

# MINOR PROPHETS



BIBLE STUDY TEXTBOOK SERIES

---

# ***MINOR PROPHETS***

A Study of Micah  
Through Malachi

by

Clinton R. Gill

---

College Press, Joplin, Missouri

Copyright 1971  
College Press

Second Printing — July, 1974  
Third Printing — July, 1979  
Fourth Printing — September, 1988

ISBN 0-89900-000-2  
ISBN 0-89900-027-4

# THE PROPHETS AND THEIR NEIGHBORS

PROPHET	CONTEMPORARY HISTORIC EVENT	DATE (B.C.)
Elijah	—Judah received tribute from Philistines and Arabians	c. 869
	—Israel wars with Syria, is victorious. Ahab makes alliance with defeated enemy Ben-Hadad II	
	—Judah in alliance with Ahab	
	—Israel furnishes troops to Syria against Assyria under Salmaneser III	c. 854
	—Judah invaded by Moabites, Ammonites and Edomites	c. 853
Elisha	—Moab attacked by kings of Israel, Judah and Edom	c. 852
	—Ben-Hadad II lays siege to Samaria	c. 846
	—Athaliah usurps throne of Judah	c. 842
	—Jehu exterminates house of Ahab, pays tribute to Shalmaneser III of Assyria	
Joel	—Hazeal of Syria attacks Assyria, threatens Jerusalem, keeps Israel in subjection	c. 814
	—Israel's three victories over Syrians	
	—Amaziah hires mercenary army to fight against Edom	c. 797
	—Jeroboam defeats Judah, enlarges Israel's borders	c. 785
Amos	—Uzziah conquers Philistines and Arabians	c. 780
Hosea	—Judah in conflict with Assyria under Tiglath-Pileser	c. 748
	—Israel pays tribute to Assyria	
Isaiah	—Jotham in Judah keeps Ammonites in subjection, fortifies Judah and Jerusalem	c. 735
Micah	—Ahaz, defeated by Syria and Israel, makes alliance with Assyria	c. 734
	—Pekah and Rezin (of Syria) enter alliance against Judah	
	—Assyria captures northern and eastern districts of Israel under Tiglath-Pileser	
	—Israel enters alliance with So of Egypt	c. 727
	—Assyria, under Shalmaneser V, besieges Samaria	c. 724
	—Samaria falls to Sargon II of Assyria, captives carried away to far east	c. 722
	—Sargon captures Karkar, defeats Egypt at Raphia	c. 720
	—Sargon captures Ashdod	c. 711

# THE PROPHETS AND THEIR NEIGHBORS

PROPHET	CONTEMPORARY HISTORIC EVENT	DATE (B.C.)
	—Sennacherib (successor to Sargon) invades Philistia and Judah	c. 701
	—Hezekiah submits to Sennacherib, pays tribute.	c. 701
	—Providential disaster to Assyrian army	
	—Sennacherib defeats Egypt at Eltekeh	
	—Assyria, under Esarhaddon, successor to Sennacherib, conquers Egypt	c. 681
	—Tirhakah regains throne and independence of Egypt	c. 670
	—Assyrians, under Assurbanipal, invade Egypt, sack Karnak (No-Amon)	
Nahum	—Josiah seeks Jehovah, books of law discovered in temple	c. 628
	—Temple repaired, covenant renewed	
	—Necho, Pharaoh of Egypt, marches through Palestine	
	—Cyaxares founds Median Empire	c. 633
	—Jehoahaz deposed by Necho on his return from Euphrates and carried into Egypt	c. 610
	—Nineveh, capital of Assyria, destroyed by Medes and Persians	c. 609
Daniel	—Nebuchadnezzar captures Jerusalem carries off sacred vessels to Babylon Daniel taken captive	c. 605
	—Necho of Egypt defeated by Nebuchadnezzar.	
Ezekiel	—Jehoiakim rebels against Babylon	c. 602
	—Jehoiachin captured by Nebuchadnezzar, Ezekiel taken captive to Babylon	c. 598
	—Zedekiah placed on throne of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar	c. 594
	—Zedekiah and other petty kings rebel against Babylon	c. 589
	—Nebuchadnezzar invades Jerusalem	
	—Jerusalem captured and destroyed Gedaliah appointed by Nebuchadnezzar to govern Judah	c. 587
Jeremiah	—Jeremiah carried away to Egypt	
	—Death of Nebuchadnezzar	c. 562
	—Cyrus captures Babylon . . . Darius made ruler, Daniel promoted by Darius	c. 538
	—Cyrus becomes sole ruler of Babylon, issues edict to benefit Jews	c. 536
	—Jews return home under Zerubbabel, attempt to rebuild temple	c. 535
Haggai	—Prophets urge people to rebuild	c. 520

## THE PROPHETS AND THEIR NEIGHBORS

PROPHET	CONTEMPORARY HISTORIC EVENT	DATE (B.C.)
Zechariah	—Darius Hystaspis succeeds Cambyses, protects and aids Jews in rebuilding.	
	—Temple dedicated	c. 516
	—Battle of Marathon	490
	—Accession of Xerxes	486
	—Battle of Salamis	480
	—Esther becomes queen of Persia	c. 478
	—Accession of Artaxerxes	c. 465
	—Ezra leads caravan of Jews to Jerusalem	458
	—Nehemiah secures appointment as governor of Jews in Palestine.	445
Malachi	—Nehemiah returns briefly to court of Persia and comes back to correct evils of Jerusalem	438
	—Herodotus	444
	—Pericles in Athens	

*"The things written aforetime were written  
for our learning."* Romans 15:4

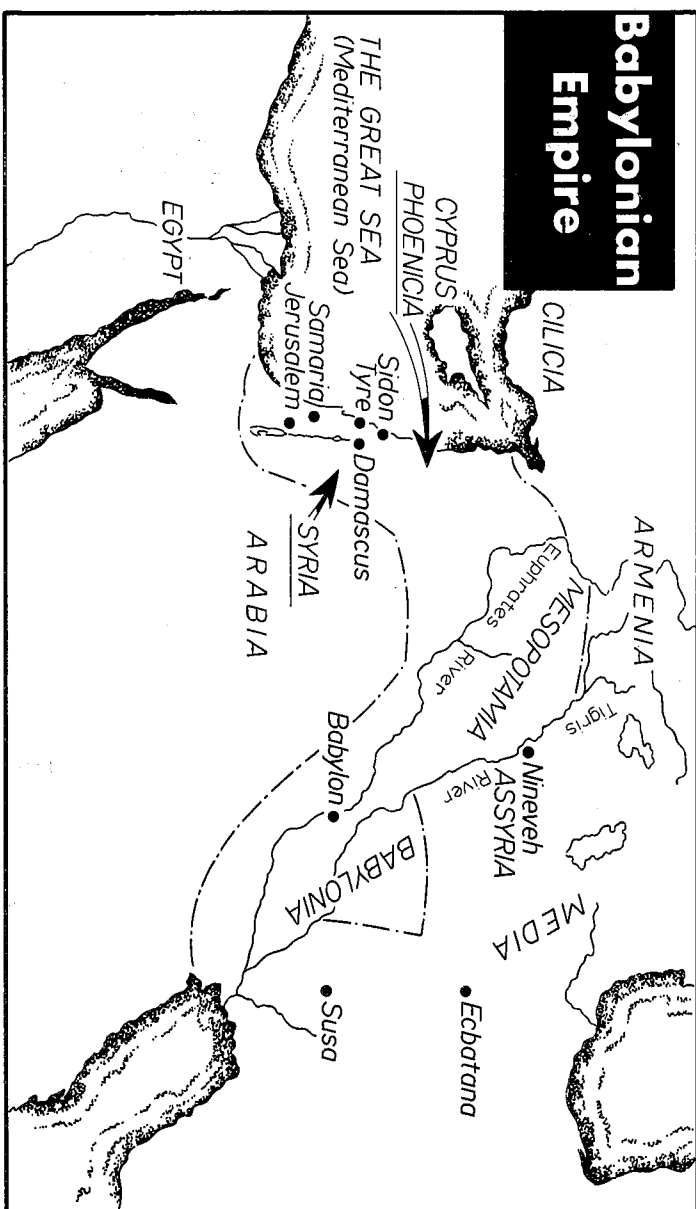
To

"Charlie", "Sue Sue", and "The Tiger"



# PREFACE

# Babylonian Empire



# THE PROPHETS AND THEIR CONTEMPORARIES

KINGS OF ISRAEL	PROPHETS	KINGS OF JUDAH
Jeroboam I (22 years )		Rehoboam (17 years )
Nadab ( 2 years )		Abijam ( 3 years )
Baasha (24 years )		Asa (41 years )
Elah ( 2 years )		
Zimri ( 7 days )		
Omri (12 years )		Jehoshaphat (25 years )
Ahab (22 years )	Elijah	
Ahaziah ( 2 years )		Jehoram ( 8 years )
Joram (12 years )		Ahaziah ( 1 year )
		Athaliah ( 7 years )
		Joash (40 years )
Jehu (28 years )	Elisha	
Jehoahaz (17 years )	Joel	
Jehoash (16 years )		Amaziah (29 years )
Jeroboam II (41 years )	Amos	Uzziah (52 years )
Zachariah ( 6 months)	Hosea	
Shallum ( 1 month )		Jotham (16 years )
Menahem (10 years )		
Pekahiah ( 2 years )		
Pekah (20 years )		Ahaz
Hosea ( 9 years )	Isaiah	Hezekiah (29 years )
	Micah	Manasseh (55 years )
Captivity by Assyria under Sargon 721 B.C.	Zephaniah	Amon ( 2 years )
	Nahum	Josiah (31 years )
	Habakkuk	Jehoahaz ( 3 months)
Fall of Nineveh 612 B.C. during reign of Jehoiakim	Jeremiah	Jehoiakim (11 months)
	Daniel	Jehoiachin ( 3 months)
		First captivity, 597
		Zedekiah (11 years )
		Destruction of Jerusa- lem . . . second captivity . . . 586 B.C. by Nebu- chadnezzar
	Jeremiah	
	Ezekiel	
	Fall of Babylon 589 B.C. to Cyrus of Persia	Return from Babylonian captivity led by Zeru- babbel and Joshua
	Haggai	
	Zechariah	
	Obadiah	
	Malachi	



# CONTENTS

DEDICATION .....	viii
PREFACE .....	ix
CONTENTS .....	xiii

Chapter I—HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE .....	1
Chapter II—WHAT IS A PROPHET? .....	5
Chapter III—THE COVENANT THEME IN THE PROPHETS ....	10
Chapter IV—BAAL WORSHIP .....	22

## — MICAH —

Chapter V—SUPERScription .....	45
Chapter VI—FIRST CYCLE .....	51
Chapter VII—SECOND CYCLE .....	77
Chapter VIII—THIRD CYCLE .....	93
Chapter IX—FUTURE EXALTATION AND MESSIANIC HOPE ..	105
Chapter X—JEHOVAH'S CONTROVERSY WITH HIS PEOPLE ..	123

## — NAHUM —

Chapter XI—PREFACE .....	144
Chapter XII—INTRODUCTION .....	148
Chapter XIII—DETAILS OF NINEVEH'S DOWNFALL .....	156
Chapter XIV—THE EPITAPH OF NINEVEH .....	161

## — HABAKKUK —

Chapter XV—PREFACE TO HABAKKUK .....	170
Chapter XVI—HOW CAN GOD ALLOW INJUSTICE TO GO UNPUNISHED .....	171
Chapter XVII—THE SECOND QUESTION .....	177
Chapter XVIII—THE PROPHET'S POETIC PRAYER .....	192

## — ZEPHANIAH —

Chapter XIX—INTRODUCTION TO ZEPHANIAH .....	201
Chapter XX—JUDGEMENT OF GOD .....	205
Chapter XXI—THE JUDGEMENT OF GOD IS UNIVERSAL ....	217
Chapter XXII—COMFORT AND CONSOLATION .....	221

— HAGGAI —

— ZECHARIAH —

— MALACHI —

xiv

## CHAPTER I

### HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

In II Peter 1:20-21 we are informed; ". . . *no prophecy of scripture is of private interpretation. For no prophecy ever came by the will of man; but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit.*"

This statement not only flatly affirms the fact of divine inspiration of the scriptures, it gives us a definite clue as to how to study them. It is not the task of the Bible student to interpret but to exegete.

*Exegesis* is a strange word to most of us. It is from the Greek *exegeomai* which means literally; "to lead out, to unfold." In contrast, to interpret is to "explain the meaning of . . . to have or show one's own understanding, to construe."

To study scripture, by the process of exegesis, is to apply certain scientific principles of investigation in the attempt to arrive at the thought which was in the mind of the inspired writer when he wrote. It is a safe assumption that "the Bible means what it says" when one has applied these principles and ascertained what it does say.

*Interpretation*, or explaining the meaning according to one's own understanding, should never be attempted until after the interpreter has made a careful exegesis of the passage to be explained. God did not give us a set of generalities which may be interpreted according to our own pre-conceived theology. Through inspired men. (the exact method of inspiration is beside the point), He said something definite. It is the task of the Bible scholar to find out what is said.

To accomplish this, one must learn to carefully apply the principles of exegesis, much the same as they would be applied to any other writing . . . especially a writing as old as those which make up the sixty-six books of the Christian Scripture. Because of the age of the Biblical writings, exegesis becomes largely a matter of removing the differences in language, circumstance, custom, etc. which divide the ancient from the modern world. The Bible, and especially, the New Testament, was written in the language which was common to those who first read it. The *Koine* Greek in which the New Testament was written and into which the Old Testament had been translated was the common language of the street and market and household. The mode of self expression, the idioms and figures and allusions used were familiar to those who read. Hence it may be assumed the first readers of Scripture readily understood what may seem a dark saying to the most profound modern English-speaking Bible student. The rules, or principles of exegesis suggested here are the means by which these

## MINOR PROPHETS

differences are removed, and the simple yet profound thoughts of God recorded in the Bible made apparent to us.

*RULE NO. 1 . . . Use a dictionary.* Most Americans are unfamiliar with the Hebrew and Greek of the Bible, and so must rely on English translations. For this reason, it is inadvisable to limit oneself to a single translation. Every translation has its strengths and its weaknesses. By comparing several the student of the English Bible is much more likely to arrive at the thought presented in the original than he is if he uses only one translation.

No matter which translation, or translations one uses, the words in it represent in the opinion of the translator, the best possible transferal of thought from the original scripture text to the language of the reader. It is best not to assume that you know what a particular word means, especially if it is a key word in a verse or passage. An *unabridged* dictionary will usually give, as the first meaning of a word, the meaning of that word in the language from which we have borrowed it.

For an example; the Greek word *baptismo* may be defined in general American usage as "the application of water in the name of The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit." (As a matter of fact it is so defined in the MEMBERSHIP MANUAL of the Methodist Church.) WEBSTER'S NEW WORLD DICTIONARY OF THE AMERICAN LANGUAGE, on the other hand, gives the original meaning as "a dipping in (Gr. immersion)." Since God chose to record His Word in Hebrew and Greek, rather than English, it is never safe to be uncertain of the meaning of key words.

The translators of our English Bibles have used words which they believe best represent the original language. By using an unabridged dictionary as a study aid, you may be sure that the English word means to you what it meant to the translator.

*RULE NO. 2 . . . Pay attention to grammar.* Grammar is nothing more nor less than the organized presentation of thought. The translators usually do not attempt to follow the grammatical construction of the original, because to do so would result in a translation very difficult for an English speaking person to read.

However, just as in the choice of individual words, so in the grammatical constructions, the translators have attempted to represent the *thought* of the original.

Many people do not like to study grammar. Even in elementary



## HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

and high school they found it very tedious. This is unfortunate because it is impossible to understand a written thought without applying the rules of grammar, either consciously or instinctively. In any event, the serious student of the Word of God cannot afford to ignore this basic rule of exegesis. A very helpful tool to refresh yourself on the rules of English grammar is *Plain English Handbook*, McCormick-Mathers Publishing Company.

**RULE NO. 3 . . .** *Mind the context.* Words mean *nothing*, or rather, they may mean *anything* out of a specific context. The word context means literally "to weave together." The thoughts of various words, phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs, and chapters are woven into one complete whole. To take a word or a verse out of context is to cut out a small piece from a plaid garment. It does not accurately represent the whole pattern of thought presented by the Author of the book from which it was taken; and so may be made to say something entirely different than which the Author would have us learn.

A rather humorous illustration of the importance of context comes to mind: A verse of Scripture says "muzzle not the oxen that treadeth out the corn." Another verse says "for of such is the kingdom of haeven." The logical conclusion from these two verses is that there are oxen in heaven" . . . the Bible says so." Of course the Bible does not say so unless these particular verses are wrenched out of context. The proof texts of every denominational creed and of every religious cult claiming to be Christian are used in just this way, and with much more serious consequences than the ridiculous conclusion that there are oxen in heaven.

Or take for instance the word "run". In modern parlance it may mean "to move rapidly"; it may refer to a score in a baseball game; or it may refer to a snag in a nylon. The words of the Bible are like that. They mean many things out of context. But in a particular subject in a given set of circumstances they mean only one thing.

**RULE NO. 4 . . .** *Study historically.* The books of the Bible were written to real people, at a time and place in history. Their lives were lived under conditions very different from those of twentieth century America.

The culture was the culture of the orient, the middle east, the ancient Egyptians, the Greeks and the Romans. The language was that of the "Partheans and Medes and Elamites and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, in Judea, and Capadocia and Asia" (*Acts 2:9-10*) and dozens of

## MINOR PROPHETS

other places and peoples which fall like strange sounds on the ears. They lived in the days of Sargon and Shallamanezer and No-Amon and Caesar and Herod. Their concepts of deity were formed in the crucible of Baalism and Jehovah worship, and all the varying degrees of pantheism which fall between. They pledged allegiance not to "The United States of America and to the republic for which it stands," but to Babylonia and Memphis and Athens and Rome . . . and to the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. David was not a little boy who killed a giant in Sunday School, but the great king of Israel in whose image it was hoped the Messiah would come and establish His kingdom as the final world power in the never ending sequence of world powers.

It is amazing, and thrilling to see the Scriptures come alive with real people in real situations . . . and it's relatively easy to transport oneself back into Bible times. For a few dollars one can buy HALLEY'S BIBLE HANDBOOK, and for a few more dollars THE WYCLIFFE HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF BIBLE LANDS. For what most Christians spend on a few years of vacations and fishing and golf and convention going, one can actually visit the lands of the Bible. Nothing will add the dimension of history to Bible study quite so quickly and profoundly as a few weeks in the land where it all happened. Short of a college education with a Bible major it is doubtful if anything is more valuable to the Christian who would understand the Bible.

*RULE NO. 5 . . . Study analytically.* There is no more sure way of being certain of one's understanding of a given passage of Scripture than to compare one's conclusions concerning this passage with what the Bible in general teaches on the same subject. If your conclusions concerning a passage clash with what you have learned from the rest of the Bible about the same subject it is time to review *both*. Either you have misunderstood this passage, or you have overlooked something in what the rest of the Bible says. *The Bible does not contradict itself.*

There is an inherent danger in this particular rule of study. To study analytically *before* having applied the other rules of exegesis is to run the risk of misunderstanding the whole Bible on a given subject. One has a tendency, unless one is on his guard, to ignore the historical circumstances and the context of certain verses and fall into the trap of skipping about looking for proof-texts. This is the fundamental weakness in such mythology as premillennialism, adventism, etc.

## HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

Such systems are based on "grasshopper interpretation," rather than sensible exegesis. So beware the chart and the outline of proof-texts when studying one passage in the light of other passages.

*RULE NO. 6 . . . Use the commentaries.* This must be done *last* if one is to be free to draw his own conclusions without being unduly influenced by what others think a passage of Scripture means. However, it is always helpful, once one has made his own investigation of Scripture, to know what others have learned.

Throughout the entire process of study, bear in mind that the things of God are spiritually discerned. (*I Corinthians 2:10-15*). A prayer for guidance will not make your understanding of the Bible infallible, but it will open up the channels through which the thoughts of God must pass if they are to enter your heart as well as your head. The process of Bible study is the process of thinking the thoughts of God after Him. By following these simple rules, one places himself in a much more advantageous position to hear what God has said.

## CHAPTER II

### WHAT IS A PROPHET?

There is a need at the outset to answer the question "what is a prophet"? The current atmosphere in America evidences two views of this question which are poles apart and mutually contradictory. The one tends to make of the prophet a clairvoyant mystic with some unexplicable insight into future events. A popular magazine recently ran a feature article listing the amazing predictions of half a dozen of the more popularly known clairvoyants and describing their more sensational predictions, (eg. the assassination of President Kennedy, the outcome of future presidential elections, etc.)

The mystic insight attributed to these secular seers is closely akin to the "powers" attributed by certain fundamentalists to the prophets of the Bible. In both there is an exaggerated emphasis upon and concern for the foretelling of future events which makes of the prophet little more than a fortune-teller.

At the opposite extreme is the concept of the Biblical prophet as merely a normal man with *above* normal insights into moral, spiritual and ethical truth. This concept plays down, denies or ignores the futuristic aspects of prophecy, according to the theology of the commentator.

## MINOR PROPHETS

It would seem that the truth about prophets and prophecy resolves itself to: (1) what did the prophet do, (2) how did he do it, and (3) why did he do it?

We will move a great way toward answering these questions by taking a long look at the word "prophet" itself. As is often the case with key words of Scripture, the translators have chosen rather to transliterate than to translate. Whether this be because such words are often too pregnant to be done justice by a single English word (English is neither a language of religious expression, as is Hebrew, or of philosophic expression, as is ancient Greek), or because the translators are concerned with selling books to widely diverse audiences, the difficulty remains that the word "prophet" is merely a transliteration of the Greek *prophetes*. As such it means nothing to an English speaking reader, excepting as his religious prejudices supply him with a preconceived notion of its meaning.

Since we are presently concerned with the prophets of the Old Testament, who wrote in Hebrew, rather than the New Testament prophets, who wrote in Greek, we must take notice that the Greek *prophetes* (prophet) is used in the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Old Testament popular in the first century) to represent not one but three Hebrew words. Each of these Hebrew synonyms is used, in various contexts, to refer to what our English versions, both Old and New Testaments, call simply by the transliterated "prophet."

*First* . . . "Prophet" is used to translate the Hebrew *roeh*. When this word is used there seems to be some emphasis upon the *means* by which God communicates His message to the spokesman. It is frequently rendered "seer."

*Second* . . . The Hebrew *chozeh* seems to share with *roeh* the concern for the means by which the message of God comes to the messenger. It also is translated *seer* as well as prophet.

*Third* . . . and most frequently used is the word *nabi*. Interestingly, this word means, at its root, "to bubble over." It suggests that the prophet is first himself filled with the Spirit and message of God, and that this filling is so complete that it bubbles over as the spiritual message of God spills out for the benefit of God's people. There seems little justification for the association with this word of the idea of emotional ecstasy. More to the point is Jesus' statement to the woman at the well that ". . . the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up (literally, bubbling over) unto eternal life."

Far more than "it shall come to pass," the watchword of the

## WHAT IS A PROPHET?

prophets was "THUS SAITH THE LORD!" It is claimed for them and by them that "the Word of the Lord came unto" them. (*Isaiah* 38:4, *Jeremiah* 18:1, *Ezekiel* 20:2, *Hosea* 1:1, *Joel* 1:1, *Micah* 1:1, *Zephaniah* 1:1, *Haggai* 1:1.) The prophet was a man possessed by God. (*I Chronicles* 16:22, *Psalms* 105:15). More than merely one who spoke for God, he was one *through* whom God spoke. (*Hosea* 12:10, *Zechariah* 7:7, *Hebrews* 1:1) His message was not his own. Rather it came directly from God through vision (*II Chronicles* 32:32, *Isaiah* 6, *Lamentations* 2:9) and without this prophetic vision the people perished (*Proverbs* 29:18).

It was not the task of the prophet to give counsel and advice. He was rather a bringer of divine command (*II Chronicles* 29:25). It was in this sense that Moses spoke both of himself and The Christ as prophets.

The thunderings of the prophets against sin were not merely those of social reformers who would build a better society, but were warnings of disaster to a people whose disobedience of God's commands threatened not only their ethnic existence but God's own purpose in bringing them into being and sustaining them as a people. (*Nehemiah* 9:30)

It is not surprising that the most succinct statement in the divine record concerning both the prophetic message and its source is to be found in the New Testament. A few moments spent considering this statement in *II Peter* 1:20-21 will prove extremely helpful to our present task of understanding the prophets themselves:

Two words come to special attention in this passage. First . . . the word *prophecy*. In light of what has been said concerning the overriding purpose of the prophet, we ought never suppose that the word "prophecy" can be limited to what the prophet said about future events. A prophecy is *any* pronouncement made by a prophet . . . on *whatever* subject.

