will come, and they will build in the temple of the LORD." People from far away would come and help build. In Zechariah's day, this meant Jews from distant lands coming home and helping. But it reaches further. Paul tells Gentile believers, "you who once were far off have become near by the blood of Christ" (Ephesians 2:13), and now they are built together into God's dwelling. And in the kingdom, the nations will come to the house of the LORD (Isaiah 2:2-3; 60:10).

"And you will know that the LORD of armies has sent me to you." When it all came true, it would prove Zechariah was God's prophet.

"And ***this*** will be, if you will surely listen to the voice of the LORD your God." The chapter ends with a condition. The coming of the Branch was certain. God would send Him no matter what. But whether that generation would share in the blessing depended on their obedience. The same is true for us. The promises of God are sure. The question is whether we will listen to His voice.

Summary

Zechariah saw four chariots coming out from between two mountains of bronze, the first with red horses, the second with black, the third with white and the fourth with strong, dappled horses. The angel told him these were the four winds of heaven, going out from standing before the Lord of all the earth. The black horses went to the land of the north with the white horses following, and the dappled horses went to the land of the south. The strong horses were eager to patrol the earth, and they were sent out to do so. The angel told Zechariah that those who went to the land of the north had given God's spirit rest there. Then the word of the LORD told Zechariah to take silver and gold from the exiles Heldai, Tobijah and Jedaiah, who had come from Babylon, go to the house of Josiah son of Zephaniah, make a crown and set it on the head of Joshua the high priest. He was to tell Joshua that the man whose name is Branch would sprout up from His place and build the temple of the LORD, bear royal majesty, sit and rule on His throne and be a priest on His throne, with a counsel of peace between the two. The crown would be kept in the temple as a memorial for Helem, Tobijah, Jedaiah and Hen. Those far away would come and build in the

temple of the LORD, and this would come about if the people diligently obeyed the LORD their God.

Study Questions

1. What did Zechariah see coming out from between the two mountains of bronze? (6:1-3)

2. What did the angel say the four chariots were, and where had they come from? (6:5)

3. What did the chariots that went to the land of the north accomplish? (6:8)

4. What did God tell Zechariah to make, and whose head was it set on? (6:9-11)

5. What is the name of the man in verse 12, and what would He do? (6:12-13)

6. Why was it surprising to put a crown on a high priest? (2 Chronicles 26:16-21)

7. How does Jesus fulfill the picture of the Priest-King? (Psalm 110:4; Hebrews 8:1)

8. Jesus is both the Priest who takes away sin and the King who rules. Have you trusted Him as both, or only as one?

9. The crown was kept as a memorial to remind the people of God's promise. What reminders help you remember God's promises?

10. The chapter ends, "if you will surely listen to the voice of the LORD your God." What is God asking you to listen to right now?

Zechariah 7: Fasting and True Obedience

Scripture

7:1-14 And it was in the fourth year of Darius the king ***that*** the word of the LORD came to Zechariah on the fourth ***day*** of the ninth month, in Kislev. And Bethel sent Sharezer and Regem-melech and his men to entreat the face of the LORD, to say to the priests who ***belonged*** to the house of the LORD of armies, and to the prophets, saying, "Shall I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years?" And the word of the LORD of armies came to me, saying, "Say to all the people of the land and to the priests, saying, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and in the seventh ***month***, even these seventy years, did you really fast for Me, ***for*** Me? And when you eat and when you drink, ***are*** not you the ones eating, and you the ones drinking? ***Is it*** not the words which the LORD proclaimed by the hand of the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and at ease, and her cities around her, and the Negeb and the Shephelah ***were*** inhabited?'" And the word of the LORD came to Zechariah, saying, "Thus says the LORD of armies, saying, 'Judge a judgment of truth, and do steadfast love and compassion, each man with his brother; and do not oppress the widow and the fatherless, the sojourner and the poor; and do not devise in your heart evil, each man ***against*** his brother.' And they refused to pay attention, and they gave a stubborn shoulder, and they made their ears heavy from hearing. And they made their heart flint, from hearing the law and the words which the LORD of armies sent by His Spirit by the hand of the former prophets; and ***there*** was great wrath from the LORD of armies. And it was ***that*** just as He called and they did not listen, so they would call and I would not listen," says the LORD of armies. "And I swept them away by storm among all the nations whom they had not known, and the land was desolate behind them, without anyone passing through or returning; and they made the land of desire into a waste."

Preview

Almost two years have passed since the night visions. It is December of 518 B.C., and the temple is about halfway built. A group of men comes from the town of Bethel with a question for the priests and prophets. For seventy years the Jews had fasted and mourned every year in the fifth month, to remember the day Jerusalem and the temple were burned. Now that the temple is going up again, should they keep doing it?

God's answer, in chapters 7 and 8, comes in four parts. In this chapter, He answers their question with a question of His own. When you fasted all those years, was it really for Me? When you eat and drink, is that not for yourselves? Then God reminds them what the former prophets had said: do justice, show steadfast love and compassion, and do not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner or the poor. Their fathers refused to listen. They made their hearts as hard as flint. So God scattered them among the nations, and the pleasant land became a ruin. The lesson is plain. God cares far more about obedient hearts than about religious rituals.

Study

7:1-3 *And it was in the fourth year of Darius the king **that** the word of the LORD came to Zechariah on the fourth **day** of the ninth month, in Kislev. And Bethel sent Sharezer and Regem-melech and his men to entreat the face of the LORD, to say to the priests who **belonged** to the house of the LORD of armies, and to the prophets, saying, "Shall I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years?"*

"And it was in the fourth year of Darius the king ***that*** the word of the LORD came to Zechariah on the fourth ***day*** of the ninth month, in Kislev." Kislev fell in November and December. This was late in 518 B.C., almost two years after the night visions (1:7). The temple would be finished about two and a half years later, in 516 B.C.

"And Bethel sent Sharezer and Regem-melech and his men to entreat the face of the LORD." Bethel was a town about twelve miles north of Jerusalem. It had once been a center of false worship, where Jeroboam set up a golden calf (1 Kings 12:28-29). Now it was settled again by Jews who had come home from exile (Ezra 2:28). The people of Bethel sent two men with a group. Some read the Hebrew differently, taking Bethel-sharezer as one man's name, but either way, a group came to Jerusalem with a question. To "entreat the face of the LORD" means to seek His favor, to pray to Him.

Their question was for "the priests who ***belonged*** to the house of the LORD of armies, and to the prophets." Here it is: "Shall I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years?" The fifth month was when the Babylonians burned the temple and the city in 586 B.C. (2 Kings 25:8-9; Jeremiah 52:12-13). Ever since, the Jews had kept a fast on that day, weeping and mourning. To fast means to go without food for a time, usually to mourn, repent or seek God. Separating myself means setting oneself apart, holding back from food and pleasures.

It was a fair question. If the temple was being rebuilt, why keep mourning its loss? But God's answer went deeper than the question.

7:4-6 *And the word of the LORD of armies came to me, saying, "Say to all the people of the land and to the priests, saying, 'When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and in the seventh **month**, even these seventy years, did you really fast for Me, **for** Me? And when you eat and when you drink, **are** not you the ones eating, and you the ones drinking?*

"And the word of the LORD of armies came to me," and God told Zechariah to speak "to all the people of the land and to the priests." God's answer was not just for the men from Bethel. It was for everyone.

"When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and in the seventh ***month***, even these seventy years, did you really fast for Me, ***for*** Me?" The fast of the seventh month remembered the murder of Gedaliah, the governor the Babylonians had appointed over Judah after Jerusalem fell (2 Kings 25:25; Jeremiah 41:1-3). His death ended the last hope of the people left in the land, and many fled to Egypt.

God asks a searching question. Was it really for Me? He repeats the word for emphasis: for Me, for Me. Their fasting may have been more about feeling sorry for themselves, for their lost city and their hard lives, than about grieving over the sin that caused it. They mourned the results of their sin but not the sin itself.

"And when you eat and when you drink, ***are*** not you the ones eating, and you the ones drinking?" When they feasted, they did it for themselves. When they fasted, they did it for themselves too. God was not at the center of either.

This question cuts to the heart of all religious practice. We can go to church, pray, give, fast and read the Bible, and still do it all for ourselves: to feel good, to be seen, to keep a habit, to check a box. Jesus warned against fasting to be seen by others, "so that they may appear to men ***to be*** fasting" (Matthew 6:16). God looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). The question for us is the same. When you worship, is it really for Him?

7:7 ***Is it*** *not the words which the LORD proclaimed by the hand of the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and at ease, and her cities around her, and the Negeb and the Shephelah* ***were*** *inhabited?'"*

"***Is it*** not the words which the LORD proclaimed by the hand of the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and at ease, and her cities around her" were also inhabited, along with the southern desert and the low hills? God sends them back to the old sermons. The former prophets had said all of this before the exile, when Jerusalem was still standing and full of people.

What did they say? Isaiah had already answered the question about fasting. The people asked, "Why have we fasted, and You have not seen?" (Isaiah 58:3) and God told them they were fasting while they oppressed their workers (Isaiah 58:3). The fast God wanted was to loosen the bonds of wickedness and set the oppressed free (Isaiah 58:6). Hosea said, "For steadfast love I desire, and not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6).

The answer to their question had been given long ago. They did not need a new word from God. They needed to obey the old one.

7:8-10 *And the word of the LORD came to Zechariah, saying, "Thus says the LORD of armies, saying, 'Judge a judgment of truth, and do steadfast love and compassion, each man with his brother; and do not oppress the widow and the fatherless, the sojourner and the poor; and do not devise in your heart evil, each man* ***against*** *his brother.'*

"And the word of the LORD came to Zechariah." Now God sums up what the former prophets had said.

"Judge a judgment of truth." Be honest and fair in court and in every decision. Do not take bribes or twist the truth for the powerful.

"And do steadfast love and compassion, each man with his brother." Steadfast love is the Hebrew word hesed, loyal, faithful, covenant love, the kind of love that keeps its promises. Compassion is

tender mercy, feeling for others in their pain. God wants His people to treat one another the way He treats them.

"And do not oppress the widow and the fatherless, the sojourner and the poor." These four are the people with no one to stand up for them. A widow had no husband to provide for her. The fatherless had no father to protect them. A sojourner was a foreigner living in the land, without family or land of his own. The poor had no money to defend themselves. Again and again, God says He watches over these people, and He judges those who take advantage of them (Exodus 22:21-24; Deuteronomy 10:18).

"And do not devise in your heart evil, each man ***against*** his brother." God looks not only at our actions but at our hearts. Do not even plan harm against someone in your mind.

This is what God wanted more than fasting. It is what Micah said: "what does the LORD require from you but to do justice, and to love steadfast love, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8). James says the same in the New Testament: true religion is "to visit orphans and widows in their tribulation" (James 1:27). How do you treat the people around you who have no one to stand up for them?

7:11-12 *And they refused to pay attention, and they gave a stubborn shoulder, and they made their ears heavy from hearing. And they made their heart flint, from hearing the law and the words which the LORD of armies sent by His Spirit by the hand of the former prophets; and* ***there*** *was great wrath from the LORD of armies.*

Now God tells what their fathers did with that message. "And they refused to pay attention, and they gave a stubborn shoulder." A stubborn shoulder is the picture of an ox that jerks its shoulder away and refuses to take the yoke. "And they made their ears heavy from hearing." They stopped up their ears. They did not want to hear.

"And they made their heart flint." Flint is one of the hardest stones there is. They made their hearts so hard that God's Word could not get in. Notice that they did this to themselves. A hard heart does not happen all at once. It happens one refusal at a time.

What did they refuse? "The law and the words which the LORD of armies sent by His Spirit by the hand of the former prophets." This is an important verse. It tells us that the prophets spoke by God's Spirit. Their words were not their own ideas. They were God's words given by the Holy Spirit. Peter says the same: men spoke from God, carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). To reject the prophets was to reject God.

"And ***there*** was great wrath from the LORD of armies." When people keep hardening their hearts against God's Word, judgment comes.

7:13-14 *And it was **that** just as He called and they did not listen, so they would call and I would not listen," says the LORD of armies. "And I swept them away by storm among all the nations whom they had not known, and the land was desolate behind them, without anyone passing through or returning; and they made the land of desire into a waste."*

"And it was ***that*** just as He called and they did not listen, so they would call and I would not listen," says the LORD of armies. This is a sobering principle. God called, and they would not listen. Then, when trouble came, they called on God, and He would not listen. There comes a time when it is too late (Proverbs 1:24-28). That is why Scripture says, "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Hebrews 3:7-8).

"And I swept them away by storm among all the nations whom they had not known." God scattered them like a whirlwind scatters dust, into foreign lands and strange peoples. "And the land was desolate behind them, without anyone passing through or returning." The land was empty. "And they made the land of desire into a waste." The land of desire was the good land God had given them, the land everyone wanted. Their sin turned it into a wasteland.

This is the end of the first part of God's answer. The men from Bethel had asked about a fast. God told them the real issue was not the calendar but the heart. Their fathers had kept rituals and ignored justice and mercy, and it had cost them everything. Do not make the same mistake. In chapter 8, God will give the rest of His answer, and it is full of hope.

Summary

In the fourth year of King Darius, on the fourth day of the ninth month, the people of Bethel sent Sharezer, Regem-melech and their men to seek the LORD's favor and ask the priests and prophets whether they should keep weeping and fasting in the fifth month, as they had for so many years. The LORD told Zechariah to ask all the people and the priests whether, when they had fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months for seventy years, they had really fasted for Him, and whether their eating and drinking had not been for themselves. These were the same words the LORD had proclaimed through the former prophets when Jerusalem and the towns around it were inhabited and at peace. The LORD had told them to judge truly, show steadfast love and compassion to one another, not oppress the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner or the poor, and not plan evil against one another in their hearts. But they refused to listen, turned a stubborn shoulder, stopped their ears and made their hearts like flint so they would not hear the law and the words the LORD sent by His Spirit through the former prophets. So great wrath came from the LORD. Just as He had called and they would not listen, so they called and He would not listen. He scattered them with a storm among nations they did not know, and the pleasant land was left desolate.

Study Questions

1. When did the men from Bethel come, and what did they ask? (7:1-3)

2. What two fasts had the people kept for seventy years, and what did they remember? (7:3, 5; 2 Kings 25:8-9, 25)

3. What question did God ask about their fasting and their feasting? (7:5-6)

4. What had the former prophets told the people to do? (7:9-10)

5. How did the fathers respond to the prophets' message? (7:11-12)

6. By whom did the LORD send His words through the former prophets? (7:12)

7. What happened to the people and the land because they would not listen? (7:13-14)

8. When you pray, give, go to church or read the Bible, is it really for the Lord, or sometimes for yourself?

9. Who are the widow, the fatherless, the sojourner and the poor around you, and how can you show them steadfast love?

10. A hard heart forms one refusal at a time. Is there something God has been telling you that you keep refusing to hear?

Zechariah 8: The LORD Returns to Zion

Scripture

8:1-17 And the word of the LORD of armies came, saying, "Thus says the LORD of armies: 'I am jealous for Zion ***with*** great jealousy, and ***with*** great fury I am jealous for her.' Thus says the LORD: 'I have returned to Zion, and I will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; and Jerusalem will be called "the City of Truth," and the mountain of the LORD of armies, "the Mountain of Holiness."' Thus says the LORD of armies: 'Old men and old women will again sit in the open squares of Jerusalem, and each man ***with*** his staff in his hand because of ***the*** abundance of days. And the open squares of the city will be filled ***with*** boys and girls playing in its open squares.' Thus says the LORD of armies: 'If it is too wonderful in the eyes of the remnant of this people in those days, will it also be too wonderful in My eyes?' declares the LORD of armies. Thus says the LORD of armies: 'Look, I am saving My people from the land of ***the*** east and from the land of the setting of the sun; and I will bring them, and they will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness.' Thus says the LORD of armies: 'Let your hands be strong, you who are hearing in these days these words from the mouth of the prophets who ***were present*** on the day the house of the LORD of armies was founded, ***that*** the temple ***might*** be built. For before those days ***there*** was no wage for man, and ***there*** was no wage for the animal; and for the one going out and for the one coming in ***there*** was no peace from the adversary; and I sent all men, each man against his neighbor. And now I ***will*** not ***be*** to the remnant of this people as in the former days,' declares the LORD of armies. 'For ***there will be*** the seed of peace: the vine will give its fruit, and the land will give its produce, and the heavens will give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to inherit all these. And it will be ***that*** just as you were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you, and you will be a blessing. Do not be afraid; let your hands be strong.' For thus says the LORD of armies: 'Just as I planned to do harm to you when your fathers provoked Me to anger,' says the LORD of armies, 'and I did not relent, so I have again planned in these days to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Do not be afraid. These ***are*** the things that you shall do: speak truth, each man with his neighbor; judge truth and a judgment of peace in your gates; and each man, do not devise in your heart the evil ***against*** his neighbor, and do not love an oath of falsehood; for all these ***are what*** I hate,' declares the LORD."

8:18-23 And the word of the LORD of armies came to me, saying, "Thus says the LORD of armies: 'The fast of the fourth ***month*** and the fast of the fifth and the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth will become for the house of Judah joy and gladness and good appointed times; and love the truth and the peace.' Thus says the LORD of armies: '***It will*** yet ***be*** that peoples will come, and the inhabitants of many cities; and the inhabitants of one ***city*** will go to another, saying, "Let us surely go to entreat the face of the LORD and to seek the LORD of armies. Let me go, even I." And many peoples and mighty nations will come to seek the LORD of armies in Jerusalem and to entreat the face of the LORD.' Thus says the LORD of armies: 'In those days ten men from all the tongues of the nations will take hold, and they will take hold of the corner ***of the robe*** of a Jewish man, saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard ***that*** God ***is*** with you."'"

Preview

Chapter 7 looked back at the sad past. Chapter 8 looks forward to a bright future. Ten times in this chapter we read, "Thus says the LORD of armies," and each time God adds another promise. He is jealous for Zion. He has returned to dwell in Jerusalem, which will be called the City of Truth. Old men and women will sit in its streets, and boys and girls will play there. He will bring His people home from east and west. The land will give its fruit again, and the people who were a curse among the nations will become a blessing.

Then God finally answers the question from Bethel. The fasts that remembered the fall of Jerusalem will become feasts of joy and gladness. And the chapter ends with one of the most beautiful pictures in the prophets. People from many nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the LORD, and ten men from every language will take hold of the robe of one Jewish man and say, "Let us go with you, for we have heard ***that*** God ***is*** with you." I believe these promises had a beginning in Zechariah's day and will have their full answer when Christ reigns in Jerusalem.

Study

8:1-3 *And the word of the LORD of armies came, saying, "Thus says the LORD of armies: 'I am jealous for Zion **with** great jealousy, and **with** great fury I am jealous for her.' Thus says the LORD: 'I have returned to Zion, and I will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; and Jerusalem will be called "the City of Truth," and the mountain of the LORD of armies, "the Mountain of Holiness."'*

"And the word of the LORD of armies came, saying." This is the first of ten sayings in the chapter, each beginning, "Thus says the LORD of armies" or "Thus says the LORD."

God says: "I am jealous for Zion ***with*** great jealousy, and ***with*** great fury I am jealous for her." We saw this in 1:14. God's jealousy is His burning, protective love for His people. He loves Zion so much that He is furious with anyone who harms her, and He will not share her with idols.

"I have returned to Zion, and I will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem." God had left His temple in Ezekiel's day because of the people's sin (Ezekiel 10:18-19; 11:23). Now He says He has come back. Jerusalem "will be called" by a new name, "the City of Truth." The city of lies and false prophets will become a city where truth is spoken and lived. "And the mountain of the LORD of armies" will be called "the Mountain of Holiness." Holiness means being set apart for God, pure and without sin.

Has Jerusalem ever been the City of Truth and the Mountain of Holiness? Not yet. It was not in Zechariah's day, nor when it rejected Jesus, nor today. I believe this will be fully true when the Lord Jesus returns and reigns there (14:9-11, 20-21).

8:4-5 *Thus says the LORD of armies: 'Old men and old women will again sit in the open squares of Jerusalem, and each man **with** his staff in his hand because of **the** abundance of days. And the open squares of the city will be filled **with** boys and girls playing in its open squares.'*

"Old men and old women will again sit in the open squares of Jerusalem, and each man ***with*** his staff in his hand because of ***the*** abundance of days." The open squares were the public places near

the city gates, where people met, talked and did business. The old men and women would be so old they needed a cane, and they would sit and enjoy the sunshine.

"And the open squares of the city will be filled ***with*** boys and girls playing in its open squares." What a picture of peace. In war, the old and the young are the first to die (Lamentations 2:11, 21). In a city at peace, the old live long and the children play in the streets without fear.

God does not only promise great things like a rebuilt temple. He promises ordinary joys: grandparents resting, children laughing. That tells us something about His heart. He cares about the simple happiness of everyday life. Isaiah describes the kingdom in the same way, with people living long lives (Isaiah 65:20).

8:6 *Thus says the LORD of armies: 'If it is too wonderful in the eyes of the remnant of this people in those days, will it also be too wonderful in My eyes?' declares the LORD of armies.*

"If it is too wonderful in the eyes of the remnant of this people in those days, will it also be too wonderful in My eyes?" declares the LORD of armies. Too wonderful means too hard to believe, too amazing to happen. The remnant, the small group that came back, looked at their little town and their unfinished temple and thought, that could never happen here.

God's answer is a question. It may be too hard for you to believe. Is it too hard for Me? God asked Abraham the same thing when Sarah laughed at the promise of a son: "Is anything too wonderful for the LORD?" (Genesis 18:14). Jeremiah said, "nothing is too difficult for You" (Jeremiah 32:17).

What promise of God seems too good to be true to you? Remember that it is not too hard for Him.

8:7-8 *Thus says the LORD of armies: 'Look, I am saving My people from the land of* ***the*** *east and from the land of the setting of the sun; and I will bring them, and they will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness.'*

"Look, I am saving My people from the land of ***the*** east and from the land of the setting of the sun." The east and the west mean everywhere. God will bring His people back from every corner of the earth. In Zechariah's day, most Jews had come from Babylon in the east. But God speaks of the whole world.

"And I will bring them, and they will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness." This is the heart of God's covenant with Israel, repeated again and again (Exodus 6:7; Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:28). God wants a people who belong to Him and a relationship with them that is faithful and right.

I believe this promise reaches to the end of the age, when God will gather Israel from all the nations to their land and they will know Him as their God (Ezekiel 36:24-28; Romans 11:26). The partial returns we have seen in history are signs that God is not finished.

8:9-10 *Thus says the LORD of armies: 'Let your hands be strong, you who are hearing in these days these words from the mouth of the prophets who **were present** on the day the house of the LORD of armies was founded, **that** the temple **might** be built. For before those days **there** was no wage for man, and **there** was no wage for the animal; and for the one going out and for the one coming in **there** was no peace from the adversary; and I sent all men, each man against his neighbor.*

"Let your hands be strong, you who are hearing in these days these words from the mouth of the prophets." The prophets were Haggai and Zechariah, who had spoken "on the day the house of the LORD of armies was founded." Let your hands be strong means, keep working, do not give up.

God reminds them how things were before they started building again. "For before those days ***there*** was no wage for man, and ***there*** was no wage for the animal." There was no work and no profit. Haggai had said the same: they worked, but their wages went into a bag with holes (Haggai 1:6). "And for the one going out and for the one coming in ***there*** was no peace from the adversary." There was no safety. Enemies troubled them (Ezra 4). "And I sent all men, each man against his neighbor." Even inside the community there was strife.

8:11-13 *And now I **will** not **be** to the remnant of this people as in the former days,' declares the LORD of armies. 'For **there will be** the seed of peace: the vine will give its fruit, and the land will give its produce, and the heavens will give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to inherit all these. And it will be **that** just as you were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you, and you will be a blessing. Do not be afraid; let your hands be strong.'*

"And now I ***will*** not ***be*** to the remnant of this people as in the former days." Everything was about to change. "For ***there will be*** the seed of peace." The seed of peace means that what they planted would grow in peace. "The vine will give its fruit, and the land will give its produce, and the heavens will give their dew." The curse of drought in Haggai 1:10-11 would be lifted. God would bless the land again.