The term prophecy is derived from the word *prophet*. As mentioned, previously, this word is not generally translated in the English versions, but is rather a transliteration, a mere transposing of letters. Its meaning is obscured rather than rendered by such indirectness on the part of the translators.

In the language of both the New Testament and the Septuagint, (from which the New Testament writers quote) *prophetes* (prophet) is a compound of *pro*, meaning "before" in reference *primarily* to place rather than time, as a speaker stands "before" his audience, with *phemi*, meaning "to declare or report, especially quoting *the words of another*."

## MINOR PROPHETS

A prophet, then, was one who stood before God's people and spoke God's word. A "prophecy" is anything the prophet said.

*Second* . . . the word Scripture, (*Graphes*) means simply a writing . . . any writing. "Prophecy of Scripture" is simply the written record of the prophet's message.

This recorded message, says Peter, is not a matter of "private interpretation." In this context Peter refers to the *source* of the prophet's message. What he said was not his own interpretation of a given set of historic circumstances and their bearing on the ultimate purpose of God. Rather, "men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit."

By the same token, our understanding of the written account of the prophet's message can never be according to our own views and opinions. It is just here that the most violence is done to the divine record of prophecy by those who would force prophecy, especially those passages dealing with eschatology, into the molds of their own systems.

To say it briefly, the prophet meant what he said. It is our task, through applying the rules of exegesis, to find out what he said rather than trying to make him say what we want him to mean!

There was no greater danger in Israel than that posed by the false prophet. (*Deuteronomy* 13:1-5, *I Kings* 22:22-23, *Isaiah* 9:15) The false prophets taught untruths in the name of God. (*Jeremiah* 14:14) That which they taught was not of God but was their own deceived notions (*Jeremiah* 23:26). They saw false and deceptive visions (*Lamentations* 2:14). Their personal lives were ungodly (*Jeremiah* 23:11), wanton and faithless (*Zephaniah* 3:4). Consequently their prophecying led God's people astray. (*Micah* 3:5).

In brief, the false prophet was the exact antithesis of the true prophet. The true prophet, since he was to be God's spokesman, was first a man through whom God *could* speak. If the false prophet was faithful, in a sense greater than just being "true to God". He was faithful in that he believed God explicitly and trusted Him to do what He promised, or on occasion threatened, to do.

If the false prophet was ungodly, the true prophet was godly. Godliness, as the prophets lived it, was more than mere mortality; it was a constant conscious awareness of a real, contemporary God, which controlled their every thought and act. If the false prophet was wanton, the true prophet was selfless to the point of martyrdom. Indeed, it has been suggested that martyrdom is the identifying mark of the true prophet. It is not true that every genuine prophet was put to death by those to whom he spoke, yet such was so nearly true that Stephen could challenge his tormentors with "Which of the prophets

## WHAT IS A PROPHET?

did not your fathers persecute? and they killed them that showed before of the coming of the Righteous One . . ." (*Acts 7:52*)

It may be said, that the primary function, perhaps the sole function, of the prophet at the time of the minor prophets was to turn God's people back to God's covenant. (*Nehemiah 9:26*) Whatever was said about the future was intended to accomplish this overriding purpose.

Israel, to whom the prophets were sent, were God's people. Ideally they were a theocracy. Though they were headstrong (Stephen would say stiffnecked) to the point of rejecting God's rule over them to clamor for a king, God still endeavored to rule them as His covenant people.

During the period of the judges this rule was direct. In the period of transition from the judges to the kings it was Samuel who acted as kingmaker; and Samuel, the last of the judges, is also called a prophet.

While the kingdom was united, God still spoke to His people through prophets. The king himself was not exempt. It was the prophet who confronted David face to face with his theft of "the little ewe lamb."

Prophetic activity, in so far as the *writing* prophets are concerned, reached its peak during the period of the divided kingdom. There is a note almost of desperation in the voice of God as He tries again and again through His prophets to recall a people who will not be ruled anymore by Him.

Following the return from captivity, the people, and there were pitifully few of them, persisted in their rebellion against the rule of God. The Old Testament closes with a last plaintive warning of the consequences in the message of a prophet.

The sum of the matter is that from Moses to Malachi, the prophets served as the voice of God, first in the giving of the Law and then in the repeated insistence that God must rule, indeed that He *could* rule only through obedience to His law. *Whatever the prophets said about the future was said in the attempt to motivate God's people to obey Him*, either by holding forth the glories of God's eternal purpose toward which His rule was leading or by stern warnings of the consequences of failure to cooperate, by obedience, in the accomplishment of that purpose.

It must be born in mind, as noted by Jack P. Lewis, that "prophecy is conditional (*Jeremiah 18:5-11*) (when it speaks of the future).

## MINOR PROPHETS

The question must be kept before you: have the conditions of this threat or promise been met?"

### CHAPTER III

### THE COVENANT THEME IN THE PROPHETS

"The Blood Red Thread" which holds the Bible together is the covenant in which God promised to bless all the nations of the earth through the seed of Abraham. To think of the Judaeo-Christian system as "Man's search for God" is to think of a mouse in search of a cat! Not that God is playing cat and mouse, but that the search is so obviously in the other direction. It is God who seeks man, not man who seeks God. Redemption is God's idea, not man's!

The search began with God's cry, "Adam, Where art thou?" (*Genesis* 3:9) The answer came back from Calvary; "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (*Matthew* 27:46) Both were the cries of anguish from the broken hearts of parent and child.

When the very best Man cried out from the cross it was because He was face to face with the experience of being lost. The ultimate of this experience is death, "the wages of sin." When Jesus was "made sin on our behalf" (*II Corinthians* 5:18-19), He experienced, in our behalf the meaning of "lost."

Whatever God may have done in the eons of time touched so briefly in the first eleven chapters of *Genesis*, it was the call of Abram in *Genesis* 12:1-3 which set in motion the "Scheme of Redemption" that was to climax at Calvary. In the making of the everlasting covenant, established at this call, God revealed to man the only way back to God by virtue of His unmerited favor made effective through obedient faith.

The covenant was proposed by God, not man. Man can only respond on God's terms. (*Ephesians* 2:8) The heart of the covenant was the promise that through it all the nations of the earth will be blessed in the seed of Abraham. The New Testament identifies that "seed" as Christ, (*Galatians* 3:16) and as those baptized into Him. (*Galatians* 3:27-29)

The theme of the Bible is the history of this covenant, and its fulfillment in Christ, through the new covenant people. It is the record of God's working in the history of His covenant people to "recon-



## THE COVENANT THEME

cile the world unto Himself." (*II Corinthians 5:19*). The Covenant of Promise first began to be fulfilled in "all that Jesus began to do and to teach (*Acts 1:1*) and continues to be fulfilled through the new covenant people, the church (*Galatians 3:29*).

Jesus indicated that two things stand written in the *Old Testament* Scriptures: (1) that the Christ should suffer and be raised the third day and, (2) that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all the nations beginning at Jerusalem. (*Luke 24:44-48*) The church thus becomes, under the New Covenant the continuing presence of Christ in the world" . . . His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all . . ." (*Ephesians 1:23*)

It has always been God's intent, ultimately, to offer reconciliation to every man who would respond to Him in obedient faith. In the Old Testament, those descendants of Abraham *who remained in the covenant relationship* through obedient faith were His people. Those who went off after strange gods were cut off. It was not physical ancestry that maintained this arrangement, but obedient faith. *Through the covenant* Abraham became the father of the *faithful* under both the Old and New Covenant. (*Galatians 3:6-9*)

Since it was the task of the prophets to call a rebellious people back to obedient faith in order to maintain the covenant through which all the families of the earth would be blessed, we must be familiar with the covenant in order to understand the message of the prophets.

The first mention of the covenant between God and Abram is brief and to the point. Recorded in *Genesis 12:1-3*, this simple statement contains all the essential elements to be found in the expanded records of the covenant seen progressively throughout the rest of the Old Testament. In this sense, Genesis twelve is the beginning of the Bible. The first eleven chapters of Genesis are the preface.

The heart of the covenant, indeed the heart of the Bible is, "For God so loved the *world* that He gave His only begotten Son, that *whosoever* believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (*John 3:16*) This is the Gospel which God "preached beforehand unto Abraham, saying "In thee shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." (*Galatians 3:8*)

God's eternal purpose in man, so far as it has been revealed to man, is that God shall rule, as Father, within each man through the obedience of faith. As W. O. Carver has put it, "(the purpose of God) is the *spiritual* ideal wherein all shall know God, from the least to the greatest."

Since man first sinned, it has been God's intent to call, out of

## MINOR PROPHETS

the rebellious race, a people for His own possession . . . a people who will commit themselves to Him as Father so as to allow Him to adopt them as sons. (*Ephesians 1:3-5*)

The call began with Abraham, when he lived in Ur. All that is necessary to bring sinful man back into divine sonship is implicit in the covenant made with this man. Whom God *chooses* He *calls*, whom He *calls*, He *blesses*, whom He *blesses* He *commissions*. The *called* continue to receive the *blessings* of God only so long as they continue to carry out the *commission*. *The commission in every age always moves toward the bringing of men back into God's family by His grace made operative through obedient faith.*

In the case of Abraham, the call was direct. God spoke to him personally and called him out of his home, away from his people. The Hebrew writer reminds us that "by *faith* Abraham, when he was called, *obeyed* to go out, not knowing whither he went." This is faith expressing itself in obedience. Upon this obedient faith, Abraham was blessed. God said; "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee and make thy name great." (*Genesis 12:2 (a)*).

As the recipient of these blessings, Abraham was commissioned; "Be thou a blessing." (*Genesis 12:2 (b)*). Being faithful to the commission, he would receive further blessing; "I will bless them that bless thee and curse them that curse thee." *Genesis 2:3 (a)*).

The conclusion of this brief first account of the covenant is a simple statement of its purpose; ". . . in thee shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."

Throughout this passage (*Genesis 12:1-3*) it is impossible to escape the implication that the call, the blessings, the commission, the continued blessings and the purpose are not intended for Abraham alone, but for all those who by obedient *faith* were to become the sons of Abraham. This implication is to be found in all the great historical epochs of the Bible. As C. C. Crawford points out, "We do not have three religious systems revealed therein . . ." (*i.e.* patriarchal, Jewish, and Christian). Rather, we have the record of God at work in His covenant people to accomplish His eternal purpose in man by reconciliation of all humanity through the covenant people in general and the "*Seed*" (singular) of Abraham (*i.e.* Christ) in particular. (*Galatians 3:16*)

The expanded record of the covenant found in Genesis seventeen forcefully reiterates that which is stated in the shorter record of *Genesis 12:1-3*. Here emphasis is placed upon the multiplication of Abraham's descendants. Abraham was to be multiplied exceedingly. Three

## THE COVENANT THEME

times it is said he shall be the father of many nations. His name is changed to Abraham (from Abram) for this season. Kings were to come out of him.

The Covenant is to be established not only between God and Abraham, but between Him and Abraham's descendants "in their generations," (*i.e.* each in its own time for an *everlasting* covenant. *He* will be *God* to these *covenant* people, beginning with Abraham and continuing through his descendants. *His descendants are those who trust and obey God.* (*Galatians 3:7*).

All the land of Canaan is to be given to Abraham and his seed after him for an everlasting covenant on the condition, "*I will be their God.*"

Finally comes the stern directive, "*Thou Shalt Keep My Covenant, Therefore, And Thy Seed After Thee In Their Generations.*"

Later, the seed had indeed "multiplied exceedingly" so that a law must be given which would mold the family into a nation. The fundamental condition of the covenant, namely that *He* would be their *God*, became the first commandment of the law "Thou Shalt have no other gods before me." (*Exodus 20:3*) The Law would be given only after the people had sworn to keep the covenant. (*Exodus 19:5-8*)

The *Genesis 17* record of the covenant closes with the giving of the symbol of the covenant, which would later become a command of the Law, *ie.* that every male be circumcised. (*Leviticus 12:3, Deuteronomy 10:16*) It is important that we not miss the symbolism of circumcision. ". . . the uncircumcised manchild whose flesh of his foreskin has not been circumcised, that *soul* shall be cut off from his people; *he hath broken the covenant.*" (*Genesis 17:14*) Circumcision, the symbol of God's agreement with His people was from the beginning intended as a constant warning of the consequences of breaking the covenant. As, in circumcision, flesh was cut off in initiating one into the covenant relationship with God, so a spiritual cutting off from God would result from breaking the covenant. Every Israelite who rejected Jesus, the fulfillment of the covenant, bore in his own body a warning of the consequences! To break the covenant was to forfeit the promise!

Two thousand years after Abraham, the first Christian martyr accused his tormentors of being "uncircumcised in heart and ears," (*Act 7:51*) and later Paul was to write, "We are the circumcision, who worship God in the spirit . . . and have no confidence in the flesh . . ." (*Philippians 3:3* compare *Deuteronomy 30:6*)

From beginning to end, the covenant depended upon *obedient*

## MINOR PROPHETS

*faith*, upon worshipping God "in spirit and truth," rather than upon physical ancestry alone. Any man who failed in this, though he be a direct descendant of Abraham in the flesh and a citizen of the Commonwealth of Israel, could expect to be *cut off* in the spirit from God.

The re-statement of the everlasting covenant to Isaac, Abraham's son, and Jacob, Abraham's grandson, did not change the original purpose of God in calling Abraham and his seed into the covenant relationship with Himself. Nor did the re-affirmation of that same covenant with the nation of Israel at the giving of the Law alter the divine purpose . . . (cf. *Galatians* 3:17)

It *was* a re-affirmation which took place when God molded the family of Abraham into a nation by giving them the law. God did not make a *new* covenant at Sinai. Rather He gave a law which was to govern the nation who had agreed to the covenant. (*Exodus* 19:5-8) The heart of the covenant was still ". . . in thee shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." The covenant relationship still depended upon *the obedience of faith*. This obedience was now to be expressed in obedience to the law.

So, as Paul informs us, ". . . the covenant, confirmed beforehand by God, the law . . . doth not disannul; so as to make the promise of none effect." (*Galatians* 3:17)

Israel, under the law, was to be a nation of priests. (*Exodus* 19:6) The primary function of the priest is to mediate between God and man and offer sacrifices. As a nation of priests, Israel should have been vitally concerned for the relationship of all peoples to God. The failure of national Israel which turned her divine priesthood into bigotry and her Messianic hopes into nationalistic ambition did not alter the purpose of God in those faithful covenant people *within* the nation. Those who were concerned for the *obedience of faith* rather than nationalism and racial pride were still His people, the *real* Israel.

It was because the majority of Abraham's descendants forgot the main thrust of the covenant toward the blessing of all men, that Paul was constrained to write, ". . . they are not all Israel, that are of Israel." (*Romans* 9:6) In God's eyes, true Israel's primary concern was the covenant and its promise of a divine redeeming Seed. These were a minority among the citizens of the nation of Israel.

The real meaning of the covenant is seen in *Genesis* 22:22. Isaac (Abraham's seed) was sacrificed, showing that the blessing of all nations promised by the covenant could only come about through the sacrifice of the True Seed. Here is also demonstrated the truth that the fulfillment of the covenant depended upon *obedient faith* on the part of the

## THE COVENANT THEME

covenant people and not *just* upon the seed's being descended from Abraham.

Since the idea of the covenant relationship between Jehovah and His people is the most basic idea in God's dealing with Israel, it profoundly effects the whole moral and ethical outlook of the prophets (eg. *Micah 4:1-3*). The Law of Moses simply codified the ethical and moral precepts implicit in the covenant. It spelled out the meaning of *obedient faith*.

The call of the prophets was a call to moral and ethical repentance, as well as religious obedience to the law. A call to repentance is never the establishment of a *new* ethic. It is necessarily a plea rather to return to the old. The call of the prophets was a call to keep the *everlasting* covenant by obeying the law of God.

Whether it be Jeremiah or John or Jesus or the church preaching "repentance and remission of sins," (*Luke 24:44-47*) the call is the same. God's people, who have missed the mark of eternal morality implied in the covenant and spelled out in the law, must turn once more to the eternal ethic of Jehovah.

We, who would come into God's family under the New Covenant, without the necessity of first having been under the Old, cannot escape the necessity of repentance by pleading ignorance. Having never become familiar with the codified ethic of the Covenant as established in the law we must nevertheless repent, "for when Gentiles that have not the law do by nature the things of the law, these, not having the law are the law unto themselves, in that they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness therewith and their thoughts one with another accusing or else excusing them . . ." (*Romans 2:14-15*) The eternal morality of God is universal, else the promise of the covenant to bless all men is not valid.

When Jesus opened the eyes of His apostles to understand the Old Covenant Scriptures in terms of His own identity, ministry, suffering and resurrection, He concluded that the end of it all is "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in *all the nations*, beginning at Jerusalem." (*Luke 24:47*) John's comment on Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, recognized as the "golden text of the Bible" states God's love as universal. (*John 3:16*) God has kept His promise to bless all men in Abraham's Seed.

God's concern that *all* men should hear of the remission of sins and be challenged to return to Him did not *begin* in Luke's Gospel. Nor did God *begin* to love the world the night Jesus was born. In the Old Testament as well as the New, God moves in universal love to

## MINOR PROPHETS

redeem *all* men. God loved the whole world of men from the beginning, else Jesus would never have been born!

From the giving of the law it was the nation formed of Abraham's descendants through whom God moved his purpose forward toward the fullness of time (*Galatians* 4:4-5), when the promised Seed of Abraham should appear to bless all men. The task of the prophets was to recall the covenant people to the keeping of the law, not only to preserve their physical national identity but, more significantly, to preserve the spiritual genetic of *obedient faith*. It was this spiritual genetic through which the covenant was to be fulfilled as "they that are of *faith*, the same are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand unto Abraham, saying 'in thee shall all the nations be blessed.'" (*Galatians* 3:7-8)

First century (A.D.) Judaism made the law, which was the means to the greater end of fulfilling the covenant, the end in itself. The nation framed by the law came to be the sole object of God's affection in the mind of the Jew. National ambitions and Jewish welfare as a political kingdom overshadowed the greater purpose of God (*ie.* the blessing of all men by calling them to a new covenant).

This narrow nationalism is understandable, when one considers the Roman yoke under which first century Israel galled. However, we must avoid the pitfall which prevented Israel from accepting the promised Seed of Abraham when He came, namely *the reading of Jewish nationalism into the message of the Old Testament prophets*.

Again to quote W. O. Carver, "The answer to Jewish narrowness was the Jew's Bible!" The task of the prophets was to recall God's covenant people to His law to be used of Him to bless all the nations. Not everyone who could trace his physical ancestry back to Abraham certainly not everyone who was a citizen of the first century Jewish commonwealth, was included. Abraham is the father, not of the Jew *per se*, but of the faithful. (*Galatians* 3:7)

## THE REMNANT

Faced with the rebellion of both the northern and southern kingdoms and the impending overthrow of each, the 8th century prophets began to realize that *most* of the physical descendants of Abraham, the children of Israel, were simply not going to "make it." Whatever God was going to accomplish through Israel as a covenant people would be accomplished only through those within the commonwealth who re-

## THE COVENANT THEME

mained faithful to the covenant. These the prophets referred to as "the remnant."

Several Hebrew synonyms are used to designate these faithful, but the central idea is the same in each. It is the faithful minority who remain aware of the covenant with God who are to form the "holy seed" for the New Israel (the church) under the new covenant. It is the *remnant alone* who were truly "*Israel*." The term "remnant" is used in several passages to refer only to the historic few who returned from the Babylonian captivity, but in many more passages the remnant takes on distinct Messianic overtones. It is the faithful few through whom God will bless all nations in fulfillment of His covenant.

These faithful few are a holy seed, a spiritual kernel within the nation. They were to survive the calamities which befell the rebellious nation and become the germ of the eternal people of God. They were to be blessed of God and to be a blessing. The number of the physical descendants of Abraham would be "as the sands of the sea," but only the remnant would be saved. (Compare *Isaiah 10:22* and *Romans 9:27, 11:5*)

Ahijah is the first prophet to utter this idea (*I Kings 16*). Isaiah connects the remnant with the children *who keep the covenant* (*II Kings 19:34*). He recalls the promise to David, (reiterated by the God of the covenant), that the children of the covenant should sit upon the throne, *if the children kept the covenant*.

In *II Kings 21:10-14* is the warning that even the remnant must pass through the captivity because of Baal worship in the land.

*Ezra 9:14* expresses concern that the commands of God will again be broken after the return from Babylon and that consequently God would consume them "so that there should be no remnant nor escaping."

*Isaiah 10:20-22* records the prophetic visions of the preservation of the remnant: "The people are as the sands of the sea, yet a remnant shall return."

*Isaiah 11:11-12* indicates that the remnant includes even some who are of the ten "lost tribes" of the northern kingdom who would be assembled together with the dispersed of Judah.

*Isaiah 46:3* promises deliverance to all the remnant of the house of Jacob.

*Jeremiah 23:3* sets down the promise of God to "gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them." This promise is accompanied by another; "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a king shall reign and prosper and shall execute judgment in the earth." The

## MINOR PROPHETS

echo of these promises is found in *Acts* 2:5 when *devout* Jews from every nation under heaven gathered together to hear the first apostolic sermon.

Jeremiah also pictures the joy among the chief of nations that was to accompany the deliverance of the remnant. (*Jeremiah* 31:7-ff)

Ezekiel is less optimistic. He fears for the "full end of the remnant of Israel." (*Ezekiel* 11:13)

*Micah* 2:12 looks beyond the captivity to the gathering of the remnant. *Micah* 4:7 associates the making up of the remnant with the establishment of the Messianic kingdom, and *Micah* 5:7-8 depicts the remnant to be "in the midst of many people . . . among the Gentile." It was to these that Paul would go first in every city.

*Micah* 7:18 takes into account the necessity of redemption even on the part of the faithful few as he portrays God passing over the transgressions of the remnant.

*Zephaniah* 3:13 makes note of the righteousness of the redeemed remnant.

The point of all this is, of course, that the threat of disaster to the commonwealth of Israel could never exhaust the whole purpose of God. The nation might be, indeed finally was, cut off, but God's purpose in his people would find fulfillment through the faithful remnant.

The scope of this writing, as the final volume of the BIBLE TEXTBOOK SERIES, is the last seven of the minor prophets. We shall now review the highlights of the covenant theme in each of these books in turn. It is suggested that the reader study carefully Jesus' approach to the Old Testament by which He opened the eyes of the Twelve "that they might understand the Scriptures" (*Luke* 24:44-49), and the unfolding of the covenant promise in Acts.

With this approach clearly in mind, it is further suggested that the reader review *all* the Old Testament prophets from Jesus' point of view. It is a rewarding experience to read the Old Testament through His eyes and see the everlasting covenant move forward to its fulfillment in Him and the church, the real Israel of God.

For our present purposes in completing the final volume of the series, we begin with Micah. While the judgments of Micah are leveled against the rebellious covenant people, the *universal* concern of God is seen at once in *Micah* 1:2. Micah's exclamation includes not only "all ye people", the common term for the children of Israel, but ". . . hearken, O earth, and all that therein is." All the nations of the earth have a stake in the repentance of God's covenant people!



## THE COVENANT THEME

When Jesus sat at supper with the two downcast disciples in Emmaus and "beginning from Moses and from all the prophets He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself . . ." (*Luke 24:13-35*) He no doubt recited such passages as *Micah 1:4-5* and *5:2-5*.

Micah sees Jehovah as the Master of all the nations. In his prophecy, as well as that of other Old Testament writers may be traced the outline of the way by which God's sway over all men is to be brought about. People from all nations are to willingly answer the call when He who is Abraham's Seed is born in "Bethlehem Ephratah . . . little among the thousands of Judah . . . shall come forth . . . whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting . . . (and) the remnant of Israel." (*Micah 5:2-5*)

In *Micah 2:12*, *4:7*, *5:7*, *5:8*, and *7:18*, the prophet focuses attention on those few in the nation who were true to the covenant. These are the remnant. The multitudes of Abraham's physical descendants have gone off after strange gods. They have broken the covenant, by disobeying the law, but there is a remnant whose lives of obedient faith are such that God will yet be able to bless all the nations in the Seed of Abraham.