"And it will be ***that*** just as you were a curse among the nations, O house of Judah and house of Israel, so I will save you, and you will be a blessing." For years, other nations used Israel's name in curses. When they wanted to wish disaster on someone, they would say, may you be like Judah (Jeremiah 24:9). Now God would turn it around. Israel would be a blessing. That was God's first promise to Abraham: "in you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). Notice that God speaks of both houses, Judah and Israel. He has not forgotten the northern tribes.

"Do not be afraid; let your hands be strong." When God promises His blessing, His people can work without fear.

8:14-15 *For thus says the LORD of armies: 'Just as I planned to do harm to you when your fathers provoked Me to anger,' says the LORD of armies, 'and I did not relent, so I have again planned in these days to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Do not be afraid.*

"Just as I planned to do harm to you when your fathers provoked Me to anger," says the LORD of armies, "and I did not relent." God had promised to judge the fathers, and He did exactly what He said. He did not change His mind.

"So I have again planned in these days to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Do not be afraid." Here is the comfort. The same God who kept His word in judgment will keep His word in blessing. If He was faithful to His warnings, He will be faithful to His promises. We can trust Him both ways.

8:16-17 *These **are** the things that you shall do: speak truth, each man with his neighbor; judge truth and a judgment of peace in your gates; and each man, do not devise in your heart the evil **against** his neighbor, and do not love an oath of falsehood; for all these **are what** I hate,' declares the LORD."*

"These ***are*** the things that you shall do." Blessing does not mean God's people can live however they want. Here is how they should live.

"Speak truth, each man with his neighbor." Paul quotes this in Ephesians 4:25. "Judge truth and a judgment of peace in your gates." The gates were where the elders sat as judges. Their decisions should be true and should bring peace, not division.

"And each man, do not devise in your heart the evil ***against*** his neighbor, and do not love an oath of falsehood." An oath of falsehood is a lie sworn under oath. "For all these ***are what*** I hate," declares the LORD.

These are the same things the former prophets said (7:9-10). God's standards do not change. Lying, scheming and false swearing are things He hates. Truth, justice and peace are what He loves. The City of Truth (8:3) needs people of truth.

8:18-19 *And the word of the LORD of armies came to me, saying, "Thus says the LORD of armies: 'The fast of the fourth **month** and the fast of the fifth and the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth will become for the house of Judah joy and gladness and good appointed times; and love the truth and the peace.'*

"And the word of the LORD of armies came to me." Now, at last, God answers the question from Bethel (7:3).

"The fast of the fourth ***month*** and the fast of the fifth and the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth will become for the house of Judah joy and gladness and good appointed times." The Jews kept four fasts for the fall of Jerusalem. In the tenth month, Babylon began its siege of the city (2 Kings 25:1). In the fourth month, the walls were broken through (Jeremiah 39:2). In the fifth month, the temple was burned (2 Kings 25:8-9). In the seventh month, Gedaliah was murdered (2 Kings 25:25).

God says all four days of sorrow will become feasts of joy. Appointed times were the feasts of Israel's calendar. The days that remembered disaster would one day celebrate salvation. God did not just say, you may stop fasting. He said, I will turn your mourning into joy (Jeremiah 31:13). That is what He does.

"And love the truth and the peace." The answer ends with a command. Joy and gladness go together with loving truth and peace.

Jesus spoke about fasting too. While He, the Bridegroom, was with His disciples, they did not fast. After He was taken away, they would fast (Matthew 9:15). But when He comes again, the mourning will turn into joy.

8:20-22 *Thus says the LORD of armies: '**It will** yet **be** that peoples will come, and the inhabitants of many cities; and the inhabitants of one **city** will go to another, saying, "Let us surely go to entreat the face of the LORD and to seek the LORD of armies. Let me go, even I." And many peoples and mighty nations will come to seek the LORD of armies in Jerusalem and to entreat the face of the LORD.'*

"***It will*** yet ***be*** that peoples will come, and the inhabitants of many cities." Now God looks beyond Israel to the nations. "And the inhabitants of one ***city*** will go to another, saying," and here is what they will say: "Let us surely go to entreat the face of the LORD and to seek the LORD of armies." One city will invite another. And each person will say, "Let me go, even I." No one will want to be left out.

"And many peoples and mighty nations will come to seek the LORD of armies in Jerusalem and to entreat the face of the LORD." Isaiah and Micah saw the same thing: many peoples will say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD" (Isaiah 2:3; Micah 4:2).

Imagine the scene. In Zechariah's day Jerusalem was a small, weak town that the nations ignored. God says that one day the great nations will come to it to seek Him. This began in part when the gospel went out from Jerusalem to all nations (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). But I believe the full picture is the kingdom of Christ, when "everyone who is left of all the nations" will go up to Jerusalem year by year to worship the King (14:16).

8:23 *Thus says the LORD of armies: 'In those days ten men from all the tongues of the nations will take hold, and they will take hold of the corner **of the robe** of a Jewish man, saying, "Let us go with you, for we have heard **that** God **is** with you."'"*

"In those days ten men from all the tongues of the nations will take hold, and they will take hold of the corner ***of the robe*** of a Jewish man." Ten men means many. In the Bible, ten is often a round number for a full group. Tongues means languages. People from every language will grab hold of one Jewish man. The corner of the robe was where the tassels were sewn, the blue cords God told Israel to wear to remember His commandments (Numbers 15:38-39). To take hold of it was to cling to him, to ask to go along.

And they will say, "Let us go with you, for we have heard ***that*** God ***is*** with you." The nations will recognize that the God of Israel is the true God, and that He is with His people.

What a turnaround. For centuries, the Jewish people have been scorned, scattered and persecuted. God says a day is coming when the nations will seek them out because God is with them.

What does this mean for us now? It reminds us that "salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22). God gave the Scriptures through them (Romans 3:2), and the Savior was a Jewish man, Jesus of Nazareth. Every Gentile who has come to God through Christ has, in a sense, taken hold of the robe of a Jewish man and said, let us go with you. But this verse is also a promise about the nation of Israel. God is not finished with them (Romans 11:1-2, 25-29). In the kingdom, the people of Israel will be honored among the nations as God's people. That is not the church taking Israel's place. It is God keeping His promise to Israel, and blessing the nations through them, just as He told Abraham.

Summary

The LORD of armies said He was jealous for Zion and had returned to dwell in Jerusalem, which would be called the City of Truth. Old men and women would sit in its squares, and boys and girls would play there. What seemed too wonderful to the remnant was not too wonderful for Him. He would gather His people from east and west to be His people in truth and righteousness. Those who heard the prophets were to let their hands be strong, for the days of no wages and no peace were ending, and the land would give its fruit. Judah and Israel, once a curse among the nations, would be a blessing. They were to speak truth, judge fairly and not plot evil or love false oaths. The four fasts for Jerusalem's fall would become joyful feasts. Many peoples would come to seek the LORD in Jerusalem, and ten men from every language would take hold of the robe of a Jew, because they had heard that God was with him.

Study Questions

1. What does God say about His jealousy for Zion, and what will Jerusalem be called? (8:2-3)
2. What picture of peace does God give in verses 4 and 5?
3. What question does God ask the remnant about things that seem too wonderful? (8:6)
4. How would Judah and Israel change from a curse to a blessing among the nations? (8:13)
5. What things does God tell His people to do, and what does He say He hates? (8:16-17)
6. What would happen to the four fasts that remembered the fall of Jerusalem? (8:19)
7. What will people from many nations and languages do in those days, and why? (8:20-23)
8. What promise of God seems too wonderful to you right now? How does 8:6 speak to that?
9. God promises ordinary joys like old people resting and children playing. What everyday blessings can you thank Him for this week?
10. The nations will say, "we have heard that God is with you." Could the people around you say that about you? Why or why not?

Zechariah 9: Your King Comes to You

Scripture

9:1-8 The oracle of the word of the LORD ***is*** against the land of Hadrach, and Damascus ***is*** its resting place; for the eye of mankind and of all the tribes of Israel ***is*** toward the LORD; and also Hamath, ***which*** borders on it; Tyre and Sidon, for she is very wise. And Tyre built for herself a fortress, and she heaped up silver like the dust, and gold like the mud of ***the*** streets. Look, the Lord will dispossess her, and He will strike her wealth in the sea, and she will be consumed by the fire. Ashkelon will see ***it*** and be afraid, and Gaza, and she will writhe exceedingly, and Ekron, for her confidence has been put to shame. And a king will perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon will not be inhabited. And a mixed people will dwell in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of ***the*** Philistines. And I will remove his blood from his mouth and his detestable things from between his teeth; and he also will be left for our God, and he will be like a chief in Judah, and Ekron like a Jebusite. And I will encamp at My house ***as*** a guard, against the one passing through and against the one returning; and an oppressor will not pass over them again, for now I have seen with My eyes.

9:9-17 Rejoice exceedingly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Look, your King comes to you; He ***is*** righteous and saved, lowly and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, a son of female donkeys. And I will cut off chariotry from Ephraim and ***the*** horse from Jerusalem, and the bow of war will be cut off; and He will speak peace to the nations, and His rule ***will be*** from sea to sea, and from ***the*** River to the ends of ***the*** earth. Also you, by the blood of your covenant I have set free your prisoners from a pit ***in*** which ***there is*** no water. Return to the stronghold, O prisoners of the hope; even today ***I am*** declaring ***that*** I will restore double to you. For I will bend Judah for Myself ***as*** a bow; I will fill ***it with*** Ephraim; and I will stir up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and I will make you like the sword of a mighty man. And the LORD will appear over them, and His arrow will go out like the lightning; and the Lord GOD will blow on the ram's horn, and He will go in the storm winds of ***the*** south. The LORD of armies will defend them, and they will eat and subdue the stones of a sling; and they will drink ***and*** be loud as ***with*** wine, and they will be full like the bowl, like the corners of an altar. And the LORD their God will save them on that day as the flock of His people; for ***they are*** the stones of a crown, lifting themselves up over His land. For how ***great is*** His goodness, and how ***great is*** His beauty! Grain will make the young men flourish, and new wine the virgins.

Preview

Chapter 9 begins the second half of Zechariah. There are no more dates or night visions. These chapters look far ahead. The first section is an oracle of judgment on the nations around Israel, from Syria down to the Philistine coast. Yet even among the Philistines, a remnant will belong to God, and God will camp around His own house to guard it.

Then comes one of the best-known prophecies in the Old Testament. "Look, your King comes to you; He ***is*** righteous and saved, lowly and riding on a donkey." Jesus fulfilled these words when He rode into Jerusalem the week He was crucified. The next verse leaps ahead to His reign of

peace, and the chapter ends with God freeing His prisoners and making them shine like jewels in a crown.

Study

9:1-2 *The oracle of the word of the LORD **is** against the land of Hadrach, and Damascus **is** its resting place; for the eye of mankind and of all the tribes of Israel **is** toward the LORD; and also Hamath, **which** borders on it; Tyre and Sidon, for she is very wise.*

"The oracle of the word of the LORD." An oracle is a message from God, and the Hebrew word carries the idea of a burden, a heavy message, often of judgment. Chapters 9-11 are the first oracle, and chapters 12-14 are the second (12:1).

The oracle is "against the land of Hadrach, and Damascus ***is*** its resting place." Hadrach was a region in northern Syria. Damascus was the capital of Syria. The word of the LORD would come to rest on Damascus, that is, it would settle there in judgment.

"For the eye of mankind and of all the tribes of Israel ***is*** toward the LORD." This may mean that all people, and Israel too, will look to the LORD when they see what He does. Or it may mean that the LORD's eye is on all people, watching them. Either way, nothing happens outside His sight.

"And also Hamath, ***which*** borders on it." Hamath was another city in Syria, to the north. "Tyre and Sidon, for she is very wise." Tyre and Sidon were the great seaport cities of Phoenicia, on the coast north of Israel. They were famous for trade and shrewd in business. But worldly wisdom cannot save a city from God.

The oracle moves from Syria down the coast to Philistia. Many Bible teachers have noticed that this follows the path of Alexander the Great, who in 333 and 332 B.C. took Damascus, destroyed Tyre and then took Gaza. That is a fair reading of how these words were first fulfilled.

9:3-4 *And Tyre built for herself a fortress, and she heaped up silver like the dust, and gold like the mud of **the** streets. Look, the Lord will dispossess her, and He will strike her wealth in the sea, and she will be consumed by the fire.*

"And Tyre built for herself a fortress." Tyre was built partly on an island about half a mile off the coast, with walls rising from the water. It seemed impossible to take. Nebuchadnezzar besieged it for thirteen years and never fully conquered the island city. "And she heaped up silver like the dust, and gold like the mud of ***the*** streets." Tyre was rich beyond measure from its trade across the Mediterranean (Ezekiel 27).

"Look, the Lord will dispossess her." To dispossess means to take away her property and drive her out. "And He will strike her wealth in the sea, and she will be consumed by the fire." Alexander built a causeway, a road of stone and earth, out to the island, broke through the walls after a seven-month siege and burned the city. Her walls and her wealth could not save her.

9:5-6 *Ashkelon will see **it** and be afraid, and Gaza, and she will writhe exceedingly, and Ekron, for her confidence has been put to shame. And a king will perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon will not be inhabited. And a mixed people will dwell in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of **the** Philistines.*

"Ashkelon will see ***it*** and be afraid, and Gaza, and she will writhe exceedingly, and Ekron." These were cities of the Philistines, Israel's old enemies on the southern coast. When they saw mighty Tyre fall, they would tremble. "For her confidence has been put to shame." Ekron had hoped Tyre would stop the invader. That hope was gone.

"And a king will perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon will not be inhabited." Gaza's ruler would be destroyed. Gaza held out against Alexander for two months, and when it fell, its commander was put to death.

"And a mixed people will dwell in Ashdod." A mixed people means foreigners, people of mixed race and no proper descent. The proud Philistines would lose their own city to strangers. "And I will cut off the pride of ***the*** Philistines." The Philistines as a nation would disappear from history, and they did.

9:7 *And I will remove his blood from his mouth and his detestable things from between his teeth; and he also will be left for our God, and he will be like a chief in Judah, and Ekron like a Jebusite.*

"And I will remove his blood from his mouth and his detestable things from between his teeth." The Philistines ate meat with the blood still in it and ate foods sacrificed to idols, things the Law called detestable (Leviticus 17:10-12). God would take those things out of their mouths. In other words, He would end their idolatry.

Then comes a surprise. "And he also will be left for our God." Some of the Philistines would turn to the LORD. "And he will be like a chief in Judah, and Ekron like a Jebusite." The Jebusites lived in Jerusalem before David took it and were later absorbed into Israel (2 Samuel 24:18-24). Even Israel's bitter enemies would one day be counted among God's people.

9:8 *And I will encamp at My house **as** a guard, against the one passing through and against the one returning; and an oppressor will not pass over them again, for now I have seen with My eyes.*

"And I will encamp at My house ***as*** a guard, against the one passing through and against the one returning." While armies marched up and down the coast, God would camp around His house like a soldier on guard. When Alexander's army passed by, Jerusalem was not destroyed.

"And an oppressor will not pass over them again, for now I have seen with My eyes." This reaches further than Alexander. Jerusalem has been oppressed many times since. The full promise waits for the kingdom of Christ (14:11).

9:9 *Rejoice exceedingly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Look, your King comes to you; He **is** righteous and saved, lowly and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, a son of female donkeys.*

Now comes the heart of the chapter. "Rejoice exceedingly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!" After all the judgment on the nations, God calls His people to shout for joy. Why?

"Look, your King comes to you." Israel had not had a king since 586 B.C. The governor Zerubbabel was from David's line but was not a king. Now God promises that their King is coming. Notice the word "your." He is Israel's own King, the promised Son of David. And He comes "to you," to Jerusalem.

What kind of King is He? "He ***is*** righteous." He is right in all He does and always does what is right. Jeremiah called Him "a righteous Branch" (Jeremiah 23:5). Unlike so many of Israel's kings, He has no sin.

"And saved." The Hebrew word can mean having salvation, or victorious, delivered by God. Some translations say He brings salvation. The point is that He comes with God's saving power. Through His death and resurrection, He won the victory and brings salvation to His people.

"Lowly." He is humble, gentle and poor. He does not come with pride or force. Jesus said, "I am gentle and humble in heart" (Matthew 11:29). He "humbled Himself, having become obedient as far as death, even death of a cross" (Philippians 2:8).

"And riding on a donkey, and on a colt, a son of female donkeys." A conquering king rode a war horse. A donkey was an animal of peace. Judges and kings in Israel's early days rode donkeys and mules (Judges 10:4; 1 Kings 1:33), so a king on a donkey came in peace, not in war. The repetition, donkey and colt, is Hebrew poetry, saying the same thing twice to make it vivid.

More than five hundred years later, Jesus fulfilled this prophecy exactly. He sent two disciples to bring a donkey and her colt (Matthew 21:1-3), "so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled" (Matthew 21:4). Matthew quotes Zechariah: "Look, your King comes to you, gentle and mounted on a donkey, even a colt, ***the*** foal of a beast of burden" (Matthew 21:5). John quotes it too: "Do not fear, daughter of Zion; look, your King comes, sitting on a colt of a donkey" (John 12:15).

Jesus did this on purpose. He was saying plainly, I am your King. The crowds cried, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" (Matthew 21:9). But many wanted a warrior to drive out Rome. He came lowly, on His way to a cross, and He wept over the city because it did not know the time of its visitation (Luke 19:41-44).

What kind of King do you want? Many people want a Jesus who will fix their problems and fight their battles. He does care about those things. But He came first to deal with our deepest problem, our sin. He came humble, to die. Have you welcomed Him as He really is?

9:10 *And I will cut off chariotry from Ephraim and **the** horse from Jerusalem, and the bow of war will be cut off; and He will speak peace to the nations, and His rule **will be** from sea to sea, and from **the** River to the ends of **the** earth.*

"And I will cut off chariotry from Ephraim and ***the*** horse from Jerusalem, and the bow of war will be cut off." Ephraim stands for the northern tribes of Israel, and Jerusalem for Judah. God will remove the weapons of war from His whole people. They will not need them anymore.

"And He will speak peace to the nations, and His rule ***will be*** from sea to sea, and from ***the*** River to the ends of ***the*** earth." The King will rule the whole world. The River was the Euphrates, the far boundary of the land promised to Abraham (Genesis 15:18). Psalm 72:8 uses the same words about the King's dominion: "from sea to sea, and from ***the*** River to the ends of ***the*** earth." He will not rule by force, but by speaking peace.

Verse 9 and verse 10 sit side by side, but they describe two different times. Verse 9 came true when Jesus rode into Jerusalem. Verse 10 has not yet come true. The prophets often saw the first and second comings of Christ together, like two mountain peaks that look close from far away, with a wide valley between them (see Isaiah 9:6-7). Jesus came first as the lowly King on a donkey. He will come again as the King of kings on a white horse (Revelation 19:11-16), and then He will speak peace to the nations and reign over the whole earth (14:9).

9:11-12 *Also you, by the blood of your covenant I have set free your prisoners from a pit **in** which **there is** no water. Return to the stronghold, O prisoners of the hope; even today **I am** declaring **that** I will restore double to you.*

"Also you, by the blood of your covenant I have set free your prisoners from a pit ***in*** which ***there is*** no water." A covenant was sealed with blood. At Sinai, Moses sprinkled the people with "the blood of the covenant" (Exodus 24:8). A pit with no water was a dry cistern, sometimes used as a prison, as for Joseph (Genesis 37:24) and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 38:6). God's scattered people were like prisoners in such a pit.

We cannot read about the blood of the covenant without thinking of Jesus. At the Last Supper He said, "this is My blood, the ***blood*** of the new covenant, which is being poured out for many for forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28). By His blood, prisoners of sin are set free.

"Return to the stronghold, O prisoners of the hope." What a beautiful name: prisoners of hope. They were still captives, but they were bound to a hope that could not fail. The stronghold may be Jerusalem, or God Himself. "Even today ***I am*** declaring ***that*** I will restore double to you." Double means a full, generous blessing, twice what they had lost (Isaiah 61:7).

9:13 *For I will bend Judah for Myself **as** a bow; I will fill **it with** Ephraim; and I will stir up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece, and I will make you like the sword of a mighty man.*

"For I will bend Judah for Myself ***as*** a bow; I will fill ***it with*** Ephraim." God will use His people like a warrior uses a bow and arrows. Judah is the bow, and Ephraim is the arrow. Both kingdoms, north and south, will be united in God's hand.

"And I will stir up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece." When Zechariah spoke, Greece did not rule Israel. After Alexander, Greek kings did. In the second century B.C., the Greek king Antiochus IV tried to stamp out the worship of the LORD and defiled the temple. The Maccabees led a revolt, defeated the Greek armies and cleansed the temple in 164 B.C. Many Bible teachers see that victory as the first fulfillment of this verse (see Daniel 8:21-25; 11:21-35).

"And I will make you like the sword of a mighty man." Weak Judah would become strong in God's hand.

9:14-15 *And the LORD will appear over them, and His arrow will go out like the lightning; and the Lord GOD will blow on the ram's horn, and He will go in the storm winds of **the** south. The LORD of armies will defend them, and they will eat and subdue the stones of a sling; and they will drink **and** be loud as **with** wine, and they will be full like the bowl, like the corners of an altar.*

"And the LORD will appear over them, and His arrow will go out like the lightning." God fights for His people like a warrior in a storm. "And the Lord GOD will blow on the ram's horn," the trumpet that called Israel to battle, "and He will go in the storm winds of ***the*** south."

"The LORD of armies will defend them," and they will trample the enemy's sling stones. "And they will drink ***and*** be loud as ***with*** wine, and they will be full like the bowl, like the corners of an altar." The altar bowls were filled with the blood of sacrifices. The picture is of a victory that is complete and full.

9:16-17 *And the LORD their God will save them on that day as the flock of His people; for **they are** the stones of a crown, lifting themselves up over His land. For how **great is** His goodness, and how **great is** His beauty! Grain will make the young men flourish, and new wine the virgins.*

"And the LORD their God will save them on that day as the flock of His people." God the Warrior is also God the Shepherd. He saves His people as a shepherd saves his flock. "For ***they are*** the stones of a crown, lifting themselves up over His land." God's people are like jewels set in a crown, shining over His land. They are precious to Him. Malachi says God's people will be His "treasured possession" (Malachi 3:17).

"For how ***great is*** his goodness, and how ***great is*** his beauty!" Some read this as speaking of God's goodness and beauty, and some of the goodness and beauty of the land and people He blesses. Either way, the chapter ends in wonder. "Grain will make the young men flourish, and new wine the virgins." In the kingdom there will be plenty, and the young will grow strong and full of joy.

Summary

An oracle of the LORD came against Hadrach, Damascus, Hamath, Tyre and Sidon. Tyre heaped up silver and gold behind her fortress, but the Lord would strike her power and burn her. The Philistine cities would be afraid and lose their pride, yet a remnant of them would belong to God, and God would guard His house. The daughter of Zion was called to rejoice, because her King was coming, righteous and bringing salvation, humble and riding on a donkey's colt. He would end war, speak peace to the nations and rule to the ends of the earth. Because of the blood of His

covenant, God would free His prisoners from the waterless pit and restore double to the prisoners of hope. He would use Judah and Ephraim as His bow against the sons of Greece, appear over them like lightning and defend them. On that day He would save them as His flock, and they would sparkle in His land like jewels in a crown.

Study Questions

1. Which nations and cities does the oracle in 9:1-7 speak against?

2. What did Tyre trust in, and what would happen to her? (9:3-4)

3. What surprising promise does God make about a remnant of the Philistines? (9:7)

4. How does Zechariah describe the coming King, and what would He ride? (9:9)

5. How did Jesus fulfill 9:9? (Matthew 21:1-9; John 12:12-16)

6. Why do verses 9 and 10 describe two different comings of Christ?

7. By what does God set His prisoners free, and what does He call them? (9:11-12)

8. Jesus came humble, not as the warrior many expected. What do you expect from Jesus, and does it match who He really is?

9. Are there ways you trust, like Tyre, in walls and wealth rather than in God?

10. God calls His people "prisoners of the hope." What hope are you holding on to while you wait for God to act?

Zechariah 10: The LORD Gathers His People

Scripture

10:1-12 Ask rain from the LORD in the time of ***the*** latter rain; the LORD makes the storm clouds, and He will give them showers of rain, to each man vegetation in the field. For the teraphim speak wickedness, and the diviners see falsehood, and they speak dreams of worthlessness; they comfort ***with*** futility. Therefore they have wandered like sheep; they are afflicted, for ***there is*** no shepherd. My anger has burned against the shepherds, and on the male goats I will visit ***punishment***; for the LORD of armies has visited His flock, the house of Judah, and He will make them like His horse of majesty in the battle. From him ***will come*** a cornerstone, from him a tent peg, from him a bow of war; from him every ruler will go out together. And they will be like mighty men, treading in the mud of ***the*** streets in the battle; and they will fight, for the LORD ***is*** with them, and they will put to shame the riders of horses. And I will make strong the house of Judah, and the house of Joseph I will save, and I will bring them back, for I have compassion on them; and they will be as ***though*** I had not rejected them; for I ***am*** the LORD their God, and I will answer them. And Ephraim will be like a mighty man, and their heart will be glad as ***with*** wine; and their sons will see ***it*** and be glad; let their heart rejoice in the LORD. Let Me whistle for them and gather them, for I have ransomed them; and they will become many as they were many. And I will sow them among the peoples, and in the far places they will remember Me; and they will live with their sons, and they will return. And I will bring them back from the land of Egypt, and from Assyria I will gather them; and to the land of Gilead and Lebanon I will bring them, and ***room*** will not be found for them. And He will pass through the sea ***of*** distress, and He will strike the waves in the sea, and all the depths of ***the*** Nile will dry up; and the pride of Assyria will be brought down, and the scepter of Egypt will depart. And I will make them strong in the LORD, and in His name they will walk about, declares the LORD.

Preview

Chapter 10 continues the promises of chapter 9. It begins with a simple command: ask the LORD for rain. Do not go to household idols and fortune tellers. They speak lies and give empty comfort, and because the people trusted them, they wandered like sheep with no shepherd. God is angry with the false shepherds who led them astray, but He has visited His flock, and He will make them strong like a war horse.

From Judah will come the cornerstone, the tent peg and the battle bow, and every ruler. God will strengthen the house of Judah and save the house of Joseph, the northern tribes who had been scattered long before. He will whistle for them and gather them from Egypt and Assyria and every far place, and bring them home until there is no room left for them in the land. This chapter is one of the great promises in the prophets that God will one day gather all Israel, north and south, back to Himself and to their land.

Study

10:1 *Ask rain from the LORD in the time of **the** latter rain; the LORD makes the storm clouds, and He will give them showers of rain, to each man vegetation in the field.*

"Ask rain from the LORD in the time of ***the*** latter rain." In Israel there were two rainy seasons. The early rain fell in the fall, when the seed was planted. The latter rain fell in the spring, in March and April, and made the grain swell before harvest (Deuteronomy 11:14; James 5:7). Without the latter rain, there would be no crop.

"The LORD makes the storm clouds, and He will give them showers of rain, to each man vegetation in the field." The LORD, not Baal, is the God of the rain. The Canaanites believed Baal, their storm god, sent the rain. Israel had often fallen into worshiping him for that reason. God says, come to Me. Ask Me. I make the clouds and I give the rain.

It is a simple lesson, and we forget it easily. God wants us to ask Him for what we need. Jesus taught us to pray, "Give us today our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). Do you ask God for the ordinary things you need, or do you only pray when things are desperate?

10:2 *For the teraphim speak wickedness, and the diviners see falsehood, and they speak dreams of worthlessness; they comfort **with** futility. Therefore they have wandered like sheep; they are afflicted, for **there is** no shepherd.*

"For the teraphim speak wickedness." Teraphim were household idols, small images kept in the home and used to seek guidance or good luck. Rachel stole her father's teraphim (Genesis 31:19), and Micah kept them in his house of idols (Judges 17:5). They were often used in divination. "And the diviners see falsehood, and they speak dreams of worthlessness." Diviners were fortune tellers who claimed to read the future by signs and omens. The Law of Moses forbade it (Deuteronomy 18:10-12). Their dreams were empty. "They comfort ***with*** futility." They gave people comfort, but it was worthless. It was not true.

"Therefore they have wandered like sheep; they are afflicted, for ***there is*** no shepherd." Because the people trusted idols and fortune tellers instead of God, they wandered off like lost sheep and suffered for it. There was no true leader to guide them. When Jesus saw the crowds, "He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and thrown down, like sheep not having a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36).

People today still look for guidance in all the wrong places: horoscopes, psychics, lucky charms and the advice of anyone who will tell them what they want to hear. It may bring a little comfort for a while, but it is empty. Only God's Word gives true guidance.

10:3 *My anger has burned against the shepherds, and on the male goats I will visit **punishment**; for the LORD of armies has visited His flock, the house of Judah, and He will make them like His horse of majesty in the battle.*

"My anger has burned against the shepherds, and on the male goats I will visit ***punishment***." The shepherds were the leaders of the people, kings, princes, priests and false prophets, who should

have cared for the flock but led it astray. The male goats were the strong, pushy leaders of the flock (Ezekiel 34:17). God was angry with them. Ezekiel 34 says the same: woe to the shepherds who feed themselves and not the sheep.

"For the LORD of armies has visited His flock, the house of Judah." To visit here means to come and care for them. God would punish the bad shepherds and take care of the sheep Himself. Ezekiel heard God say, "I will raise up over them one shepherd, and he shall shepherd them, My servant David" (Ezekiel 34:23). That Shepherd is Jesus, the Son of David, who said, "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:14).

"And He will make them like His horse of majesty in the battle." What a change. The weak, wandering sheep become a proud war horse, the king's own horse in battle. God turns timid people into strong ones.

10:4-5 *From him **will come** a cornerstone, from him a tent peg, from him a bow of war; from him every ruler will go out together. And they will be like mighty men, treading in the mud of **the** streets in the battle; and they will fight, for the LORD **is** with them, and they will put to shame the riders of horses.*

"From him ***will come*** a cornerstone, from him a tent peg, from him a bow of war; from him every ruler will go out together." From him means from Judah. Four pictures describe the leaders who will come from Judah.

A cornerstone is the main stone at the corner of a building, the one the whole structure rests on and lines up with. A tent peg holds a tent firmly in place, and a large peg in a house wall held up the family's valuables (Isaiah 22:23). A bow of war is the weapon that wins the battle. And every ruler, or every leader, would come from Judah too.

Many Bible teachers see the Messiah in these pictures. He came from Judah (Genesis 49:10; Hebrews 7:14). He is the cornerstone: "Jesus Christ Himself being the cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:20; Isaiah 28:16). He is the firm peg on whom everything hangs. He is the warrior who wins the final battle (Revelation 19:11). Others read the verse more generally, as God promising that Judah would have its own good leaders again instead of foreign rulers. Both fit, and the second leads to the first. The best Leader from Judah is Christ.

"And they will be like mighty men, treading in the mud of ***the*** streets in the battle." God's people would trample their enemies like mud in the street. "And they will fight, for the LORD ***is*** with them, and they will put to shame the riders of horses." Riders of horses were the strongest troops of the time. Foot soldiers of Judah would defeat them. Why? Because the LORD was with them.

10:6-7 *And I will make strong the house of Judah, and the house of Joseph I will save, and I will bring them back, for I have compassion on them; and they will be as* ***though*** *I had not rejected them; for I* ***am*** *the LORD their God, and I will answer them. And Ephraim will be like a mighty man, and their heart will be glad as* ***with*** *wine; and their sons will see* ***it*** *and be glad; let their heart rejoice in the LORD.*

"And I will make strong the house of Judah, and the house of Joseph I will save." The house of Judah is the southern kingdom. The house of Joseph is the northern kingdom of Israel, often called Ephraim, after Joseph's son. The northern kingdom had been carried off by Assyria in 722 B.C., two hundred years before Zechariah. Most of its people had never come back. Many thought they were gone for good. God says, I will save them too.

"And I will bring them back, for I have compassion on them." Why would God bring them back? Not because they deserved it, but because of His compassion. "And they will be as ***though*** I had not rejected them." God would restore them so completely that it would be as if they had never been cast off. "For I ***am*** the LORD their God, and I will answer them."

"And Ephraim will be like a mighty man, and their heart will be glad as ***with*** wine." The scattered northern tribes will be strong and joyful. "And their sons will see ***it*** and be glad; let their heart rejoice in the LORD." The joy passes down to their children.

God has not forgotten the northern tribes. Ezekiel saw two sticks, one for Judah and one for Joseph, joined into one in God's hand, so that Israel would be one nation in the land again with one King (Ezekiel 37:15-22). This has not happened yet in full. I believe it will happen when Christ returns.

10:8-9 *Let Me whistle for them and gather them, for I have ransomed them; and they will become many as they were many. And I will sow them among the peoples, and in the far places they will remember Me; and they will live with their sons, and they will return.*

"Let Me whistle for them and gather them, for I have ransomed them." A shepherd whistles to call his sheep, and they come running. A beekeeper whistles to call his bees. God only needs to whistle, and His scattered people will come. Why? "For I have ransomed them." To ransom means to buy back, to pay the price to set a captive free. God had redeemed Israel from Egypt, and He would redeem them again.

"And they will become many as they were many." They would grow in number again, as they did in Egypt (Exodus 1:7).

"And I will sow them among the peoples." The scattering of Israel was God's judgment. But here God calls it sowing, like a farmer scattering seed. Seed is scattered so that it will grow. Even in exile, God had a purpose. "And in the far places they will remember Me." Far from home, they would remember the LORD. "And they will live with their sons, and they will return." They would survive, with their children, and come back.

It is amazing that the Jewish people have survived as a people for nearly two thousand years of scattering among the nations. Many great nations of the ancient world have disappeared. Israel has not. God said they would not.

10:10-12 *And I will bring them back from the land of Egypt, and from Assyria I will gather them; and to the land of Gilead and Lebanon I will bring them, and **room** will not be found for them. And He will pass through the sea **of** distress, and He will strike the waves in the sea, and all the depths of **the** Nile will dry up; and the pride of Assyria will be brought down, and the scepter of Egypt will depart. And I will make them strong in the LORD, and in His name they will walk about, declares the LORD.*

"And I will bring them back from the land of Egypt, and from Assyria I will gather them." Egypt and Assyria were the two old powers that had oppressed and scattered Israel. Here they stand for all the lands of their exile, as in Isaiah 11:11. Assyria as an empire was gone by Zechariah's day, but the region was still where many of the northern tribes had been taken.

"And to the land of Gilead and Lebanon I will bring them." Gilead was east of the Jordan, and Lebanon was in the north. These were the borders of the land God promised. "And ***room*** will not be found for them." So many would return that there would not be enough room.

"And He will pass through the sea ***of*** distress, and He will strike the waves in the sea, and all the depths of ***the*** Nile will dry up." This is the language of the exodus. God parted the Red Sea for Israel long ago. He will do it again. Whatever sea of trouble stands between His people and home, He will strike it and make a way. Jeremiah said that a day would come when people would no longer speak of God bringing Israel out of Egypt, but of God bringing them from the north and from all the lands where He had banished them (Jeremiah 16:14-15). The second exodus will be greater than the first.

"And the pride of Assyria will be brought down, and the scepter of Egypt will depart." The powers that oppressed God's people will lose their power.

"And I will make them strong in the LORD, and in His name they will walk about, declares the LORD." Their strength would not be their own. It would be "in the LORD." And they would walk in His name, living for Him, under His authority.

That is a good word for us too. Paul says, "be empowered in ***the*** Lord and in the strength of His might" (Ephesians 6:10). Whatever God calls us to, He gives the strength to do it.

Summary

The people were told to ask the LORD for rain in the season of the spring rain, for He makes the storm clouds and gives showers of rain and green plants in the field. The household idols spoke deceit, the diviners saw lies and told false dreams and gave empty comfort, so the people wandered like sheep and suffered for lack of a shepherd. The LORD's anger burned against the shepherds, and He would punish the leaders, but He had visited His flock, the house of Judah, and would make them like His proud horse in battle. From Judah would come the cornerstone, the

tent peg, the battle bow and every ruler. They would be like mighty men trampling the enemy in the mud of the streets, fighting because the LORD was with them and putting the horsemen to shame. God would strengthen the house of Judah and save the house of Joseph, bringing them back because of His compassion, as if He had never rejected them, for He is the LORD their God and would answer them. Ephraim would be like a mighty man, glad as with wine, and their children would rejoice in the LORD. God would whistle for them and gather them, for He had redeemed them, and they would be as many as before. Though He scattered them among the peoples, they would remember Him in far countries and return with their children. He would bring them back from Egypt and Assyria to Gilead and Lebanon until there was no room for them. He would pass through the sea of trouble, strike its waves and dry up the depths of the Nile; the pride of Assyria would be brought down and the scepter of Egypt would depart. The LORD would make them strong in Himself, and they would walk in His name.

Study Questions

1. What does God tell His people to ask for, and from whom? (10:1)

2. What were the teraphim and the diviners, and what did trusting them do to the people? (10:2)

3. Why was God angry with the shepherds, and what did He promise to do for His flock? (10:3)

4. What four things would come from Judah, and how do they point to Christ? (10:4; Ephesians 2:20)

5. Who is the house of Joseph, and what does God promise them? (10:6-7)

6. Why does God say He will gather His people, and what does He compare their scattering to? (10:8-9)

7. How does 10:10-11 describe the return as a new exodus?

8. Do you ask God for the ordinary things you need? What would it look like to bring Him your daily needs this week?

9. Where do people around you look for guidance today in place of God? Where are you tempted to look?

10. God says He will make His people "strong in the LORD." In what area of your life do you need His strength right now?

Zechariah 11: The Rejected Shepherd

Scripture

11:1-17 Open your doors, O Lebanon, and let fire devour among your cedars. Wail, O cypress, for the cedar has fallen, because the majestic ***ones*** have been devastated. Wail, O oaks of Bashan, for the forest of the vintage has come down. The sound of the wailing of the shepherds! For their splendor has been devastated. The sound of the roaring of young lions! For the pride of the Jordan has been devastated. Thus says the LORD my God: "Shepherd the flock of the slaughter, whose buyers kill them and are not held guilty, and ***each of*** their sellers says, 'Blessed ***be*** the LORD, and I have become rich!' And their shepherds do not have pity on them. For I will no longer have pity on the inhabitants of the land," declares the LORD. "And look, I am handing over mankind, each man into the hand of his neighbor and into the hand of his king; and they will crush the land, and I will not deliver ***it*** from their hand." And I shepherded the flock of the slaughter, therefore the afflicted of the flock. And I took for myself two staffs; one I called Favor, and one I called Union; and I shepherded the flock. And I destroyed the three shepherds in one month; and my soul was impatient with them, and their soul also loathed me. And I said, "I will not shepherd you. The dying one, let it die; and the one being destroyed, let it be destroyed; and those who are left, let them devour, each one the flesh of her neighbor." And I took my staff Favor and cut it in pieces, to break my covenant which I had made with all the peoples. And it was broken on that day; and so the afflicted of the flock who were watching me knew that it ***was*** the word of the LORD. And I said to them, "If ***it is*** good in your eyes, give ***me*** my wage; and if not, refrain." And they weighed out my wage, thirty ***pieces of*** silver. And the LORD said to me, "Throw it to the potter, the magnificent price at which I was priced by them." And I took the thirty ***pieces of*** silver and threw it ***into*** the house of the LORD, to the potter. And I cut in pieces my second staff, Union, to break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel. And the LORD said to me, "Take again for yourself the equipment of a foolish shepherd. For look, I am raising up a shepherd in the land; those being destroyed he will not visit, the young he will not seek, and the broken he will not heal, the one standing he will not sustain; and the flesh of the fat he will devour, and their hooves he will tear off. Woe ***to*** the worthless shepherd, who abandons the flock! A sword ***will be*** on his arm and on his right eye! His arm will surely wither, and his right eye will surely grow dim."

Preview

After the bright promises of chapters 9 and 10, chapter 11 turns dark. It opens with a cry of mourning as fire sweeps through the cedars of Lebanon and the oaks of Bashan, and the shepherds wail. Then God gives Zechariah a strange assignment. He is to act out the part of a shepherd over a flock that is headed for slaughter, a flock whose owners sell them off and whose shepherds have no pity on them.

Zechariah takes two staffs, named Favor and Union, and cares for the flock, but the flock despises him. When he asks for his wages, they weigh out thirty pieces of silver, the price of a slave. God tells him to throw it to the potter in the house of the LORD. Zechariah breaks both staffs, and then plays the part of a worthless shepherd who will devour the flock. More than five hundred years

later, the Good Shepherd was rejected and sold for thirty pieces of silver, and the money bought a potter's field. This is one of the clearest prophecies of Christ's rejection in the Old Testament.

Study

11:1-3 *Open your doors, O Lebanon, and let fire devour among your cedars. Wail, O cypress, for the cedar has fallen, because the majestic **ones** have been devastated. Wail, O oaks of Bashan, for the forest of the vintage has come down. The sound of the wailing of the shepherds! For their splendor has been devastated. The sound of the roaring of young lions! For the pride of the Jordan has been devastated.*

"Open your doors, O Lebanon, and let fire devour among your cedars." Lebanon was famous for its tall cedars, the finest wood in the ancient world. Fire is coming, and Lebanon cannot keep it out. "Wail, O cypress, for the cedar has fallen." If the mighty cedar falls, the smaller trees are next. "Wail, O oaks of Bashan," the great forest east of the Sea of Galilee, for it too has come down.

"The sound of the wailing of the shepherds! For their splendor has been devastated." The shepherds' splendor was their pasture. "The sound of the roaring of young lions! For the pride of the Jordan has been devastated." The pride of the Jordan was the thick jungle along the Jordan River where lions lived (Jeremiah 49:19). Even the lions roar because their home is gone.

What is this about? The judgment sweeps through the whole land, north, east and down the Jordan. Trees in the prophets often stand for proud rulers and nations (Isaiah 10:33-34). Many Bible teachers believe these verses describe the judgment that came after Israel rejected the Shepherd of this chapter, the destruction of Jerusalem by Rome in A.D. 70, which Jesus foretold "because you did not know the time of your visitation" (Luke 19:44). Others see a more general picture of judgment on the land and its leaders.

11:4-6 *Thus says the LORD my God: "Shepherd the flock of the slaughter, whose buyers kill them and are not held guilty, and **each of** their sellers says, 'Blessed **be** the LORD, and I have become rich!' And their shepherds do not have pity on them. For I will no longer have pity on the inhabitants of the land," declares the LORD. "And look, I am handing over mankind, each man into the hand of his neighbor and into the hand of his king; and they will crush the land, and I will not deliver **it** from their hand."*

"Thus says the LORD my God," and here is the command: "Shepherd the flock of the slaughter." God tells Zechariah to take the role of a shepherd. A shepherd fed, led and protected the sheep. But this flock was "the flock of the slaughter," sheep meant to be killed.

Who was hurting them? "Whose buyers kill them and are not held guilty." The buyers were foreign rulers. The sellers were Israel's own leaders, who sold out their people for profit and even said, "Blessed ***be*** the LORD," for making them rich. That is hypocrisy at its worst, using God's name to bless greed. "And their shepherds do not have pity on them."

"For I will no longer have pity on the inhabitants of the land," declares the LORD. God had been patient a long time. Now He would hand the people over, "each man into the hand of his neighbor

and into the hand of his king." They would turn on each other and be crushed by a king. At Jesus' trial, the chief priests said, "We have no king except Caesar" (John 19:15). Within forty years, Caesar's armies crushed the land.

11:7 *And I shepherded the flock of the slaughter, therefore the afflicted of the flock. And I took for myself two staffs; one I called Favor, and one I called Union; and I shepherded the flock.*

"And I shepherded the flock of the slaughter, therefore the afflicted of the flock." Zechariah obeyed. He took special care of "the afflicted of the flock," the poor and humble sheep. These were the ones who would recognize his work (11:11).

"And I took for myself two staffs; one I called Favor, and one I called Union; and I shepherded the flock." A shepherd usually carried a rod and a staff (Psalm 23:4). Zechariah's two staffs had names. Favor means grace, kindness or pleasantness. It stood for God's gracious protection. Union means bonds, binding together. It stood for the unity of God's people. A good shepherd brings both: God's favor and a united flock.

This is a picture of the Good Shepherd. When Jesus came, He gave special care to the poor, the sick, the outcast and the humble (Luke 4:18; Matthew 11:5). It was the common people who heard Him gladly (Mark 12:37).

11:8-9 *And I destroyed the three shepherds in one month; and my soul was impatient with them, and their soul also loathed me. And I said, "I will not shepherd you. The dying one, let it die; and the one being destroyed, let it be destroyed; and those who are left, let them devour, each one the flesh of her neighbor."*

"And I destroyed the three shepherds in one month." This is one of the hardest verses in the Old Testament to explain, and Bible teachers have suggested dozens of answers: three short-reigning kings, the three offices of prophet, priest and king, the priests, elders and scribes of Jesus' day, or later rulers. The honest answer is that we do not know for sure. The main point is that the shepherd removed the false shepherds.

"And my soul was impatient with them, and their soul also loathed me." Here is the tragedy. The shepherd grew weary of the flock, and the flock hated him. To loathe means to detest, to be disgusted by. The sheep despised their good shepherd. John says of Jesus, "He came to His own ***things***, and His own ***people*** did not receive Him" (John 1:11).

"And I said," and the shepherd's words were, "I will not shepherd you." Because they rejected him, he gave them up: "The dying one, let it die," and let those who are left devour one another. This is God's judgment, letting people have what they chose. In the Roman siege of A.D. 70, the people suffered from famine and from fighting among themselves.

11:10-11 *And I took my staff Favor and cut it in pieces, to break my covenant which I had made with all the peoples. And it was broken on that day; and so the afflicted of the flock who were watching me knew that it **was** the word of the LORD.*

"And I took my staff Favor and cut it in pieces, to break my covenant which I had made with all the peoples." The staff called Favor stood for God's gracious protection of His people. God had, in a sense, made a covenant with the nations to hold them back from destroying Israel. Now that protection was broken. The nations would be free to come against them.

"And it was broken on that day; and so the afflicted of the flock who were watching me knew that it ***was*** the word of the LORD." The humble sheep, the ones who had been paying attention to the shepherd, understood. They knew this was God speaking. In Jesus' day, the humble believers, His disciples, understood what the leaders did not. Jesus wept over Jerusalem and said its house would be left desolate (Matthew 23:37-38).

11:12 *And I said to them, "If **it is** good in your eyes, give **me** my wage; and if not, refrain." And they weighed out my wage, thirty **pieces of** silver.*

"And I said to them," and here is what he asked: "If ***it is*** good in your eyes, give ***me*** my wage; and if not, refrain." Zechariah asks the people what his work as their shepherd was worth to them. He leaves it up to them. Pay me if you think I am worth it. If not, do not.

"And they weighed out my wage, thirty ***pieces of*** silver." In those days money was weighed, not counted as coins. Thirty pieces of silver was thirty shekels, about twelve ounces of silver. Under the Law of Moses, thirty shekels was the price paid to a master if an ox gored his slave to death (Exodus 21:32). It was the price of a dead slave.

This was an insult. They valued their shepherd, and so their God, at the price of a slave. It would have been better to pay nothing.

11:13 *And the LORD said to me, "Throw it to the potter, the magnificent price at which I was priced by them." And I took the thirty **pieces of** silver and threw it **into** the house of the LORD, to the potter.*

"And the LORD said to me," and here are His words: "Throw it to the potter, the magnificent price at which I was priced by them." Notice who was priced: "at which I was priced." The shepherd's price is God's price. To reject the shepherd was to reject the LORD. The words "the magnificent price" are bitter sarcasm. What a lordly sum! Throw it to the potter means, throw it away, it is fit only for the potter, a man who worked with cheap clay. The potter may have worked in the temple area, making the clay vessels used there.

"And I took the thirty ***pieces of*** silver and threw it ***into*** the house of the LORD, to the potter." Zechariah threw the money into the temple, for the potter.

Now read what happened more than five hundred years later. Judas asked the chief priests what they would give him to hand Jesus over, "And they set for him thirty silver ***coins***" (Matthew 26:15). After Jesus was condemned, Judas brought the money back, saying, "I sinned,

having handed over innocent blood" (Matthew 27:4). He threw the silver into the temple (Matthew 27:5), and the chief priests, unable to put blood money into the treasury, "bought with them the field of the potter for a burial place for the strangers" (Matthew 27:7). Every detail matches.