It is the remnant that the Messiah will "put together as the sheep of Bozrah, as the flock in the midst of their fold." It is they who shall "have passed through the gate . . . and thy King shall pass before them, and the Lord on the head of them." (*Micah 2:12-13*)

It is the remnant, "that was cast off of a strong nation . . ." (*ie.* who actually had little to say about the rebellion of the Jewish commonwealth against God) over whom the "Lord shall reign . . . from henceforth, even for ever." (*Micah 4:7*)

The universal outreach of this remnant to bless all the nations is seen in *Micah 5:7-8*. ". . . the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people." It was the few faithful Jews in the synagogue who formed the nucleus of most of the churches established by Paul.

In *Micah 7:18*, it is the remnant whose iniquities are pardoned and whose transgressions are passed over. The prophet sees this as the fulfillment of ". . . the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn to our fathers from the days of old." (*Micah 7:20*) In other words the pardoning of the remnant is seen by Micah as a fulfillment of the covenant.

Micah's Messianic message is the accomplishment, through the faithful few, of that which God set out to do in the call of Abraham.

Zephaniah makes less direct reference to the covenant theme than

## MINOR PROPHETS

does Micah, yet the mention he does make is enough to show that he is aware of the importance of his message to the fulfilling of God's promise. His instruction is to "wait ye upon me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up . . . that I may assemble the kingdoms . . . that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one consent." (*Zephaniah 3:8-F*)

The remnant in Zephaniah is more emphatically those who are to return from the captivity (*Zephaniah 2:7*) but even here there are Messianic overtones. "The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth; for they shall feed and lie down and none shall make afraid." (*Zephaniah 3:13*) Here is a people true to the moral and ethical demands of the covenant and of the spirit more than the letter of the law. Here is the unlimited sway of the Lord over the lives of His people. His law is "written in their hearts." (*cf. Jeremiah 31:33*)

Haggai also sees the end of the covenant as the rule of God over all and His people as a blessing to every nation. *It was their gravest error that the Jews identified God's dominion over all men with their own national ambition to become the dominant world power.* The error did not alter God's intent that in Abraham's Seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed.

Haggai's statement in behalf of God is "according to the word that I *covenanted* with you when you came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you; fear ye not." (*Haggai 2:5*) His assurance is that despite the appearance of defeat in the overthrow of the nation, the resources are His to do what He promised in the covenant. (Read *Haggai 2:5-9*)

In *Haggai 1:12-14* it is again the remnant through whom the purpose of God moves forward.

Zechariah has much to say on the covenant theme. In *Zechariah 2:11* the prophet appeals to Messianic fulfillment as proof of divine origin of His message. "Many nations shall join themselves to Jehovah in that day, and shall be my people; and I will dwell in the midst of them."

This proof is accompanied by the plea "Be silent, all flesh, before Jehovah; for He is waked up out of His holy habitation." (*Zechariah 2:13*)

Zechariah will have none of the nationalistic exclusiveness which developed among the Jews from David to Christ. Rather he gives voice to the assurance that His kingdom shall rule over all and His people shall bless the whole race of men. The Jews identified God's kingdom

## THE COVENANT THEME

more and more with their own hopes of political dominion over the earth, but the fulfilling Seed of Abraham was to say, "My kingdom is not of this world . . . my kingdom is not from hence." (*John 18:36*)

The Apostle Paul, wrote to non-Jewish Christians in Colosse that God has delivered us ". . . out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love." (*Colossians 1:13*)

In *Zechariah 6:9-15* the fulfilling Seed is called "The Branch." (compare *Isaiah 4:2, 11:1-ff*) Here proof of the divine authenticity of the prophet's message is that "He shall build the Temple of Jehovah, and shall sit on His throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both . . . and they that are far off shall come and build in the temple of Jehovah." (*cp. Ephesians 2:19-22*)

Paul, who more than any other New Testament writer (except possibly Luke) is aware of the universal outreach of the covenant, echoes these thoughts in the Ephesian letter. In that epistle, which has been called "the greatest piece of writing in all history," the eternal purpose of God and its fulfillment in the church is outlined in amazing completeness. It is not surprising, therefore, to find in the Ephesian letter the ultimate fulfilling of the message of the Prophets.

To those who once were "separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise" (*Ephesians 2:12*) Paul wrote "For He is our peace, who made both one, and brake down the middle wall of partition . . . that He might create in Himself of the two (Jew and Gentile) one new man (human kind)." (*Ephesians 2:14*) This is the crescendo of the symphony to which the prophets wrote prelude. Zechariah's statement "the counsel of peace shall be between them both" (*i.e.* the throne and the temple) is here fulfilled in the cross through the church.

Nor is this all; Zechariah says the Branch "shall build the temple." In the Ephesian letter we learn that this temple is the church" . . . being built upon the foundation of apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a *holy temple* in the Lord; in whom also ye also are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit." (*Ephesians 2:20-ff*)

In *Zechariah 6:15*, the prophet writes a reminder that the promise is conditional; "And this shall come to pass *if* ye will diligently obey the voice of Jehovah your God." The nation of Israel did not diligently obey, but the faithful remnant (true Israel) did.

This is vividly demonstrated in the contrast of the first century Jewish priests and authorities with such men and women as Simeon

## MINOR PROPHETS

(*Luke 2:25-35*) and Anna (*Luke 2:36-38*), and Joseph (*Matthew 1-19*) and Nathaniel (*John 1:45-47*) and some five hundred others (*I Corinthians 15:6*) who formed the first Christian fellowship in Jerusalem.

One of the most glaring contrasts between the Kingly Christ and the kingly ambitions of the post-Babylonian Jews is the description of His final entry into Jerusalem. Zechariah wrote "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold thy King cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt, the foal of an ass." (*Zechariah 9:9*) John sees the fulfillment of this in Jesus' choice of beasts for His so-called "triumphal entry" and quotes the prophecy exactly. (*John 12:14-15*) The king the Jews expected would have been more fittingly mounted on a war horse!

The covenant theme is less obvious in Malachi, so we shall reserve comment upon it until later. Enough has been said to establish the covenant theme, "in thee shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," as the pole star of the prophets.

## CHAPTER IV

### BAAL WORSHIP

Much of the Old Testament, certainly much of the message of the prophets, is indiscernable without at least a perfunctory understanding of the worship of Baal. Every reference to idolatry among God's people unless otherwise specified is a reference to Baal worship. Of the seven immediate neighbors of Israel, only Moab worshipped other *major* deities.

Moab's major deity was Chemosh. It is easily demonstrated that Chemosh was simply Baal with a strong *Jeh* (Jehovah) influence.

Judah worshipped Jehovah, but the influence of Baal was so great that the Jehovah of Judah during the period of the minor prophets is scarcely discernable from Chemosh of Moab. (*eg. Isaiah 66:17*).

Some historians have tried to show that Baal was not one god, but merely a common name ascribed to the local deities of the middle eastern peoples. Careful tracing of the worship performed in his honor, and of the nature ascribed to Baal himself indicates otherwise. The various Baalism worshipped in different localities were one and the same god in various guises and with varying local coloration.

## BAAL WORSHIP

From Babylon to Assyria and Syria, to Egypt, to Greece, and finally to Rome, the evidence points to the goddess-mother herself, the child and the father as the same unholy trinity. The child presented as a fullgrown deity is presented under the name of Ninus in Babylon, Baal in Assyria, Syria and Israel, Osiris in Egypt, Dionysus in Greece and Bacchus in Rome are one and the same god. So much so, in fact, that sometimes even the name is the same from place to place.

There are a myriad of other names for Baal. The multiplicity in each locale of worship is multiplied by the far reaching locations of his influence. See the chart at the end of this chapter for a sketchy analysis of some of these names in the locations where they were used.

The roots of Baal worship are buried in the silt of Noah's flood and the confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel. Its beginnings were apparently brought about, not through the evolution of religious thought, but deliberately as a device to aid in the building of the early Babylonian empire. "Knowing God, they glorified Him not as God." (*Romans 1:21*) The evolution of thought, traceable in the spread of the "Mystery" cults, as this worship is known, throughout the ancient middle eastern world and the Mediterranean basin is to be accounted for on the basis of local coloration and custom as they entered the idolatrous religions from place to place.

It was as the originator of false religion that Babylon earned the title "mother of harlots." (*Revelation 17:5*) The prophets frequently allude to this allegory of Baalism. (eg, *Micah 1:7*)

Wherever the mystery religion spread, there was always to be found three major deities . . . always a father, a virgin mother and a sacrificed son. These were always accompanied by a host of minor gods and goddesses who were believed to exert varying degrees of influence upon the lives of their worshippers.

The similarities shared by the universal triune deities, both in the world of the Bible and throughout the world are too numerous, too obvious and too dominant to be accounted for on the basis of mere coincidence. They point to a common origin of the myths surrounding the father, mother and son.

The scope of this present work will not permit an indepth study of these phenomena . . . by which man, at the dawn of history deliberately turned from the worship of the only God to "The likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and four footed beasts and creeping things." (*cf. Romans 1:18-23*) throughout the world. We shall limit ourselves to an oversimplified account of the process as it effected the world of the minor prophets.

## MINOR PROPHETS

The abundance of evidence, (though admittedly not conclusive proof,) identifies Nimrod as the founder of the sensuous idolatry which soon became identified with sun worship and spread from the Tigris-Euphrates valley round the fertile crescent to the Nile and thence around the entire Mediterranean world. This son of Cush, grandson of Ham, according to the divine record (*Genesis 10:9*) was first a mighty hunter, (his name means "subduer of the leopard.") who soon "began to be mighty upon the earth." (*I Chronicles 1:10*) "The beginning of his kingdom was Babel." (*Genesis 10:10*) Modern archeology identifies the tower of Babel with the ruins of Bers Nimroud which means "tower of Nimrod."

The first inhabitants of Moab are referred to as "mighty ones" (*Genesis 15:5*). Those of Ammon were called "crafty, wicked men" (*Genesis 15:15*). The original dwellers in Edom were the same as those in Moab. (*Genesis 6:4*)

The term *rapha* ("Mighty ones") is the same as that translated "crafty or wicked ones." It is also, unfortunately, translated "giants" in some contexts in the Authorized Version of the Old Testament. (Eg. *Deuteronomy 2:20*) Matthew Henry, in these contexts, has rightly rendered the term "terribles ones" in reference to the Emmins in the land of Moab. (cf. *Deuteronomy 2:11*) The term may be synonymous with *nephilium* fallen ones of *Genesis 6:4* and *Numbers 13:33*.

It seems likely that Nimrod, or some other mighty hunter, realized that a band of hunters, trained in the use of weapons to subdue animals could be disciplined to act together and as easily subdue humans. There is little doubt that, at this point in history, animals were multiplying far more rapidly than men, and Nimrod's exploits against them would assure him the rank of hero among his fellows. They could be easily persuaded to give up a measure of their personal liberty in exchange for protection by this "mighty one." This marked a decisive break with the patriarchal system by which men had theretofore been governed. (*Israel followed suit, probably through the influence of her Baal worshipping neighbors when she demanded a king in the place of the judges . . . I Samuel 8:10*)

Nimrod, fully entrenched as the eminent benefactor of his people, led them to seek their chief good in sensual pleasure, and convinced them that they could enjoy the delights of sin without fear of retribution from God. His exploits were always accompanied by troops of women, to the sounds of music, revelings and games . . . and whatever else fed the desires of the flesh.

Galling under the righteous rule of God, recently enforced by

## BAAL WORSHIP

the flood, these "mighty ones" began to make a deliberate ritual of unrighteousness. Themselves they exalted (Nimrod and his followers, including Simeramis his wife) as leaders of a cult of sensualism. It is quite natural that they be called "fallen ones" by those who did not participate in their debauchery and who still remembered the lesson of the flood.

Diodorus records: "Ninus, the most ancient of the Assyrian kings mentioned in history, performed great actions. Being naturally of a war-like disposition, and ambitious of glory that results from valour, he armed a considerable number of men that were, like himself, brave and vigorous, trained them . . ." Ninus is further described as rising to extraordinary heights and power by bringing the people of Babylon under subjection to him *while it was yet a city*. There is no room for reasonable doubt that Ninus of secular history and the Nimrod of the Bible are one and the same.

Various legends of the death of Nimrod persist throughout the middle east yet today. One such myth among the Arabs says that Nimrod, vexed at God for sending a prophet to warn him against persistence in ritualized immortality, resolved to attack God in heaven. In order to carry out this threat, he built a great tower. Having ascended to the top of the tower, he found himself no closer to heaven than when he started. The following night the tower collapsed, which incident only served to inflame Nimrod's anger. He then devised a plan to fly into heaven in a car drawn by strong birds. The car crashed on Mt. Hermon, and Nimrod was fatally mutilated in the fall. (The mutilation of the god played a prominent role in the worship of Baal.)

Another version of the death of Nimrod, which is far more important in the development of Baal worship, has him being attacked by a wild boar. In this version also Nimrod dies of mutilation.

Yet another version says that he went to the rulers of Bab (Babylon) and endeavored to convince them that they should condone and promote his cult of immortality. Still aware of God's wrath through the flood, they reacted violently and sentenced Nimrod to death by mutilation.

Varied as these legends are, they contain a single common element which forms the heart of Baal worship. Nimrod died violently at the height of his career as a "mighty one" and he was mutilated.

Nimrod's wife, Semiramis, who had risen to power and influence with her husband through the promotion of religious immortality was faced with a decision. She must either sink back into obscurity or

## MINOR PROPHETS

she must devise a way to transfer her husband's influence to herself. She soon resolved that he should be worshipped as a god. The ancient world in general was familiar with God's promise to send a deliverer to crush the head of the serpent. (*Genesis 3:15*) (Allusions to this promise are found in every major religion.) The followers of Nimrod's cult would be quick to accept Semiramis' presentation of Nimrod reborn through her: as *Zero-ashta* (the seed of woman) *Mith-ras* the mediator. She was at once his wife and his mother, and is so represented throughout the mystery religions.

The earliest pictures of Baal worship show him crushing the head of the serpent, as do those of his Greek, Indian, Scandinavian and Egyptian counterparts. In all the great idolatrous religions of the world there is the death of a great leader-hero who voluntarily lays down his life for his people, only to be reborn of his wife as "*alma mater*" virgin mother. One of the universal titles of this sacrificed son is "deliverer." Part of the ritual of his worship, as we shall see later, is the mourning over his death. (See *Ezekiel 8:14*, where the prophet alludes to the women weeping over Tammuz. Tammuz is one of the early Assyrian titles for Baal.)

Many ancient evidences point to the fact that men shortly after the flood began to picture the heavens pressed close to the earth that one could not stand upright beneath them. This represented God's demands for righteousness and the suppression of physical appetites. Nimrod had led the revolt against this, and now Semiramis could present him as the one who, through his own death, had lifted the burden of righteousness from the backs of his followers. Had not God himself promised a deliverer? By virtue of his death his followers could live for the flesh without fearing the wrath of God.

The Greek version of this pagan emancipation would show Atlas lifting the heavens upon his shoulders, and Homer would write:

*"From the clear vein the immortal Ichor (precious blood) flowed,  
Such stream as issues from a wounded god,  
Pure Emanation, uncorruptible flood,  
Unlike our gross, debased terrestrial blood."*

Having retained her power and prestige through the claim that her hero-husband had actually died as the promised deliverer and been reborn as a god, Semiramis herself soon became elevated above the plain of mortality and venerated as the "Queen of Heaven," "Mother of God." Just as the early pictures of Ishtar (or Semiramis) have her holding the deified babe and pointing toward heaven.



## BAAL WORSHIP

This marks the beginning of Zorasterism in Babylon. The true God was not entirely forgotten. As the new religion spread westward he was venerated as "the great invisible," as the "hidden one." He was thought to be unconcerned for the lives of men and was to be worshipped in silence. In Babylon he was known as Belus, Bel (the confounder . . . cf. *Jeremiah* 1:3, Chaos (the god of confusion) and Cush (the father of Nimrod) whose symbol was a club. The idea of confounder and confuser are easily understood as references to the experience at the Tower of Babel, and the club is obviously the symbol of his intolerable wrath.

It was the son and the mother who were the chief objects of worship. He was the great deliverer, and she was, after all, his mother and thus, in a sense, even more to be revered because without her he would never have been reborn following his death.

Various names for the son in Assyria were Kronos, Ninus, Monis, Tammuz, and Zero-Ashter. The mother was known variously as Semiramis, Reah, Cyble, and Ishtar, terms denoting her various relationships to her husband-son and to her devotees.

In Baalbek, the ancient Syrian city of Baal, this worship became refined, more clearly defined and its rituals more stylized. The father was here referred to as Bel. The name Chaos, ascribed to him as the confuser of tongues, lapsed into disuse. The mother became known at Baalbek as Ashtoreth and the son as Baal or Hadaad.

Here also the cult became identified with sun worship. Baal became the god of the sun, and his chief symbol the halo or sunburst.

In Phoenicia the Assyrian names prevailed largely, with some local variation and coloring. It was from Phoenicia that the name of the mother, Astoreth, came into our western languages. The anglicized form is Easter.

In Egypt, the legend of the sacrificed god added a detail concerning his rebirth which made the Egyptian version of his worship distinct. Legend there had it that the god, known to Egyptians as Osiris, had been torn in pieces when he was killed. In the process of his rebirth his mother, known to Egyptians as Isis, or Mut, was required to bring the pieces back together to refashion his body. She was able to locate all but his reproductive organs and his eyes. Hence the son in Egypt became the un-reproductive god of darkness and ruled over the underworld.

The father, identified first with Re and later, in the middle kingdom, with Amon-re rose to a prominence he did not enjoy in Babylon or Baalbek. He ruled the day and produced life through the mother.

## MINOR PROPHETS

The mother, Isis, became the chief object of the sensual ritualism which marked Egyptian sun worship.

The Egyptian symbol of Osiris the son, was a golden calf which retained the spots of the Babylonian leopard skin in which Ninus had been portrayed. The sun burst became the symbol of Amon-re the sun god . . . and the mother retained her everpresent symbol of fertility, the egg. The single symbol which represented best the cult in Egypt was the egg standing atop a tau cross, thus forming the key of life which was ever held in the hand of Amon-re.

*His symbol has been revived in modern times by the Hippie-Yippie movements, whose ritualization of fleshly love, sensual dancing and rhythmic music performed to the accompaniment of narcotic induced hallucinations is hardly discernible from the worship of the Egyptian sun cult.*

The Greeks added their own peculiar cultural flavor to the worship of the pagan trinity. The deeds of their ancient heroes were attributed to the son, whom they called variously Bacchus (the lamented one), Plutus, Dionysus, (the sin bearer), Kisos, Adonis, and Mercury (the persuasive speaker.)

The mother was, to the Greeks, Irene, Ceres, Artimus, Aphrodite and Diana. In general, Diana was revered as the goddess of chastity and her temple served by vestal virgins. At Ephesus it was a different story. There she was contemplated as the mother of the gods, and her turreted crown was reminiscent of the tower of Babel.

The father was Hephaistis to the Greeks.

The Romans borrowed their religion from the Greeks as they borrowed everything else from the Greeks. The father became Janus, the mother was Venus, and the son retained the Greek titles of Bacchus, Adonis and Mercury.

Throughout the development and spread of the cult, the multiplicity of names for each of the three deities is derived from terms applied to them in their various relationships to one another and to their worshippers.

They appear in various dress and are credited with the heroic deeds of certain local heroes. In every place they maintain the same essential relationship one to the other. The father, for the most part was given little attention, (excepting in Egypt) though the worshippers were careful not to completely ignore him. The son was revered as saviour-deliverer and worshipped for his direct concern with the affairs of men. The mother, in whom resided the wellsprings of life, and to

## BAAL WORSHIP

whom the son owed his own life, was the center of the most sensual fertility rites the minds of her depraved priests and priestesses could concoct.

Worshippers were initiated into the cult by ritual which utilized rhythmic music, flashing lights and narcotic potions to induce emotional experiences and physical sensations by which the candidate came to believe he had actually shared, vicariously, in the atoning death and re-birth of the deliverer-god.

In addition to this universal triad, there was in each locale a multitude of minor deities . . . gods and goddesses who had originally been local tribal gods and who were included in the hierarchy of heaven when the worship of the sun god trinity became predominant. Mount Olympus reeled with the rhythm of their reveling.

So, it was that the prominent male deity of all of Israel's neighbors came to be known and worshipped as Baal. His influence upon the people of God cannot be overstated.

He claimed several titles throughout Assyria and Palestine, all of which are easily applicable to Nimrod to whom may most probably be traced the first use of his blasphemous title: the meaning of Baal is "Lord!"

The original title of Baal seems to have been *Baal-Abarin*, lord of the mighty ones. Other titles include *Baal-Aph*, lord of wrath, *Baal-lashon*, lord of the tongue, *Baal-hatzim*, lord of arrows, *Baal-Bereth*, lord of fir trees, *Baal-Berith*, lord of the covenant.

*Baal-Aph*, lord of wrath, depicts the originator of the cult as a man angry against the righteousness of God and His demands, which, as we have seen, were depicted as the oppressive lowering of the heavens. In lifting this oppressive insistence upon righteousness, Baal-Aph became the deliverer of his people.

*Baal-Lashon*, lord of tongues, depicts the original Baal as persuasive in drawing away a following from the worship of the righteous God. Centuries later his counterpart in Greece and Rome would be known as Mercury, the orator (not messenger) of the gods.

*Baal-Hatzim*, lord of arrows, depicts Baal as a mighty hunter and warrior. Such prowess in the hunt was the beginning of Nimrod's power.

*Baal-Bereth*, lord of fir trees, represents Baal as the great deliverer made immortal through his rebirth. The evergreen became the symbol of immortality.

## MINOR PROPHETS

This concept of everlasting power is also described in another title *Baal-Berith*, lord of the covenant, describing his everlasting power and indestructible life as giving him authority over men. This title was itself a direct challenge to Jehovah, the covenant God of the Hebrews.

A final title, probably ascribed to the father rather than the son, was *Baal-Thalath*, the lord of the rib, or husband of the rib. This signifies that he always walked sideways (with a limp). (It is probably the origin of Vulcan's lameness also). Thus the father of the gods was identified with Adam, through an allusion to the creation of his wife from his rib. In memory of this the priests of Baal limped, or walked sideways about the altar. In *I Kings 18:26* the word rendered "leaped" means, literally, to limp. It was a side-ways limping dance performed about the altar as the sacrifices were offered to Baal. In performing it, the priests slashed themselves in memory of Baal's sacrifice, after having first numbed themselves with narcotic potions.

It has been said that Baalism was, at its root, the worship of everything immoral. Its beginnings and evolvment are described vividly as *Romans 1:18-32*. The entire Roman world of Paul's day was permeated with the religious concepts and immoral practices promoted by the Mystery cults. Even the Jews shared them, albeit without associating their concepts with pagan worship *per se*. (Cf. *Romans 1:32*)

The worship of Baal, and his various counterparts in other ancient peoples, centered around certain annual feast days, each of which commemorated some momentous event in the sacrifice of the son and the life-giving virtues of the *alma mater*.

The sacrificial death of Baal for the deliverance of his people was celebrated in connection with the winter solstice, the time when the sun reached its farthest point from the equator. The lengthened period of darkness common to winter months and the abbreviated period of daylight accompanied by the overshadowing of the sun by clouds was taken as commemorative of the death of the sun god.

On *December 24*, after sun set, a huge log was burned to symbolize his suffering and death. Next morning a fir tree stood in its place, symbolizing his immortality. The tree was trimmed with colored eggs, depicting the fertility of the virgin mother through whom he had been reborn.

*December 25th* was given over to orgies of immortality and drunkenness. Baalbek's Berosus, later known in Greek and Roman times as the festival of *Bacchus* or *Saturnalia* were varied versions of the cele-

## BAAL WORSHIP

bration of the rebirth of the sun god. Slaves were temporarily freed to depict the deliverance of the people by Baal. One slave was chosen and honored as Zoganes, the god of wantonness.

Zoganes found his way to Europe, during the dark ages, in the person of the "Lord of Misrule." It was he who there led the *Christ Mass* festivities on *December 25th*. There also the *fir tree* trimmed with *eggs* commemorated the re-birth of the deliverer and became part of the Christ Mass festivities.

The mistletoe, regarded as a divine branch come down from heaven and growing on the sacred tree which sprang from earth, also figured in the rituals of Baal and became more prominent as the influence of the cult spread through northern Europe. The kiss, symbol of the reconciliation bought by the sacrifice of the sun god signaled the beginning of the sensual rites beneath the mistletoe.