Matthew then says, "Then was fulfilled what was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet" (Matthew 27:9), and he quotes words that come mostly from Zechariah 11:12-13. Why does he name Jeremiah? Good Bible teachers give several explanations, and they are worth knowing.

First, Matthew may be combining two prophecies, as New Testament writers sometimes did, and naming the more important prophet. Jeremiah also went to a potter's house (Jeremiah 18:1-4), bought a potter's flask and spoke judgment in the valley of Hinnom, the same valley where the potter's field was (Jeremiah 19:1-11), and bought a field with silver as a sign (Jeremiah 32:6-9). The buying of a field comes from Jeremiah, and the thirty pieces thrown to the potter from Zechariah. Mark does the same thing when he quotes Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 together under the name of Isaiah (Mark 1:2-3).

Second, in some ancient Jewish arrangements of the books, Jeremiah stood first among the prophets (one such order is given in the Talmud, in the section called Baba Bathra 14b), and the whole collection could be called by the name of its first book, the way Jesus spoke of "the psalms" for the whole third part of the Hebrew Bible (Luke 24:44).

Third, some suggest that Jeremiah spoke these words and that Zechariah later wrote them down, though Scripture does not say so.

Matthew did not make a mistake. He knew the Scriptures far better than we do. The first explanation is the one most often given, and it fits how New Testament writers sometimes combined passages. The main point is clear: the Good Shepherd was priced at thirty pieces of silver by the people He came to save, just as God said.

11:14 *And I cut in pieces my second staff, Union, to break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.*

"And I cut in pieces my second staff, Union, to break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel." The second staff stood for the unity of God's people. Breaking it meant the brotherhood would be broken. Instead of standing together, the people would be divided against one another.

After the rejection of Jesus, the Jewish nation was torn by bitter fighting between groups, even while the Romans surrounded Jerusalem. The people were scattered, and Jerusalem was "trampled by ***the*** nations" (Luke 21:24). But this is not the end of the story. God promised to bring Judah and Joseph back together (10:6; Ezekiel 37:15-22). What was broken when the Shepherd was rejected will be mended when the Shepherd is received (12:10).

11:15-17 *And the LORD said to me, "Take again for yourself the equipment of a foolish shepherd. For look, I am raising up a shepherd in the land; those being destroyed he will not visit, the young he will not seek, and the broken he will not heal, the one standing he will not sustain; and the flesh of the fat he will devour, and their hooves he will tear off. Woe* ***to*** *the worthless shepherd, who abandons the flock! A sword* ***will be*** *on his arm and on his right eye! His arm will surely wither, and his right eye will surely grow dim."*

"And the LORD said to me," and He said, "Take again for yourself the equipment of a foolish shepherd." Now Zechariah plays a different role. The equipment of a shepherd was his staff, his bag and his sling. A foolish shepherd here means a wicked, worthless one, a man who does not care about God or the sheep.

"For look, I am raising up a shepherd in the land." Because the people rejected the good shepherd, God would allow them to have a bad one. What would he be like? "Those being destroyed he will not visit, the young he will not seek, and the broken he will not heal, the one standing he will not sustain." He will neglect every sheep in need. "And the flesh of the fat he will devour, and their hooves he will tear off." He will eat the sheep, tearing them apart down to the hooves. He uses the flock for himself.

"Woe to the worthless shepherd, who abandons the flock!" Woe is a cry of judgment. "A sword ***will be*** on his arm and on his right eye! His arm will surely wither, and his right eye will surely grow dim." The arm is his strength, the eye his understanding. God will destroy both.

Who is this worthless shepherd? Israel has had many bad leaders. But many Bible teachers believe this points ahead to the final false shepherd, the man of sin (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4) and the beast (Revelation 13). Jesus said, "if another comes in his own name, him you will receive" (John 5:43). He will make a covenant with Israel and then break it (Daniel 9:27). Those who reject the true Shepherd will in the end accept a false one. But Christ will destroy him at His coming (2 Thessalonians 2:8; Revelation 19:20).

What is the lesson for us? Every person will follow some shepherd. If we turn away from Jesus, the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11), we will end up following someone who uses us. Whom are you following?

Summary

Fire was coming on the cedars of Lebanon and the oaks of Bashan, and the shepherds would wail. The LORD told Zechariah to shepherd a flock marked for slaughter, whose buyers and sellers abused them and whose shepherds had no pity. He shepherded them with two staffs, Favor and Union, and removed three shepherds in one month, but the flock detested him, so he gave them up. He broke Favor, ending the covenant with the peoples, and the afflicted of the flock knew it was the word of the LORD. They weighed out his wages, thirty pieces of silver, and the LORD told him to throw that fine price to the potter, so he threw it into the house of the LORD. He broke Union, ending the brotherhood of Judah and Israel. Then he took up the equipment of a foolish shepherd, for God would raise up a worthless shepherd who would devour the flock, and on whom God's judgment would fall.

Study Questions

1. What picture of judgment opens the chapter? (11:1-3)

2. How did the buyers, the sellers and the shepherds treat the flock? (11:5)

3. What were the names of Zechariah's two staffs, and what did each stand for? (11:7, 10, 14)

4. How did the flock feel about their shepherd, and what did he do as a result? (11:8-9)

5. What wage did they weigh out, and what did that amount mean? (11:12; Exodus 21:32)

6. What did God tell Zechariah to do with the money, and how did this come true in Jesus' day? (11:13; Matthew 27:3-10)

7. What will the worthless shepherd be like, and what will happen to him? (11:15-17)

8. The people valued their shepherd at the price of a slave. What is Jesus worth to you? How does your life show it?

9. Those who reject the Good Shepherd end up following a false one. What "shepherds" compete for your attention and trust?

10. The afflicted of the flock understood what others missed. What helps you stay humble and teachable before God's Word?

Zechariah 12: Jerusalem Saved and the One They Pierced

Scripture

12:1-9 The oracle of the word of the LORD concerning Israel. Declares the LORD, who stretches out ***the*** heavens and founds ***the*** earth and forms the spirit of man within him: "Look, I am making Jerusalem a cup of reeling to all the peoples around; and also against Judah it will be, in the siege against Jerusalem. And it will be on that day ***that*** I will make Jerusalem a stone of burden for all the peoples; all who lift it will surely be gashed; and all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it. On that day," declares the LORD, "I will strike every horse with bewilderment and its rider with madness; and over the house of Judah I will open My eyes, and every horse of the peoples I will strike with blindness. And the chiefs of Judah will say in their heart, 'The inhabitants of Jerusalem ***are*** strength to me in the LORD of armies their God.' On that day I will make the chiefs of Judah like a pot of fire among wood and like a torch of fire among sheaves; and they will devour, on the right and on the left, all the peoples around; and Jerusalem will again dwell in her place, in Jerusalem. And the LORD will save the tents of Judah first, so that the splendor of the house of David and the splendor of the inhabitants of Jerusalem will not become great above Judah. On that day the LORD will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and the one who stumbles among them on that day will be like David, and the house of David like God, like the angel of the LORD before them. And it will be on that day ***that*** I will seek to destroy all the nations that are coming against Jerusalem.

12:10-14 And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplications; and they will look to Me, ***to Him*** whom they have pierced; and they will mourn over Him like a mourning over the only ***son***, and ***they will*** show bitterness over Him as ***one*** shows bitterness over the firstborn. On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be great, like the mourning of Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. And the land will mourn, clans ***by*** clans alone: the clan of the house of David alone, and their wives alone; the clan of the house of Nathan alone, and their wives alone; the clan of the house of Levi alone, and their wives alone; the clan of the Shimeites alone, and their wives alone; all the clans that remain, clans ***by*** clans alone, and their wives alone."

Preview

Chapters 12-14 are Zechariah's second oracle, and they look to the very end of this age. The words "on that day" appear again and again. The LORD, who stretched out the heavens and formed the human spirit, says that all the nations of the earth will be gathered against Jerusalem. But Jerusalem will be a cup that makes them reel and a heavy stone that injures everyone who tries to lift it. God will strike their horses with panic and their riders with madness, give the leaders of Judah fire to consume their enemies, and defend the people of Jerusalem so that the weakest among them will be like David.

Then comes the turning point of the whole book. God will pour out on the house of David and the people of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and of prayer. "And they will look to Me, ***to Him*** whom they have pierced." They will mourn for Him as for an only son, with a grief as great as any Israel has

ever known, every family alone, husbands and wives apart. I believe this describes the day when Israel as a nation will recognize Jesus as their Messiah, at the end of the Tribulation when He returns. It is one of the most moving prophecies in the Bible.

Study

12:1 *The oracle of the word of the LORD concerning Israel. Declares the LORD, who stretches out **the** heavens and founds **the** earth and forms the spirit of man within him:*

"The oracle of the word of the LORD concerning Israel." This is the second oracle (see 9:1). The first was mostly against the nations. This one is about Israel.

Before God says what He will do, He tells us who He is: the LORD "who stretches out ***the*** heavens and founds ***the*** earth and forms the spirit of man within him." The God who made all things can do what He promises, and because He formed the human spirit, He can change hearts, as verse 10 will show.

12:2-3 *"Look, I am making Jerusalem a cup of reeling to all the peoples around; and also against Judah it will be, in the siege against Jerusalem. And it will be on that day **that** I will make Jerusalem a stone of burden for all the peoples; all who lift it will surely be gashed; and all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it.*

"Look, I am making Jerusalem a cup of reeling to all the peoples around." A cup of reeling is a cup of strong drink that makes a person stagger and fall. The nations who come against Jerusalem will drink it and stumble in confusion (Isaiah 51:17-23). "And also against Judah it will be, in the siege against Jerusalem." Judah too will be caught up in the siege.

"And it will be on that day ***that*** I will make Jerusalem a stone of burden for all the peoples; all who lift it will surely be gashed." A stone of burden is a heavy stone. Some think of a stone used in ancient weightlifting contests. Anyone who tries to lift it will hurt themselves badly. Jerusalem will be a problem the nations cannot handle, and trying to destroy it will wound them.

"And all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it." This is the key to the setting. Many times armies have come against Jerusalem, but never yet "all the nations of the earth." I believe this describes the end of the Tribulation, the seven-year time of trouble before Christ returns, when the nations gather against Jerusalem in the campaign the Bible calls Armageddon (Revelation 16:14-16; 19:19). Joel 3:2 and Zechariah 14:2 describe the same gathering.

We can already see how Jerusalem is a burden to the nations. A small city has drawn the attention of the whole world. That is no accident. God has set it at the center of His plan.

12:4-5 *On that day," declares the LORD, "I will strike every horse with bewilderment and its rider with madness; and over the house of Judah I will open My eyes, and every horse of the peoples I will strike with blindness. And the chiefs of Judah will say in their heart, 'The inhabitants of Jerusalem* ***are*** *strength to me in the LORD of armies their God.'*

"On that day," declares the LORD, "I will strike every horse with bewilderment and its rider with madness." In ancient warfare, horses were the army's strength. God will strike them with panic and their riders with confusion. The enemy's power will become useless. This is what God did in Israel's old battles, throwing the enemy into confusion (Judges 7:22; 2 Chronicles 20:22-23).

"And over the house of Judah I will open My eyes." God will watch over His people with care. "And every horse of the peoples I will strike with blindness." His eyes will be open on Judah, and the enemy will be blind.

"And the chiefs of Judah will say in their heart," and here is what they will say: "The inhabitants of Jerusalem ***are*** strength to me in the LORD of armies their God." The leaders of Judah will see that Jerusalem stands because of God. Their strength is not in their weapons. It is in the LORD of armies.

12:6-7 *On that day I will make the chiefs of Judah like a pot of fire among wood and like a torch of fire among sheaves; and they will devour, on the right and on the left, all the peoples around; and Jerusalem will again dwell in her place, in Jerusalem. And the LORD will save the tents of Judah first, so that the splendor of the house of David and the splendor of the inhabitants of Jerusalem will not become great above Judah.*

"On that day I will make the chiefs of Judah like a pot of fire among wood and like a torch of fire among sheaves." A pot of fire was a pan of burning coals. Put it in a woodpile or a torch to dry grain, and everything burns. God will make His people powerful against their enemies, "and Jerusalem will again dwell in her place."

"And the LORD will save the tents of Judah first," the homes in the countryside outside the walls. Why? "So that the splendor of the house of David and the splendor of the inhabitants of Jerusalem will not become great above Judah." No one will be able to boast or look down on others. God saves in a way that keeps everyone humble.

12:8-9 *On that day the LORD will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and the one who stumbles among them on that day will be like David, and the house of David like God, like the angel of the LORD before them. And it will be on that day* ***that*** *I will seek to destroy all the nations that are coming against Jerusalem.*

"On that day the LORD will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem." God will be their shield. "And the one who stumbles among them on that day will be like David." The weakest, most feeble person in Jerusalem will be like David, the great warrior who killed Goliath.

"And the house of David like God, like the angel of the LORD before them." The house of David, the royal family, will be like God Himself, like the angel of the LORD going before them. In the exodus,

the angel of God went before Israel to lead and protect them (Exodus 14:19; 23:20). Many see here a hint of the Son of David, Jesus, who is God, leading His people.

"And it will be on that day ***that*** I will seek to destroy all the nations that are coming against Jerusalem." God will set Himself to destroy the armies gathered against His city. Revelation 19:11-21 describes Christ returning to destroy the armies of the beast. Zechariah 14:3 says the LORD will go out and fight against those nations.

12:10 *And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplications; and they will look to Me,* ***to Him*** *whom they have pierced; and they will mourn over Him like a mourning over the only* ***son****, and* ***they will*** *show bitterness over Him as* ***one*** *shows bitterness over the firstborn.*

Now we come to the heart of the chapter and one of the great verses of the Bible. Let us go slowly.

"And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplications." God speaks. He will pour out, like water from a jar, a spirit of grace and supplications. Grace is God's undeserved favor. Supplications are humble, earnest prayers for mercy. This may mean the Holy Spirit, who brings grace and leads people to pray (Ezekiel 39:29; Joel 2:28). It may also mean a new attitude of heart, a spirit that receives grace and cries out to God. Either way, it is God's work. Israel will not turn on its own. God will turn their hearts. This is what God promised in the new covenant: "I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you" (Ezekiel 36:26).

"And they will look to Me, ***to Him*** whom they have pierced." Look carefully at who is speaking. It is the LORD (12:1, 4). He says, they will look to Me, whom they have pierced. To pierce means to stab through, with a sword or spear. How can God be pierced? God is spirit. He cannot be stabbed. Unless God became a man.

That is exactly what happened. The eternal Son of God became a man, Jesus of Nazareth. When He hung on the cross, "one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out" (John 19:34). John, who was there, saw it, and he wrote, "And again another Scripture says," and then he quoted Zechariah: "They will look on ***Him*** whom they pierced" (John 19:37). John tells us that the One pierced on the cross was the One Zechariah spoke of. Jesus is the LORD who was pierced.

Then notice the change of words. "To Me," and then "over Him." The LORD says they will look to Me, and then says they will mourn over Him. The One pierced is the LORD, and yet He is also spoken of as another person. This fits what the New Testament teaches about God the Father and God the Son. The Son is God, and He is also distinct from the Father. Zechariah could not have explained it fully, but he wrote it down just as God gave it.

"And they will mourn over Him like a mourning over the only ***son***." There is no sorrow like losing an only son, because with him goes all hope for the future of the family (Amos 8:10). "And ***they will*** show bitterness over Him as ***one*** shows bitterness over the firstborn." The firstborn son was the heir, the pride of the family. They will grieve with that kind of bitter, deep sorrow.

When will this happen? John 19:37 shows a first fulfillment at the cross, when the soldiers looked on the One they pierced, and some who watched were moved. At Pentecost, when Peter preached that God had made this Jesus whom they crucified both Lord and Christ, many in Jerusalem "were pierced in the heart" (Acts 2:36-37) and three thousand believed. But the full fulfillment is still ahead. Revelation 1:7 says, "Look, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, and those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will wail because of Him." Jesus Himself said that after the tribulation of those days, "all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory" (Matthew 24:29-30).

I believe Zechariah 12:10 describes the day when Israel as a nation will turn to Jesus as their Messiah. It will happen at the end of the Tribulation, when the nations are gathered against Jerusalem and Christ returns to save His people. In that moment, they will see Him, they will recognize the wounds, and they will understand that the One their nation rejected was their own Messiah, their God. Paul says that "a hardening in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:25-26). God has not cast off His people. One day they will look on Him and believe. Some teachers apply this verse only to Jews and Gentiles who come to Christ through the gospel in this age. Paul's words about Israel in Romans 11 point to a future turning of the nation as well.

What does this mean for those of us who believe now? Every person who comes to Christ has, in a sense, looked on the One they pierced. Our sins put Him on the cross. "He ***was*** pierced for our transgressions" (Isaiah 53:5). True repentance begins when we see Jesus and realize that He was pierced for us, and we grieve over our sin. That grief is not hopeless. "The grief according to God produces repentance to salvation without regret" (2 Corinthians 7:10). Have you looked to Him?

12:11 *On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be great, like the mourning of Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo.*

"On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be great, like the mourning of Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo." Most Bible teachers believe this refers to the mourning for King Josiah. Josiah was the last good king of Judah. He was killed in battle at Megiddo in 609 B.C., and all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for him. Jeremiah wrote laments for him, and the singers remembered him in their songs for generations (2 Chronicles 35:22-25). Hadad-rimmon was likely a place near Megiddo where the mourning happened. It was the greatest national mourning Israel had known.

Some have suggested Hadad-rimmon was a pagan god whose death was mourned in a yearly ritual, but most see the death of Josiah here, which fits the setting much better.

The mourning for the pierced One will be like that, but greater. Josiah was a good king who died for his own mistake. Jesus is the perfect King who died for the sins of His people.

12:12-14 *And the land will mourn, clans **bȳ** clans alone: the clan of the house of David alone, and their wives alone; the clan of the house of Nathan alone, and their wives alone; the clan of the house of Levi alone, and their wives alone; the clan of the Shimeites alone, and their wives alone; all the clans that remain, clans **bȳ** clans alone, and their wives alone."*

"And the land will mourn, clans ***bȳ*** clans alone." The mourning will be national, but it will also be personal. Each family will mourn by itself.

"The clan of the house of David alone, and their wives alone; the clan of the house of Nathan alone, and their wives alone." David was the royal line, and Nathan was one of David's sons, through whom Luke traces the family line of Jesus (Luke 3:31). Levi was the priestly tribe, and Shimei a grandson of Levi (Numbers 3:17-18). The royal and priestly families will lead the mourning. Those who led the nation in rejecting Christ will lead in mourning for Him.

"All the clans that remain, clans ***bȳ*** clans alone, and their wives alone." Everyone. Husbands and wives will even mourn separately. Why? Because this kind of grief is deeply personal. No one can repent for someone else. Each person must face the One they pierced for himself or herself.

The same is true for us. You cannot be saved by your family's faith, your spouse's faith or your church's faith. Each of us must come to Christ personally. And when we do, the next verse in Zechariah has the answer to our grief: a fountain opened for sin and for impurity (13:1).

Summary

The LORD, Creator of the heavens, the earth and the human spirit, said He would make Jerusalem a cup of reeling and a heavy stone for all the nations gathered against it. He would strike their horses with panic, watch over Judah, and make the leaders of Judah like fire among sheaves. He would save the tents of Judah first, so no one could boast, and He would shield Jerusalem so that the weakest would be like David. He would set out to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. Then He would pour out on David's house and Jerusalem a spirit of grace and prayer, and they would look on Him whom they had pierced and mourn for Him as for an only son and a firstborn. The mourning would be as great as the mourning at Hadad-rimmon in the plain of Megiddo, and every family in the land would mourn by itself, husbands and wives apart.

Many times I have been grieved over my sin because I saw that Jesus was pierced for me. That changes how I look at sin. It is not small when it cost Him that much.

Study Questions

1. How does God describe Himself at the start of this oracle, and why does that matter? (12:1)

2. What will Jerusalem be to the nations that gather against it? (12:2-3)

3. How will God protect Jerusalem and strengthen Judah? (12:4-9)

4. What will God pour out on the house of David and the people of Jerusalem? (12:10)

5. Who is speaking in 12:10, and who is pierced? How does John 19:34-37 answer that?

6. How deep will Israel's mourning be, and what is it compared to? (12:10-11)

7. Why do you think each family, and even husbands and wives, will mourn alone? (12:12-14)

8. Romans 11:25-26 says "all Israel will be saved." How does 12:10 help you understand God's faithfulness to Israel?

9. Have you ever been grieved over your sin because you saw that Jesus was pierced for you? How did that change you?

10. No one can repent for anyone else. Is there anyone you are trusting to be right with God for you, instead of coming to Christ yourself?

Zechariah 13: A Fountain for Sin and the Shepherd Struck

Scripture

13:1-9 On that day there will be a fountain opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity. And it will be on that day, declares the LORD of armies, ***that*** I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they will no longer be remembered; and also the prophets and the spirit of uncleanness I will cause to pass away from the land. And it will be ***that*** if a man still prophesies, then his father and his mother who bore him will say to him, "You shall not live, for you have spoken falsehood in the name of the LORD"; and his father and his mother who bore him will pierce him through when he prophesies. And it will be on that day ***that*** the prophets will be ashamed, each man of his vision when he prophesies; and they will not put on a cloak of hair in order to deceive. And he will say, "I ***am*** not a prophet; I ***am*** a man working ***the*** ground, for a man acquired me from my youth." And ***one*** will say to him, "What ***are*** these wounds between your hands?" And he will say, "***Those*** which I was struck ***with in*** the house of those who love me." O sword, awake against My shepherd, and against the man ***who is*** My associate, declares the LORD of armies. Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; and I will turn My hand against the little ones. And it will be in all the land, declares the LORD, ***that*** two parts in it will be cut off ***and*** perish, and the third will be left in it. And I will bring the third into the fire, and I will refine them as ***one*** refines the silver, and I will test them as ***one*** tests the gold. It will call on My name, and I will answer it; I will say, "It ***is*** My people," and it will say, "The LORD ***is*** my God."

Preview

Chapter 12 ended with Israel mourning for the One they pierced. Chapter 13 begins with God's answer to their grief: "On that day there will be a fountain opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity." The tears of repentance meet a fountain of cleansing. Then God will clean the land itself. Idols will be forgotten, and false prophets will be so ashamed that they will deny ever having been prophets.

The chapter then steps back in time to the cause of it all. God calls out to a sword: awake against My Shepherd, the Man who is My associate. Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered. On the night He was arrested, Jesus quoted these words about Himself. The chapter ends with a hard but hopeful picture. In the land, two parts will be cut off, and a third will be brought through the fire and refined like silver and gold. They will call on God's name, and He will answer. "It ***is*** My people," He will say, and they will say, "The LORD ***is*** my God."

Study

13:1 *On that day there will be a fountain opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity.*

"On that day there will be a fountain opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for impurity." That day is the day of 12:10, when Israel looks on the One

they pierced. A fountain is a spring of water that keeps flowing and never runs dry. It is "opened," made available, ready for use.

What is it for? "For sin and for impurity." Sin is our wrongdoing against God. Impurity is the uncleanness that sin leaves on us. Under the Law, people who became unclean were washed with water mixed with the ashes of a red heifer, called the water of impurity (Numbers 19:9). But that water only cleansed the outside, for a time. This fountain cleanses the heart, forever. Ezekiel heard the same promise: "I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; from all your uncleannesses and from all your idols I will cleanse you" (Ezekiel 36:25).

What is this fountain? The New Testament gives the answer. It is the cleansing that comes through the death of Christ, the One they pierced. "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). On the cross, when the soldier pierced His side, "blood and water came out" (John 19:34). The fountain was opened at the cross. It has been flowing ever since, for everyone who comes. And on that day, when Israel turns to Christ, the nation will be washed in it.

Notice the order. First comes mourning over sin (12:10-14). Then comes cleansing (13:1). God never leaves a repentant sinner in his tears. He always has a fountain ready. If you have grieved over your sin, come to the fountain. "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).

13:2 *And it will be on that day, declares the LORD of armies, **that** I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they will no longer be remembered; and also the prophets and the spirit of uncleanness I will cause to pass away from the land.*

"And it will be on that day, declares the LORD of armies, ***that*** I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they will no longer be remembered." When God cleanses His people, He also cleanses the land. Idolatry was Israel's oldest sin. God will remove it so completely that no one will even remember the names of the false gods.

"And also the prophets and the spirit of uncleanness I will cause to pass away from the land." The prophets here are the false prophets, men who claimed to speak for God but spoke lies. Behind them was "the spirit of uncleanness," an evil spirit, the power of the devil working through false religion (1 Kings 22:22; 1 John 4:1-3). In the last days, the false prophet will deceive many (Revelation 13:11-14; 19:20). But when Christ reigns, God will remove every false voice from the land.

13:3 *And it will be **that** if a man still prophesies, then his father and his mother who bore him will say to him, "You shall not live, for you have spoken falsehood in the name of the LORD"; and his father and his mother who bore him will pierce him through when he prophesies.*

"And it will be ***that*** if a man still prophesies, then his father and his mother who bore him will say to him," and here are their words: "You shall not live, for you have spoken falsehood in the name of the LORD." In the kingdom, loyalty to the LORD will be so strong that if anyone falsely claims to speak for God, even his own parents will not protect him. "And his father and his mother who bore him will pierce him through when he prophesies."

This is a hard verse, and we need to read it carefully. The Law of Moses said that a false prophet who led people to other gods must be put to death, and that not even a family member should be spared (Deuteronomy 13:6-10; 18:20). Zechariah describes that law being kept in a land made holy, under the direct rule of the King. Notice the word "pierce." The same word was used in 12:10. Israel once pierced the true Prophet. Now they will pierce the false ones.

This verse is not a command for us today. Believers are not told to harm anyone over false teaching. In the church, false teaching is answered with truth, correction and, when needed, church discipline (Titus 3:10; 2 John 10-11). The point here is that in that day God's people will love Him more than anything, even more than their own family. Jesus said, "The one who loves father or mother above Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37). Truth will matter more than family ties.

13:4-5 *And it will be on that day **that** the prophets will be ashamed, each man of his vision when he prophesies; and they will not put on a cloak of hair in order to deceive. And he will say, "I **am** not a prophet; I **am** a man working **the** ground, for a man acquired me from my youth."*

"And it will be on that day ***that*** the prophets will be ashamed, each man of his vision when he prophesies." False prophets will be so ashamed that they will hide what they once did. "And they will not put on a cloak of hair in order to deceive." A hairy cloak was the clothing of a prophet. Elijah wore one (2 Kings 1:8), and so did John the Baptist (Matthew 3:4). False prophets wore it too, to look like real prophets and fool people. On that day, no one will try that trick anymore.

"And he will say," and here is his excuse: "I ***am*** not a prophet; I ***am*** a man working ***the*** ground, for a man acquired me from my youth." The man will deny being a prophet at all. He will say he is just a farmer, a man who has worked on someone else's land since he was young. He will do anything to avoid being known as a false prophet.

13:6 *And **one** will say to him, "What **are** these wounds between your hands?" And he will say, "**Those** which I was struck **with in** the house of those who love me."*

"And ***one*** will say to him," and the question is, "What ***are*** these wounds between your hands?" Someone notices marks on the man's body. Between your hands may mean on the chest, or on the arms. He answers, "***Those*** which I was struck ***with in*** the house of those who love me."

Many Christians over the years have read this verse as a prophecy of Jesus' nail wounds, and it has been used that way in songs and sermons. I understand why. But in its setting, the man speaking is a false prophet trying to hide his past (13:4-5). False prophets in the ancient world often cut themselves in their frenzied rituals. The prophets of Baal did this on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:28). When someone asks about his scars, the false prophet makes up an excuse. He says he got them at a friend's house, maybe in a fight or a family quarrel. The words "those who love me" may even mean his lovers, the idols he served (Hosea 2:7).

In context, then, the plain meaning of verse 6 is about the false prophet, not about Christ. The next verse, though, clearly is about Christ. We should let the context lead us.

13:7 *O sword, awake against My shepherd, and against the man **who is** My associate, declares the LORD of armies. Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; and I will turn My hand against the little ones.*

"O sword, awake against My shepherd, and against the man ***who is*** My associate, declares the LORD of armies." Now the scene changes. God speaks to a sword, the sword of judgment, and tells it to wake up and strike. Strike whom? "My shepherd." This is not the worthless shepherd of 11:17. This is God's own Shepherd, the good one.

Look at what God calls Him: "the man ***who is*** My associate." The word means a companion, a close neighbor, an equal. It is used in the Law for a fellow member of the community, one's neighbor (Leviticus 6:2). God calls this Shepherd a man, and also His equal and companion. Who could be both a man and God's equal? Only Jesus Christ, who is fully man and fully God. Jesus said, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30).

And who sends the sword? God Himself. "Strike the shepherd." The LORD of armies commands the striking of His own Shepherd. Isaiah said the same: "the LORD has caused to fall on Him the iniquity of all of us" (Isaiah 53:6). The cross was not an accident or a defeat. Wicked men did it, but it was God's plan to save us (Acts 2:23).

"And the sheep will be scattered." When the Shepherd is struck, the sheep run. On the night He was arrested, Jesus said to His disciples, "All of you will be caused to stumble in Me during this night; for it has been written," and He quoted this verse: "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered" (Matthew 26:31; Mark 14:27). A few hours later, "all the disciples, having forsaken Him, fled" (Matthew 26:56). Many also see the scattering of the Jewish people among the nations after A.D. 70 as part of this scattering.

"And I will turn My hand against the little ones." This may mean God's hand of judgment falling on the little ones, the humble sheep, as they suffer in the scattering. Or it may mean God turning His hand to protect and gather them, as a shepherd gathers the lambs. The words can be read either way. Jesus did not lose His little flock. After He rose, He gathered His scattered disciples again (Matthew 26:32; 28:7).

Think about this. The Shepherd was struck so that the sheep could be saved. "The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep" (John 10:11). He was struck in our place.

13:8-9 *And it will be in all the land, declares the LORD, **that** two parts in it will be cut off **and** perish, and the third will be left in it. And I will bring the third into the fire, and I will refine them as **one** refines the silver, and I will test them as **one** tests the gold. It will call on My name, and I will answer it; I will say, "It **is** My people," and it will say, "The LORD **is** my God."*

"And it will be in all the land, declares the LORD, ***that*** two parts in it will be cut off ***and*** perish, and the third will be left in it." This is a sobering verse. Two thirds of the people in the land will die, and one third will be left. When will this happen? Some see it in the terrible losses of the Roman war of A.D. 66-70. I believe it points to the Tribulation, the time Jeremiah called "a time of distress for Jacob" (Jeremiah 30:7), and Jesus called a great tribulation, "such as has not

happened from ***the*** beginning of ***the*** world until now" (Matthew 24:21). Israel will pass through terrible suffering. We should read this with sorrow, not with curiosity. These are real people whom God loves.

But God does not stop with loss. "And I will bring the third into the fire, and I will refine them as ***one*** refines the silver, and I will test them as ***one*** tests the gold." Silver and gold are refined by melting them in fire, so that the impurities rise to the top and are skimmed off. What is left is pure. The fire does not destroy the metal. It purifies it. God will use the hardest days in Israel's history to bring out a pure, believing remnant. A remnant means those who are left, the faithful few God keeps for Himself.

"It will call on My name, and I will answer it." The refined remnant will pray, and God will hear. God says, "It ***is*** My people," and the remnant answers, "The LORD ***is*** my God." This is the covenant restored. Hosea's children had been named Not My People (Hosea 1:9). Now God says, you are My people, and they answer, the LORD is my God (Hosea 2:23). That is the same remnant who look on the One they pierced (12:10) and are washed in the fountain (13:1). Paul says, "and so all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26).

This is a word for us too. Peter says that our trials test our faith, which is "much more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire" (1 Peter 1:7). When we go through the fire, God is not destroying us. He is refining us. And at the end of it, we will be able to say with new depth, the LORD is my God.

Summary

On that day a fountain would be opened for David's house and the people of Jerusalem to wash away sin and impurity. On that day the LORD of armies would remove the names of the idols from the land so they would be remembered no more, and He would remove the false prophets and the unclean spirit. If anyone still prophesied falsely, his own father and mother would tell him he must die for speaking lies in the LORD's name, and they would pierce him through. The prophets would be ashamed of their visions and would no longer wear a hairy cloak to deceive. Each would say he was no prophet but a farmer who had worked the land since his youth, and if asked about the wounds on his body, he would say he got them in the house of his friends. The LORD of armies called the sword to awake against His Shepherd, the man who is His companion: strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and He would turn His hand against the little ones. In the whole land two thirds would be cut off and die, and one third would be left. God would bring that third through the fire and refine them like silver and test them like gold. They would call on His name and He would answer; He would say they are His people, and they would say the LORD is their God.

Study Questions

1. What will be opened on that day, and for what purpose? (13:1)

2. How does the New Testament help us understand the fountain? (1 John 1:7; John 19:34)

3. What will God remove from the land? (13:2)

4. How will false prophets act when they are ashamed? (13:4-6)

5. Whom does God tell the sword to strike, and what does He call Him? (13:7)

6. When did Jesus quote 13:7, and how was it fulfilled? (Matthew 26:31, 56)

7. What will happen to the third that is left, and what will they say? (13:8-9)

8. Mourning over sin leads to the fountain of cleansing. Is there sin you have grieved over but not yet brought to Christ to be washed?

9. God the Father sent the sword against His own Shepherd for you. How does that change the way you see the cross?

10. God refines His people like silver and gold. What "fire" are you going through, and how might God be using it to refine you?

Zechariah 14: The LORD Will Be King Over All the Earth

Scripture

14:1-11 Look, a day is coming for the LORD, and your plunder will be divided in your midst. And I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem for the battle, and the city will be captured, and the houses will be plundered, and the women will be ravished; and half of the city will go out into the exile, and the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. And the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as ***on*** the day of His fighting, on a day of battle. And His feet will stand on that day on the Mount of Olives, which ***is*** before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split from its middle toward the east and toward the west ***into*** a very great valley; and half of the mountain will move toward the north, and half of it toward the south. And you will flee ***by*** the valley of My mountains, for the valley of ***the*** mountains will reach to Azal; and you will flee just as you fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. And the LORD my God will come, ***and*** all holy ones with You. And it will be on that day ***that*** there will not be light; splendid ***ones*** and congealing. And it will be one day, it is known to the LORD, not day and not night; and it will be ***that*** at the time of evening there will be light. And it will be on that day ***that*** living waters will go out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea; in summer and in winter it will be. And the LORD will be King over all the earth; on that day the LORD will be one, and His name one. All the land will be changed like the Arabah, from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem; and she will be raised up and will dwell in her place, from the Gate of Benjamin to the place of the first gate, to the Gate of the Corners, and ***from*** the Tower of Hananel to the winepresses of the king. And they will dwell in her, and there will no longer be utter destruction, and Jerusalem will dwell in security.

14:12-21 And this will be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the peoples that have waged war against Jerusalem: ***He will*** make his flesh rot while he ***is*** standing on his feet, and his eyes will rot in their sockets, and his tongue will rot in their mouth. And it will be on that day ***that*** a great panic from the LORD will be among them; and they will take hold, each man, ***of*** the hand of his neighbor, and his hand will rise against the hand of his neighbor. And also Judah will fight at Jerusalem; and the wealth of all the nations around will be gathered, gold and silver and garments in very great abundance. And so will be the plague of the horse, the mule, the camel and the donkey, and all the livestock that will be in those camps, like this plague. And it will be ***that*** everyone who is left of all the nations that came against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to bow down to the King, the LORD of armies, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths. And it will be ***that*** whoever of the clans of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to bow down to the King, the LORD of armies, the rain will not be on them. And if the clan of Egypt does not go up and does not come in, then not on them ***will the rain be***; ***on them*** will be the plague with which the LORD will strike the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths. This will be ***the punishment for*** the sin of Egypt and ***the punishment for*** the sin of all the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths. On that day there will be on the bells of the horses, "Holiness to the LORD"; and the pots in the house of the LORD will be like the bowls before the altar. And every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holiness to the LORD of armies; and all those who sacrifice will

come and take from them and boil in them. And there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD of armies on that day.

Preview

The last chapter of Zechariah describes the day of the LORD. In the prophets, the day of the LORD is not a single twenty-four-hour day. It is the time when God steps into history at the end of this age to judge His enemies and save His people, followed by His blessing in the kingdom. All the nations gather against Jerusalem, and for a time the city suffers terribly. Then the LORD goes out to fight. His feet stand on the Mount of Olives, the mountain splits in two, and He comes with all His holy ones. Living waters flow out from Jerusalem, summer and winter.

"And the LORD will be King over all the earth." That is the high point of the chapter and of the whole book. The nations come up year by year to worship the King, and even the cooking pots are holy to the LORD. I read this chapter as a real picture of Christ's return and His thousand-year reign on the earth. Good Bible teachers read it in other ways, and the main ones are named at verses 1 and 2.

Study

14:1-2 *Look, a day is coming for the LORD, and your plunder will be divided in your midst. And I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem for the battle, and the city will be captured, and the houses will be plundered, and the women will be ravished; and half of the city will go out into the exile, and the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city.*

"Look, a day is coming for the LORD." This is the day that belongs to Him, when He acts openly in judgment and salvation (Joel 2:31; Zephaniah 1:14). "And your plunder will be divided in your midst." The enemy will divide up Jerusalem's wealth inside its own walls.

"And I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem for the battle." This is the gathering of 12:2-3. God Himself gathers the nations, to bring them to judgment (Joel 3:2; Revelation 16:14-16). I believe this happens at the end of the Tribulation, just before Christ returns. Other teachers read these verses differently. Some see the Roman capture of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and many amillennial teachers take the chapter as a picture of the church's struggle and Christ's final victory. This study reads it as still future, because the Lord's feet will stand on the Mount of Olives (14:4), where the angels said Jesus would return (Acts 1:11-12).

Then come painful words. The city will be captured and the houses plundered, and the women will suffer the cruel abuse that invading armies have always brought. Half of the people will be taken into exile, and the rest will stay in the city.

We should not read this lightly. War brings great suffering, and the weakest suffer most. Scripture does not hide that. God is not praising what the armies do. He is warning that it will happen, and He will judge those who do it (14:12). Jesus said those days would be so terrible that "unless those days had been shortened, no flesh would have been saved" (Matthew 24:22). Just when all seems lost, the LORD steps in.

14:3 *And the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as **on** the day of His fighting, on a day of battle.*

"And the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as ***on*** the day of His fighting, on a day of battle." God fought for Israel at the Red Sea (Exodus 14:14). He will fight for them again, openly and for the last time. Revelation 19:11-21 describes it: heaven opens, and Christ rides out on a white horse, "and in righteousness He judges and makes war." When the King comes, the battle is soon over.

14:4 *And His feet will stand on that day on the Mount of Olives, which **is** before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split from its middle toward the east and toward the west **into** a very great valley; and half of the mountain will move toward the north, and half of it toward the south.*

"And His feet will stand on that day on the Mount of Olives, which ***is*** before Jerusalem on the east." The LORD will stand, with real feet, on a real mountain: the ridge just east of Jerusalem, across the Kidron Valley.

How can the LORD have feet? The answer is Jesus. God the Son became a man, and He still has a risen, glorified body. The Mount of Olives is where He wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:37-41), taught about His return (Matthew 24:3) and prayed the night before He died. And it is where He went back to heaven. Two angels told the disciples, "This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same manner as you watched Him going into heaven" (Acts 1:11). Then they "returned to Jerusalem from ***the*** mount called Olivet" (Acts 1:12). He left from the Mount of Olives, bodily and visibly. He will come back to it the same way.

"And the Mount of Olives will be split from its middle toward the east and toward the west ***into*** a very great valley." Half of the mountain moves north and half south. Revelation speaks of a great earthquake at that time, "such as had not been since men were on the earth" (Revelation 16:18). I do not read this as only a picture. The angels said He would come back as He left, and Zechariah said where He would stand.

14:5 *And you will flee **by** the valley of My mountains, for the valley of **the** mountains will reach to Azal; and you will flee just as you fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. And the LORD my God will come, **and** all holy ones with You.*

"And you will flee ***by*** the valley of My mountains, for the valley of ***the*** mountains will reach to Azal." The new valley becomes an escape route for the people trapped in Jerusalem. No one today knows exactly where Azal was. They will flee as people fled from the earthquake in the days of King Uzziah, about 792 to 740 B.C., an earthquake so well remembered that Amos dated his book by it (Amos 1:1). This time they flee into safety.

"And the LORD my God will come, ***and*** all holy ones with You." Zechariah turns and speaks to God directly. Jesus said "all the holy angels" will come with Him (Matthew 25:31), and Paul says He will come "with all His saints" (1 Thessalonians 3:13). I believe that includes the church. Believers will already have been caught up to meet the Lord before the Tribulation

(1 Thessalonians 4:16-17), and now they return with Him, "clothed in fine linen, white and pure" (Revelation 19:14).

14:6-7 *And it will be on that day **that** there will not be light; splendid **ones** and congealing. And it will be one day, it is known to the LORD, not day and not night; and it will be **that** at the time of evening there will be light.*

"And it will be on that day ***that*** there will not be light; splendid ***ones*** and congealing." The Hebrew here is hard. It may mean the lights of heaven will grow dim, or that there will be no cold or frost. Jesus said that after the Tribulation "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light" (Matthew 24:29).

"And it will be one day, it is known to the LORD, not day and not night." It will be a day unlike any other, and only the LORD knows its timing (Matthew 24:36). "And it will be ***that*** at the time of evening there will be light." When darkness should fall, light comes. That is how the day of the LORD ends for His people.

14:8 *And it will be on that day **that** living waters will go out from Jerusalem, half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea; in summer and in winter it will be.*

"And it will be on that day ***that*** living waters will go out from Jerusalem." Living waters are fresh, flowing waters. Jerusalem has never had a river. Now one will flow "to the eastern sea," the Dead Sea, and "to the western sea," the Mediterranean, "in summer and in winter," when most streams in Israel are dry. Ezekiel saw this river flow from the temple and turn the Dead Sea fresh (Ezekiel 47:1-12), and Joel saw it too (Joel 3:18). This study reads it as a real river in the kingdom, as many teachers do. It is also a picture of Christ, who said, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink" (John 7:37).

14:9 *And the LORD will be King over all the earth; on that day the LORD will be one, and His name one.*

"And the LORD will be King over all the earth." This is the summit of the book. Every vision and promise in Zechariah leads here.

Today the nations rage against the LORD and His Anointed (Psalm 2:1-2). But a day is coming 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). Jesus will rule the whole world from Jerusalem in righteousness and peace, and every knee will bow to Him (Philippians 2:10-11).

"On that day the LORD will be one, and His name one." This echoes Israel's great confession: "Hear, Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD ***is*** one" (Deuteronomy 6:4). There will be no rival gods and no idols. His name alone will be honored.

14:10-11 *All the land will be changed like the Arabah, from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem; and she will be raised up and will dwell in her place, from the Gate of Benjamin to the place of the first gate, to the Gate of the Corners, and **from** the Tower of Hananel to the winepresses of the king. And they will dwell in her, and there will no longer be utter destruction, and Jerusalem will dwell in security.*

"All the land will be changed like the Arabah, from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem." The Arabah is the low, flat valley of the Jordan and the Dead Sea. Geba was a few miles north of Jerusalem, and Rimmon was in the far south of Judah. The hill country around the city will be leveled. "And she will be raised up and will dwell in her place." Jerusalem will be lifted up, as Isaiah said, "established at the top of the mountains" (Isaiah 2:2). The gates and towers named in verse 10 were real places in the old city, marking its full length and breadth.

"And they will dwell in her, and there will no longer be utter destruction, and Jerusalem will dwell in security." Utter destruction is the Hebrew word herem, something given over completely to destruction. Jerusalem has been besieged and destroyed many times. Never again. In the kingdom, the city that has known so much war will be safe.

14:12-15 *And this will be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the peoples that have waged war against Jerusalem: **He will** make his flesh rot while he **is** standing on his feet, and his eyes will rot in their sockets, and his tongue will rot in their mouth. And it will be on that day **that** a great panic from the LORD will be among them; and they will take hold, each man, **of** the hand of his neighbor, and his hand will rise against the hand of his neighbor. And also Judah will fight at Jerusalem; and the wealth of all the nations around will be gathered, gold and silver and garments in very great abundance. And so will be the plague of the horse, the mule, the camel and the donkey, and all the livestock that will be in those camps, like this plague.*

"And this will be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the peoples that have waged war against Jerusalem." The armies that attacked the city will be struck with a plague that makes their bodies waste away while they are still standing. The description is short and terrible. These are the armies that came to destroy God's people and fight the returning King, and God's judgment on them is sudden and complete (Revelation 19:21).

"A great panic from the LORD will be among them," so that the soldiers turn on each other, as Israel's enemies did in Gideon's day (Judges 7:22). "And also Judah will fight at Jerusalem," and the wealth of the nations will be gathered in, gold, silver and garments. In 14:1 the enemy divided Jerusalem's plunder. Now the tables are turned. Even the animals in the enemy camps will be struck.

We should not read this with any pleasure. God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11). But He is just, and He will not let the nations destroy His people forever. These armies chose to make war on the King of kings.

14:16 *And it will be **that** everyone who is left of all the nations that came against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to bow down to the King, the LORD of armies, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths.*

"And it will be ***that*** everyone who is left of all the nations that came against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to bow down to the King, the LORD of armies, and to celebrate the Feast of Booths." What grace: survivors from the very nations that attacked Jerusalem will come to worship the King.

Why the Feast of Booths? It was the last and most joyful of Israel's yearly feasts, held after the fall harvest. For seven days the people lived in booths, shelters made of branches, to remember how God cared for them in the wilderness (Leviticus 23:33-43). In the kingdom, the wandering will be over and the harvest gathered, and God will dwell with His people. John says the Word "dwelt among us" (John 1:14), using a word that means He pitched His tent among us. In the kingdom, the King will dwell among the nations, and the joy of this feast will be full.

This also shows that the thousand-year kingdom is not yet the new heavens and new earth (Revelation 21-22). There will still be nations, years passing and, as the next verses show, the possibility of disobedience. It is Christ's reign on this earth (Revelation 20:4-6).

14:17-19 *And it will be **that** whoever of the clans of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to bow down to the King, the LORD of armies, the rain will not be on them. And if the clan of Egypt does not go up and does not come in, then not on them **will the rain be**; **on them** will be the plague with which the LORD will strike the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths. This will be **the punishment for** the sin of Egypt and **the punishment for** the sin of all the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths.*

"And it will be ***that*** whoever of the clans of the earth does not go up to Jerusalem to bow down to the King, the LORD of armies, the rain will not be on them." The King will rule with justice. Without rain there is no harvest, a fitting discipline for those who refuse the harvest feast. Egypt is named because Egypt's water comes from the Nile, not from rain. Would Egypt escape? No. God has other ways, and Egypt will suffer "the plague with which the LORD will strike the nations that do not go up to celebrate the Feast of Booths."

Why would anyone refuse to worship Christ when He reigns visibly? People born in the kingdom will still need to be saved by faith, as in every age, and at the end of the thousand years many will join Satan's last rebellion (Revelation 20:7-9). Only the new birth changes the human heart.

14:20-21 *On that day there will be on the bells of the horses, "Holiness to the LORD"; and the pots in the house of the LORD will be like the bowls before the altar. And every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holiness to the LORD of armies; and all those who sacrifice will come and take from them and boil in them. And there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD of armies on that day.*

"On that day there will be on the bells of the horses," and here is what will be written on them: "Holiness to the LORD." Those words were once engraved only on the gold plate of the high

priest's turban (Exodus 28:36). Now they will be on the bells of work animals. "And the pots in the house of the LORD will be like the bowls before the altar," and "every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holiness to the LORD of armies." Even the kitchen pots will be holy. The line between holy and common will be gone.

"And there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD of armies on that day." The Hebrew word can also mean a trader, because the Canaanites were known for trade. Either way, no unclean person and no one making money off God's house will be there. When Jesus cleansed the temple, He said, "do not make the house of My Father a house of trade" (John 2:16).