The boar came to figure significantly in the observance of the sacred solstice. He was sacrificed to the god in memory of the legend which said that a wild boar had been the instrument of the death of the sacrificed god. The sacrificed boar then became the "main course" of the feast in honor of Baal. One cannot but be aware of this practice when reading such passages as *Isaiah 66:17* and other Old Testament Scriptures forbidding the eating of pork. The problem in the early church of eating meat sacrificed to idols (eg. *Romans 14*) sprang from this and other animals sacrificed to the Greek and Roman versions of the sun god.

In Egypt the symbol of Osiris (the son in the pagan trinity) was the goose, and in Rome sacred geese were always kept in the temple of Jupiter, as at Baalbek.

The traditional English Christmas dinner consisting of a boar's head, goose and yule cakes finds its historic origin in Baal worship.

The worship of Astarte, the mother of Baal was always the worship of fertility and fecundity. The letter "O", symbol of *Zero-Ashta* (the seed of woman) in Babylon, came to represent the egg in her fertility rites.

The rite took place in the spring. Its date was determined using the method established by early Babylonian astrology. Three days after the vernal equinox, when the sun god crossed the equator on his way north for the spring and summer seasons, a feast of forty sacred days began. The period, known in Egypt as Lent and held in honor of Osiris, was later celebrated in Greece and Rome in honor of Adonis. It represented forty days of mourning by Ceres (the mother) over

## MINOR PROPHEETS

Prosepine her daughter who had been carried away and raped by her husband-son.

During the Greek period at Baalbek, when Baal was worshipped in the temple of Bacchus, the fusion of the Greek variation of sun worship caused little difficulty as it became identified with the fertility rites connected with the egg and observed by Baal worshippers since the time of the divided kingdom and before. The dyed eggs were eaten with barley cakes following the consecration of both to Baal and Ashteroth (Easter). This feast was eaten to the accompaniment of lewd dances and sacred prostitution.

The feast of the eggs marked the end of the forty days of Lent. Its beginning was signaled in Egypt, in the Temple of Karnak, by the sun light streaming through an aperture in the ceiling at just the right angle once each year to strike the head of Mut, the mother of Osiris.

These and other feasts, observed with variations and refinement throughout the ancient world grew out of the Baal worship with which Israel was surrounded, and to which she more than once surrendered.

Elevated places were selected for the worship of Baal. This may explain Elijah's choice of a mountain as the site for the contest with the prophets of Baal. Meeting them on their own ground he made mockery of their counterfeit religion. Baal worship in high places must also be kept in mind in reading the words of the Psalmist: "I will lift up mine eyes *unto the hills*. From whence cometh my help? My help cometh from the Lord (the real Lord) which made heaven and earth." (and not from Baal, lord of the hills!)

Perhaps the most vivid description of Baal worship, as it confronted the people of God, is evidenced in the worship conducted by the Ammonites. The local name for Baal at Ammon was Moloch. It is likely that it was from the worship of Moloch that the Phoenician name Baal-Hammam, lord of the heat, originated.

Moloch was made of brass, cast with the head of a calf and seated on a brazen throne. Both the throne and the image were hollow, as were its arms and legs. The idol thus shaped, formed a furnace in which the flames were fanned to incredible fury ("seven times hotter than hot") by the draft created as fire swept upward through the limbs to the trunk and through the outstretched arms.

With the arms of Moloch heated red by the flames, the victim, usually a baby girl, was thrown into them where she immediately burned to death. The infant's screams were drowned by the frantic beatings of the drums which signaled the beginning of sensual dances and lewd rituals.

## BAAL WORSHIP

References to this horrendous practice may be found in such Old Testament passages as *Ezekiel 16:22*, *Jeremiah 7:31*, and *Jeremiah 19:5*.

It was from the word *binnom*, describing the screams of dying infants that the Jews took the name of the Valley of Hinnom. In expression of their disgust for this unspeakable cruelty they made the valley in which it was practiced the city dump of Jerusalem. It was this valley from which Jesus borrowed the word Gehenna . . . translated Hell!

Milton's description of the worship of Moloch is vivid and accurate:

*"First, Moloch, horrid king, besmeared with blood  
of human sacrifice, and parents tears;  
Though for the noise of drums and timbrels loud  
Their children's cries unheard, that passed through fire  
To this grim idol, Him the Ammonite  
Worshipped in Rabba and her watery plain  
In Argob and Basan, to the stream  
Of utmost Arnon. Nor content with such  
Audacious neighborhood, the wisest heart  
Of Solomon he led by fraud to build  
His temple right against the temple of God  
On that opprobrious hill; and made his grove  
The pleasant valley of Hinnom, Tophet thence  
And black Gebenna call'd, the type of Hell"*

The worshippers of the sun, personified in Baal, spiritualized the reproductive powers in the male and female human being. With the image of a virile bull before them, and the egg of fertility as an instrument of worship, they tried to revive the forces of reproduction and life through ritualized fornication. With Baal, at the center of the religion was always the virgin mother . . . perpetually virgin despite her invention of and dedication to sacred prostitution. It was the corruption of Jehovah worship by Baalism which was the chief cause of the downfall of the northern kingdom and the Babylonian captivity of the southern kingdom. It was the culture produced through a corruption of Jehovah worship by Baal worship against which the prophets spoke. It was a people whose covenant relationship to God was compromised by the sensual worship of idols that the prophets sought to call to repentance. The task was over-whelming, and the result all but inevitable.

## MINOR PROPHETS

From the time of Moses Baalism had been a threat to the faith of the covenant people. The first mention of this influence in Scripture is found in *Numbers* 22:41, and the first indication of Israelite participation in it in *Numbers* 25:3.

There can be little doubt that the people from the beginning had been familiar with sungod worship, of which Baalism was one form. Abraham had been called out of the Chaldees, which was the cradle of sun worship. For four hundred years the children of Israel had lived in Egypt, where the worship of Amon-re, Isis, and Osiris, along with a myriad of minor deities literally dominated every facet of life, from the Pharaoh to the lowest slave.

In *Judges* 2:11, 13, 3:7, 8:33, 10:6, and 1:10 we learn that the influence of Baal among the people increased rapidly following their occupation of the promised land. From time to time there were periods of repentance (eg. *I Samuel* 7:4), but the temptation of a religion of sensual experience against the worship of an invisible God who must be served in obedient faith was overwhelming. Modern archeology has unearthed little evidence of graven images among the people at this period of their history, but there is an abundance of amulets and charms depicting Asthoreth, the fertility goddess always associated with Baal, which were worn by Israelite women during pregnancy.

It remained for Solomon to introduce sun god worship into Israel to such an extent that it became an integral part of the daily culture of the people. True, Solomon built the temple to Jehovah in Jerusalem and indulged in lavish patronage of Jehovah worship. But it is equally true that the kingdom of Solomon was most noted among foreign contemporaries, not for his strict worship of Jehovah but for its crass commercialism. It was in this pursuit that Solomon concluded treaties and entangling alliances with polytheistic states. It was to support this policy of national aggrandizement that he levied taxes and conscripted laborers to the extent that, following his death, his successor son's refusal to abandon the policy brought about the permanent division of the kingdom and the ultimate end of the Davidic dynasty.

Religious exclusiveness such as that demanded of Israel under the law, is never the handmaiden of internationalism and power politics. Solomon's alliances were often sealed by opportunistic marriages to pagan princesses, and strange wives, rather than being required to worship and serve the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, were encouraged to continue in their native forms of the sun god worship which dominated the ancient near east. The temple itself, although incorporating



## BAAL WORSHIP

the divinely given pattern of the tabernacle in its "floor plan", was essentially a Canaanite structure, built by Canaanite architects on a Canaanite high place. And in its shadow Solomon himself erected, for his Egyptian wife, another temple to the sun god!

Although Solomon must bear the blame for introducing idolatry, (and idolatry in those days, in that part of the world meant sun god worship, of which Baalism was one form) into Jerusalem and so into what was to become the southern kingdom, this despicable religion found fertile soil in the north also. The champion of Baal there was Jezebel whose name has come to be synonymous with everything immoral.

The civil strife which brought about the division of the kingdom following the death of Solomon was instigated by a prophet of God (*I Kings 11:26-29*) who was speaking against the new order in Jerusalem, not only because it demanded unjust levies from the northern tribes but because it had placed paganism in the seat of Jehovah worship. Another prophet warned Rehoboam that the uprising in the north was God's will. (*I Kings 12:21-24*).

When Jeroboam erected in Bethel a shrine to rival the temple in Jerusalem, it was a shrine to Jehovah, and golden bulls placed in it were intended simply as symbolic support for the throne of the invisible Jehovah. But the similarity of the golden bulls to the images associated with Baal worship was too obvious. Many who came to the shrine to worship Jehovah remained to worship the golden bulls. There can be little doubt that this marked the beginning of the strange admixture of Baalism and Jehovah worship which came to be the religion of the northern kingdom. It was by confusing these two mutually incompatible faiths that Jeroboam "made Israel sin." (*I Kings 15:34*).

The attempt of the northern kings to recapture the glories of Solomon led them into an alliance with Phoenician Tyre. Now any student of ancient history is aware that Tyre in particular, and the Phoenesians in general were responsible for bringing Baal worship into the Mediterranean coastlands in the first place. The alliance between Samaria and Tyre was cemented by a marriage of Ahab to the pagan princess Jezebel.

Whatever can be said about Jezebel, and a great deal has been said, both in the Bible and in other writings, she was a woman of deep religious conviction. She was not content to merely be allowed to serve her foreign god in Israel. She became a missionary, determined to turn the entire northern kingdom from Jehovah to Baal. It is to her credit that, unlike the professing Jehovahists among whom she

## MINOR PROPHETS

lived, she was not interested in a compromise between the two mutually antagonistic religions. She took every measure at her disposal to bring the issue to a showdown. (*1 Kings 18-19*).

The gods and goddesses of Phoenecia were thus arrayed against the one true God. Baal the sun god and his wife-mother Astarte (Ashtoreth) represented the most completely carnal forces of fertility. The rituals performed in their names, especially those to Astarte, were concerned with the control of fecundancy of the earth of animals and of man. The most degrading acts imaginable were performed as acts of public worship to curry the favor of the gods.

The contrast between the absolute morality demanded by the law of Jehovah and the absolute immorality of Baal worship cannot be overstated. If Israel were to be God's people, and keep His laws there could be no compromise with such ritualized lewdness. Men take on the character of the gods they worship. If Israel ever took Baal to his bosom in earnest, it would be the end of Israel as a covenant people.

Yet many did turn from Jehovah, with His demands for righteousness to serve Baal and Astarte—and their own fleshly desires. Some, clinging to tradition, yet indulging in apostasy actually came to address Jehovah as though He were Baal.

After the death of Jezebel, there were a few feeble attempts at reform. Added to these were the warnings of the prophets of God, which were anything but feeble. But the die was cast. It was all downhill—all the way to destruction. When finally the Ashara, high goddess symbol of Baalism, was allowed by Jehu to remain in Samaria, it became apparent that the paganism introduced as a foreign cult now thrived as an Israelite cult . . . the predominant religion, eventually, of the northern kingdom! The influence of this cult upon the ultimate demise of that kingdom cannot be overstated.

It was against this compromised worship and its resultant sinful society that the prophets of the pre-exilic age thundered, in both the north and the south. The only ray of hope which shown through the storms clouds which the prophets saw on the horizons of both Israel and Judah was the conviction that a remnant of the covenant people would repent and remain faithful to the Covenant of Jehovah.

It is possible, at first casual contact, that the essentials of Baal worship will impress the Christian reader as being remarkably similar to those of Christianity. The belief in a trinity, the sacrifice of the son of a god for the deliverance of his people, the birth of the son through a virgin mother may give one a start.

## BAAL WORSHIP

A closer look will show these similarities, if indeed they can be called similarities at all, to be those of a counterfeit. The trinity of Baalism was composed of a nearly unknown father god who was for the most part ignored by the worshipper, a son sacrificed to save his people FROM RIGHTEOUSNESS, and a mother who was portrayed as the same time as a virgin and the leader of a cult whose priestesses were public prostitutes. The trinity of the Christian (if this term is permissible at all, being unscriptural,) is composed of an all-powerful, loving Father whose will is the overriding purpose of all, including the life of His Son, a Son whose life was given to save His people FROM RIGHTEOUSNESS, and a Holy Spirit whose nature is entirely non-physical and hence as far from the nature of the sun goddess as is possible. The re-birth of the sacrificed Baal was through the powers of the goddess. The resurrection of Jesus was by the power of the Father. The virgin mother of Baal was elevated as Queen of Heaven, while the virgin mother of Jesus is last seen among the humble worshippers of her Son. (*Acts. 1:14*) The purpose of Baalism was to thwart the demands of God, the ideal of the Christian faith is to fulfill His eternal purpose.

## THE SEPTUAGINT—LXX

We have included in this commentary, instead of the usual paraphrase, a translation of the Septuagint.

This is the earliest version of the Old Testament Scriptures now in existence, or of which modern scholarship possesses any certain knowledge.

Translated from the original Hebrew into Greek in Alexandria, Egypt, beginning under the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus and being completed under Ptolemy Soter (c. 285 B.C.), the Septuagint filled a critical need in its day. The influence of the Greeks upon the Jews living outside Judea was so great that they no longer spoke or read Hebrew. Putting their Scriptures into one common Alexandrian dialect of the day was an event comparable to our translation of the King James Version in 1611.

As with any attempt to bring thought from one language to another, there is some loss, no doubt there is in bringing Hebrew theological forms into the philosophic language of the Greeks.

However, the version is important to the Christian scholar, not only as the oldest Scripture now in existence, but because it is the version quoted and alluded to by Jesus and the Apostles.

The LXX, as it is called for the 70 Jewish scholars who translated it, was the Bible of the New Testament Church.

# MINOR PROPHETS

	BABYLON (Assyria)	SYRIA	PHOENICIA	EGYPT	GREECE	ROME
FATHER	Belus Bel (the confounder) Chaos (god of confusion) Cush	Bel	Bel	Amoun Re Amoun-re	Hephaitis Saturn	Janus
MOTHER	Cybele Semiramis Istar Rhea	Ashtoreth	Astarte Astoreth	Maut Isis	Irene Ceres Artemis Aphrodite Dinah	Venus
SON	Kronos Zero-ashta Mithras Tammuz Ninus Mouis	Baal Hadaad	Baal (?)	Osiris Khons	Plutus Bacchus Adonis Mercury Kisos Iacchus	Bacchus Adonis Mercury Jupiter

## QUESTIONS OVER INTRODUCTION

### Chapter I—Questions

#### How to Study the Bible

1. What is *exegesis*? How is it superior to *interpretation* as an approach to Bible Study?
2. In the science of exegesis, what is meant by "removing the differences?"
3. List and explain the rules of exegesis:
  - a. why is a dictionary an important tool to Bible study?
  - b. why is an unabridged dictionary preferable?
  - c. how do the rules of grammar aid in Bible study?
  - d. what is meant by context?
  - e. why is it important to study scripture in context?
  - f. what is the advantage of studying the Bible in its historical setting?
  - g. what is analytical Bible study?
  - h. what is the inherent danger of analytical study of scripture?
  - i. why should commentaries be used only after the first five rules of exegesis have been applied to a text?
  - j. discuss the importance of prayer as a factor in Bible study.

### Chapter II—Questions

#### What Is A Prophet?

1. List two popular views of prophecy and show how each contradicts the other.
2. What three questions must we answer to arrive at a scriptural view of the prophet?
3. What is the literal meaning of the Biblical word Prophet?
4. The watch word of the Biblical prophet is not "it shall come to pass" but \_\_\_\_\_?
5. Explain the Biblical concept of prophecy from *II Peter 1:20-21*.
6. Compare the characteristics of the false and true prophets in Israel.
7. The primary function of the prophet in the time of the minor prophets was?
8. How does the work of the prophet relate to the government of Israel as a theocracy?
9. What is meant by the statement "Prophecy is conditional?"

## MINOR PROPHETS

### Chapter III—Questions

#### The Covenant Theme in the Prophets

1. What is the "blood red thread" which holds the Bible together.
2. Discuss—"the covenant was proposed by God, not man."
3. The covenant arrangement between God and His prophets was maintained by \_\_\_\_\_ rather than physical ancestry.
4. Who first received the covenant from God (*Genesis* 12: 1-3)?
5. Whom God choses He \_\_\_\_\_?
6. Whom God calls He \_\_\_\_\_?
7. Whom God blesses He \_\_\_\_\_?
8. The called continue to receive God's blessing only as long as they \_\_\_\_\_.
9. The historical epochs of the Bible do not record these religious systems. Rather they are the record of \_\_\_\_\_.
10. The descendants of Abraham are all who \_\_\_\_\_. (*Galatians* 3:7)
11. How did circumcision constitute a warning concerning the covenant.
12. How should Israel's position as a nation of priests have effected her attitude toward other peoples?
13. In God's eyes, true Israel's primary concern was a covenant and its promise of \_\_\_\_\_.
14. How does the sacrifice of Isaac show the true meaning of the covenant?
15. \_\_\_\_\_ is the most basic idea in God's dealing with Israel.
16. Jesus understood the Old Covenant Scriptures in terms of His own \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_. And concluded the end of it all to be \_\_\_\_\_.
17. What is the relationship of John 3:16 to the covenant theme of the Bible?
18. The "spiritual genetic to be preserved by Israel's obedience of the Law of Moses was \_\_\_\_\_.
19. The answer to Jewish narrowness was \_\_\_\_\_.
20. It is the \_\_\_\_\_ (the faithful few) who were truly Israel, according to the minor prophets and the New Testament.

## QUESTIONS OVER INTRODUCTION

### Chapter IV—Questions

#### Baal Worship

1. Every reference to idolatry among God's people, unless otherwise specified, is a reference to \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The various Baalism worshipped in various localities were \_\_\_\_\_.
3. In the trinity of Baalism, the child is variously called \_\_\_\_\_ in Babylon \_\_\_\_\_ in Assyria, Syria and Israel \_\_\_\_\_ in Egypt, \_\_\_\_\_ in Greek and \_\_\_\_\_ in Rome.
4. The beginning of Baal worship was not the result of religious evolution but of \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Wherever this false religion spread it centered in three major dieties, a \_\_\_\_\_, a \_\_\_\_\_, and a \_\_\_\_\_ son.
6. The abundance of evidence identifies \_\_\_\_\_ as the founder of idolatry.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ of secular history and \_\_\_\_\_ of the Bible are one and the same.
8. all the versions of the death of Nimrod contain a single common element which forms the heart of Baal worship this element is \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Simcramus wife of \_\_\_\_\_ became \_\_\_\_\_ mother of \_\_\_\_\_ the mediator who in turn became Baal of the Canaanites.
10. Tammuz was \_\_\_\_\_.
11. What was meant by the ancient picture of heaven pressed so close to earth that a man could not stand upright?
12. What unique element did the Egyptians add on the legend of the sacrificed god.
13. What devices were used to initiaite worshippers into the sun god cults?
14. Baal had many names, derived from his various actions and relationships:
  - a. Baal-Aph Lord of wrath signifies \_\_\_\_\_.
  - b. Baal-Lashon Lord of tongues signifies \_\_\_\_\_.
  - c. Baal-Hatzin Lord of Arrows signifies \_\_\_\_\_.
  - d. Baal-Bereth Lord of Fir Trees signifies \_\_\_\_\_.
15. Baalism at its root, is the worship of everything \_\_\_\_\_.
16. What is the significance of December 25th in Baal worship?
17. Who was Moloch?
18. How did Solomon influence the rise of Baalism in Israel?
19. The evil queen \_\_\_\_\_ was a missionary of Baalism.
20. The pre-exilic prophets thundered against \_\_\_\_\_ worship and its resultant \_\_\_\_\_.

## MINOR PROPHETS

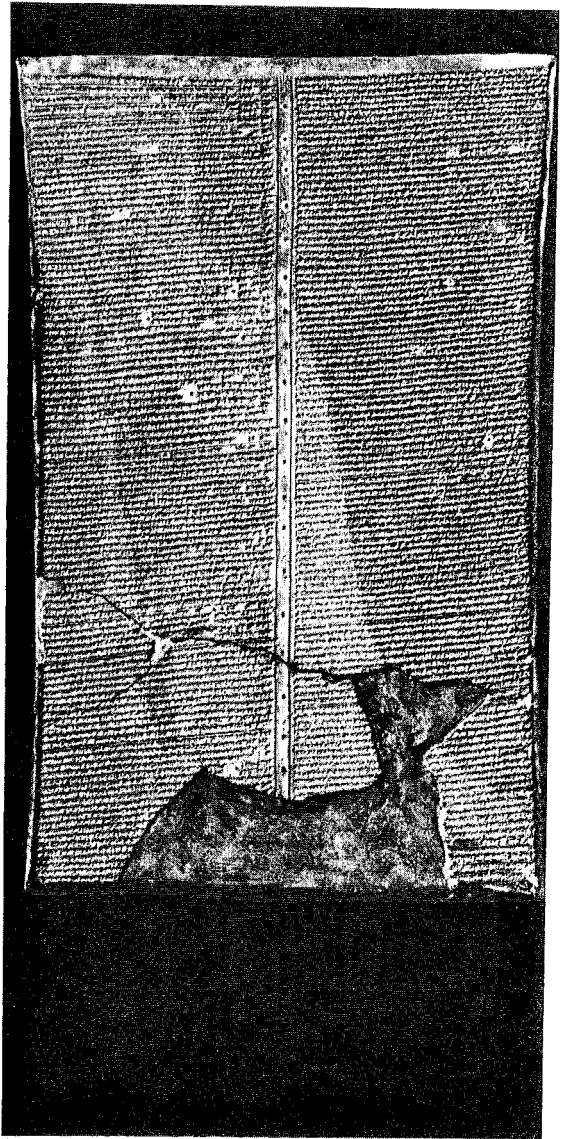
*"Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria . . ."*

(II Kings 17: 5-6).

"I besieged and captured Samaria, and carried off 27,290 of its inhabitants as booty."

The Assyrian text of this victory inscription of Sargon II dealing with his campaign in Israel, which is preserved in the original, reads like a confirmation of the biblical statement.

FROM: THE BIBLE AS HISTORY IN PICTURES  
By Werner Kellert - Win. Morrow Co.





# PART II

## MICAH

## MICAH

# OUTLINE OF MICAH

- I. The first cycle... 1:2-4
  - A. A call to harken... 1:2-4
    - 1. Evidence of universal concern... 1:2(a)
    - 2. The Lord to be witness... 1:2(b)
    - 3. The Lord from His holy temple... 1:2(c)-3(a)
    - 4. Tread upon the high places... 1:3(b)
    - 5. Mountains to melt, valleys to melt like wax... 1:4
  - B. Occasion of wrath... 1:5
    - 1. Jacob — Israel
    - 2. Judah
    - 3. Samaria
    - 4. Jerusalem... sin of Judah
    - 5. Poluted and false religions of Samaria and Jerusalem.
  - C. Samaria to be destroyed... 1:6-12(a)
    - 1. Samaria... scene of desolation... 1:6-7
    - 2. The husband's lament... 1:8
    - 3. The purpose of punishment... 1:9
    - 4. Punishment extended to the gates of Jerusalem... 1:10-12(a)
  - D. Warnings to Judah... 1:12(b)-16
    - 1. Maroth... v. 12(b)
    - 2. Lachish... v. 13
    - 3. Moresheth Gath... v. 14
    - 4. Mareshah... v. 15
- II. The second cycle... 2:1-13
  - A. Woe to the arrogant misleaders... 2:1-3
  - B. A taunt against the wicked... 2:4-5
  - C. The prophet accused as an enemy... 2:6-7(a)
  - D. The prophet answers his critics... 2:7(b)-11
  - E. Warnings tempered by promises... 2:12-13  
(The first mention of the remnant by Micah)
- III. Third cycle... 3:1-12
  - A. Outrages of civil officials... 3:1-4
  - B. Mercenary prophets... 3:5-8
  - C. Conclusion of the denunciation... 3:9-12
- IV. Future exaltation of the remnant... chapters 4-5
  - A. Zion, center of worship... 4:1-5
  - B. The restoration of the Diaspora... 4:6-8
  - C. Distress and redemption... 4:9-5:1

- D. Focus on the Messiah... 5:2-6
- E. The glorious future of the remnant... 5:7-15
- V. Jehovah's controversy with His people... chapters 6-7
  - A. Forgotten acts of salvation... 6:1-8
  - B. God's justice demands the wicked be punished... 6:9-16
  - C. Micah longs for Godliness... 7:1-6
  - D. The prophet looks to God... 7:7-13
  - E. The prophet prays for his people... 7:14-17
  - F. Prayer of prophetic praise... 7:18-20

## CHAPTER V

### SUPERScription ... Micah 1:1

RV . . . The word of Jehovah that came to Micah the Morashite in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.