We do not have to wait for the kingdom to live this way. Paul says, "whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all things to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). Your work, your kitchen and your free time can be holiness to the Lord, if you give them to Him.

Summary

A day of the LORD is coming when all the nations will be gathered against Jerusalem. The city will be taken and plundered, and half its people will go into exile. Then the LORD will go out and fight those nations. His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which will split into a great valley through which His people will flee, and the LORD will come with all His holy ones. That day will be unlike any other, and at evening there will be light. Living waters will flow from Jerusalem east and west all year round. The LORD will be King over all the earth, and His name will be the only name. The land will be leveled, Jerusalem will be raised up and will live in security, never again destroyed. The armies that fought against Jerusalem will be struck by a plague and by panic, and their wealth will be gathered in. The survivors of the nations will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD of armies, and keep the Feast of Booths, and those who refuse will have no rain. On that day even the bells of the horses and the cooking pots will be holy to the LORD, and there will no longer be a trader in His house.

Study Questions

1. What will happen to Jerusalem when the nations are gathered against it? (14:1-2)

2. What will the LORD do, and where will His feet stand? (14:3-4)

3. How does Acts 1:11-12 connect to 14:4?

4. Who will come with the LORD, and what does the New Testament say about them? (14:5; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; Jude 14)

5. What will flow out from Jerusalem, and where will it go? (14:8)

6. What does 14:9 say about the LORD's rule and His name?

7. What will the survivors of the nations do year after year, and what happens to those who refuse? (14:16-19)

8. Jesus left from the Mount of Olives and will return there. How does the promise of His return affect the way you live today?

9. Is Jesus King over your life now, or only someone you plan to bow to someday?

10. In that day even horses' bells and cooking pots will be "Holiness to the LORD." What ordinary part of your life can you set apart to Him this week?

Overview of Malachi

Malachi is the thirty-ninth book of the Bible, the last of the twelve Minor Prophets and the last book of the Old Testament. Malachi was the last prophet God sent to Israel before John the Baptist. After him, heaven was silent for about four hundred years.

About eighty years had passed since Haggai and Zechariah stirred the people to finish the temple in 516 B.C. Ezra had come and taught the Law. Nehemiah had rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. The people had made a solemn covenant to keep God's Law, to marry only within the faith, to keep the Sabbath and to bring their tithes to God's house (Nehemiah 10). But when Malachi spoke, much of that zeal had cooled. The priests offered blind, lame and sick animals on God's altar and treated the service of God as a weariness. Men broke faith with the wives of their youth and married women who worshiped other gods. The people held back their tithes. Many had begun to say that serving God did not pay and that evil people seemed to do better than the righteous.

Malachi answers them in a striking way. Again and again God makes a statement, the people answer with a question, and God replies. "I have loved you," God says (1:2). "In what have You loved us?" they answer. The questions show how far their hearts had drifted. They could not see God's love, their own sin or His justice. Malachi calls them back to honor God with true worship, faithful marriages and honest giving. Then he looks ahead. God will send His messenger to prepare the way, and then the Lord they are seeking will come suddenly to His temple. A day is coming that will burn like a furnace for the wicked, but for those who fear God's name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And before that great day, God will send Elijah the prophet.

The theme of Malachi is God's unchanging love and faithfulness to a people who had grown cold toward Him. The key verse is:

Malachi 3:6 (SLB)

"For I ***am*** the LORD; I have not changed; and you, sons of Jacob, have not come to an end."

Malachi has 4 chapters and 55 verses. (In the Hebrew Bible, Malachi has three chapters, and our 4:1-6 is numbered there as 3:19-24. The SLB, like most English Bibles, divides it into four.) Here is its structure:

Part One: The LORD's Love and Israel's Faithless Worship (chapters 1-2)

- Malachi 1: I Have Loved You
- Malachi 2: Faithless Priests and Broken Marriages

Part Two: The Coming Messenger and the Day of the LORD (chapters 3-4)

- Malachi 3: The Messenger and the Refiner's Fire
- Malachi 4: The Sun of Righteousness and Elijah the Prophet

Where this book points to Christ: Malachi promised a messenger who would "clear a way before Me" (3:1). All four Gospels show that this messenger was John the Baptist (Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27; see John 1:23). Jesus said John came in the spirit of Elijah, the Elijah who was to come (Matthew 11:14; 17:10-13; Luke 1:17). And the One whose way John prepared is the Lord Himself. Malachi says "the Lord whom you are seeking will come to His temple" (3:1). Jesus came to that temple. He was presented there as a baby, taught there and cleansed it. He is "the messenger of the covenant" (3:1), the One who brought the new covenant in His blood. He will come again as the Refiner who purifies His people (3:2-3), and on that day He will rise on those who fear God's name like the sun, bringing healing (4:2). The Old Testament ends looking for Him, and the New Testament begins by announcing that He has come.

Background of Malachi

Author: "Malachi" (1:1). His name means "My messenger" in Hebrew, a fitting name for a man whose book speaks of God's messenger (3:1). Nothing else is known about him: not his father, his hometown or his tribe. Because the name means my messenger, some have thought it may be a title rather than a personal name, and an early Greek translation reads it as "his messenger." But every other prophetic book opens with the prophet's name, and Jewish and Christian tradition has always taken Malachi as a real man. I take it the same way.

Who it was written to: The Jews living in Jerusalem and Judah after the return from exile, and especially the priests, who were leading the people into careless worship (1:6; 2:1). God calls them "Israel" (1:1) and "sons of Jacob" (3:6), the heirs of all His promises to their fathers.

When it was written: Malachi does not date his book, but its setting points to the time of Nehemiah. The temple had been rebuilt and was in use, with priests and sacrifices (1:7-10; 3:1, 10). A governor ruled Judah under Persia (1:8). The sins Malachi names are the same ones Nehemiah faced on his second visit to Jerusalem: priests who defiled their office (Nehemiah 13:29), marriages to women who served other gods (Nehemiah 13:23-27), and tithes not brought to the storehouse (Nehemiah 13:10-12). Nehemiah went back to King Artaxerxes in the thirty-second year of his reign, 433 B.C., and later returned to Jerusalem (Nehemiah 13:6-7). So most conservative scholars date Malachi about 433 to 420 B.C., around Nehemiah's second visit. That fits the date of about 430 B.C. often given for the book.

Setting: Judah was still a small Persian province. The great promises of Haggai and Zechariah, of glory filling the temple and the King coming to Zion, had not yet come true in the way the people hoped. Life was hard, harvests were poor (3:11), and the neighbors were not impressed. Over time, disappointment turned into doubt, and doubt into carelessness. The people kept up the forms of religion, but their hearts were not in it. They brought God their leftovers and wondered why He did not bless them. Malachi was sent to wake them up.

How the book speaks: Malachi is written as a series of disputes. God makes a statement. The people push back with a question, often beginning, "In what...?" Then God answers. There are six of these in the book: about God's love (1:2-5), the priests' contempt for God's name (1:6-2:9), broken faith in marriage (2:10-16), God's justice (2:17-3:5), robbing God (3:6-12), and harsh words against God (3:13-4:3). It reads almost like a courtroom, with God laying out His case.

The four hundred silent years: After Malachi, no prophet spoke for God in Israel for about four hundred years, until John the Baptist. Those years were not empty. Persia fell to Alexander the Great. Greek rulers came and went, and the Maccabees fought for the temple. Rome took control of the land. The Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek, the common language of the world. Roads were built, and Jews were scattered through many lands with their synagogues. God was preparing the world for the coming of His Son. Paul says, "when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son" (Galatians 4:4). Malachi's last words promised a messenger like Elijah. The next prophet Israel heard was a man dressed in camel's hair in the wilderness, saying, "Prepare the way of ***the*** Lord" (Matthew 3:3).

Purpose: To assure a discouraged and careless people that God still loved them; to rebuke the priests for dishonoring God's name and the people for broken marriages and withheld tithes; to answer their doubt about God's justice by promising that the Lord would come to His temple to refine His people and judge the wicked; to comfort those who feared the LORD with the book of remembrance; and to point forward to the messenger, Elijah the prophet, who would prepare the way for the great and awesome day of the LORD.

Malachi 1: I Have Loved You

Scripture

1:1-14 The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel by the hand of Malachi. I have loved you, says the LORD. And you say, "In what have You loved us?" ***Was*** not Esau a brother to Jacob? declares the LORD. And I loved Jacob, and Esau I hated; and I made his mountains a waste, and his inheritance for jackals of ***the*** wilderness. If Edom says, "We have been shattered, and we will return and build the ruins," thus says the LORD of armies: They will build, and I will tear down; and they will call them "Territory of Wickedness," and "The People with Whom the LORD Is Indignant Forever." And your eyes will see, and you will say, "The LORD is great beyond the border of Israel!" A son honors a father, and a servant his master. And if I ***am*** a father, where ***is*** My honor? And if I ***am*** a master, where ***is*** My fear? says the LORD of armies to you, O priests who despise My name. And you say, "In what have we despised Your name?" ***You are*** bringing near defiled bread on My altar. And you say, "In what have we defiled You?" In your saying, "The table of the LORD, it ***is*** despised." And when you bring near a blind ***animal*** to sacrifice, ***is it*** not evil? And when you bring near a lame and sick ***animal***, ***is it*** not evil? Bring it near, please, to your governor; will he be pleased with you, or will he lift up your face? says the LORD of armies. And now, entreat, please, the face of God, that He may be gracious to us. From your hand this has been; will He lift up ***the*** faces of ***any*** of you? says the LORD of armies. Who ***is there*** even among you that would shut the doors, so that you would not light My altar for nothing? I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of armies, and I will not accept an offering from your hand. For from the rising of ***the*** sun to its setting My name ***is*** great among the nations, and in every place incense ***is*** being burned, being brought near to My name, and a pure offering; for My name ***is*** great among the nations, says the LORD of armies. And you are profaning it in your saying, "The table of the Lord, it ***is*** defiled, and its fruit, its food ***is*** despised." And you say, "Look, what a weariness!" and you sniff at it, says the LORD of armies; and you bring the stolen ***animal*** and the lame and the sick; and you bring the offering! Shall I accept it from your hand? says the LORD. And cursed ***is*** the deceiver, when ***there*** is in his flock a male, and he vows and sacrifices a blemished ***animal*** to the Lord; for I ***am*** a great King, says the LORD of armies, and My name ***is*** feared among the nations.

Preview

The last book of the Old Testament opens with God's love. "I have loved you, says the LORD." But the people answer, "In what have You loved us?" They cannot see it. Their lives are hard, and they wonder if God really cares. God points them to their brother nation, Edom. He chose Jacob and not Esau, and while Edom lies in ruins, never to be rebuilt, Israel is still here. Their very existence is proof of God's love.

Then God turns to the priests. A son honors his father and a servant his master. If I am a Father, where is My honor? If I am a Master, where is the fear due to Me? The priests were bringing blind, lame and sick animals to God's altar, things they would never dare give the governor. They sniffed at the service of God and called it a weariness. God says He would rather someone shut the temple doors than keep up such worship. His name is great among the nations, and He is a great King. He deserves our best, not our leftovers.

Study

1:1 *The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel by the hand of Malachi.*

"The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel by the hand of Malachi." An oracle is a weighty message from God, and the Hebrew word carries the sense of a burden. It is the same word that opens Zechariah 9 and 12. This message was not light. It was God's word, carried "by the hand of Malachi," His messenger.

Malachi speaks "to Israel." By this time, most of the returned exiles were from the tribe of Judah, but God still calls them Israel, the whole covenant people descended from Jacob. He had not forgotten any of them.

The name Malachi means my messenger. It is fitting that the last prophet of the Old Testament carries that name, and that his book promises another messenger who will prepare the way of the Lord (3:1).

1:2-3 *I have loved you, says the LORD. And you say, "In what have You loved us?"* ***Was*** *not Esau a brother to Jacob? declares the LORD. And I loved Jacob, and Esau I hated; and I made his mountains a waste, and his inheritance for jackals of* ***the*** *wilderness.*

"I have loved you, says the LORD." What a way to begin. Before God says a word about their sin, He tells them He loves them. Everything else in the book, all the rebuke and warning, comes from that love. God disciplines those He loves (Hebrews 12:6).

"And you say," and the people answer, "In what have You loved us?" The people do not believe it. They had come home from exile to a ruined city. Their harvests were poor. They lived under a foreign king. The great promises of the prophets seemed far away. Where was God's love? Have you ever asked that? When life is hard, it is easy to doubt that God cares.

God answers by pointing to history. "***Was*** not Esau a brother to Jacob? declares the LORD. And I loved Jacob, and Esau I hated." Jacob and Esau were twin brothers, the sons of Isaac and Rebekah. Before they were born, God told Rebekah that two nations were in her womb, "and the elder will serve the younger" (Genesis 25:23). God chose Jacob, the younger, to carry the promise He made to Abraham. Jacob became Israel. Esau became the father of Edom, the nation southeast of the Dead Sea.

What does "I hated" mean? This is a hard phrase, and we need to read it carefully.

In Hebrew, love and hate are often used to compare a choice: one is chosen and the other is not, one is preferred over the other. When Genesis says Leah was "hated" (Genesis 29:31), it means Jacob loved Rachel more (Genesis 29:30). When Jesus says that anyone who comes to Him must "hate his own father and mother" (Luke 14:26), He means we must love Him so much more that our love for family looks like hate by comparison. So "Esau I hated" does not mean God felt spite toward Esau the man. It means God chose Jacob and not Esau for the covenant and the promise.

Notice too that Malachi is speaking about nations. Verses 3 and 4 talk about Esau's "mountains" and "inheritance" and about Edom rebuilding its ruins. God had chosen Israel as the nation through whom He would bring the Messiah and bless the world. Edom was not chosen for that role. And Edom, over the centuries, became a bitter enemy of Israel, cheering when Jerusalem fell (Obadiah 10-14; Psalm 137:7). God judged Edom for that.

Paul quotes this verse in Romans 9:13: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." He uses it to show that God's choice depends on His mercy, not on what people do: the choice was made before the twins were born, "nor having done anything good or evil, so that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of the ***One*** calling" (Romans 9:11).

Good Bible teachers read Romans 9 in two main ways. Some believe Paul is teaching that God chooses certain individuals for salvation by His own free will. Others believe Paul, like Malachi, is speaking mainly of God choosing nations and people for a role in His plan, Israel to carry the promise, and that each person is still called to believe. Both agree on what matters most here. God's choice of Jacob was pure grace. Jacob did not earn it. Neither did Israel. "Not because you were more numerous than all the peoples did the LORD set His love on you and choose you" (Deuteronomy 7:7). And Esau's descendants were judged for their own sins, not for something they could not help.

For the people in Malachi's day, the point was simple. You ask how God has loved you? Look at Edom. Look at yourselves. You are still here. God chose you, kept you and brought you home. That is love.

For us, the point is the same. If you belong to Christ, God loved you first, before you did anything good or bad. "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son ***as*** a propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

"And I made his mountains a waste, and his inheritance for jackals of ***the*** wilderness." Edom's land was rugged mountain country. By Malachi's day it had been ravaged, likely by Arab tribes pushing in from the desert, and much of it lay in ruins.

1:4-5 *If Edom says, "We have been shattered, and we will return and build the ruins," thus says the LORD of armies: They will build, and I will tear down; and they will call them "Territory of Wickedness," and "The People with Whom the LORD Is Indignant Forever." And your eyes will see, and you will say, "The LORD is great beyond the border of Israel!"*

Edom says, "We have been shattered, and we will return and build the ruins." Edom thinks it can bounce back. We have been knocked down, but we will rebuild.

"Thus says the LORD of armies: They will build, and I will tear down." God's answer is final. They can build, but He will tear it down. And people will call them "Territory of Wickedness," and "The People with Whom the LORD Is Indignant Forever."

History bears this out. Edom never rose again as a nation in its own land. Many of its people moved into the south of Judah, where they were later called Idumeans, and after the Roman wars

of the first century A.D. the Edomites vanish from history. Israel, on the other hand, has survived everything. That is God's faithfulness.

"And your eyes will see," and Israel will say, "The LORD is great beyond the border of Israel!" Israel will see God's hand among the nations and confess that He is not a small, local god. He rules beyond Israel's borders. He rules everywhere.

1:6 *A son honors a father, and a servant his master. And if I **am** a father, where **is** My honor? And if I **am** a master, where **is** My fear? says the LORD of armies to you, O priests who despise My name. And you say, "In what have we despised Your name?"*

Now God turns to the priests. "A son honors a father, and a servant his master." Everyone knew this. A son shows respect to his father. A servant obeys and respects his master.

"And if I ***am*** a father, where ***is*** My honor? And if I ***am*** a master, where ***is*** My fear?" God was both Father and Master to Israel (Exodus 4:22; Isaiah 63:16). Fear here means reverent respect. Where was it?

God speaks to the priests directly: "O priests who despise My name." To despise is to treat as worthless. The name of God stands for who He is. The priests, of all people, should have honored it most. They served at His altar every day. But familiarity had bred contempt.

"And you say," and they answer, "In what have we despised Your name?" They did not even see it. That is often how it is with spiritual coldness. It creeps in slowly, and we do not notice.

1:7-8 ***You are*** *bringing near defiled bread on My altar. And you say, "In what have we defiled You?" In your saying, "The table of the LORD, it **is** despised." And when you bring near a blind **animal** to sacrifice, **is it** not evil? And when you bring near a lame and sick **animal**, **is it** not evil? Bring it near, please, to your governor; will he be pleased with you, or will he lift up your face? says the LORD of armies.*

God answers: "***You are*** bringing near defiled bread on My altar." The bread here means the food of the altar, the sacrifices offered to God. They were defiled, unclean, unfit. They ask, "In what have we defiled You?" God answers that they say, "The table of the LORD, it ***is*** despised." The table of the LORD is the altar. By their actions they were saying, the altar does not matter, anything will do.

"And when you bring near a blind ***animal*** to sacrifice, ***is it*** not evil? And when you bring near a lame and sick ***animal***, ***is it*** not evil?" The Law of Moses was clear. Animals offered to God had to be without blemish. "Blind or broken or maimed" animals were forbidden (Leviticus 22:20-22; Deuteronomy 15:21). But the priests were accepting the worst animals in the flock, the ones that were going to die anyway or could not be sold. The best stayed at home.

"Bring it near, please, to your governor; will he be pleased with you, or will he lift up your face? says the LORD of armies." The governor was the Persian official over Judah. God says, try giving that sick animal to the governor as a gift. See how he likes it. You would never dare insult a human official like that. Why do you insult Me?

This is a searching question for us. Do we give God our best, or our leftovers? Our best time, or the tired end of the day? Our best money, or what is left after everything else? David said, "I will not offer up to the LORD my God burnt offerings without cost" (2 Samuel 24:24). Paul says we are to present our bodies "***as*** a living, holy sacrifice, well-pleasing to God" (Romans 12:1). God does not need our gifts. But He deserves our best, because He gave His best for us.

1:9-10 *And now, entreat, please, the face of God, that He may be gracious to us. From your hand this has been; will He lift up* ***the*** *faces of* ***any*** *of you? says the LORD of armies. Who* ***is there*** *even among you that would shut the doors, so that you would not light My altar for nothing? I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of armies, and I will not accept an offering from your hand.*

"And now, entreat, please, the face of God, that He may be gracious to us." There is a bite in these words. Go ahead, pray for God's favor. "From your hand this has been; will He lift up ***the*** faces of ***any*** of you?" With offerings like these, do you really expect God to accept you?

"Who ***is there*** even among you that would shut the doors, so that you would not light My altar for nothing?" This is a startling wish. God says He would rather someone close the temple doors and stop the sacrifices altogether than keep up this empty, insulting worship. Worship without the heart is worse than no worship at all.

"I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of armies, and I will not accept an offering from your hand." God refuses their gifts. He does not want religion that is only going through the motions. Jesus quoted Isaiah: "This people draws near to Me with their mouth, and with the lips honors Me, but their heart is far away from Me" (Matthew 15:8).

1:11 *For from the rising of* ***the*** *sun to its setting My name* ***is*** *great among the nations, and in every place incense* ***is*** *being burned, being brought near to My name, and a pure offering; for My name* ***is*** *great among the nations, says the LORD of armies.*

"For from the rising of ***the*** sun to its setting My name ***is*** great among the nations." From east to west, everywhere, God's name will be honored. "And in every place incense ***is*** being burned, being brought near to My name, and a pure offering; for My name ***is*** great among the nations, says the LORD of armies."

What a contrast. The priests in Jerusalem, at God's own altar, despise His name. But among the nations, God's name will be great, and pure offerings will be brought to Him in every place.

When does this happen? Bible teachers read it in a few ways. Many see it fulfilled now, in the worship of believers from every nation through Jesus Christ. Jesus said the time had come when true worshipers would worship the Father "in spirit and truth" (John 4:23), not only in Jerusalem. Our prayers rise like incense (Revelation 5:8), and our praise is "a sacrifice of praise" (Hebrews 13:15). Others see it mainly in the future kingdom, when all nations will worship the LORD (Zechariah 14:16; Isaiah 66:19-21). Both fit. The worship of the nations began with the gospel going out to the world, and it will be complete when Christ reigns.

The point for Malachi's hearers was sharp. If the nations will honor My name, how can you, My priests, despise it?

1:12-13 *And you are profaning it in your saying, "The table of the Lord, it **is** defiled, and its fruit, its food **is** despised." And you say, "Look, what a weariness!" and you sniff at it, says the LORD of armies; and you bring the stolen **animal** and the lame and the sick; and you bring the offering! Shall I accept it from your hand? says the LORD.*

"And you are profaning it in your saying," and here is what they say: "The table of the Lord, it ***is*** defiled, and its fruit, its food ***is*** despised." To profane is to treat something holy as common. The priests treated God's altar like a common table and His service like a chore.

They say, "Look, what a weariness!" "And you sniff at it, says the LORD of armies." They sighed and rolled their eyes. What a bother. They sniffed at God's service as if it smelled bad. Have you ever felt that way about worship, or prayer, or serving others? It is easy to let the things of God become routine and then a burden.

"And you bring the stolen ***animal*** and the lame and the sick; and you bring the offering!" Some of the animals were even stolen. "Shall I accept it from your hand? says the LORD." Of course not.

1:14 *And cursed **is** the deceiver, when **there** is in his flock a male, and he vows and sacrifices a blemished **animal** to the Lord; for I **am** a great King, says the LORD of armies, and My name **is** feared among the nations.*

"And cursed ***is*** the deceiver, when ***there*** is in his flock a male, and he vows and sacrifices a blemished ***animal*** to the Lord." Here is a man who has a good male animal in his flock, the kind the Law required. He makes a vow to God, a promise to give an offering. But when the time comes, he keeps the good animal and brings a blemished one instead. He is a deceiver, trying to cheat God. God calls him cursed.

"For I ***am*** a great King, says the LORD of armies, and My name ***is*** feared among the nations." This is the reason. God is not a small god to be cheated. He is the great King over all kings. The nations will fear His name. How much more should His own people?

Chapter 1 begins with God's love and ends with God's greatness. Because He loves us, we can come to Him. Because He is the great King, we come with reverence and bring Him our best.

Summary

The LORD told Israel through Malachi that He had loved them. When they asked how, He pointed to Esau and Jacob: He chose Jacob and rejected Esau, and He had made Edom's land a waste. Edom might rebuild, but He would tear it down, and Israel would see it and say the LORD is great beyond their borders. Then God rebuked the priests who despised His name. They brought blind, lame and sick animals to His altar, gifts they would never offer the governor, and called His service a weariness. God wished someone would shut the temple doors, because He would not accept their offerings, while His name would be great among the nations from the rising of the sun to its setting. Cursed is the cheat who vows a good animal and gives a blemished one, for God is a great King, and His name is feared among the nations.

Study Questions

1. What is the first thing God says to His people in Malachi, and how do they answer? (1:2)

2. How did God show His love for Jacob, compared to Esau? (1:2-5; Genesis 25:23)

3. What does it mean that God loved Jacob and hated Esau, and how does Paul use it? (1:2-3; Romans 9:11-13)

4. What did God ask the priests about His honor and His fear? (1:6)

5. What kinds of animals were the priests offering, and why was that wrong? (1:7-8; Leviticus 22:20-22)

6. Why would God rather have the temple doors shut than receive their offerings? (1:10)

7. What does God say about His name among the nations? (1:11, 14)

8. When life is hard, have you ever asked God how He has loved you? How does this chapter answer that?

9. Are you giving God your best, or your leftovers, in your time, money and energy? What would change if you gave Him your best?

10. Has worship, prayer or serving ever felt like "a weariness" to you? What helps you come back to honoring God as your Father and great King?

Malachi 2: Faithless Priests and Broken Marriages

Scripture

2:1-9 And now, to you ***is*** this commandment, O priests. If you will not listen, and if you will not put ***it*** on ***your*** heart to give glory to My name, says the LORD of armies, and I will send the curse on you, and I will curse your blessings; and also I have cursed it, because you are not putting ***it*** on ***your*** heart. Look, I am rebuking the seed for you, and I will scatter dung on your faces, the dung of your festivals; and one will carry you away to it. And you will know that I have sent to you this commandment, for My covenant to be with Levi, says the LORD of armies. My covenant was with him, the life and the peace, and I gave them to him ***for*** fear; and he feared Me, and before My name he was dismayed. The law of truth was in his mouth, and injustice was not found on his lips; in peace and in uprightness he walked with Me, and many he turned back from iniquity. For the lips of a priest shall keep knowledge, and they shall seek law from his mouth; for he ***is*** the messenger of the LORD of armies. And you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the law; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the LORD of armies. And also I, I have made you despised and low before all the people, inasmuch as you are not keeping My ways, and ***are*** showing partiality in the law.

2:10-17 Is there not one father for all of us? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously, each man against his brother, to profane the covenant of our fathers? Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been done in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the holiness of the LORD, which He loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god. May the LORD cut off, for the man who does it, the one who wakes and the one who answers, from the tents of Jacob, and the one who brings near an offering to the LORD of armies. And this second ***thing*** you do: covering the altar of the LORD ***with*** tears, ***with*** weeping and groaning, because ***there is*** no longer turning to the offering, or taking ***it with*** favor from your hand. And you say, "On account of what?" Because the LORD has testified between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously; and she ***is*** your companion and the wife of your covenant. And did He not make one, and a remnant of spirit ***is*** His? And what ***is*** the one seeking? A seed of God. And you shall take heed in your spirit, and against the wife of your youth let none deal treacherously. For he hates sending away, says the LORD, the God of Israel, and he covers his clothing ***with*** violence, says the LORD of armies. And you shall take heed in your spirit, and you shall not deal treacherously. You have wearied the LORD with your words. And you say, "In what have we wearied ***Him***?" In your saying, "Everyone who does evil ***is*** good in the eyes of the LORD, and in them He delights," or, "Where ***is*** the God of justice?"

Preview

Chapter 2 continues God's charge against the priests. If they will not listen and give glory to His name, He will turn their blessings into curses. God reminds them of His covenant with Levi, the father of the priestly tribe. Levi's true priests feared God, taught the truth and turned many away from sin. A priest was meant to be the messenger of the LORD of armies. But these priests had turned aside, caused many to stumble and shown favoritism in teaching God's Law, so God had made them despised before the people.

Then Malachi turns to the home. Men of Judah had married women who worshiped other gods, and many had broken faith with the wives of their youth, sending them away. The LORD Himself was a witness to their covenant. This passage is tender ground for anyone touched by divorce, and we will walk through it carefully. The chapter ends with the people wearying God with their words, saying, "Where ***is*** the God of justice?"

Study

2:1-2 *And now, to you **is** this commandment, O priests. If you will not listen, and if you will not put **it** on **your** heart to give glory to My name, says the LORD of armies, and I will send the curse on you, and I will curse your blessings; and also I have cursed it, because you are not putting **it** on **your** heart.*

"And now, to you ***is*** this commandment, O priests." God continues speaking to the priests of chapter 1. The commandment is the warning that follows.

"If you will not listen, and if you will not put ***it*** on ***your*** heart to give glory to My name, says the LORD of armies, and I will send the curse on you." To put it on your heart means to take it seriously, to make it a matter of the heart and not just the hands. The priests went through the motions of worship, but their hearts were not in it. Their whole job was to give glory to God's name, and they were not doing it.

"And I will curse your blessings." The priests pronounced blessings on the people (Numbers 6:22-27), and they received blessings in the form of food and offerings. God says He will turn those blessings into curses. "And also I have cursed it, because you are not putting ***it*** on ***your*** heart." It had already begun.

James says teachers "will receive greater judgment" (James 3:1). Those who handle holy things must do it with their whole heart.

2:3-4 *Look, I am rebuking the seed for you, and I will scatter dung on your faces, the dung of your festivals; and one will carry you away to it. And you will know that I have sent to you this commandment, for My covenant to be with Levi, says the LORD of armies.*

"Look, I am rebuking the seed for you." The seed may mean the grain crop, which God would hold back, or the priests' offspring, who would suffer for their fathers' sin. Either way, the harm would reach their future.

"And I will scatter dung on your faces, the dung of your festivals; and one will carry you away to it." These are deliberately shocking words. The waste of sacrificed animals was carried outside the camp and burned (Exodus 29:14; Leviticus 4:11-12). The priests who treated God's altar with contempt would be treated as refuse themselves, a picture of complete disgrace.

"And you will know that I have sent to you this commandment, for My covenant to be with Levi, says the LORD of armies." The purpose of the warning was not to destroy the priesthood but to restore it, so that God's covenant with Levi would continue.

2:5-6 *My covenant was with him, the life and the peace, and I gave them to him **for** fear; and he feared Me, and before My name he was dismayed. The law of truth was in his mouth, and injustice was not found on his lips; in peace and in uprightness he walked with Me, and many he turned back from iniquity.*

"My covenant was with him, the life and the peace." God made a covenant with the tribe of Levi to be His priests and servants. Moses blessed Levi to teach God's judgments and Law (Deuteronomy 33:8-11), and God gave Phinehas, Aaron's grandson, "My covenant of peace" (Numbers 25:12). The covenant promised life and peace.

"And I gave them to him ***for*** fear; and he feared Me, and before My name he was dismayed." The faithful priests of old feared God. They stood in awe of His name. They were not casual about holy things.

"The law of truth was in his mouth, and injustice was not found on his lips." They taught God's Word truly and did not twist it. "In peace and in uprightness he walked with Me." Their lives matched their words. They walked with God, like Enoch and Noah. "And many he turned back from iniquity." Their teaching and example turned people away from sin.

That is a picture of a godly minister, and every pastor, teacher and parent can pray to be like that.

2:7 *For the lips of a priest shall keep knowledge, and they shall seek law from his mouth; for he **is** the messenger of the LORD of armies.*

"For the lips of a priest shall keep knowledge, and they shall seek law from his mouth." The priest was to know God's Word and guard it, so that people could come to him and learn what God says. Ezra was that kind of priest. He "had set his heart to seek the law of the LORD and to do ***it***, and to teach" (Ezra 7:10).

"For he ***is*** the messenger of the LORD of armies." The word messenger here is the Hebrew malak, the same word in Malachi's own name and in 3:1. A priest who taught God's truth was God's messenger to the people. Under the new covenant, every believer is part of "a holy priesthood" (1 Peter 2:5), called to speak God's truth to others.

2:8-9 *And you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the law; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the LORD of armies. And also I, I have made you despised and low before all the people, inasmuch as you are not keeping My ways, and **are** showing partiality in the law.*

"And you, you have turned aside from the way." The priests of Malachi's day had left the path. "You have caused many to stumble by the law." Instead of turning people from sin, they made people stumble. Their teaching led people wrong. "You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the LORD of armies." They had ruined what God gave.

"And also I, I have made you despised and low before all the people." They despised God's name (1:6), so God made them despised. The people lost respect for them. "Inasmuch as you are not keeping My ways, and ***are*** showing partiality in the law." Partiality means favoritism, bending

the rules for the rich and important. They applied God's Law strictly to some and loosely to others. James warns believers against holding the faith "with partiality" (James 2:1).

2:10 *Is there not one father for all of us? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously, each man against his brother, to profane the covenant of our fathers?*

Now Malachi speaks to the whole nation. "Is there not one father for all of us? Has not one God created us?" The one father may be Abraham or Jacob, the father of the nation, or it may be God Himself, who made Israel His people (Isaiah 63:16; 64:8). The next line suggests God. Either way, they were one family.

"Why do we deal treacherously, each man against his brother, to profane the covenant of our fathers?" To deal treacherously means to break faith, to betray someone who trusted you. This word appears five times in verses 10 to 16. It is the key word of the passage. They were betraying one another, and in doing so they were treating God's covenant with their fathers as a common thing.

2:11-12 *Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been done in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the holiness of the LORD, which He loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god. May the LORD cut off, for the man who does it, the one who wakes and the one who answers, from the tents of Jacob, and the one who brings near an offering to the LORD of armies.*

"Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been done in Israel and in Jerusalem." An abomination is something God finds disgusting. What was it? "For Judah has profaned the holiness of the LORD, which He loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god."

The daughter of a foreign god means a woman who worshiped another god. This is important. The problem was not race or nationality. It was faith. The Law forbade Israel to marry those who served other gods, "for he will turn your son away from after Me, and they will serve other gods" (Deuteronomy 7:3-4). That is exactly what happened to Solomon (1 Kings 11:4). But the door was always open to anyone from another nation who turned to the LORD. Rahab the Canaanite and Ruth the Moabite married into Israel and are named in the family line of Jesus (Matthew 1:5). Ruth said to Naomi, "your people ***will be*** my people, and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16). What God forbade was marrying someone who still served other gods. Ezra and Nehemiah faced this same problem (Ezra 9-10; Nehemiah 13:23-27).

The New Testament teaches the same principle for believers. Paul says, "Do not become unequally yoked with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14), and a widow is free to remarry, "only in ***the*** Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:39). A believer should marry a believer. This has nothing to do with skin color or nationality. In Christ, "There is not Jew nor Greek" (Galatians 3:28).

"May the LORD cut off, for the man who does it, the one who wakes and the one who answers, from the tents of Jacob." The phrase "the one who wakes and the one who answers" is hard to translate. It seems to be a saying that means everyone, all of his family, anyone at all connected

with him. Malachi prays that God would cut off such a man from the community of Israel, even if he brings an offering to the LORD of armies. Religious activity does not cover a betrayal like this.

2:13-14 *And this second **thing** you do: covering the altar of the LORD **with** tears, **with** weeping and groaning, because **there is** no longer turning to the offering, or taking **it with** favor from your hand. And you say, "On account of what?" Because the LORD has testified between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously; and she **is** your companion and the wife of your covenant.*

"And this second ***thing*** you do: covering the altar of the LORD ***with*** tears, ***with*** weeping and groaning." The people were weeping at the altar. Why? "Because ***there is*** no longer turning to the offering, or taking ***it with*** favor from your hand." God was not accepting their offerings, and they did not understand why. They cried and cried, but heaven was closed.

They ask, "On account of what?" Why will God not hear us? Here is the answer: "Because the LORD has testified between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously."

The wife of your youth is the woman a man married when he was young, the one he started life with. Many men in Malachi's day were divorcing their older wives, perhaps to marry younger women, or women from wealthy families who worshiped other gods (2:11). In that culture, a divorced woman was often left alone and poor.

God says, I was a witness. Marriage is not just an agreement between two people. God is present at every wedding. He hears every promise. "And she ***is*** your companion and the wife of your covenant." She is your partner, your friend. And she is the wife of your covenant. Marriage is a covenant, a binding promise made before God (Proverbs 2:17). Breaking it is breaking faith with God.

This explains why their prayers were not heard. Peter says husbands should honor their wives "so that your prayers may not be cut off" (1 Peter 3:7). How we treat our husband or wife affects our walk with God.

2:15 *And did He not make one, and a remnant of spirit **is** His? And what **is** the one seeking? A seed of God. And you shall take heed in your spirit, and against the wife of your youth let none deal treacherously.*

"And did He not make one, and a remnant of spirit ***is*** his?" This is one of the hardest verses in the Old Testament to translate, and versions differ. The most likely sense is that God made husband and wife one. In the beginning, God took the man and the woman and made them "one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Jesus quoted this when He taught about marriage: "So then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:6). "And a remnant of spirit ***is*** his" may mean that God has all power of spirit and life, so He could have made many wives for Adam, but He made one.

"And what ***is*** the one seeking? A seed of God." Why did God make them one? He was seeking godly offspring, children raised in faith. A faithful marriage is God's design for raising children who know Him.

"And you shall take heed in your spirit, and against the wife of your youth let none deal treacherously." Guard your heart. Faithfulness in marriage begins in the spirit, long before any outward betrayal.

2:16 *For he hates sending away, says the LORD, the God of Israel, and he covers his clothing* ***with*** *violence, says the LORD of armies. And you shall take heed in your spirit, and you shall not deal treacherously.*

This verse has been read in two main ways, and it helps to know both. In the SLB, the word "he" at the start of the verse is printed with a small letter, which leaves the question open.

Many translations make God the speaker and the subject: God says He hates divorce, the sending away of a wife. On this reading, God plainly says how He feels about the breaking of a marriage covenant.

Other translations read it as describing the man who does it: a man who hates his wife and sends her away covers his garment with violence. On this reading, God is saying that the husband who puts away his faithful wife out of dislike is doing violence to her, and it stains him like blood on his clothes.

Both readings lead to the same truth. God takes the treacherous breaking of a marriage seriously. Sending away a faithful wife was not a small thing to Him. It was violence against her, and "says the LORD of armies," He saw it. "And you shall take heed in your spirit, and you shall not deal treacherously." For the fifth time, God says it: do not break faith.

Now I want to speak pastorally, because this verse touches real people. Some who read this have been through a divorce. Some grew up in a home that broke apart. Some were the ones who were sent away, like the wives in Malachi's day. If that is you, hear this: God's anger in this passage is against the treachery, not against the one who was betrayed. God was defending those wives. He is "near to the broken of heart" (Psalm 34:18).

Not every divorce is the same. Jesus spoke of sexual immorality as a reason (Matthew 19:9), and Paul spoke of a believer abandoned by an unbelieving spouse (1 Corinthians 7:15). Good Bible teachers differ on what these exceptions allow, especially about remarriage, and this is a place for humility and for your pastor's counsel. And this verse was never meant to keep anyone in danger. If you or your children are being harmed, get to safety and get help.

For those who carry guilt over a divorce they caused, there is forgiveness. The blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin (1 John 1:7). "***There is*** therefore now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Divorce is not the unforgivable sin. The church should be a place where the divorced are welcomed, loved and helped to heal, not a place of shame.

2:17 *You have wearied the LORD with your words. And you say, "In what have we wearied **Him**?" In your saying, "Everyone who does evil **is** good in the eyes of the LORD, and in them He delights," or, "Where **is** the God of justice?"*

"You have wearied the LORD with your words." God is never tired in body (Isaiah 40:28). But people can grieve Him and try His patience with their words. They ask, "In what have we wearied ***Him***?" Again they do not see it.

Here is how. They were saying, "Everyone who does evil ***is*** good in the eyes of the LORD, and in them He delights." They looked around and saw wicked people doing well, and they concluded that God must like evil people. Or they asked, "Where ***is*** the God of justice?" If God is just, why does He not act? Why do the wicked prosper?

The psalmist asked the same: he was envious of the arrogant when he saw "the peace of ***the*** wicked" (Psalm 73:3), until he went into God's sanctuary and saw their end (Psalm 73:17). It is not wrong to bring that question to God honestly. What wearied God was not an honest question but a cynical one, people who used His delay as an excuse to stop fearing Him.

God's answer comes in chapter 3: "Look, I am sending My messenger" (3:1). The God of justice is on His way.

Summary

God warned the priests that if they would not honor His name, He would curse their blessings and disgrace them. His covenant with Levi had been one of life and peace, and the faithful priests feared God, taught the truth and turned many from sin, for a priest is the messenger of the LORD of armies. But these priests had turned aside, made many stumble and shown partiality in the Law. The people broke faith with one another. Men of Judah married women who served foreign gods, and men betrayed the wives of their youth, though the LORD was witness to their covenant and had made them one, seeking godly offspring. God condemned the treacherous sending away of a faithful wife as violence and told them to guard their spirit and not break faith. They had wearied the LORD by saying He delights in evildoers and asking where the God of justice was.

Study Questions

1. What did God warn the priests He would do if they would not give glory to His name? (2:1-3)

2. What were the faithful priests of the covenant with Levi like? (2:5-6)

3. Why does God call a priest "the messenger of the LORD of armies"? (2:7)

4. How had the priests of Malachi's day failed? (2:8-9)

5. What does "the daughter of a foreign god" mean, and why was that marriage wrong? (2:11; Deuteronomy 7:3-4)

6. Why were the people's tears at the altar not answered? (2:13-14)

7. What does Malachi say about the LORD's place in a marriage? (2:14-15)

8. If divorce has touched your life, what does this chapter show you about God's heart toward the one who was betrayed and toward the one who repents?

9. How do you "take heed in your spirit" to guard faithfulness in your marriage or your closest relationships?

10. Have you ever asked, "Where is the God of justice?" What helps you keep trusting Him when the wicked seem to prosper?

Malachi 3: The Messenger and the Refiner's Fire

Scripture

3:1-12 Look, I am sending My messenger, and he will clear a way before Me; and suddenly the Lord whom you are seeking will come to His temple, and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight; look, He is coming, says the LORD of armies. And who endures the day of His coming? And who ***is*** the one standing when He appears? For He ***is*** like the fire of a refiner and like the soap of launderers. And He will sit ***as*** a refiner and purifier of silver; and He will purify the sons of Levi, and He will refine them like gold and like silver; and they will be to the LORD those bringing near an offering in righteousness. And the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD, like the days of old and like former years. And I will draw near to you for judgment, and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear to falsehood, and against those who oppress the wages of the hired laborer, the widow and the fatherless, and those who thrust aside the sojourner; and they do not fear Me, says the LORD of armies. For I ***am*** the LORD; I have not changed; and you, sons of Jacob, have not come to an end. From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept ***them***. Return to Me, and let Me return to you, says the LORD of armies. And you say, "In what shall we return?" Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me. And you say, "In what have we robbed You?" ***In*** the tithe and the contribution. With the curse you are cursed, and Me you are robbing, the nation, all of it. Bring all the tithe into the storehouse, and let ***there*** be food in My house; and test Me, please, by this, says the LORD of armies, if I will not open for you the windows of the heavens, and pour out for you blessing until ***there is*** not enough ***room***. And I will rebuke the devourer for you, and it will not destroy for you the fruit of the ground, and the vine in the field will not be barren for you, says the LORD of armies. And all the nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of armies.

3:13-18 Your words have been strong against Me, says the LORD. And you say, "What have we spoken together against You?" You have said, "***It is*** futile to serve God; and what profit ***is it*** that we have kept His charge, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of armies? And now we are calling the arrogant blessed; also those who do wickedness have been built up; also they have tested God, and they have escaped." Then those who fear the LORD spoke together, each man with his neighbor; and the LORD paid attention and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and for those who esteem His name. And they will be Mine, says the LORD of armies, for the day that I am making, a treasured possession; and I will spare them, as a man spares his son who serves him. And you will again see ***the difference*** between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.

Preview

The people had asked, "Where ***is*** the God of justice?" (2:17). Chapter 3 answers: He is coming. First God will send His messenger to clear the way. Then the Lord they are seeking will suddenly come to His temple. But who can stand when He appears? He will be like a refiner's fire and a launderer's soap. He will purify the priests and judge the wicked.

Then God says, "I ***am*** the LORD; I have not changed." That is why Israel still stands. God calls them back and shows them they are robbing Him in tithes and offerings. The chapter ends with a quiet scene: while some say it is useless to serve God, those who fear the LORD talk together, and God listens. A book of remembrance is written before Him, and He says, "they will be Mine," His treasured possession.

Study

3:1 *Look, I am sending My messenger, and he will clear a way before Me; and suddenly the Lord whom you are seeking will come to His temple, and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight; look, He is coming, says the LORD of armies.*

"Look, I am sending My messenger, and he will clear a way before Me." In Hebrew, My messenger is malakhi, the same as the prophet's name. In ancient times, before a king traveled, a messenger went ahead to clear the road, fill the holes and announce that the king was coming. Isaiah spoke of the same thing: "In the wilderness clear the way of the LORD" (Isaiah 40:3).

Who is this messenger? The New Testament tells us plainly. Jesus said of John the Baptist, "this is he concerning whom it has been written," and then He quoted Malachi: "Look, I send My messenger before Your face, who will prepare Your way before You" (Matthew 11:10; Luke 7:27). Mark begins his Gospel with this verse (Mark 1:2). John prepared the way by calling Israel to repent and be baptized, and by pointing to Jesus: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

Notice a small change. In Malachi, God says the messenger will clear the way "before Me." In the Gospels, it is "before Your face" and "Your way." The One who is coming is the LORD Himself, and the Gospels say that One is Jesus. That is a clear statement of who Jesus is. John prepared the way for the LORD, and the LORD who came was Jesus.

"And suddenly the Lord whom you are seeking will come to His temple." The people had been asking where God was. He would come, and suddenly. "The Lord" here is the Master, and the temple is "His temple." Jesus came to the temple that Zerubbabel built and Herod enlarged. He was presented there as a baby (Luke 2:22-32), taught there and cleansed it, calling it "the house of My Father" (John 2:16). It was His temple because He was its Lord.

"And the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight." This is a second messenger, different from the first. The first prepares the way. The second is the Lord Himself, called "the messenger of the covenant." Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant (Hebrews 9:15), sealed in His blood (Luke 22:20). "Look, He is coming, says the LORD of armies."

3:2-3 *And who endures the day of His coming? And who **is** the one standing when He appears? For He **is** like the fire of a refiner and like the soap of launderers. And He will sit **as** a refiner and purifier of silver; and He will purify the sons of Levi, and He will refine them like gold and like silver; and they will be to the LORD those bringing near an offering in righteousness.*

"And who endures the day of His coming? And who ***is*** the one standing when He appears?" The people wanted God to come and judge the wicked. But they did not stop to think that He would judge them too. When the holy God comes, who can stand?

"For He ***is*** like the fire of a refiner and like the soap of launderers." A refiner melts silver or gold so the impurities can be skimmed off. A launderer scrubbed cloth white with strong soap. Both speak of cleansing that is thorough, painful and good.

"And He will sit ***as*** a refiner and purifier of silver." A refiner sits by the fire, watching closely, so that the metal is not harmed. He knows exactly how much heat it needs. "And He will purify the sons of Levi." He starts with the priests, the ones who had despised His name (1:6). Judgment begins with the house of God (1 Peter 4:17). "And He will refine them like gold and like silver; and they will be to the LORD those bringing near an offering in righteousness."

When does this happen? Like Zechariah 9:9-10, this passage sees Christ's two comings together. At His first coming, John's preaching and Jesus' cleansing of the temple were a foretaste of this refining. But the full refining and judgment, the day that no one can endure, is at His second coming. Then Israel will be purified, and the priests will offer worship that pleases God (Zechariah 13:9; Ezekiel 44:15).

God still refines His people today. He uses hard things to burn away what does not belong, and He sits by the fire, knowing how much heat we can take (1 Peter 1:7).

3:4-5 *And the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD, like the days of old and like former years. And I will draw near to you for judgment, and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear to falsehood, and against those who oppress the wages of the hired laborer, the widow and the fatherless, and those who thrust aside the sojourner; and they do not fear Me, says the LORD of armies.*

"And the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD, like the days of old and like former years." After the refining, worship will be pure again, as it was in the best days of Israel's history.

"And I will draw near to you for judgment." The people asked for the God of justice. Here He is, "a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers," against liars, and against those who cheat hired workers and oppress the widow, the fatherless and the foreigner.

God cares about all of life, from the home to the paycheck. And notice the root of it all: "they do not fear Me." When people stop fearing God, they stop caring for one another.