LXX . . . And the word of the Lord came to Michaeas the son of Moraschi, in the days of Joatham, and Achaz, and Ezechias, kings of Juda, concerning what he saw regarding Samaria and Jerusalem.

## COMMENTS

The record of Micah's prophecy begins with a claim to inspiration. There is no description of his call, as in Isaiah and others, but the simple statement that "the word of Jehovah came to Micah the Morashite." It is echoed by *Hebrews 1:1* and *II Peter 1:19-21*.

Micah is also recognized as a prophet by Jeremiah, (*Jer. 26:18*), who says he speaks to all people of Judah in the day of Hezekiah.

Pusey makes the significant observation that the title and date are an important part of a prophetic book, since they indicate to people who come after that what the prophet wrote was not written after the event. To say it simply, there is evidence in the prophet's identifying both himself and his time of writing, that what he says is *going* to happen was not in fact written *after* it happened. It is not written *ex post facto*.

It is impossible to overstate this truth or the importance of it, since fulfilled prophecy represents some of the best possible evidence for the inspiration of the Scriptures. As we have seen, the foretelling of the future was not the *primary* concern of the prophets. Nevertheless, when they *did* deal with the future, they did so with infallible accuracy.

In view of the fact that no mere human can foretell what is going to happen two minutes from now, the accuracy with which the prophets write of the future bespeaks divine guidance. They often dealt with events which were not minutes but years, even centuries into the future, and they did so without equivocation. If they "missed" it would prove they were delivering their own conjectures rather than a divine message . . . but they did not "miss." They preached and wrote what only God could know.

Micah not only claims that what came to him was the "word of Jehovah," he also claims to have seen in a vision those things which he foretold concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. *Hosea 1:1* employs the phrase "the word of Jehovah," while *Nabum 1:1* speaks of his writing as the record of a "vision." Micah employs both terms.

Had a later editor compiled these works they would probably have begun each book with identical headings. The variation with which each of the writers claims divine origin for his message lends weight of evidence to the conviction that what they wrote was *from* God *through* the prophets. One thinks at once of the Hebrew writer's assertion that *God* spoke to the fathers in the prophets in varying degrees and in varying ways. (*Hebrews 1:1*)

The significant thing is that in each of these three cases (Micah, Nahum, Hosea), there is a direct claim to divine inspiration. Micah makes a double claim indicating not only that what he is about to write is the "word of Jehovah" but indicating also the method by which it came to him, *ie.* in a vision. As Matthew Henry has aptly put it, "what is written . . . must be heard and received, not as the word of dying men . . . but as the word of the living God."

Micah's phrase, "in a vision," merits special attention. He claims to have *seen* vividly that which he writes. His record is an eyewitness account of history *in advance!*

This accounts for the unhesitating certainty with which he describes events that at the time of writing lay in the future. History has long since vindicated his confidence in what he wrote by confirming its accuracy.

It is well to note, before attempting a study of this book, that Micah's message is not arranged *chronologically* but *logically*. The emphasis is upon the message rather than upon the calendar of events.

The time of Micah's call is set by his reference to three kings of the southern kingdom. They are Jotham, who reigned from 750 to 735 B.C., Ahaz, who reigned from 735 to 715, and Hezekiah, who reigned from 715 to 687. Because of the nature of the persons and

reigns of these kings, Micah saw the leadership of Judah swing from holiness, peace, and prosperity, to crass idolatry and immorality, and then, almost desperately, back again toward righteousness and national respectability.

Jotham, the first of the kings mentioned by Micah, was the eleventh king of the southern kingdom. His contemporaries in the north were Shallum, who reigned one month, Menahem, who reigned two years, and Pekahiah, who reigned two years.

Jotham's reign totaled forty years, the first twenty-five of which were spent as co-regent with his father, Uzziah (also called Azariah). He reigned alone for sixteen years. The record of his rule is found in *II Kings* 15:30, 32, 33.

Jotham is best described as holy, his reign as peaceful and prosperous. (*Cf. II Chronicles* 27:2-6) He was succeeded on the throne of Judah by his son, Ahaz, whose person and administration were the exact opposite of his own.

The twelfth king of Judah, Ahaz, became king at the age of twenty. He was idolatrous in the extreme, to the point of sacrificing his own children to Baal. It was his reign that brought about the conditions which led to the destruction of Judah. Despite the efforts of his successor-son at reform, the seeds of God's wrath were deeply planted.

It was to Ahaz that Isaiah gave the prophecy of the virgin birth of the Messiah. (*Cf. Isaiah* 7:14) The efforts of modern translators (eg. the Revised Standard Version) to deny Isaiah's intent to foretell a birth without benefit of natural father is based solely upon the ambiguous literal meaning of the word *alma*, translated *virgin* in *Isaiah* 7:14. Literally, *alma* may mean, also, young maiden. This overlooks the historic context of the writing, which is set against the backdrop of Baal worship. It also ignores the intended impact of Isaiah's prophecy upon King Ahaz, a devotee of Baal.

The worship of the sun god, in his many guises from Babylon to Rome, always included the *alma mater* or *virgin mother*. Isaiah's use of the term *alma* to describe the birth of the Savior is part of the prophet's attempt to call the king back from idolatry to the worship of the *true* God, Whose Son would *indeed* one day be born of a virgin. (See above section on Baal worship.)

Fearing the northern alliance of Syria and Israel, the idolatrous Ahaz entered into a compact with Tiglath Pileser III, the wily ruler of Assyria. The results were disastrous for Judah. The southern kingdom became a mere satellite nation, a vassal state, tributary to Tiglath Pileser's Assyrian Empire.

The third king mentioned by Micah is regarded as a reformer. Hezekiah, the thirteenth king of Judah, and the son of the Baal-worshipping Ahaz, became king at the age of twenty-five. Most of his energies were given to attempting to undo what his father had done in the corrupting of God's people with idolatry.

What motivated Hezekiah's commitment to Jehovah and the restoration of temple worship, we can only guess. Some interesting fiction could be written describing him as a child, horrified at the sacrifice of his brothers and sisters to his father's pagan god.

Hezekiah's contemporaries in Israel were Pekah, who reigned for twenty years and Hoshea, who ruled for nine years. It was early following Hezekiah's ascension to the throne of Judah that Israel was overrun by Assyria.

Although the fall of Israel left Judah exposed on the north to the Assyrian armies of Sennacharib, the dedicated Hezekiah refused to pay tribute to the invader. As a result, in the fourteenth year of his reign, he found his own kingdom invaded by Sennacharib and his capital city, Jerusalem, threatened.

Because of the king's dedication to God, Jehovah intervened in behalf of Judah and Sennacharib was stopped just short of the city and turned back. (*Cf. II Kings 28 and Isaiah 36:1-22*)

Just following the deliverance of his kingdom from Assyrian invasion, Hezekiah fell desperately ill. It has been suggested that his illness was of divine origin to prevent him falling prey to his own pride. In any event, God intervened a second time on his behalf, when in answer to prayer, the king's illness was prevented from being fatal, and he was given the promise of fifteen more years of life and prosperity.

For this second deliverance, Hezekiah's gratitude was eloquent, (*Cf. Isaiah 38:10-20*) but short-lived. He shortly made a vain show of pride and possessions before Merodach-baladar of Babylon and as punishment received a message from God that, at a future time, his wealth would be taken to Babylon.

Concerning Micah himself little is known, but that little is enough to give a picture of a God-fearing man from the country, shocked and enraged at the luxurious degeneracy which he found in the capital cities of Samaria and Jerusalem.

He is best described as "a younger contemporary of Isaiah," a country man whose home was in Moresheth, some thirty miles southwest of Jerusalem.

In the Septuagint Moresheth is referred to as Moresheth-Gath, meaning a possession of Gath. There are those who believe that Moresheth and Gath are one and the same. If this is true, Micah's home is to be identified with Gath southwest of Jerusalem rather than Gath-Gittain which lies about the same distance to the northwest. Jerome places it just east of Eleutheropolis.

Moresheth is mentioned explicitly by name only once in the Bible in *Micah 1:14*. There is one other allusion to it in *Jeremiah 26:18*.

The village lay in the Judean piedmont bordered on the north and east by the hill country and on the south and west by the plain which marks the way from Jerusalem to Gaza just on the border of the land of the Philistines.

Micah mentions the towns and villages in this area in such a way as to leave no doubt that he was personally familiar with them. The area is grazing country, with fields of grain and olive groves.

Micah, the prophet, is concerned with the plights of the poor in a land of affluence and plenty. The contrast between the much of the "haves" and the little of the "have nots" is reminiscent of our own unbalanced distribution of wealth.

Micah's answer was not political pressure. He led no "poor people's marches," he burned no businesses, he headed no political pressure group. To him, as he spoke the "Word of Jehovah," social injustice was a symptom of spiritual decay for which repentance of the oppressor was the only solution. The problem was, to him, ethical. The advantage taken of the poor by the rich, of the powerless by the powerful was, in the eyes of this country-bred preacher, an affront to God. He does not preach man's duty to man as a separate ideal from man's duty to God. *Rather the former is the outworking of the latter.*

In keeping with this, Micah's understanding of the work of a prophet was not primarily concerned for the future. His understanding of this mission is best expressed in his own words, "But as for me, I am full of power by the Spirit of Jehovah, and of judgement, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin." (*Micah 3:8*) Whatever he said about what lay in the future, he said it first to move his contemporaries to immediate repentance, and secondly to reassure them that God would not forget His covenants.

As a contemporary of Isaiah and Hosea, Micah's surroundings were those common also to them. It is not strange, then, that his message is also similar to theirs. As background, a reading of *II Kings 15:32-20:21* and *II Chronicles 27:1-32:33* will prove invaluable.

Fifty years of peace and prosperity had ended with the death of Jeroboam II. In 745 B.C. the Assyrians, led by Tiglath Pileser III, began their westward march and expansion. By 738 Damascus had fallen. In 721 the same fate would engulf the northern kingdom and its capital city, Samaria.

Although Judah, the southern kingdom, did not fall at that time, Hezekiah's anti-Assyrian policies later turned Sennacherib and the armies of Assyria on Judah. In 711, as previously stated, the southern kingdom became a tributary, a mere satellite of the Assyrian empire. When Sennacherib marched westward to put down a revolt in the philistine states, he humbled Judah with the same effort.

Thus Micah spoke in a time of social unrest, national insecurity, and religious turmoil not unlike those of the United States in mid-twentieth century. He viewed evil as a failure to grasp the nature of true religion, and believed that the only remedy was to strike at the source by denouncing the wickedness and demanding repentance upon pain of national annihilation. He would have agreed with *James 1:27* completely.

He makes no hesitation in insisting that the demands of God are binding upon the rich and powerful as well as the poor and powerless. He does not preach a "middle class morality" but eternal ethical right determined by Jehovah.

## Chapter V—Questions

1. Micah's prophecy begins with a claim to \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Why is the date of a prophetic statement an important part of the book?
3. Micah's "double claim" to inspiration indicates both \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Account for the unhesitating certainty with which Micah describes the events of the future.
5. Micah's message is not chronological but \_\_\_\_\_.
6. The time of Micah's call is set by his reference to three kings: Jotham, who reigned from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_, Ahaz, who reigned from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ who reigned from 715 to 687 B.C.
7. The first 25 years of Jotham's reign were as co-regent with \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Describe Jotham's reign.
9. Ahaz's reign was characterized by \_\_\_\_\_.



10. \_\_\_\_\_ is also called \_\_\_\_\_.
11. Ahaz entered into an alliance with \_\_\_\_\_ of Assyria.
12. This resulted in the southern kingdom becoming a \_\_\_\_\_.
13. Hezekiah, the third king mentioned by Micah, was the \_\_\_\_\_ king of Judah. He was the son of Ahaz, but he did not worship \_\_\_\_\_.
14. Hezekiah's contemporaries in Israel were \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
15. Due to Hezekiah's dedication to Jehovah, \_\_\_\_\_ was stopped just short of Jerusalem and turned back.
16. Micah is described as a younger \_\_\_\_\_ of Isaiah.
17. To Micah, social injustice was a symptom of \_\_\_\_\_.
18. How did Micah understand his mission? (*Micah 3:8*)
19. Micah does not preach a "middle class morality" but \_\_\_\_\_.
20. The overthrow of the northern kingdom was accomplished by the \_\_\_\_\_ empire while Judah was conquered later by \_\_\_\_\_ who were in turn defeated by \_\_\_\_\_ who released the captive remnant.

## CHAPTER VI

### FIRST CYCLE

#### A CALL TO HARKEN . . . Micah 1:2-4

RV . . . Hear, ye peoples, all of you; hearken, O earth, and all that therein is: and let the Lord Jehovah be witness against you, the Lord from his holy temple. For, behold, Jehovah cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains shall be melted under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, as waters that are poured down a steep place.

LXX . . . Hear these words, ye people; and let the earth give heed, and all that are in it: and the Lord God shall be among you for a testimony, the Lord out of his holy habitation. For, behold, the Lord comes forth out of his place, and will come down, and will go upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains shall be shaken under him, and the valleys shall melt like wax before the fire, and as water rushing down a declivity.

## COMMENTS

A CALL TO HEAR AND HARKEN . . .  
EVIDENCE OF UNIVERSAL CONCERN . . . 1:2(a)

At the outset of Micah's recorded prophecy there is evidence of God's universal concern for all men. The prophet's call is to both "ye *peoples*, all of you," and to "(hearken) *earth*, and *all* therein is."

The term "people" is frequently used in Scripture to designate the covenant people of God. It is a term used to delineate between Israel and "the nations." (eg. *Psalms* 50:7)

In verse 2, Micah calls to "ye people, *all of you*." His message is intended for *all* those to whom the expression "the people" may rightly be applied, both in the northern and southern kingdom.

By his use of ". . . earth and all that therein is," Micah calls the whole world to listen to God's indictment of His covenant people. The use of "earth and all that therein is" to describe the non-covenant nations (*ie.* the Gentiles) was one of longstanding precedent.

Moses, in *Deuteronomy* 32:1, uses this expression to declare to all mankind the name and greatness of Jehovah.

Micah's contemporary, Isaiah, used the same phrase to tell all mankind that God's people have rebelled against Him. (*Isaiah* 1:2)

Two reasons are apparent for God's concern that the "earth and all that is in it" hear His charges against both Samaria and Jerusalem; *ie.* against both branches of the covenant people: (1) All men have a vital interest in the fulfillment of the covenant through the people. The more nationalistic the people became, and the more their religious practices became polluted with Baalism, the less aware they became of God's promise to bless, through them, all the nations of the earth. But God never forgot. (2) The time was fast approaching when God would cast off His rebellious people. When this happened, neither the world nor the people themselves would have any reason to say that God was unfaithful. None could say that He had not warned the people of the dire consequence of their failure to keep His covenant and obey His law. (Cf. *Romans* 11:1-4)

A vital lesson is to be learned from this verse by today's "people," the church, namely that he who will not learn from God's past dealings with His people can blame only himself and not God for his own suffering. When the Jews were finally cast off by God it was after they had ignored not only the warning of the prophets but the meaning of the captivity which they endured as a result of not heeding that warning.

## THE LORD IS TO BE WITNESS . . . 1:2(b)

The condemnation of God is never arbitrary. The people are to have a "fair trial." The "star witness" for the prosecution is to be the Lord Jehovah Himself.

Moses had issued a similar warning of impending judgment, "And the generation to come, your children that shall rise up after you, and the foreigner that shall come from a far land, shall say, when they shall see the plagues of the land, the sickness wherewith Jehovah hath made it sick; and that the whole land thereof is brimstone and salt, and a burning, that it is not sown, nor beareth, not any grass groweth therein, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zebion, which Jehovah overthrew in His anger, and in His wrath: even all the nations shall say, whereof hath Jehovah done this unto this land? Then men shall say, because they forsook the *covenant* of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, and went and served other gods, and worshipped them, gods that they knew not, and that He had not given them: therefore the anger of Jehovah was kindled against this land, to bring down upon it all the curse that is written in this book; and Jehovah rooted them out of their land in anger, and in wrath and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as at this day." (*Deuteronomy* 29:22-28)

Anyone who has visited present day Palestine has been amazed that this land was once called "a land flowing with milk and honey." Excepting those sections that have felt the improvements of modern technology and agricultural reclamation, it is a barren rocky wasteland. Such a visitor finds himself asking, "Wherefore hath Jehovah done this to this land?"

The answer of both Moses and the prophets is ". . . because they (God's people) forsook, the covenant of Jehovah . . ." What is true of the land is equally true of the people who once inhabited it. Micah presents the Lord Himself as the chief witness to the justice of God's wrath against His rebellious people.

Nor is the Lord the only witness. The defense of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was essentially the same testimony against the people as that made by the Lord in the prophetic writings. The burden of Stephen's defense is that God's dealing with the people had always been progressive, toward the accomplishment of His eternal purpose to bless all men rather than static and prejudiced toward the commonwealth of the Jews. This purpose Stephen saw as universal rather than local. Underlying his entire argument is Stephen's insist-

ence that God's treatment of Israel has always been ethical, rather than erratic. His actions are governed by the same morality He demands of them. Stephen closes with the classic accusation that the people have always been "stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears" to the point of murdering the prophets whom God sent to call them back to the covenant. (Cf. *Acts, chapter seven*)

### THE LORD IS IN HIS HOLY TEMPLE . . . 1:2(c)-3(a)

The temple here is not necessarily, nor even probably the temple at Jerusalem. *Psalms 11:4* speaks of "Jehovah in His holy temple." The eleventh Psalm is generally recognized as a Psalm of David, and was therefore written *before* there was a temple in Jerusalem.

The temple, or holy dwelling place out of which the Lord comes to testify against His people is His real dwelling place. The sanctuary of Solomon's temple (or its reconstructed post-Babylonian counterpart) was never more than a type of the real habitation of God.

We have this on the word of no less an author than the writer of the New Testament epistle to the Hebrews. *Hebrews 8:5(a)* informs us that the tabernacle (which was given permanence in the building of the temple) was ". . . a copy and shadow of the heavenly things."

God is not an absentee God. He does not "dwell in temples made by hand," (*Acts 17:24*) it is true, but the fact that He is invisible is not to be misunderstood. His judgements in history are evidence that the "Lord of Lords; who only hath immortality, dwelling in light unapproachable; whom no man hath seen, nor can see . . ." (*I Timothy 6:15(b)-16*) does indeed "come forth out of His place, and will come down . . ." (*Micah 1:3*)

There is no need to read the second advent of Christ into these verses. God has always come out of His holy place to chastise His people. Perhaps these historic comings, such as this one spoken by Micah, are a foretaste, a warning, of the final coming of Christ in judgement, but the words of Micah were fulfilled in the judgements of God against the northern and southern kingdoms at the hands of Sargon and Nebuchadnezzar.

### TREAD UPON THE HIGH PLACES . . . 1:3(b) +

The "high places" refer to Baal worship. They were generally any natural or man-made projection which stood above their surroundings. (Cf. *I Kings 13:32* and *II Kings 23:15*)

High places were forbidden by the law (*Deuteronomy 12:11-14*) and when Israel entered the promised land they were instructed to destroy them as monuments to Canaanite idolatry. (Cf. *Leviticus 26:30*, *Numbers 33:52*, *Deuteronomy 33:29*) These commandments were so completely ignored by the people that they became practically unknown.

By divine command, Gideon built altars in the high places, as did also Manoah. (*Judges 6:25-26*, *13:16-23*) Samuel also appears to have violated the commandment against high places in building the altar at Mizpah, (*I Samuel 7:10*) and again at Bethlehem. (*I Samuel 16:5*) Saul transgressed this command at Gilgal and Ajalon. (Compare *I Samuel 13:9* and *14:35*) David ignored the divine ordinance against high places on the threshing floor at Ornan, (*I Chronicles 21:26*) as did Elijah on Mount Carmel (*I Kings 18:30*) and other prophets. (*I Samuel 10:5*)

Some of the above named men violated this command in obedience to directive from God for a special purpose (eg. Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal.)

Rehoboam instituted definite worship in the high places. (*II Chronicles 11:15*, *II Kings 23:9*)

Hezekiah's reforms included the systematic elimination of these shrines to paganism. (*II Kings 18:4,22*, *II Chronicles 31:1*) This task was completed under Josiah. *II Kings 23*, *II Chronicles 34:3*)

After this systematic destruction, there is no further mention of the worship of Jehovah in high places in the Old Testament. However, the "worship in these hills" mentioned by the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (*John, chapter four*) was probably a vestige of this despicable practice of mixing Jehovah worship with Baal worship. Baalbek, the last surviving center of sun god worship, continued to flourish under the Roman domination of the New Testament period and well into the third century A.D.

The working of God in history has long since trodden down the "high places" of Baal worship and of polluted Jehovah worship, but the influence of Baal among God's people is apparent yet today as Christians continue the observance of the same holy days by the use of many of the same devices and customs.

The more one learns of the abominable practice of Baal worship and of its devastating effect upon the covenant people, the more one questions the wisdom of promoting such days and customs in the church. The history of virtually every major "Christian holiday" is traceable directly to the worship of the sun god in one form or another.

## MOUNTAINS TO MELT, VALLEYS TO MELT LIKE WAX . . .

1:4

Fire is the traditional symbol of God's purifying judgement. Moses, exhorting Israel against covenant breaking, warned; "Take heed to yourselves lest ye forget the covenant of Jehovah your God, which He made with you, and make you a graven image in the form of anything which Jehovah thy God hath forbidden thee. For Jehovah thy God is a devouring fire, a jealous God. (*Deuteronomy* 4:23-24)

It is fitting that Micah, and other prophets (e.g. *Isaiah* 66:15) in their attempt to call the people back to the covenant through obedience to the law, should remind them of this symbol. The heat of God's wrath is depicted as melting the mountains and turning the valleys to wax. The symbolism is obvious, both the high and the low, the great and the small will be devoured by God's fiery wrath. God is no respecter of persons. As the song writer has put it:

*"The great man was there, but his greatness  
When death came was left far behind.  
The angel who opened the records  
Not a trace of his greatness could find."*

No matter how high or low the station, hearts hard as stone against the pleading of God's prophets become like wax in the presence of His wrath. One of the primary warnings of the prophets is that human greatness does not bring preferential treatment from God.

## THE OCCASION OF THE WRATH . . . Micah 1:5

RV . . . For the transgression of Jacob is all this, and for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the transgression of Jacob? is it not Samaria? and what are the high places of Judah? are they not Jerusalem?

LXX . . . All these calamities are for the transgression of Jacob, and for the sin of the house of Israel. What is the transgression of Jacob? is it not Samaria? and what is the sin of the house of Jacob? is it not Jerusalem?

## COMMENTS

The purifying wrath of God against "the people" is, in this case, occasioned by "the sins of Jacob . . . and for the transgression of the

house of Israel." Here in the "indictment" Micah uses the covenant names which treat both the kingdoms as one people.

Many times the covenant name for God is "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." The shorter form of reference to the covenant people is simply "Jacob," as used here by Micah. Jacob, as the last of the patriarchs and the father of the twelve tribes, is best representative of the covenant people as a whole.

Indeed, it is his new name, Israel, given to him upon his realization that Jehovah is the universal God rather than a local deity, which came to represent the people as well as the man.

"Israel" was first the name of the man, Jacob. Following his dream on the way to Haran from Beersheba, Jacob awoke to the realization that "surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not." (*Genesis* 28:16) It was during the dream that God reaffirmed to him the everlasting covenant which He had made with Abraham and confirmed previously with Jacob's father, Isaac.

As with them, so with Jacob, the heart of the covenant was: "in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." (*Genesis* 28:14) Some fourteen years later, following his marriage to the daughters of Laban, Jacob turned in prayer to God because of his fear that his brother Esau would seek revenge against him. Subsequently, God granted him the experience of wrestling with an angel. When he prevailed in the combat the angel said to him, "thy name shall be no more called Jacob but Israel (Prince of God) for as a prince thou hast power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." (*Genesis* 32:28)

To understand the meaning of the name Israel in any given passage, one must keep in mind the various uses of it throughout the Old and New Testaments. The exact meaning must be determined by the specific context in which it appears.

As we have seen, *Israel* was first the covenant name given to Jacob upon his realization of the universal nature of God. It next came to apply to the whole family descended from this man, then to the twelve tribes into which the family grew, *ie.* the direct descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob.

*Israel* next came to apply to the nation formed of Jacob's descendants by the giving of the Law through Moses. This is significant, since Israel was the *covenant* name. The attachment of it to the nation points up the truth written by Paul, "a covenant confirmed beforehand by God, the law, which came four hundred and thirty years after, doth not disannul, so as to make the promise of none effect."

(*Galatians* 3:18) The purpose of God in Israel was not changed by the passing of time and development of a political commonwealth. The very name worn by the nation under the Law was intended to emphasize their covenant relationship to God, and to signify the life, character and mission that was to be theirs as His called-out people.

First the family, then the federation of tribes wore this name. In the beginning the people were held together by a sense of kinship growing out of a common ancestry and a common covenant God.

In the giving of the Law a third factor united them. The Law was, in effect, a national constitution. During the time of the judges, when the Law was applied directly by God through the judges, there was an acute awareness of the nation's covenant relationship to God. Under the reign of Saul, David and Solomon, the covenant awareness waned as the people struggled for national identity among the nations of the world. By the time the kingdom was divided, the term *Israel* expressed almost entirely a nationalistic concept which was nearly devoid of any covenant awareness.

The ideal which runs through both the pre-exilic and post-exilic prophets is the restoration of covenant awareness through obedient faith in God.

Micah's prophecy is addressed to pre-exilic *Israel*. The outlook of the people at this time was strongly nationalistic. Covenant awareness was at perhaps its lowest ebb, yet the prophet uses the ancient covenant name *Israel* in such a way as to remind his readers of its real meaning.

The name *Israel* was taken by the southern kingdom during the post-exilic period (following the return from Babylon). (*Ezra* 6:16, *Nehemiah* 11:3) In the inter-Biblical period, from Malachi to Matthew, the term fell into disuse. In its place the nation and the people were called *Jews* to distinguish them from Greek, Roman, Persian, etc.

In the New Testament, *Israel* is used to emphasize relationship to God as a covenant people. (*Matthew* 9:33, *Luke* 2:32, *John* 3:10, *Acts* 4:10) When the nation, or race, is intended in the New Testament, the term is "*Jews*." This is obviously a distinction vital to the understanding of the relationship of New Testament *Israel* to the Old Covenant and God's people under it.

Before singling out first the northern and then the southern kingdoms to warn each of its particular punishment, Micah calls to them both in terms calculated to remind them wherein they have failed. They will be punished for more than specific sins. The punishment for these sins will be brought about by their failure to keep the cove-



nant. Such had been the warning of Jehovah against His people at the time of the giving of the Law, and earlier at the institution of circumcision.

In both Israel and Judah, Micah equates the sins of the nation with the nature of its capital. The transgression of Jacob (Israel) is Samaria. The sin of Judah is Jerusalem.

### JUDAH . . . 1:5(b)

Following the rebellion of the ten northern tribes and the division of the kingdoms, the northern kingdom became known as Israel and the southern as Judah. While the rebellious northern tribes seem to have usurped the "family name" of God's people, it was the southern kingdom through whom the fulfillment of the covenant finally came.

Originally, the name *Judah* designated the fourth son of Jacob and Leah, born in Mesopotamia during the time when his father served his uncle Laban. Judah, the great-grandson of Abraham, became the head of and gave his name to the most powerful of the twelve tribes. In the blessing of Judah, Jacob promised that, ". . . the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a law-giver from between his feet, until Shilo come; and unto him shall be the obedience of the people." (*Genesis 49:10*)

The significance of this, as well as the rest of the blessing, (*Genesis 49:8-12*) is seen in the increasing strength of Judah throughout the history of the people. (See *Numbers 2:3*, *Joshua 9:1*, *Judges 1:1-2*, *Isaiah 29:1*, etc.) The capital city, Jerusalem, became the capital of the southern kingdom, with Judah as the predominant tribe, (the southern kingdom also included Benjamin and Simeon) and remained so until the coming of the Christ to the Roman province of Judea. Judea was the first century vestige of Judah, and its capital also was Jerusalem. The scepter had not passed from Judah until He came!

In the occupation of the land of Canaan under Joshua, Judah, the tribe, had occupied the southern section from the Jordan to the Mediterranean as far north as the southern boundaries of Dan and Benjamin. (*Joshua 15*) With the division of the kingdom, it was this territory, along with the greater part of that of Benjamin to the north and Simeon to the south, that formed the southern kingdom.

*Samaria* . . . transgression of Jacob . . . Micah 1:5(b)

The capital of the northern kingdom of Israel was Samaria. Micah singles out this capital in the north as the personification of the "transgression of Jacob."

Samaria was situated south of the Plain of Esdralon in the vicinity where Abraham had stayed for a while on the plains of Moreh. (*Genesis* 12:6) It was in the territory possessed, in the days of Joshua, by Ephraim and Manasseh. The name, Samaria, came to be applied to that general area following the time of Solomon.

The city from which the territory of Samaria took its name was situated on a hill some forty miles north of Jerusalem. In 880 B.C., Omri moved his capital there from Tirzah. The hill upon which it sits is located adjacent to the fertile *wady esh-Shair*, and towers some 300 feet above the valley which extends from Shechem (Sychar) westward to the coast. The Mediterranean is clearly visible from this vantage point.

Under Ahab, due in a large part to the influence of Jezebel, Baal worship came to dominate both the religion and the general culture of Samaria. (*II Kings* 3:2) Idolatry, sensuality and oppression become the order of the day. (See chapter III, BAAL WORSHIP.)

Modern archeological excavations at Samaria reveal seven Israelite levels. The first and second, or lowest, levels date from the time of Omri and Ahab. The seventh, or highest, level marks the destruction of Samaria by the Assyrians following the three year siege begun by Shalmaneser in the seventh year of Hoshea's reign. The siege was concluded under Sargon II in 722.

It was this destruction of which Micah warns in our text. Sargon claims to have carried away only 27,290 from the entire nation of Samaria (Israel). No doubt, as with Judah later, these were the most powerful and influential citizens.

The sin with which Samaria is particularly identified, when Micah calls her "the transgression of Jacob," is idolatry, particularly the worship of Baal. As Halley puts it, "God had sent Elijah, Elisha and Amos to turn them (the Samaritans) back from idols. But in vain. They were about ripe for the death blow."

#### JERUSALEM . . . SIN OF JUDAH . . . 1:5(c)

Manuscript evidence here seems to indicate as the correct reading, ". . . what are the high places of Judah . . ." rather than "what is the sin of Judah."

If this be true, the sin of Judah is but a variation of the idolatry of Samaria. However, the "high place" of Jerusalem would be the temple and its immediate surroundings as the center of worship. The worship conducted there, rather than being out and out Baal worship, was, during this period, Jehovah worship polluted with Baalism.

It is interesting to note that both *Je* (in Jehovah) and *Baal* literally mean Lord. It is often difficult to tell, in some passages, whether the prophets are denouncing Baal worship *per se* or a corruption of Jehovah worship.

The Bible reader is first introduced to the *site* of Jerusalem some one thousand years before the time of David. We are told (*Genesis 14*) that Abraham stopped there shortly after the slaughter of the kings. (*Hebrews 7*) The ancient name of the place was Salem, an abbreviated form of yeru-Shalem foundation, or city, of peace.

It was here that Abraham met and paid tithes to Melchizedek. The name means literally "my king is Zedek." He was priest to the God *El-Elyon*, "God of Peace," whom Abraham identified with *Yawe*h (Jehovah). *Genesis 14:18-20*

It is probable that this also marks the site of the sacrifice of Isaac by his father, Abraham. "The land of Moriah," (*Genesis 22:2*) has not been positively identified. The Septuagint reads, "the highland," while the Syriac has "land of the Amorites." Local tradition, however, identifies Moriah with the mountain on which the temple was built. (*II Chronicles 3:1*)

The Scriptures do not identify the exact location of Isaac's sacrifice, but both Jewish and Arab (Moslem) tradition locate it at the present site of the "Dome of the Rock." This second most sacred shrine in Islam stands where the Biblical temple once stood.

(Incidentally, it is the possession of this sacred site which furnishes much of the fuel for the present inferno in the Middle East.)

At the time of Joshua, Jerusalem was the domain of Adom-Zedek, the Amorite who, in alliance with four other kings, attempted to prevent the Israelite conquest of southern Canaan. (*Joshua 10*) It was then the home of the Jebusites. (*Genesis 10:15* and *Numbers 13:29*) The city was on the border between the lands assigned to Benjamin, on the north, and Judah, on the south (*Joshua 15:7-8* and *18:10*) It was never occupied by the Israelites until the time of David, by which time it was at least a thousand years old!

The most historic transaction ever to take place in this ancient city took place when David made it his capital. Following the death of Saul at Gilboa, David reigned over Judah from Hebron (*II Samuel 2:1-4*) When the death of Ishbosheth opened the way for David to unite the northern and southern tribes, Jerusalem was a more appealing location for two primary reasons.

First, Jerusalem was more centrally located than Hebron, and hence more accessible from both north and south.

Second, and perhaps more significant, the city belonged to no tribe. Being situated on the line between Benjamin to the north and Judah to the south, it could be made the seat of government for the federation without disturbing the *status quo* of any tribe, in much the same way that Washington D.C. was made our national capital without being part of any state.

Jerusalem is one of two cities called, in Scripture, "city of David." The other is Bethlehem. (*Luke 2:11*) The latter was his "home town" by birth, (*I Samuel 1:16*) the former became his city by force of arms. (*II Samuel 5*)

After making Jerusalem his political capital, David determined to make it the religious capital also. He brought the Ark of the Covenant from Shiloh to Jerusalem and placed it with careful preparation. (*II Samuel 6:12-14*) He also purchased the threshing floor of Araunah as the site upon which a permanent housing for the Ark would be built and later erected an altar of burnt offerings upon the site. (*II Samuel 24:25*)

The traditional tomb of David may be seen today on the southwestern slopes of the hill upon which Jerusalem sits. Most scholarship discounts the authenticity of the site, however.

Evidence of early pagan influence in Jerusalem, capital of Jehovah worship, is seen in such activity as the sacrifice offered by Adonijah "by the stone of Zohemoth, which is beside En-rogel." (*I Kings 1:9*) Zohemoth is associated with Baal worship.

(Readers of the English Bible are frequently misled concerning Adonijah by the unfortunate King James translation of *I Kings 1:6*, "he was a very goodly man." Rotherham more accurately renders this passage, "he was of exceedingly handsome appearance.")

A part of the sun worship during the festivities of the winter solstice (December 24-25) centered around the burning of a log. (See Chapter III Baal Worship) The log represented the sun god cut down in the midst of his strength. Around the stump of the tree was pictured a serpent, symbol of his reviving life. After the burning of the log on the evening of December 24, the evergreen fir appeared next morning in its place symbolizing the reviving of the slain god. The serpent which twined around the stump was also worshipped as a minor deity. It was at an altar to this pagan god that Adonijah offered sacrifices.

Since Adonijah offered his sacrifices on the eve of an abortive attempt to seize the throne of his father, David, he could scarcely do so in the proper place. It is highly probable that he was attempt-

ing to sacrifice to Jehovah. If so, his worship of God at a pagan altar is a good example of the pollution of Jehovah worship by Baalism in Jerusalem.

This pollution was multiplied several-fold by Solomon's compromise with paganism. (*I Kings 11:4-8*) Ashtoreth, Chemosh and Moloch, named in connection with Solomon's unfaithfulness are names associated with the unholy trinity of the sun god. (See again Chapter III BAAL WORSHIP).

During the first hundred years following the division of the kingdom, Jerusalem was in a state of decline. At this time, Baalism increased.

After a period of restoration, from Jehosaphat to Joash (B.C. 871-789), Jerusalem was humiliated again by Jehoash (B.C. 798-789). It was during this period that Ahab and Jezebel, of the Omri dynasty in the northern kingdom, seized the throne of Judah. The temple was laid waste and the priesthood of Baal was supported from the royal treasury.

Jerusalem was revived again under Uzziah, but the worship of Jehovah was never quite completely purified of the influence of Baalism prior to the Babylonian captivity.

It is quite obvious that the sinfulness of both Samaria and Jerusalem and their subsequent destruction are directly related to the insidious influence of Baal. Babylon, "the mother of harlots," (*Revelation 17:5*) had succeeded, through her daughter, the religion of Baal, in seducing Israel the "prince of God."

It was this spiritual immorality between the people of God and the religion of men that was the object of God's warning to them through the prophets, and the target of His wrath when they refused to repent.

#### POLLUTED AND FALSE RELIGION OF SAMARIA AND JERUSALEM RESULT IN MORAL AND SOCIAL EVILS . . .

The peculiar sins of Israel were personified in Samaria. The moral and social abuses against which Micah prophesied are the same as those listed by Amos, who preached and wrote during the same period. Amos speaks of God's faithful being sold into slavery. (*Amos 2:6-7*) The poor were oppressed. (*Amos 5:7*) Graft in high places was the order of the day (*Amos 5:12*) as was dishonesty in business dealings.

The insatiable drive for status symbols (*Amos 4:1, 3:15, 6:4*) coupled with an intense pre-occupation with entertainment (*Amos 6*) left the people unconcerned for their national welfare.

False confidence in a false god produced a false sense of security from divine judgement. (*Amos 5:14, 9:10*)

As might be expected, the moral fiber of the people was totally rotten. Amos speaks of father and son committing fornication with the same girl. (*Amos 2:7*)

The peculiar sins of Judah were personified in Jerusalem. Micah lists the peculiar sins of the southern kingdom. They vary slightly from those of the north, and the variation may be due in part to the degree of Baal influence. Nevertheless, Judah's sins are heinous and the prophet's warning is sharp just as against Israel. The absence of righteousness noted by Micah (*Micah 7:2*) is reminiscent of Abraham's futile search for one righteous man in Sodom. (*Genesis 18:23-ff*)

In denouncing this unrighteousness, Micah focuses on four principal kinds of evil-doers: (1) There were the land grabbers whom the prophet pictures as lying awake at night and scheming how they may do the small farmer out of his holdings. (2:1) Their concern was not for the moral right or wrong of what they were doing, but only for whether or not they would be found out. (2:9) This avarice was practiced even at the expenses of one's own relatives. (7:5-7)

(2) There were lovers of evil in high office. (3:1-4) In their activities, bribery rather than justice decided civil cases (7:3) so that the "little man" had no effective recourse against the grabbing of the rich and powerful.

(3) False preachers, who were more concerned with their income than with the truth or with right and wrong, preached what their wealthy listeners wanted to hear.

(4) Hireling priests added to the practice of the false prophets. (3:11) Idolatry was allowed to pollute the worship of the people. (5:11-2 and 3:7) As a result of such unholy "clergy," the people believed that their national identity as "God's People" insured them against destruction (3:11) and that God's favor could be bought with sacrifice. (6:5-7) They could have profited greatly by reading their own Bible. (eg. *Psalms 50*)

No thinking American Christian can read the minor prophets and fail to sense the parallels between Israel and Judah just prior to their downfall and America in the second half of the twentieth century. The sins are the same . . . their causes are the same . . . the public apathy is the same . . . the false sense of security is the same . . . and, because God deals with men in every age on the basis of the same eternal ethic, the danger of destruction is the same. If our nation should fall due to this moral dry rot resulting from polluted and false

religion, it would be no strange thing when viewed in the light of history. And if God should use a godless power to bring about this destruction, this also would be in keeping with the lessons of history. God is still on His throne exercising authority over nations!

### SAMARIA TO BE DESTROYED . . . Micah 1:6-11

RV . . . Therefore I will make Samaria as a heap of the field, and as places for planting vineyards; and I will pour down the stones thereof into the valley, and I will uncover the foundations thereof. And all her graven images shall be beaten to pieces, and all her hires shall be burned with fire, and all her idols will I lay desolate; for of the hire of a harlot hath she gathered them, and unto the hire of a harlot shall they return.. For this will I lament and wail; I will go stripped and naked; I will make a wailing like the jackals, and a lamentation like the ostriches. For her wounds are incurable; for it is come even unto Judah; it reacheth unto the gate of my people, even to Jerusalem. Tell it not in Gath, weep not at all: at Bethleaphrah have I rolled myself in the dust. Pass away, O inhabitant of Shaphir, in nakedness and shame: the inhabitant of Zaanan is not come forth; the wailing of Bethazel shall take from you the stay thereof.

LXX . . . Therefore I will make Samaria as a store-house of the fruits of the field, and as a planting of a vineyard: and I will utterly demolish her stones, and I will expose her foundations. And they shall cut in pieces all the graven images, and all that she has hired they shall burn with fire, and I will utterly destroy all her idols: because she has gathered of the hires of fornication, and of the hires of fornication has she amassed wealth. Therefore shall she lament and wail, she shall go barefooted, and being naked she shall make lamentation as that of serpents, and mourning as of the daughters of sirens. For her plague has become grievous; for it has come even to Juda, and has reached to the gate of my people, even to Jerusalem. Ye that are in Geth, exalt not yourselves, and ye Enakim, do not rebuild from the ruins of the house in derision: sprinkle dust in the place of your laughter. The inhabitant of Sennaar, fairly inhabiting her cities, came not forth to mourn for the house next to her: she shall receive of you the stroke of grief.

## COMMENTS

### SAMARIA . . . SCENE OF DESOLATION . . . Micah 1:6-7

Samaria had been first to succumb to Baal worship. Before Jerusalem, Samaria had first become shot through with sin as a result of

false gods. Samaria had chosen to break with the government in God's chosen city, Jerusalem. Samaria would be first to feel the wrath of God against a rebellious people.

Micah had actually seen this destruction in the vision by which the word of God came to him. (Cf. 1:1) *His* description of it bears the vivid stamp of eyewitness testimony. It is as though his eyes smarted from the dust of falling buildings and the stench of death after battle burned his nostrils. He would live to experience the same terrible desolation again in reality. The land would be overrun in 734 B.C. and the city itself wiped out in 721 B.C. by the armies of Shalmaneser and Sargon II.

Micah's God is not a petty national deity committed unconditionally to support the nation of Israel. He is the transcendent God who has called a man and through him created a people to bless all men. He will not brook flagrant disobedience and turning to strange gods. Indeed He cannot, if His eternal grand design for man is to be redeemed in the Seed of Abraham and fulfilled in a called-out family with Him as head.

Nor is He simply a petulant overlord who is in a rage because He has not had His own way. His wrath springs from much deeper wells. His wrath is His love reacting to that which threatens to thwart His blessing all the nations of the world. If He is to bring this redemption about, what He is about to do to Israel, must be done to preserve the covenant by which the blessing is to come to all.

Samaria, *capital* of the northern nation and center of her religion has become also the *capital* of her sin and the center of guilt. So Samaria will become "as a heap of the field . . . as places for planting vineyards . . ."

In the rock-strewn fields of Palestine, such a heap is a common sight, as the farmer gathers the stones into a heap in preparation for planting. The stones of which the once proud *city* of Samaria was built will be cast into the valley below and piled in heaps. This prophecy of desolation was fulfilled so completely that even these heaps of stones have all but vanished today.

Before the building of Samaria by Omri, the three hundred foot hill on which it stood was a vineyard. Because the *city* had turned to strange gods and led its people into *sin*, the site would be returned to its original use.

The hill is surrounded today by terraces, one a narrow wooded mound of earth raised slightly from the hillside. Above it are the



marks of smaller terraces which may well be the vestiges of the streets of the city. In place of streets the terraces now support terraced fields.

God will "discover the foundations" of the city. The foundations are the unseen part of any structure. To find or discover them, it is necessary first to destroy the buildings which rest upon them. One who has walked among the ruins of ancient civilizations knows the familiar sight of such foundations . . . they are the last remaining ruin of any overthrown city. God will discover them in Samaria by wiping out this capital of idolatry.

All her graven images are to be beaten to pieces. To borrow a phrase from Abraham Lincoln, we have come to "the nub of the matter." It is Israel's unfaithfulness to her covenant vow with Jehovah in worshipping these images which was to bring about the ruination of Samaria.

The word "hires" (*v.* 7) refers to all that the worshippers of Baal sought to gain from worshipping him, along with the gifts offered to him as acts of worship. The motive in false worship is always personal gain of one type or another, just as true worship is always the abandonment of self to the purpose and service of God.

In laying waste the idols of Israel, God will be destroying the hires of a harlot. In her overthrow, her wealth, gained from spiritual fornication with idols, would go to another harlot . . . the Assyrian capital of Nineveh.

Micah is not the first to call false religion harlotry, especially when indulged in by the covenant people. (False worship is called harlotry throughout the Bible from its inception in old Babylon.) The allegory is an apt one. The covenant with Israel is treated as a marriage vow; Israel's incessant affairs with Baal as adultery.

*Hosea 2:2-13* develops this allegory in the actual marital stress of the prophet's own life. *Ezekiel 16* contains two separate versions of the allegory.

In the first, the foundling child becomes the faithless wife of her benefactor. There the emphasis is upon Judah, but the principle is the same, since all of the people flirted with idolatry. The girlchild is left exposed to die. Jehovah passes by and bids her live and flourish. Later, in womanhood, He solemnly marries her and provides her with wealth and status far above her neighbors. She owes all to Him.

In return His bride plays the harlot (*Ezekiel 16:15*) by offering her children, the children of Jehovah, to idols!

*Ezekiel 16's* second allegory centers in Jerusalem. Her sin is said to be worse than Sodom or Samaria, since after all, they were not wives

of Jehovah as was she. (Micah, however, does not hesitate to use the same allegory against Samaria since the people in the north as well as those in the south stood under the same divine covenant.)

Similar accusations of unfaithfulness are directed against the covenant people in such passages as *Hosea 4:13-14*, *Amos 2:7-8*, *Isaiah 30:6*, *Jeremiah 2 & 3*, etc.

The law required that an unfaithful wife and her lover be put to death. (*Deuteronomy 22:22*) Israel's unfaithfulness is worse than that of a common prostitute who is paid for her services. She invites her lovers and pays them. (*Isaiah 30:6*, etc.) Therefore God, Who is righteous in that He always conducts Himself by the same standards which He sets for His people, will punish His faithless wife. (*Ezekiel 16:35-43*)

The punishment will not be by death. He will expose her to the world and give her over to her lovers, but He will do it to stop her harlotry and save the marriage, *ie.* the covenant. This is carefully spelled out by the prophets. The forthcoming downfall of Israel and the captivity of Judah will be followed by a reconciliation. The covenant will once again become the basis of a happy marriage. The temple will be rebuilt, following the captivity, and the *remnant* of Israel will yet be the means of blessing all the nations of the world through the Seed of Abraham.

#### THE HUSBAND'S LAMENT . . . 1:8

God does not enjoy punishing His people. Even though He has no choice but to cast off His faithless bride for a time in order to preserve the marriage, He now says, in effect, "*this is going to hurt me worse than it does you!*" Such lamentation ought to put the lie to the theology current in some modern circles which separates the God of the Old Testament from the God of the New Testament on the ridiculous assumption that the God of the Old Testament was not a "God of love." There is no pain equal to the pain suffered when love punishes to preserve!

The deep anguish of God over the state of Israel and the necessity to punish her so violently is spelled out in terms of the public mourning customary at the time. In time of deep distress, the bereaved stripped off his sandals (the Septuagint so translates "stripped" here) and his upper garments (the meaning of "naked" in these verses). Such barefoot, naked condition was a common sign of mourning. (*II Samuel 15:30*)

To lament was to beat the breast in despair to the accompaniment of a loud mournful howl. The sound is here compared to that of the jackals, (rather wild dogs) which howl when deserted like a human cub when left alone and unloved. It is also compared here with the sound of the ostrich which in distress utters a long shrill sighing cry as though in deep hurt. Another similitude may also be intended by the reference to the ostrich: an ostrich hen will occasionally forget her nest, leaving her eggs to be trampled. So has Israel deserted Jehovah. (Cf. *Hebrews 10:29* where unfaithfulness to Christ is pictured as trampling under foot the Son of God.)

Micah pictures Jehovah as utterly tormented by the plight of His people and with grief for having to punish them so severely. Although He has been deeply wounded by the unfaithfulness of His bride, He still loves her very much. Yet the purpose for which the marriage had been contracted demands her faithfulness to Him and to bring this about she must be punished. He does not glory in her impending suffering . . . He is more torn by it than she!

It would be difficult to find a more vivid example of what it means to hate sin and love sinners. The old cliché of the wife deserting her husband for his best friend is exceeded here when Israel deserts God for His worst enemy . . . Baal. Yet he does not hate her . . . He despises her sin. Even in the punishment there are overtones of forgiveness!

How much more we would appreciate our relationship to God if we could but understand how very much He loves us! How much more we would be like Him . . . and worthy to be called His children . . . if we could learn to so love in spite of sin.