3:6 *For I **am** the LORD; I have not changed; and you, sons of Jacob, have not come to an end.*

"For I ***am*** the LORD; I have not changed." This is one of the great verses of the Bible. God does not change. His character, His promises and His purposes are always the same. He does not grow tired, change His mind or forget His word. "God ***is*** not a man, that He should lie" (Numbers 23:19). James says that with the Father of lights "there is no variation or shadow of turning" (James 1:17). And Hebrews says, "Jesus Christ ***is*** the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

"And you, sons of Jacob, have not come to an end." Why was Israel still here after all their sin? Not because they were faithful, but because God was. He does not break His promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jeremiah said that only if the sun, moon and stars stop their courses will "the seed of Israel" cease from being a nation before God (Jeremiah 31:35-36). Paul says "the gifts and the calling of God ***are*** irrevocable" (Romans 11:29). God still has a future for Israel.

That is also our security. If you belong to Christ, your salvation rests not on your faithfulness but on His. He does not change.

3:7 *From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept **them**. Return to Me, and let Me return to you, says the LORD of armies. And you say, "In what shall we return?"*

"From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept ***them***." This had been Israel's pattern for a thousand years. "Return to Me, and let Me return to you, says the LORD of armies." It is the same call Zechariah gave (Zechariah 1:3). God's door is still open.

They ask, "In what shall we return?" It is a sad question. They did not think they had gone anywhere. They could not see their own sin. So God shows them one clear example.

3:8-9 *Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me. And you say, "In what have we robbed You?" **In** the tithe and the contribution. With the curse you are cursed, and Me you are robbing, the nation, all of it.*

"Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me." Can anyone really rob God? It seems impossible. Yet they were doing it. They ask, "In what have we robbed You?" God answers, "***In*** the tithe and the contribution."

The tithe was a tenth. Under the Law of Moses, Israel was to give a tenth of their harvest and herds to the LORD (Leviticus 27:30). The tithe supported the Levites, who had no land of their own and served at the temple (Numbers 18:21), and every third year a tithe went to the Levites, foreigners, orphans and widows in each town (Deuteronomy 14:28-29). The contribution was the portion of offerings given to the priests. When the people held these back, the Levites had to leave the temple to farm, as Nehemiah found (Nehemiah 13:10-12).

"With the curse you are cursed, and Me you are robbing, the nation, all of it." Their harvests were failing (3:11). Under the covenant of Moses, God had promised blessing for obedience and the curse for disobedience (Deuteronomy 28). They were under that curse because the whole nation was holding back what belonged to God.

3:10 *Bring all the tithe into the storehouse, and let **there** be food in My house; and test Me, please, by this, says the LORD of armies, if I will not open for you the windows of the heavens, and pour out for you blessing until **there is** not enough **room**.*

"Bring all the tithe into the storehouse, and let ***there*** be food in My house." The storehouse was the set of storerooms in the temple where the tithes of grain, wine and oil were kept to feed the Levites and priests (Nehemiah 13:12-13). God says, bring all of it, not part.

"And test Me, please, by this, says the LORD of armies, if I will not open for you the windows of the heavens, and pour out for you blessing until ***there is*** not enough ***room***." This is the only place in the Bible where God invites His people to test Him like this. The windows of the heavens are where the rain comes from (Genesis 7:11). God promises to send rain and harvest so great that there will not be room to store it all.

How should we understand this today? We need to be careful in two ways.

First, believers differ on whether the tithe is required of Christians. Some believe the tithe is still God's standard, pointing out that Abraham gave a tenth before the Law was given (Genesis 14:20). Others believe the tithe belonged to the Law of Moses, which was fulfilled in Christ, and that the New Testament calls us to give generously, regularly and cheerfully, as each one decides in his heart, without setting a fixed percentage (1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 9:7). Good Bible teachers hold both views. Many who hold the second view still see a tenth as a good place to start.

Second, this verse is not a formula for getting rich. Malachi 3:10 was a promise to Israel, under the covenant of Moses, about rain and harvests in their land. It does not teach that if we give money to God, or to a preacher, He will make us wealthy. Some teach that, and it has hurt many people. Paul warns that "the love of money is a root of all the evils" (1 Timothy 6:10). God does bless those who give. "God ***is*** able to make all grace abound to you, so that, always having all sufficiency in everything, you may abound to every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:8). But His blessing may be peace, joy, contentment, provision for our needs (Philippians 4:19), and treasure in heaven, not a bigger bank account.

The heart of this verse still speaks to us. Giving is an act of faith that says, all I have is His, and He will take care of me.

3:11-12 *And I will rebuke the devourer for you, and it will not destroy for you the fruit of the ground, and the vine in the field will not be barren for you, says the LORD of armies. And all the nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of armies.*

"And I will rebuke the devourer for you." The devourer is likely the locust, which could strip a field bare in a day (Joel 1:4). "And it will not destroy for you the fruit of the ground, and the vine in the field will not be barren for you." God would protect their crops.

"And all the nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of armies." When Israel honored God, the nations would see His blessing on them. I believe this will be fully true in the kingdom, when Israel is restored and the nations come to Jerusalem (Zechariah 8:13, 23).

3:13-15 *Your words have been strong against Me, says the LORD. And you say, "What have we spoken together against You?" You have said, "**It is** futile to serve God; and what profit **is it** that we have kept His charge, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of armies? And now we are calling the arrogant blessed; also those who do wickedness have been built up; also they have tested God, and they have escaped."*

"Your words have been strong against Me, says the LORD." Strong here means harsh, bold, arrogant. They ask, "What have we spoken together against You?" Again they do not see it.

Here is what they said: "***It is*** futile to serve God; and what profit ***is it*** that we have kept His charge, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of armies?" Futile means useless. They had done the religious things, kept the rules and put on a sad face in fasting, and they had not gotten what they wanted. So they decided serving God did not pay. Their religion had been a business deal, and they felt cheated.

"And now we are calling the arrogant blessed." They looked at the proud and wicked and said, they are the happy ones. "Also those who do wickedness have been built up; also they have tested God, and they have escaped." The wicked dared God to do something, and nothing happened to them.

Have you ever felt that way? It is an honest struggle, but it turns to bitterness if we let it. We do not serve God for profit. We serve Him because He is God and He loves us.

3:16 *Then those who fear the LORD spoke together, each man with his neighbor; and the LORD paid attention and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and for those who esteem His name.*

"Then those who fear the LORD spoke together, each man with his neighbor." Here is the turning point. Not everyone in Judah had grown cold. There was a faithful remnant, people who feared the LORD. While others complained, they met together and encouraged one another. Hebrews tells us not to forsake meeting together, but to encourage one another (Hebrews 10:24-25).

"And the LORD paid attention and heard." God was listening. He always is. Every word spoken in faith reaches Him.

"And a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and for those who esteem His name." Persian kings kept records of those who served them so they could be rewarded, as Mordecai was (Esther 2:21-23; 6:1-3). God keeps a book too. Those who fear Him and esteem His name, who think highly of Him and value Him, are written in it. Scripture speaks of God's book in other places as well (Exodus 32:32; Psalm 56:8; Revelation 20:12), and Jesus told His disciples to rejoice that "your names were written in the heavens" (Luke 10:20).

What a comfort. When it seems that faithfulness goes unnoticed, God notices. Nothing done for Him is forgotten.

3:17-18 *And they will be Mine, says the LORD of armies, for the day that I am making, a treasured possession; and I will spare them, as a man spares his son who serves him. And you will again see* ***the difference*** *between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.*

"And they will be Mine, says the LORD of armies, for the day that I am making, a treasured possession." A treasured possession is a king's private treasure, the jewels he keeps for himself. God used the same word for Israel at Mount Sinai: "you shall be to Me a treasured possession out of all the peoples" (Exodus 19:5). Peter uses the same idea for believers: "a people for ***His*** possession" (1 Peter 2:9). On the day God acts, those who fear Him will be His treasure.

"And I will spare them, as a man spares his son who serves him." When judgment comes, God will spare them, with the tender care of a father for a loving son.

"And you will again see ***the difference*** between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him." The people had said there was no difference, that serving God was useless. God says, a day is coming when everyone will see the difference. It will be as clear as day.

Summary

God would send His messenger to clear the way, and then the Lord, the messenger of the covenant, would suddenly come to His temple. He would be like a refiner's fire, purifying the priests and judging those who do not fear Him. Because the LORD does not change, Jacob's sons had not been destroyed. They were robbing God in tithes and offerings, so He told them to bring the whole tithe and see if He would not open the windows of heaven. Some said serving God was useless, but those who feared the LORD spoke together, and a book of remembrance was written for them. They would be His treasured possession, and all would see the difference between the righteous and the wicked.

Study Questions

1. Whom did God promise to send ahead of Him, and who was that messenger? (3:1; Matthew 11:10)

2. Who will suddenly come to His temple, and how does the New Testament show this is Jesus? (3:1; Mark 1:2)

3. What two pictures describe the Lord when He comes, and what do they mean? (3:2-3)

4. Why had the sons of Jacob not been destroyed? (3:6)

5. How were the people robbing God, and what did God tell them to do? (3:8-10)

6. What were some people saying about serving God, and why? (3:13-15)

7. What did those who feared the LORD do, and what did God do in response? (3:16-17)

8. God says, "I have not changed." How does that truth comfort you in a changing world?

9. How do you think about giving to God? Is it a matter of rules, of fear, of trust or of love?

10. When it seems that faithfulness goes unnoticed, what does the book of remembrance tell you?

Malachi 4: The Sun of Righteousness and Elijah the Prophet

Scripture

4:1-6 For look, the day is coming, burning like the furnace; and all the arrogant and everyone who does wickedness will be stubble; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze, says the LORD of armies, so that it will not leave them root or branch. And for you who fear My name the sun of righteousness will rise, and healing ***is*** in its wings; and you will go out and leap like calves of the stall. And you will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I am acting, says the LORD of armies. Remember the law of Moses My servant, which I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel, statutes and judgments. Look, I am sending to you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. And he will turn back the heart of fathers to sons, and the heart of sons to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land ***with*** a devoted destruction.

Preview

The last chapter of the Old Testament is only six verses long, but it looks all the way to the end of history. "For look, the day is coming, burning like the furnace." For the arrogant and the wicked, the day of the LORD will be like fire in dry stubble, leaving neither root nor branch. But for those who fear God's name, the same day will be like sunrise: "the sun of righteousness will rise, and healing ***is*** in its wings." They will go out leaping like calves let out of the stall.

Then come two final words. Look back: remember the Law of Moses. And look ahead: God will send Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD, to turn the hearts of fathers and children to one another. With that, the voice of prophecy falls silent for about four hundred years, until a man dressed in camel's hair appears in the wilderness, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to prepare the way for the Lord.

Study

4:1 *For look, the day is coming, burning like the furnace; and all the arrogant and everyone who does wickedness will be stubble; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze, says the LORD of armies, so that it will not leave them root or branch.*

"For look, the day is coming, burning like the furnace." The day is the day of the LORD, the day of judgment we saw in Zechariah 14 and Zephaniah 1. A furnace, or oven, was a clay oven heated with fire until it glowed. That day will burn with that kind of heat.

"And all the arrogant and everyone who does wickedness will be stubble." The people had said, "we are calling the arrogant blessed" (3:15). God answers: the arrogant will be stubble. Stubble is the dry stalks left in a field after the harvest. It catches fire in a moment and is gone. "And the day that is coming will set them ablaze, says the LORD of armies, so that it will not leave them root or branch." Nothing will be left, neither the roots below the ground nor the branches above it. The

judgment will be complete. John the Baptist used the same kind of picture when he spoke of Christ: the chaff "He will burn up with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:12).

The people had asked, "Where ***is*** the God of justice?" (2:17). Here is His answer. He has not forgotten. The wicked who seem to prosper now will not prosper forever. I believe this day will come in the judgments at the end of the Tribulation and at Christ's return (Revelation 19:11-21), and in the final judgment after the thousand years (Revelation 20:11-15).

4:2 *And for you who fear My name the sun of righteousness will rise, and healing **is** in its wings; and you will go out and leap like calves of the stall.*

"And for you who fear My name the sun of righteousness will rise." The same day that burns the wicked brings sunrise for the faithful. The sun that scorches dry stubble warms and heals the living.

Let us look closely at this beautiful verse.

"For you who fear My name." This is the remnant of 3:16, those who fear the LORD and value His name. To fear God's name is to honor Him, trust Him and live in awe of Him. The promise is for them.

"The sun of righteousness will rise." In the SLB, the word sun is printed with a small letter, as a picture. The sun is the great light that rules the day and drives away the darkness. Righteousness is what is right, God's justice and goodness put right in the world. So the sun of righteousness is the light of God's righteousness breaking over a dark world, like dawn after a long night.

Many Bible teachers, from the early church on, have seen in this sun a picture of Jesus Christ Himself, and this study reads it that way. Here is why. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, was filled with the Holy Spirit when John was born, and he said that John would go before the Lord to prepare His ways (Luke 1:76), "because of ***the*** tender mercy of our God, in which ***the*** Sunrise from on high has visited us" (Luke 1:78). Zechariah was echoing Malachi. John was the messenger. Jesus is the Sunrise. Isaiah said, "The people who walk in the darkness have seen a great light" (Isaiah 9:2), and Matthew tells us that this came true when Jesus began His ministry in Galilee (Matthew 4:16). Jesus said, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). And in the new Jerusalem, there will be no need of the sun, for "the glory of God illuminated it, and its lamp ***is*** the Lamb" (Revelation 21:23). The sun of righteousness is the Righteous One, Jesus Christ, "Jesus Christ ***the*** Righteous ***One***," as John calls Him (1 John 2:1).

"And healing ***is*** in its wings." The wings of the sun are its rays, spreading out across the sky like the wings of a great bird, bringing warmth and light to everything they touch. Wherever the rays reach, they bring healing.

The Hebrew word for wings can also mean the corners of a garment, where the tassels were sewn (Numbers 15:38). Many have connected this with the woman who touched the fringe of Jesus' garment and was healed (Matthew 9:20-22), and with the crowds who begged "that they might only touch the fringe of His garment; and as many as touched were made completely well"

(Matthew 14:36). That is a lovely picture, but it is a connection we make, not one the text spells out. The main meaning is the rays of the rising sun.

What healing does He bring? At His first coming, Jesus healed "every disease and every sickness among the people" (Matthew 4:23), and Matthew says this fulfilled Isaiah 53:4: "He Himself took our infirmities and bore the diseases" (Matthew 8:17). Above all, He healed our deepest sickness, sin. "By His wound ***there*** was healing for us" (Isaiah 53:5). And at His second coming, He will rise over His people Israel and over all who fear His name with complete healing: of the body in resurrection, of the land, and of the nations (Revelation 22:2). The night of sin and suffering will be over.

"And you will go out and leap like calves of the stall." Calves kept in a stall over the winter were let out in the spring. They run and kick for joy in the open field. That is the picture of God's people on that day: free, healed and full of joy.

Is the sun of righteousness shining on you? He has risen already for everyone who trusts Him. If you have been living in darkness, look to Him.

4:3 *And you will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I am acting, says the LORD of armies.*

"And you will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I am acting, says the LORD of armies." The wicked who were burned like stubble (4:1) will be like ashes, and God's people will walk over them. The proud who looked down on the righteous will be brought low beneath them.

This is not about God's people taking revenge. It is God who acts: "on the day that I am acting." The righteous share in His victory. Paul says, "the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet quickly" (Romans 16:20). The ones who suffered under the arrogant will one day stand in triumph, because God has kept His word.

4:4 *Remember the law of Moses My servant, which I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel, statutes and judgments.*

"Remember the law of Moses My servant, which I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel, statutes and judgments." Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai, where God gave Moses the Law about a thousand years before Malachi. Statutes and judgments are the rules and decisions of the Law.

Why end with this? Because until the messenger came, the people had what they needed. They had the Law of Moses. They were to remember it, hold to it and obey it. Malachi's whole book has shown what happened when they forgot it: careless priests, broken marriages, withheld tithes. The answer was to go back to God's Word.

The Law also pointed forward. Jesus said, "if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote concerning Me" (John 5:46). The Law showed people their sin and their need of a Savior

(Galatians 3:24). It was not the way to be saved. It was the child-guardian that led to Christ. "For the law was given through Moses; the grace and the truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

Notice that Moses is named here and Elijah in the next verse. Moses stands for the Law, and Elijah for the prophets. Together they stand for the whole Old Testament. And on the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus, talking with Him (Matthew 17:3). The Law and the Prophets met in Him.

4:5 *Look, I am sending to you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.*

"Look, I am sending to you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD." Elijah was the great prophet who stood against Baal in the days of King Ahab and Jezebel, about 860 B.C. He called Israel back to the LORD on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18). He did not die. He was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind, with a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11). Now God promises to send Elijah again, before the day of the LORD.

Who is this Elijah? The New Testament gives a clear first answer. Before John the Baptist was born, the angel told his father that John would go before the Lord "in ***the*** spirit and power of Elijah, to turn ***the*** hearts of fathers to children" (Luke 1:17). Those are Malachi's words. John even dressed like Elijah, in a garment of hair with a leather belt (Matthew 3:4; 2 Kings 1:8). Jesus said of John, "if you are willing to receive ***it***, he himself is Elijah, who is about to come" (Matthew 11:14).

But John was not Elijah come back in person. When the priests asked him, "Are you Elijah?" he said, "I am not" (John 1:21). He came in Elijah's spirit and power, doing Elijah's kind of work.

Then, after the Transfiguration, the disciples asked Jesus, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" (Matthew 17:10). Jesus answered, "Elijah indeed comes first, and will restore all things" (Matthew 17:11). Notice that He spoke of it as still future. Then He added, "But I say to you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him" (Matthew 17:12). "Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them concerning John the Baptist" (Matthew 17:13).

So Jesus said both things: Elijah has come, in John, and Elijah comes and will restore all things. Why both? Because Malachi speaks of Elijah coming "before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD." John prepared the way for Christ's first coming, and Israel did not receive him or the King he announced. Many Bible teachers believe there will also be a future ministry of Elijah before Christ's second coming, at the time of the Tribulation. Many connect this with the two witnesses of Revelation 11, who will prophesy in Jerusalem for 1,260 days. They "have authority to shut heaven, so that no rain may fall in ***the*** days of their prophecy" (Revelation 11:6), just as Elijah did (1 Kings 17:1), and fire goes out to devour their enemies (Revelation 11:5; 2 Kings 1:10). Some believe one of them will be Elijah himself. Others believe the witnesses will come in Elijah's spirit, as John did. Scripture does not tell us who they are by name.

What we can say plainly is this. John the Baptist fulfilled this promise in the spirit and power of Elijah before Christ's first coming, and God will send an Elijah ministry before His return as well.

4:6 *And he will turn back the heart of fathers to sons, and the heart of sons to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land **with** a devoted destruction.*

"And he will turn back the heart of fathers to sons, and the heart of sons to their fathers." Elijah's work, and John's, is to turn hearts. This means more than fixing family quarrels, though it includes that. It means turning a whole generation back to God, so that the children share the faith of their fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the fathers care about passing it on to their children. Luke adds that John would turn "***the*** disobedient to ***the*** understanding of ***the*** righteous, to make ready for ***the*** Lord a people prepared" (Luke 1:17). Malachi has spoken of broken homes (2:14-16). The cure for broken families is hearts turned to God.

"Lest I come and strike the land ***with*** a devoted destruction." A devoted destruction is the Hebrew word herem, something given over completely to God for destruction, the word used for the ban on Jericho (Joshua 6:17). If hearts are not turned, the land will face that kind of judgment.

And with that, the Old Testament ends. In Hebrew Bibles, Malachi is not always the last book, but in our English Bibles these are the last words before Matthew. In Jewish synagogue reading, verse 5 is often read again after verse 6, so that the reading does not end on a word of judgment. We can understand why. The Old Testament closes with a warning hanging in the air.

But the warning is not the end of the story. Four hundred years later, the next book opens with a genealogy that runs from Abraham to David to "Jesus, who is called Christ" (Matthew 1:16). Then John the Baptist appears, in the spirit and power of Elijah, crying, "Repent, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near" (Matthew 3:2). The Old Testament ends with the threat of a curse. The New Testament ends, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ ***be*** with you all. Amen" (Revelation 22:21). What happened in between? Jesus came. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13).

Has your heart been turned to God? That is what Elijah came to do, and what John came to do. The sun of righteousness has risen. Turn to Him.

Summary

The day is coming, burning like a furnace, when all the arrogant and evildoers will be stubble, and it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for those who fear God's name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings, and they will go out leaping like calves released from the stall. They will tread down the wicked, who will be ashes under their feet on the day the LORD acts. The people were to remember the Law of Moses, God's servant, given at Horeb for all Israel. And God would send Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD, to turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, so that He would not come and strike the land with total destruction.

Honestly, keeping God's Word in front of me every day is an area where I am failing right now. I write Bible studies, and I still struggle with it. Malachi ends by telling the people to remember God's Word. I need that same reminder.

Study Questions

1. What will the day of the LORD be like for the arrogant and the wicked? (4:1)

2. What will rise for those who fear God's name, and what does it bring? (4:2)

3. How do Luke 1:78 and John 8:12 help us understand "the sun of righteousness"?

4. What were the people told to remember until the messenger came? (4:4)

5. Whom did God promise to send before the great and awesome day of the LORD? (4:5)

6. How did John the Baptist fulfill this promise, and what did Jesus say about Elijah? (Luke 1:17; Matthew 11:14; 17:10-13)

7. What will Elijah's ministry do in families and in the nation? (4:6)

8. Jesus is the Sunrise from on high. What darkness in your life do you need His light and healing to reach?

9. Malachi calls the people to remember God's Word. How are you keeping God's Word in front of you each day?

10. Elijah's work is to turn hearts. Whose heart, in your own family, would you love to see turned toward God, and how can you pray for them this week?

Conclusion

These six short books close the Old Testament, and they cover a lot of ground. Nahum watched proud Nineveh fall, just as he said it would, and reminded a frightened people that "The LORD ***is*** good, a stronghold in a day of trouble" (Nahum 1:7). Habakkuk brought God his hardest questions about evil and justice, waited for the answer, and learned that the righteous live by faith, even when the fig tree does not blossom. Zephaniah warned of the great day of the LORD and then sang of God rejoicing over His people with shouts of joy. Haggai told a discouraged remnant to stop putting themselves first and build God's house, because God was with them. Zechariah lifted their eyes to the Branch, the King on a donkey, the pierced One and the day when the LORD will be King over all the earth. And Malachi, the last of them, called a cold people back to honor God and promised that the Lord would come suddenly to His temple.

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 give us a God who keeps His word. Nineveh fell in 612 B.C. Babylon came and then fell. The exiles came home, and the temple was finished in 516 B.C. The King came riding on a donkey and was sold for thirty pieces of silver. The Shepherd was struck and the sheep were scattered. John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah. If God kept those promises to the letter, we can trust Him to keep the rest: Israel will look on the One they pierced, the Lord's feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, and "the LORD will be King over all the earth" (Zechariah 14:9).

These books also show us ourselves. We can grow comfortable in paneled houses while God's work waits. We can bring God our leftovers and call His service a weariness. We can ask, "Where ***is*** the God of justice?" (Malachi 2:17) when the wicked seem to win. And God answers us the way He answered them. He does not change. He still says, "Return to Me" (Malachi 3:7). He still keeps a book of remembrance for those who fear Him. And He still sends His light into the darkness. "For you who fear My name the sun of righteousness will rise, and healing ***is*** in its wings" (Malachi 4:2).

This book also brings the whole Old Testament series to a close. We began in Genesis with God creating the heavens and the earth and promising that the Seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). We walked through the Law, the history of Israel, the songs and wisdom books and the prophets. All along the way, God was keeping one promise and pointing to one Person. After He rose from the dead, Jesus walked with two disciples and, "having begun from Moses and from all the prophets, He was explaining to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27). The Old Testament ends with Malachi looking forward to the messenger and the Lord who would follow him. The New Testament opens with John the Baptist in the wilderness and Jesus coming to be baptized. The promise of Eden became the cross and the empty tomb, and it will be completed when He comes again.

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 give you confidence that the God who spoke through these prophets is the same God today. 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, serve the Lord with your whole heart, and keep watching for His return, as those who fear the LORD did in Malachi 3:16.

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.

Green, Jay P., Sr. (ed.). The Interlinear Bible: Hebrew-Greek-English. Hendrickson Publishers, 1986 (2nd ed.; printing used 2005). ISBN 1-56563-977-4.