#### THE PURPOSE OF THE PUNISHMENT . . . 1:9

Leaving the allegory of the faithless wife and the injured husband, the Lord, through Micah, now reveals His ultimate concern. The infection of Samaria is spreading like a deadly contagion to Judah . . . to the Chosen City itself. If the Covenant of Promise is to be redeemed, the infection must be stopped. Since it is already incurable, it must be destroyed.

Moral decay resulting from false religion bears the seed of its own destruction. In the case of Samaria it was time for surgery. The northern kingdom was wiped out, its people scattered, and there was never to be a return.

There is the hope that, seeing the destruction of Samaria, Judah would repent. As the infection, so the therapeutic destruction reached

as far as the capital gates when the armies of Sennacherib camped outside the walls. (*Isaiah* 36:1, 37:33-37) God's punishment came step by step, leaving time for repentance. The defeat of Samaria and the scattering of her people, the halting of Sennacherib short of a conquest of Jerusalem were designed to call Jerusalem to her knees in contrition, to turn her away from the idolatry and insuing abandonment of morality which had become incurable in the north.

But Jerusalem would not repent. She was taken captive to Babylon so that God, through suffering, might force the remnant back to Himself that the covenant might be fulfilled through them.

### PUNISHMENT EXTENDED TO GATE OF JERUSALEM . . .

1:10-12

The punishment of God against the northern kingdom is not to stop at Samaria. It will rather roll like a relentless tide until it dashes against the very walls of Jerusalem. This is depicted dramatically by Micah as he lists one village after another, each one slightly nearer Jerusalem.

He begins with Gath, one of the five cities of the Philistines, on the northern borders of Judah and proceeds through Bethle-aphrah, Shaphir, Zaanan, Bethazel and Maroth. The coming invasion by Sennacherib is presented in all its terror as one village after another falls before him, the refugees from one finding no succor in the next.

"*Tell it not in Gath!*" Gath, the city of the Philistines . . . how the Philistines would delight to hear of the destruction of the Hebrews. The prophet's words are an echo of David's lament over the death of Saul and Jonathan. (*II Samuel* 1:20) "*Weep not at all.*" Do not reveal to the enemies of God's people your inner feelings . . . lest they rejoice!

From Gath the invaders would sweep south. "*At Bethle-aphrah have I rolled myself in the dust.*" This is the only mention of Bethle-aphrah in the Bible. Its name is a play on words . . . meaning literally "city of dust." (An appropriate name for many Judean villages!) Rolling in the dust was one of many customary forms of mourning, similar to another such practice . . . that of sitting in sackcloth and ashes.

From Bethle-aphrah the disaster mounts to Shaphir, a village of Judah which lay between Eleutheropolis and Ashkelon. The name means "fair." "*Pass away, O inhabitants of Shaphir, in nakedness and shame.*" Nakedness again is to be understood as the removal of the upper gar-

ment as a sign of mourning. That which was once fair would stand naked and ashamed in the judgement of the Lord!

*"The inhabitant of Zaanan is not come forth."* Zaanan has not been definitely identified by archeologists. It is probably the same as Zenan, located east of Ashkelon. (*Joshua 18:22*) Its people cannot come forth to console the refugees from the north because they are themselves in the path of Sennacharib. This is reminiscent of Jeremiah's warning, "Thus saith Jehovah, Behold a people cometh from the north country; and a great nation shall be stirred up from the uttermost parts of the earth. They lay hold on bow and spear; they are cruel, and have no mercy; their voice roareth like the sea, and they ride upon horses, every one set in array, as a man to the battle, against thee, O daughter of Zion. We have heard the report thereof; our hands wax feeble: anguish hath taken hold of us, and pangs as of a woman in travail. Go not forth into the field, nor walk by the way; for the sword of the enemy, and terror, are on every side. O daughter of my people, gird thee with sackcloth and wallow thyself in ashes; make thee mourning as for an only son, most bitter lamentation; for the destroyer shall suddenly come upon us." (*Jeremiah 6:22-26*)

*"The wailing of Bethazel shall take from you the stay thereof."* Bethazel may be the same as Azal. (*Zechariah 14:5*) "The stay thereof" is taken away. That is to say, Bethazel, itself smitten, cannot sustain those who flee from the destruction on the plains. There is no more security near Jerusalem. The rout is complete.

#### WARNINGS TO JUDAH . . . Micah 1:12(b)-16

RV . . . For the inhabitant of Maroth waiteth anxiously for good, because evil is come down from Jehovah unto the gate of Jerusalem. Bind the chariot to the swift steed, O inhabitant of Lachish: she was the beginning of sin to the daughter of Zion: for the transgressions of Israel were found in thee. Therefore shalt thou give a parting gift to Moreshethgath; the houses of Achzib shall be a deceitful thing unto the kings of Israel. I will yet bring unto thee, O inhabitant of Maresah, him that shall possess thee: the glory of Israel shall come even unto Adullam. Make thee bold, and cut off thy hair for the children of thy delight: enlarge thy baldness as the eagle; for they are gone into captivity from thee.

LXX . . . Who has begun to act for good to her that dwells in sorrow? for calamities have come down from the Lord upon the gates of Jerusalem, even a sound of chariots and horsemen: the inhabitants of Lachis,

she is the leader of sin to the daughter of Sion: for in thee were found the transgressions of Israel. Therefore shall he cause men to be sent forth as far as the inheritance of Geth, even vain houses; they are become vanity to the kings of Israel; until they bring the heirs, O inhabitants of Lachis: the inheritance shall reach to Odollam, even the glory of the daughter of Israel. Shave thine hair, and make thyself bald for thy delicate children; increase thy widowhood as an eagle; for thy people are gone into captivity from thee.

## COMMENTS

The warning of Micah to Judah, concerning the fall of Samaria and the northern kingdom, is that the punishment from the north is to extend through the Philistine plain to the gates of Jerusalem. In verses 6-11 we saw the encroachment from Samaria's viewpoint. In verses 12-15 we see the invasion of the northern kingdom from the vantage point of several Judean towns which are so situated as to be in the path of Sargon. We might have expected the overthrow of the north to end at the boundary between Israel and Judah, but the conqueror was not so neat in his concerns. Certain towns which lay south of the border would, largely for reasons of topography, be taken along with the northern kingdom. Whatever the attitude of the southern kingdom toward this violation of its territory, it was in no position to do much about it.

The cities mentioned are in the Philistine plain of Shephelah in northwestern Judah, and are the home territory of the prophet Micah. Moresheth-gath was Micah's home town. One can imagine the anguish of heart that came to the prophet as, in a vision, he saw the destruction of people and places filled with personal nostalgia and memories.

The first of the cities of the Philistine plain mentioned is Maroth. The name means *bitterness*. The city is known in modern times as *Unman*. It is located in the hill country bordering the plain of Shephelah near Beth-anoth and Eltekon. (Cf. *Joshua* 15:59)

As with each of the cities and towns named here, there is a play on the literal meaning of the name Morath. The people of Morath (bitterness) are anxiously waiting for the good. There is no bitterness like that felt by those who wait in the path of an invading army, hoping against hope for the intervention of a delivering force. Since this is apparently the first city below the border and on Judean territory to be invaded, the citizenry would no doubt hope for the army of the

southern kingdom to intervene on their behalf. In bitterness they waited eagerly for help (goodness) . . . but none came.

To those who stood in the path of the invader, it would seem that Sargon was the originator of their woes. The prophet sees otherwise. That which is to happen, which he has seen already happening in his vision, is "come down from Jehovah." It is punishment, first for sin, and secondly for failing to heed the prophets.

The anxiety of the citizens of Morath over their own plight would be eclipsed by their awareness that Jerusalem itself was threatened?

The next mentioned city in the line of march is Lachish. The literal meaning of Lachish is *swift beast*. Again there is a play on words in the original text. The inhabitants of Lachish (swift beast) are warned to hitch their swift steed to the chariot. There would be need for speed if any were to successfully flee before the invading host.

Lachish is located at the site of today's Tel-el-Hesey, about sixteen miles east of Gaza and slightly north. (Cf. *Joshua 15:39* and *Jeremiah 34:7*) Her punishment is just, in that she was the "beginning of sin to the daughter of Zion."

We are not sure in what sense Lachish was the "beginning" of sin. Some have thought this was one of Solomon's chariot towns. (*I Kings 9:19, 10:26*) If so, the people of Lachish would have been among the first in Israel to be introduced to the false sense of security which comes from the dependance upon military arms rather than upon the might of Jehovah.

It seems more likely that Lachish was the "beginning" of sin in that she had been among the first cities of the southern kingdom to participate in the newly minted idolatry of Jeroboam. (*I Kings 12:16-29*)

Whatever the reason, Micah makes Lachish responsible as the beginning of corruption and idolatry in Judah. The term *daughter of Zion* is a personification of all the people of Judah and of Jerusalem in particular. The implication is that Judah has been infected with Israel's sin and that Lachish is the "carrier."

Even though Lachish is a fortified city, Reoboam having made it so by surrounding it with double walls, battlements and towers, it would not escape the judgement of God at the hands of Sargon.

Micah's home town, Moresheth-gath, is next on the list of cities receiving the prophetic warning. It is difficult to know just who is being addressed in verse 14(a). There is apparently no historic connection between Lachish and Moresheth-gath and so no reason apparent why such a statement should be directed to Lachish. It seems more

likely that "*you must give parting gifts*" is directed to Judah who must watch another Judean town overrun in the downfall of the northern kingdom.

It was (and still is) customary in that part of the world for members of the family to bring goodbye gifts to a daughter who has been given in marriage, and especially to one whose marriage will take her to a far away place never to be seen again by her family. The goodbye to Moresheth-gath will be like that . . . permanent.

The literal meaning of *Moresheth* is "possession," and again, in the giving of gifts, there is the play on words which is typical of this passage.

Achzib is mentioned, along with Mareshah, in *Joshua 15:44*. It may be the Chezeb of *Genesis 38:5* and also the Cozeba of *1 Chronicles 4:42*. It is probably to be identified with modern Aen-Kezbah, situated eight miles north and east of Beit Jibrin in the Philistine plain.

The plural "houses of Achzib," is taken by some to indicate two Achzibs. If so it would be translated "the two Beth-Achzib." If this is true, the second Achzib is probably the one mentioned in *Joshua 29:29* and *Judges 1:13*. It is located in Asher and situated at or near the present site of Ez-zib on the coast between Acco and Tyre.

As with the other locations mentioned here, the name Achzib is a play on words. The Hebrew form of the word is *akhzabb*, meaning "a deceitful thing." It is applied in *Jeremiah 15:18* to a stream which seasonally dries up and which would deceive a weary traveler who expected to refresh himself. (Compare *Job 6:15*)

So Achzib shall be a deceitful thing to the king of Israel. The members of the royal family, fleeing to the town or towns of Beth Ach-achzib will not find a way of escape or refreshment.

It might be well to recall just here, that Sargon claims to have carried off only some 27,000 people from the northern kingdom. If so, it was the members of the royal family along with the social, political and cultural leaders. In this way the conquered people would be leaderless and unlikely to rebel. The flavor of fleeing royalty is found throughout the prophecies of the downfall of Israel.

In verse 15 we again find the usual play on words; this time found in the use of *yoresh*, "him that shall possess," with *Mareshah*, "a possession." *Joshua 15:44* pictures Moreshah as located near Achzib. Archeologists identify it with a ruin called Merash near Beit-Jibrin . . . about one mile to the south.

The Israelites had taken the city from the Canaanites. It will once more be possessed by a new possessor.



Adullam identified with the ruins at present day Aid-el-ma, three miles southeast of Soco and northeast eight miles from Mareshah, is, in a sense, the high water mark of the invasion at the time of the fall of Israel. Later, the entire southern kingdom would fall to Sennacharib, but for the present, the Assyrian tide stops here.

Adullam, as its location indicates, is in the lowlands of Judah (*Joshua 15:55*) and is characterized by an abundance of caves. It was here that David had fled from Saul. (*1 Samuel 22:1-ff*)

Now, centuries later, the same caves are to provide refuge for the northern nobility as they flee before the Assyrians. If there is to be a safe hiding place it will be here. So the "glory of Israel" *ie.* the valuables which are to be hidden from foreign plunder, are to come to the caves of Adullam.

Self-inflicted baldness was a symbol of mourning among the worshippers of Baal. (*Amos 8:10, Isaiah 3:24*) It is forbidden in the Law of Moses, *Leviticus 19:27-28* and *Deuteronomy 14:1*) probably because it was associated with the surrounding paganism. The demand that those here receiving the punishment of Jehovah shear their heads and the heads of their children is repeated three times for emphasis. The punishment is essentially for worshipping pagan gods. The fitting form of mourning for such is the mourning practiced by the original worshippers of Baal.

The word "eagle" in the English translation is misleading. The bird referred to here is probably the Carrion Vulture which populates Egypt (where it was worshipped) and Palestine. Its head is completely bald in front, and has only a very thin covering in back. Micah's rebuke is vivid and scathing.

The terrors of war have not changed. Insert new names for the towns and villages in this passage and we have a description of Europe cringing before Atilla the Hun, or Hitler . . . and of the people of the East trembling before the Japanese Imperial Army as it advances down the Pacific island chain toward Australia. Or, to make the allegory more contemporary yet . . . here is a picture of the Czech people shuddering as the Russian tanks roll by, or of Yugoslavia and Hungary bracing for a similar invasion.

The difference is that the invasion of Sargon and later of Sennacharib had been announced in advance by the prophets of God. They had been made aware that the pillage of war was their just punishment for having been unfaithful to God. Perhaps it is only this awareness that distinguishes them from more recent victims of conflict.

## MICAH

### Chapter VI—Questions

#### First Cycle

1. What evidence does Micah give in the early verses of his book concerning God's universal concern for all men?
2. The term "the people" is used frequently to designate——.
3. The term "the nations" indicates —— in contrast to "the people."
4. What long precedent does Micah have for his use of "earth and all that therein is" to call the whole world to listen to God's indictment of His covenant people?
5. ——, Micah's contemporary, uses the same phrase.
6. What two reasons are apparent for God's concern that the "earth and all that is in it" hear His charge?
7. Who is the "star witness" for the prosecution against God's unfaithful people?
8. Show how Stephen's defense (Acts 7) seconds the accusation of Micah against the people.
9. Discuss, in connection with Micah 1:2(c)-3(a), "God is not an absentee God."
10. What is signified by the term "high places" (Micah 1:3(b))?
11. Discuss Micah's statement that the mountains shall melt and the valleys melt like wax. Micah 1:4
12. The purifying wrath of God against the people is to be occasioned by —— and ——.
13. Trace the eight ways in which the name Israel is used historically in the Bible.
14. What is meant by pre-exilic? by post exilic?
15. Trace the Biblical history of the name Judah and its development into the word Jew.
16. Describe the situation of the city of Samaria.
17. How is Samaria the "transgression of Jacob"?
18. How is Jerusalem the "sin of Judah"?
19. Both *Je* and *Baal* mean ——.
20. Compare the sins of the northern and southern kingdoms.
21. Why was Samaria to be first to feel God's wrath?
22. Discuss the significance of Samaria's graven images.
23. How is spiritual harlotry an apt allegory of idolatry?
24. How does the lament of Micah 1:8 relate to our understanding

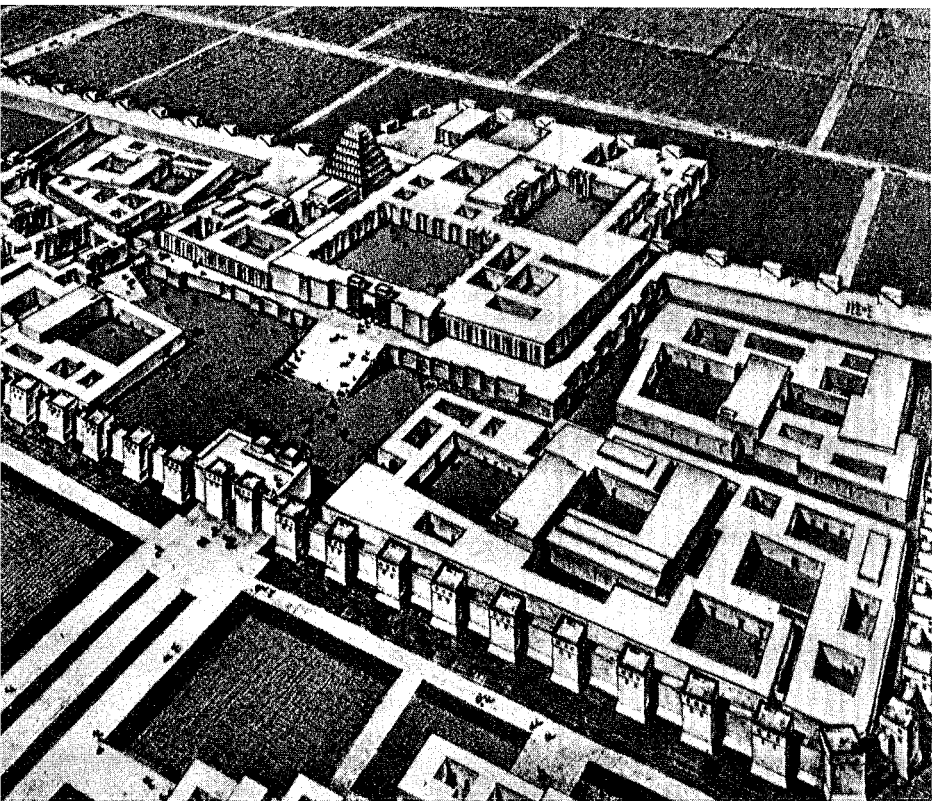
*"In the ninth year of Hoshea  
the king of Assyria took Samaria"  
(II Kings 17: 6).*

This was Sargon II, conqueror  
of the capital of the northern  
kingdom of Israel. His portrait  
has been preserved on this  
limestone relief for over two  
thousand five hundred years.



FROM: THE BIBLE AS HISTORY IN PICTURES  
By Werner Keller - Wm. Morrow Co.





Dur-Sharrukin—"Sargon's citadel"—was inscribed on cuneiform tablets which Emile Botta, the great French archaeologist, discovered at Khorsabad north of Nineveh in 1842. They were found among the ruined walls of what had been a gigantic royal establishment. Its builder was "Sargon, the king of Assyria", referred to in Isaiah 20: 1. The frontage of the city wall itself with its twenty towers—not counting the entrance gateway—was over 2000 feet long. The palace, which can be seen farther back, with its temple-tower, was built on an artificial platform 45 feet high (reconstruction).

that the God of the Old Testament is the same loving God as that of the New Testament?

25. What is the purpose of the punishment promised by Micah?
26. The warning of Micah to Judah is \_\_\_\_\_.
27. List the cities of the Philistine plains mentioned by Micah. Locate them on a map.
28. Micah's home town was \_\_\_\_\_.
29. Why did Sargon carry off the social, political and cultural leaders of Israel?
30. Self-inflicted baldness by the worshippers of Baal was a symbol of \_\_\_\_\_.

## CHAPTER VII

### SECOND CYCLE

WOE TO THE ARROGANT MISLEADERS . . . Micah 2:1-3

RV . . . Woe to them that devise iniquity and work evil upon their beds! when the morning is light, they practise it, because it is in the power of their hand. And they covet fields, and seize them; and houses, and take them away: and they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage. Therefore thus saith Jehovah: Behold, against this family do I devise an evil, from which ye shall not remove your necks, neither shall ye walk haughtily; for it is an evil time.

LXX . . . They meditated troubles, and wrought wickedness on their beds, and they put it in execution with the daylight; for they have not lifted up their hands to God. And they desired fields, and plundered orphans, and oppressed families, and spoiled a man and his house, even a man and his inheritance. Therefore thus saith the Lord; Behold, I devise evils against this family out of which ye shall not lift up your necks, neither shall ye walk upright speedily: for the time is evil.

### COMMENTS

Micah now turns from the generalities of judgement impending against the northern and southern kingdoms, their capitals and their cities, to the personal denouncement of those who sit in high places in them. The punishment of Jerusalem and Samaria are the result of sin. Sin is an individual thing. If a society or a city is sinful, it is because it is inhabited by sinful people. If the individual is subject to

undue pressure and temptation in such surroundings, it is because he must associate with sinful people. In the case of the kingdoms denounced by Micah, the people were pressed toward sin and idolatry by sinful social leaders. It was these leaders who were disbursed from Israel by the Assyrians. It was the leaders of Judah who were led captive to Babylon.

(*Verse 1*) The evil of those in power was well thought out. They lay awake nights scheming, and the next day they eagerly put their plans into action. Micah accuses them of doing these evil things simply because the power to do so was in their hands. Power is the determining factor in both their intentions and their practices. There is not even a pretense at justice. An old adage says, "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." It was true in Israel and Judah.

Plutarch wrote, "It is an observation no less just than common, that there is no stronger test of a man's character than power and authority, exciting as they are to every passion, and discovering every latent vice." Those in authority among God's people at the time of the minor prophets simply failed to pass the test. Rather than using their power and riches to the common good, they used them as an occasion of avarice and greed and debauchery.

(*Verse 2*) Pascal is quoted as saying, "power without justice is tyranny." Those in power in Israel and Judah were tyrants in the worse sense of the word. In the words of Wendell Phillips, "Power is ever stealing from the many to the few." The iniquity devised upon the beds of the powerful in Jerusalem and Samaria was designed to rob more and more of the possessions of the poor.

The prophet accuses them of coveting fields and seizing houses, of oppressing men and their families or heritage. The verse has a familiar ring to anyone who is aware of the cases common in American civil courts. In Israel and Judah there was no recourse to the courts.

(*Verse 3*) Therefore . . . because the powerful spend their time devising evil schemes against this people . . . I devise an evil from which ye shall not remove your necks, neither walk haughtily.

It has been said often that sin carries in its nature the seeds of its own punishment. One of the basic tenets of American jurisprudence is that the punishment shall fit the crime. The Law of Moses taught the principle "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." The evil which Jehovah devised against the avarice and greed of the powerful must be counted just by any standard.

Jehovah devised an "evil time" as the just punishment of these oppressors. Amos used the same terminology to describe the same impending judgement. (*Amos 5:13*)

Those against whom this particular "evil time" was devised as punishment would find no escape from it. They would not be able to "remove their necks," or to walk proudly. As they had taken lands and houses and possessions from the poor to add to their own pleasures, so, in the day of their captivity, were their houses and lands to be taken from them. Just as their power left no legal recourse for those who were oppressed by them, so their captors would have no mercy upon them.

We have previously noted that, both at the destruction of Israel and the later captivity of Judah, it was the rulers, the social elite and the influential rich who were actually led away, first by Assyria and then by Babylon. The full weight of God's punishment thus fell upon exactly those people who were directly responsible for the evil which brought it about.

#### A TAUNT AGAINST THE WICKED . . . Micah 2:4-5

RV . . . In that day shall they take up a parable against you, and lament with a doleful lamentation, and say, We are utterly ruined: he changeth the portion of my people: how doth he remove it from me! to the rebellious he divideth our fields. Therefore thou shalt have none that shall cast the line by lot in the assembly of Jehovah.

LXX . . . In that day shall a parable be taken up against you, and a plaintive lamentation shall be uttered, saying, We are thoroughly miserable: the portion of my people has been measured out with a line, and there was none to hinder him so as to turn him back; your fields have been divided. Therefore thou shalt have no one to cast a line for the lot.

#### COMMENTS

Napoleon once wrote, "Even in war, moral power is to physical as three parts to one." It was so in the case of those against whom Micah spoke the message of God. The power by which they enforced their social abuses was related directly to the moral power of a false religion. It is the exercise of power that most clearly reveals what is at the base of the true character of a man. In their case, the foundation of their abusive character was Baalism.

Having compromised God's truth with the falsehood of Baalism, the character of these rulers and social leaders was not forged of any real metal. Having first given way to the temptation to flirt with a false god, they found no real standard of ethics by which to govern their own lives. The inevitable result was the extreme cruelty against their fellows to which their greed had driven them. When the wrath of God is released against them, they will feel the sting of their own sins, as their enemies taunt them.

The taunt (or parable) which will be spoken against them by those who see the judgement of God brought upon them is written in advance, by the prophet in *Micah* 2:4-5. ". . . a parable against you, and lament with . . . lamentation," might be more literally rendered, "lament with a lamentation of lamentations." In the Hebrew text it reads "*naha, nehi, nihyah*," and is reminiscent of the sing-song "yaya, yaya, yaya" with which young children taunt one another in every language. This monotonous insulting derision will be leveled against them repeatedly as their enemies make jest of their hardship, just as they now make sport of those whom they oppress.

Their friends, on the other hand, will cry in their behalf, ". . . we are utterly ruined." Those who now sit "high and mighty" at the expense of the down-trodden will find themselves in total despair. They will exclaim, ". . . He changed the portion of my people, how doth he remove it from me! To the rebellious he divideth our fields."

The irony and justice of God's judgements are magnificent. The powerful have changed the inheritance of the common people by cunning theft. They have removed the lands from them without recourse. In their downfall they will complain against God for doing exactly the same to them. In their straying from Jehovah to Baalism they have rebelled against God, and their rebellion has resulted in their misuse of power and wealth and their trodding down of His people. In that day they will wonder why God has taken the same possessions from them and given them to the "rebellious" Gentiles who will over-run their lands.

In verse five, Micah warns them that, just as they have left no legal recourse to those from whom they have stolen property, so in that day they will have "none that shall cast the line by lot." There will be no legal division of land, because there will be no land left to divide. It will be occupied by the enemies. There will be no courts to establish titles, because the government will be in the hands of the invader. Their misery over the loss of their unjust claims and titles will bring to them a measure of the misery they are now heaping upon



others. They have forgotten that the land . . . this land especially, belongs to God. He led their fathers to it for *His* purposes. Now that they have deserted Him for Baal and are grabbing the land for their own greed, He will remove it completely from them.

History records that this warning was fulfilled in the northern kingdom at the dispersion of the ten tribes, and in the southern kingdom at the Babylonian captivity. Although God Himself restored the southern kingdom seventy years later, as a homeland for a remnant through which to fulfill the promise of the covenant, it is extremely difficult to justify any modern claim to the northern territories by the present state of Israel on any Scriptural basis. God removed the land from them in punishment for their despicable idolatry and maltreatment of His people, and because they refused to hear and heed the warnings of the prophets.

THE PROPHET ACCUSED AS AN ENEMY . . . Micah 2:6-7(a)  
RV . . . Prophecy ye not, thus they prophesy. They shall not prophesy to these; reproaches shall not depart. Shall it be said, O house of Jacob, Is the Spirit of Jehovah straitened? are these his doings?

LXX . . . Weep not with tears in the assembly of the Lord, neither let any weep for these things; for he shall not remove the reproaches, who says, the house of Jacob has provoked the Spirit of the Lord; are not these his practices?

## COMMENTS

### V. 6 . . . PROPHECY NOT . . . THEY PROPHECY

These are the words of the false prophets and their followers in response to the warning pronounced by the prophets of Jehovah. Others than Micah had been rebuked in this same way. (eg. *Amos* 7:16)

The warnings of God's spokesmen grate on the ears of those who will not hear. They specifically charge Micah to desist from saying, "reproaches shall not depart from Israel." (Don't talk like that, preacher, it's not nice and it's not tolerant, and we won't listen!")

### V. 7 . . . SHALL IT BE SAID, O HOUSE OF JACOB? . . .

Those whom the prophet has warned now turn on him as though he, and not they, were the enemies of God. In effect their challenge is, "we are God's people . . . we wear His name. Are we not the

chosen Israel? Are we not the sons of the patriarchs? How can you say that God will act so toward His favorite people?"

Here is a glimpse of the national pride and racial arrogance that was ultimately to prevent the Jews from accepting Christ and which caused them to persecute Stephen and Paul for preaching a Gospel of universal concern. They have had increasing difficulty, throughout the remainder of their history as a nation, and still today as a race, in grasping the fundamental concept of a covenant people. Somehow the idea that God's Israel is composed of those who are related to Him by *obedient faith and not merely by racial ancestry or national origin* seems beyond their comprehension as a people. Modern Zionism is a case in point.

There are some "evangelical" Christians today whose understanding of the prophets is warped by the same erroneous idea. Most of the "far out" schemes and devices dealing with eschatology have at their heart the notion that God is somehow bound to the physical Hebrew race and the citizens of a national Jewish commonwealth. Nothing could be farther from the prophets' understanding of the nature of God's Israel. The insistence of Micah in this particular context is that the race . . . the nation, will suffer non-deferable calamity because they have failed to really *be* Israel. They have failed, by going off after strange gods and by breaking the Law of God, to keep the covenant upon which their peculiar relationship to God depended. (Cf. *Exodus 19:5-6*)

The logic of Micah's accusers is reflected in their retort, "Is the Spirit of Jehovah straitened? are these His doings?" In effect, "is Jehovah's Spirit so constricted and narrow that He would allow the destruction of His chosen people?" One hears much the same reasoning today on the part of those who insist on identifying Israel with a race or a political commonwealth.

The error of such thinking lies in this: it is precisely because the Spirit of God is *not* straitened that He will take such drastic measures to preserve the covenant faith. If God were only the tribal or national God of the Hebrews, He would be bound, or straitened, to defend them as "my people, right or wrong."

But such is not the case. Israel was called into being in the beginning because it was God's purpose through them to bless *all* nations. To do this there must be a once-for-all demonstration that His relationship to His people does not depend upon their racial origin and national identity, but upon their obedient faith. In the captivity there will be no nation, no holy city, no sacred temple. The people will have *only*

their faith to cling to. Micah will shortly say that out of this experience will come a faithful remnant through whom God's redemption will come.

The tendency manifest here to blame God or His spokesman for the social calamities of a nation are not confined to the dusty ancient archives of Biblical history . . . it is a tendency very much alive and with us today. The person who says, "if there is a God why does He allow poverty and suffering and war and inequality to go unremedied," "if there is a God how can He allow such things to exist in a 'Christian' civilization?" is voicing the same false concept of God as that held by Israel and Judah in the days of the minor prophets.

The failure of such logic lies in its major premise. It assumes that a nation which gives lip service to God and prints "in God we trust" on its coins is a Christian nation. Or, in its modern version, it assumes that all men are the children of God by some inalienable right. Such simply is not, and never has been the case. God's people are those who are faithful to His covenant, who obey His commandments. Ultimately a child of God is one who receives His redemption through the promised Seed of Abraham. (Cf. *John 1:11-12*)

The time had come in Micah's day to place the blame for what was about to happen squarely where it belonged, to "tell it like it is." The suffering and destruction and famine that lay ahead for both Israel and Judah would come as a result of their unfaithfulness, their disobedience and their failure to hear and heed God's call to repentance.

We have arrived at a similar time in the history of western civilization, and especially in "Christian" America.

#### THE PROPHET ANSWERS HIS CRITICS . . . Micah 2:7(b)-11

RV . . . Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly? But of late my people is risen up as an enemy: ye strip the robe from off the garment from them that pass by securely as men averse from war. The women of my people ye cast out from their pleasant houses; from their young children ye take away my glory for ever. Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your resting-place; because of uncleanness that destroyeth, even with a grievous destruction. If a man walking in a spirit of falsehood do lie, saying, I will prophesy unto thee of wine and of strong drink; he shall even be the prophet of this people.

LXX . . . Are not the Lord's words right with him? and have they not proceeded correctly? Even beforetime my people withstood him as an enemy against his peace; they have stripped off his skin to remove hope

in the conflict of war. The leaders of my people shall be cast forth from their luxurious houses; they are rejected because of their evil practices; Iraw ye near to the everlasting mountains. Arise thou, and depart; for this is not thy rest because of uncleanness: ye have been utterly destroyed; ye have fled, no one pursuing you: thy spirit has framed falsehood, it has dropped on thee for wine and strong drink. But it shall come to pass, that out of the dropping of this people . . .

## COMMENTS

### V. 7(b) . . . DO NOT MY WORDS . . .

The word of God, no matter how stern, is never a threat to those who walk uprightly. Even the warning of inevitable national calamity would issue in the strengthened faith of the faithful, and the return from captivity of a generation dedicated to the re-establishment of true Jehovah worship. Centuries earlier David had written, "With the pure thou wilt show thyself pure; With the perverse thou wilt show thyself froward, For thou wilt save the afflicted people, But the haughty eyes thou wilt bring down." *Psalms 18:26-27*)

### V. 8 . . . BUT OF LATE . . .

The Hebrew here translated "of late" may also mean, literally, "from of old," "since yesterday," or "long ago." The thought seems to be "from of old," or from the beginning my people have risen up as an enemy. There is no more vivid description of the history of Israel. The cycle of rebellion is seen throughout the Old Testament record. God blesses . . . enjoying the blessings, the people forget their source; forgetting, they turn from God to idolatry and disobedience; as a result they are brought low; in their low estate they cry out for deliverance; in answer to their cry, God sends a deliverer; in their blindness they reject the deliverer; and in the rejection their sufferings are multiplied the more. This pattern is clearly seen in Stephen's resume (*Acts, chapter seven*) of God's historic dealing with them.

God's answer, to their plea that Jehovah cannot so treat the people who wear His name, is to remind them of their consummate mistreatment of those in their midst who are truly His.

### V. 8 . . . YE STRIP THE ROBE, ETC. . . .

The *eber* or robe is the garment worn next the body. The *salmah*, or garment is the large flowing coverlet worn as an outer garment in the day time and used as a blanket at night. The haughty followers

of the false prophets treat the humble passers-by as enemies . . . stripping them of all their garments.

This stripping of the garments of a defenseless enemy was not an uncommon practice in Bible times. Jesus was careful to instruct His followers as to the proper response when their Roman overlords did this to them. "If any man," He said, ". . . take away your outer garment, give him your inner garment also." (*Matthew 5:40*)

The idea that must not be overlooked just here is that *the proof of enmity with God is the mistreatment of His people*. He has accused them of forever rising up like enemies against Him, and now offers as proof that they are treating His people not only as enemies, but as conquered enemies. For such people to claim immunity from God's chastisement on the grounds that they are the descendants of the patriarchs is an affront not only to God's mercy but to His intelligence!

#### V. 9 . . . THE WOMEN OF MY PEOPLE . . .

Not only are the passers-by stripped of their garments by these enemies of God, the women are driven from their sheltering homes and the glory of God is kept from their children.

Perhaps the prophet has in mind here the widows and orphans of those men mentioned in verse two of this chapter as having been done out of their fields and houses and having their families oppressed.

#### V. 9 . . . YE TAKE AWAY MY GLORY FOREVER . . .

From the point of view of God's purpose in Israel, the denial of His glory to their children is absolutely intolerable. The idea of taking away Jehovah's glory from the children obviously refers to the plight of the children in a household denied of shelter, proper clothing, and in many cases the presence of a father. The denial of these physical necessities is deplorable, but worse is the denial of the proper upbringing of the children to assure their faithfulness to the covenant and obedience to the law.

These children were the children of the patriarchs! They were Abraham's progeny through whom the promised Seed must come. If God allows these conditions to prevail unchecked there will *be* no remnant through whom the Seed *can* come.

It has been said that the church is always but one generation from extinction. The generation of parents which allows a whole generation of children to grow up unaware of their duty to God will be the last generation of the church. If it takes national calamity to drive such parents to their knees for the sake of their children, 'so be

it. One thing was characteristic above all else of the Israelites during the Babylonian captivity; they taught their children the way of God!

#### V. 10 . . . ARISE AND DEPART . . .

Here is the direct command of God casting from His land those despicable people who had cast others from their homes. As those who "erred" in their hearts, and did not know God's ways in the wilderness were not allowed to enter this land (*Psalms* 95:10-11) so those who have turned from His ways will not be allowed to remain in it. Because of their sins (*Micah* 2:4-5) the sentence will not be revoked.

#### V. 11 . . . NOT YOUR RESTING PLACE . . .

The land had become a resting place after the wilderness wanderings, but it was not to be so now because of their abuses. The reason the land is not to be their resting place is, in the words of the American Standard Version, "because of uncleanness that destroyeth." Rotherham has, "Because it is defiled it shall make desolate." Some translators prefer "it shall destroy you." The sense of the statement seems to be that, because they have defiled the land which the Lord gave their fathers for the accomplishment of His covenant purpose, the land is now spewing them out. The law demanded that the land be not defiled, and stated the punishment for such delinquency as ". . . the land vomiteth out her inhabitants." (*Leviticus* 18:25). The idea that these people, by virtue of their race, are permanently bound to this land is refuted.

The phrase, "not your resting place," is reminiscent of *Hebrews* 13:14.

#### V. 12 . . . IF A MAN WALKETH . . . DO LIE . . . HE SHALL BE THE PROPHET OF THIS PEOPLE . . .

Micah now describes the kind of prophet who is always in demand among a depraved people. "He walks in a spirit of falsehood." His whole life is a lie! He presents himself as a prophet of God, knowing that the prophet's primary business is to tell the truth of God to God's people, while he has no such intention. Rather he says to the people, "I will prophecy unto thee of wine and strong drink."

The Hebrew *ruach* here translated "spirit" (of falsehood) also means wind as does the Greek *pneuma*, which in the New Testament is variously translated both wind and spirit. In *Micah* 2:11 the Revised Standard Version, has "If a man should go about and utter wind and lies, etc."

Why wine and strong drink? It is possible that these refer to the intoxicants and narcotic potions given to the candidate for initiation into Baal worship to induce the emotional experience by which he became identified with the death-resurrection myth of that god. Since the Jews, at this juncture, had so polluted Jehovah worship with Baalism, they would have given heed to a prophet who preached the validity of this practice.

It seems more likely, however, that the terminology here refers to the hollow words of the false prophet which were designed to tickle the itching ears of his listeners by telling them that they would continue in affluence and plenty, while the true prophets were warning against famine and want and captivity. Wine and strong drink are available in a situation of over-abundance. In the presence of famine and want, people turn their attention to the food and shelter which are necessities of life.

#### JUDGEMENTS TEMPERED BY PROMISES . . . Micah 2:12-13

RV . . . I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of thee; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together as the sheep of Bozrah, as a flock in the midst of their pasture; they shall make great noise by reason of the multitude of men. The breaker is gone up before them: they have broken forth and passed on to the gate, and are gone out thereat; and their king is passed on before them, and Jehovah at the head of them.

LXX . . . Jacob shall be completely gathered with all his people: I will surely receive the remnant of Israel; I will cause them to return together, as sheep in trouble, as a flock in the midst of their fold: they shall rush forth from among men through the breach made before them: they have broken through and passed the gate, and gone out by it: and their king has gone out before them, and the Lord shall lead them.

#### COMMENTS

A word must be said here regarding the textual unity of the Scriptures. The sudden shift from threats and warnings of doom to glowing promises of restoration is seen by some scholars as evidences that the book of Micah was not actually written by the prophet, or that it was not all written by the same man no matter what his identity. An example of this is seen in Professor J. E. McFayden's statement made as part of his comments on *Micah 2:12-13*. Dr. McFayden wrote, "It is

curious to find so gracious a promise following immediately upon denunciation and threat. This, however, is not an uncommon feature in prophecy. Sometimes it is open to suppose the promise was appended by a later hand: here, the scattered sheep seem to suggest the Exile, note that a century after Micah's time . . . whoever added these and similar promises was inspired by the sound conviction that threat and disaster could never exhaust the whole purpose of God."

The idea that, because the stern judgements of the prophet are interspersed with promises, the book must have been compiled by an editor, completely fails to grasp the distinction in the mind of the prophet between the unfaithful majority who are the objects of God's wrath and the faithful remnant who are the recipients of His promises.

The idea of a restored remnant presupposes the capture and destruction of the political commonwealth and the rejection of the race *per se*. If it was ever in the purpose of God to redeem a total political commonwealth or a race as an ethnic unit, that concept is abandoned with the introduction of the remnant idea. Few real students of the Bible believe such was *ever* the intent of God in the nation or race.

The remnant concept so dominated the thought of Isaiah that he named his son *Shear-Jashub*, "the Salvation of the Remnant." (Cf. *Isaiah* 7:3; 8:2,18; 9:12; 2:21; 6:9-13) It is not strange to find the same idea voiced by Isaiah's contemporaries such as Micah.

In *Romans* 11:5, Paul refers to *Isaiah* 10:22 in his exposition of the final grafting together of the faithful Gentiles and the faithful remnant of Israel into a single people of God. In referring to the rejection of the race and commonwealth *per se*, Paul insists that God has not rejected His true people.

In identifying the remnant, as distinct from the whole of the race and nation descended from Abraham, Paul refers to Elijah's "seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to Baal," *ie.* those Israelites indeed who had refused to compromise their covenant relationship to Jehovah. So, says Paul, the present remnant (the faithful of the first century) is the people chosen by the grace of God. This choice, or "election," of grace is everywhere in the Bible related to the covenant.

Paul's argument is that God has not repudiated His true people, in allowing the Gentiles access to the ranks of the election. He has rather identified them! His true people, the real Israel of God prior to the beginning of the gospel age as well as now, are not marked off from other men by their semetic ancestry or their national citizenship. They are those within the national-racial structure of the commonwealth, as well as those Jews now citizens of other nations, who are



faithful to the covenant of God. As Barclay has it, "The prophet began to see that there never was a time, and there never would be a time, when the whole nation was true to God, but at the same time, always within the nation there was a remnant left who had not forsaken their loyalty or compromised their faith."

*Amos 9:8-10* sees the separation of the remnant from the race. *Zephaniah 3:12-13* sees the gathering of the remnant people from among the dispersed Jews throughout the world. *Ezekiel 14:14,20,22* sees salvation itself not as a national matter but as an individual matter; not determined by racial origins of family heredity, but based on personal righteousness. Righteousness which is acceptable to God is always related to God through the covenant on the basis of obedient faith. All else, as Isaiah says "is as filthy rags."

As we have seen, Isaiah's entire concept of the people of God is dominated by the remnant idea.

In our present text, and later in chapter 5, verse three, Micah conceives of God gathering the remnant first from Babylon and then in specific Messianic terms.

The threats against the northern and southern kingdoms, coupled with the promises of salvation to the faithful remnant should serve a real purpose today. We need to know, for our own sakes, and to shout from the rooftops for the sake of others . . . NO nation or race is saved *per se*. God commands all men everywhere to repent. The remnant . . . the real Israel of God is the fellowship of individuals related to one another on the basis of a common covenant with God. God has not, and never will reject His people, regardless of outward appearances to the contrary. No nation or religious institution *is* his people. The remnant of the human race, as well as of the commonwealth of Israel is saved by grace through faith.

The sin of denominationalism is essentially the sin of counting oneself part of God's people on the basis of identity with a religious institution just as the Jews of Micah's day, and Jesus' day, and Paul's day, and one suspects even of our day, counted themselves as God's people because they were citizens of a kingdom whose identity was based on a religious law.

The sin of racism is the twin brother to the sin of denominationalism. The Jews could trace their ancestry back to a common origin in Abraham. God had worked with them, through the influence of faithful men, in special ways. To prevent the entrance of paganism into their thinking as a deterrent to faith, He had forbidden them to marry non-Hebrew mates. All this and many other similar factors combined

to bring them to the conclusion that *as a race* God considered the Hebrews superior to all others. During the reign of terror that was Nazi Germany this race found itself threatened with extinction by the very same kind of thinking that historically they had exercised toward other races and which they today evidence toward their middle-eastern neighbors. The conclusion of the Christian Gospel is that, among God's people there is no East or West, North or South, Jew or Greek, Black or White. God's covenant people are one in the promised Seed of Abraham.

Micah's first mention of the remnant has as its primary concern the promise that God's people would not be brought to extinction in the judgements just pronounced. Rather, a remnant would return from the captivity. The restoration, as history shows, was to be only partial. The deeper meaning of the words; "I will assemble, O Jacob, all of thee . . ." is to be realized in the Messianic fulfillment of the everlasting covenant. In chapters four and five Micah will expound this theme in some depth.

Those who did return from Babylon were Judah, Benjamin, and Levi, the components of the southern kingdom, which God had preserved for His covenant purposes. (Cf. *I Kings* 12:23-24) It is doubtful if even all of these who returned were true Israelites in the covenant sense of the word. At the beginning of the nation, all its people had been given the opportunity to be true Israel. From the captivity on, Israel's national identity was (and is) important *only* as it bears directly on the fulfillment of the everlasting covenant.

Another indication of the Messianic overtones of Micah's remnant is the "great noise by reason of the multitude of men." This would seem to indicate a much more numerous gathering than the faithful few within the small number who actually returned after the captivity. The terminology is more reminiscent of the "multitude whom no man could number," *ie.* all God's covenant people through all time, finally gathered together in His presence. (Cf. *Revelation* 7:9)

In connection with the remnant, Micah pictures Jehovah by the use of three figures; the *shepherd*, the *breaker* (or lead ram), and the *king*. He is pictured as the shepherd of the "sheep of Bozrah." "The sheep of Bozrah" was a popular saying, like the "kine of Bashan" (*Amos* 4:1), and alludes to the fine flocks which were the wealth of Bozrah, a key city of Moab. Jehovah is pictured as shepherd of the finest of flocks, and the remnant is that flock.

The "breaker," or lead ram, was the ram who went before the flock to butt or break down any and all barriers. So the Lord, leader

of the remnant flock, will break through all barriers to the ultimate accomplishment of God's purpose in the covenant people. "If God be for us, who can stand against us?"

The Messianic overtones expressed in the figure of the Lord passing as king before the remnant are obvious. It was in David particularly that the Messianic prophecies of the Lord's kingship found their personification. From David's reign on, the Messiah was expected to sit upon "the throne of His father David." There have been many and conflicting ideas as to the nature of His kingship and His kingdom, but there is a unanimity of conviction among God's people that the Lord *is* King over His people.

Beginning with Abraham and the Patriarchs, the covenant emphasis was nearly, if not entirely, upon the development of a people. In David is added the idea that this people are to compose a kingdom. The "king idea," which became the obsession of the first century Jew, was introduced by God only after He had made it crystal clear that all His dealings with Israel, including the establishment of a king over them, were primarily concerned with the fulfillment of His promise to Abraham to bless all the people of the earth, through the people of the covenant.

David was taken from his father's pasture to become a prince over the people of God. To this end God was with him and reduced his enemies to defeat. For this reason God made the name of David ring out even above that of Moses in the assemblies of Israel. And it was for the accomplishment of His eternal purpose that the Lord promised David, "And it shall come to pass when the days are fulfilled that thou must go to thy fathers, that I will set up thy seed after thee who shall be of thy sons and I shall establish his kingdom . . . and his throne shall be established forever." (*I Chronicles 17:7-14*)

Two things are to be noted here. *First*, the throne of the son of David is to be established forever. In view of what happened just following the death of Solomon, who succeeded David on his earthly throne, and of the subsequent desolation of the commonwealth, the fulfillment of God's promise to David must be found elsewhere than in the perpetuation of an earthly dynasty. The eternal, or everlasting throne of David is to find its fulfillment in the King of Kings.

*Secondly*, the promise to David that his seed would sit upon the everlasting throne of His people was unconditional! The promises made to Abraham were conditioned by obedient faith. Among these was the promise of a land in which to dwell. To break the covenant was to for-

feit all claim to the land. God's determination to set the seed of David over this faithful people was absolute and unconditioned.

From David on the faithful within Israel, who were of the Davidic line became the particular branch of Abraham's progeny through which the Promised Seed would come.

It must be kept in mind that the Davidic covenant is simply the Abrahamic covenant restated. As with the conditional promise to Abraham, so the unconditional promise to David had universal purposes in the blessing of all men. That Micah was aware of this is obvious in *Micah 4:1-ff* as we shall see in a later chapter. In his presentation of the fulfillment of the Kingly promise, Matthew identifies the two covenants as one and the same. *Matthew 1:1* begins the genealogy of the Eternal King with the words, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of *David*, the Son of *Abraham*." (Italics mine)

From the demise of Solomon and the division of the kingdom onward, God preserved the institutions of Israel "for David's sake." The southern kingdom is established to preserve the Davidic line (*I Kings 11:11-13*) Jerusalem was saved "for David's sake." (*II Kings 19:34*) Throughout the prophets, the Messianic hope is Davidic. (Cp. *Isaiah 55:1-3*, *Amos 9:11*, *Hosea 3:5*, *Zechariah 12:17-21*)

And so, for at least a thousand years before the birth of the King, God's concern is seen to be not with the race or the national political entity but with the unconditional promise to set the Seed of David upon the throne of His people. More than ever, the people existed for the sake of the Seed. When the time came that the Jews as a nation and the religious institutions of that nation rejected the Christ, God would cast them off. But the promise which was the heart of the covenant would be fulfilled through a covenant remnant ruled by the promised Seed of David.

It does violence to the awesomeness of this promise to limit it to *any earthly experience* of God and His people.

## Chapter VII—Questions

### Second Cycle

1. Discuss the relationships between individual and "social" sins.
2. Discuss "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely" in reference to the situation denounced by Micah.
3. How do power and authority test a persons character?
4. Discuss Pascal's statement "power without justice is tyranny."