

The Herald Of Christ's Kingdom

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The Minor Prophets

EDITOR'S JOURNAL

"For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit."— 2Peter 1:21 (ASV)

Prophecy covers fully one-fourth of the Bible's pages. The prophet in ancient Israel was a commentator on current events and often functioned as the conscience of the nation. As a result, he generally spoke to the situations of his time. However, as Peter notes in the text above, they were moved in these utterances by the holy spirit. This overruling gives their prophecies significance to later events. Thus a study in prophecy requires at the same time a study in history, linking the events of the past to the greater realities of the future.

Professor Unger in his Bible Dictionary says of the prophetic office, "The prophets frequently appeared in the role of social and political reformers, stirring preachers of righteousness and religious revivalists, in addition to being predictors of judgment or blessing, as the occasion demanded. The prophet's message was ever religious and spiritual, announcing the will of God to men and calling for complete obedience. . . . The genius of prophecy was . . . a prediction of the future arising from the conditions of the present and was inseparably connected with the profoundly religious and spiritual message the prophet was called to proclaim to his own generation."

They were bold men. They spoke out relentlessly against national sins and individual laxity. They were often persecuted by those in authority. Ignoble kings replaced them with false prophets whose loyalty they bought by putting them on the royal payroll. God's prophets were, perhaps, the most influential men in ancient Israel.

The last twelve books of the Old Testaments are called the "minor prophets." The term "minor" hardly fits the group. Their message had a major effect. The term is given, perhaps, to distinguish them from the much longer books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Two of these "minor prophets," Hosea and Zechariah, even contain more chapters than Daniel, the last of the major prophets.

In this issue of **THE HERALD** several of the books of these prophets are examined. These are not meant to be exhaustive treatments, nor is there space to scrutinize all of their writings. The choice of which ones to look at in detail was arbitrary. You will find articles on Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Haggai.

Not all "minor" prophets wrote books. A few are not even mentioned by name. Not all were men. Deborah and Huldah were notable among the female prophets. The verse by verse Bible study deals with one prophecy by an unnamed woman, probably Bathsheba, whose prophetic words are recorded in the last chapter of the book of Proverbs. The article examining her words is entitled Wise Words to a Wayward Son.

Hopefully this issue can incite our readers to a more diligent study of these shorter books of the Bible as the editors place these articles before you. As one of these so-called "minor prophets" has written, "Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7).

The Book of Joel

Plowshares Into Swords

"Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare war . . . Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, 'I am a warrior.'"—Joel 3:9,10 (Revised Standard Version)

Michael Nekora

The words of Joel seem quite contemporary. Countries once considered weak are now the main buyers of implements of war. Consider India. More than most, India needs plowshares and pruning hooks to provide food for her countless millions. Yet she spends huge amounts of money to develop a nuclear capability, believing that defense against her enemies should be her first priority. It is the day of the Lord and his great army, and that is the message of the prophet Joel.

Locusts

The beginning of Joel's prophecy concerns a plague of locusts. He talks about an unprecedented plague of four different kinds of locusts: the cutting, the swarming, the hopping, and the destroying (according to the RSV). In chapter two they are likened to a devouring fire, to war horses, to a powerful army. The major question presented by this description is whether Joel is describing literal locusts or if he is using them as a symbol of something else. Some commentators think there was an actual plague that came upon Israel in Joel's time. Others think Joel is using locusts as an allegory for an enemy that would descend upon the people. Both viewpoints may be correct.

Joel starts by saying, in effect, "You've seen this with your own eyes. It is so significant it should be passed on from one generation to another." This supports the idea that the plague was literal, one of many punishments God permitted upon his disobedient people. But Joel appears to use this plague as a symbol of the great destruction to be visited upon the earth in the great time of trouble: "The Lord utters his voice before his army, for his host is exceedingly great; he that executes his word is powerful. For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; who can endure it?" (Joel 2:11).

The same kind of pictorial language is used in Revelation to describe what happens when the fifth angel sounds his trumpet: "And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold" (Rev. 9:3, 7)

Few people believe this text refers to literal locusts. Rather they symbolize a great destructive force. Note that verse 4 says the "locusts" were not to hurt grass, trees, or green things—the very object of literal locusts. Joel too uses locusts symbolically.

Consider this verse: "I will remove the northerner far from you and drive him into a parched and desolate land" (Joel 2:20). Locusts do not come from the north in middle eastern lands. They come from the south and southeast. But in many places a destructive force that comes against Israel in the great time of trouble is said to come from the "north":

"Then the Lord said unto me, Out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land. For, lo, I will call all the families of the kingdoms of the north, saith the Lord; and they shall come, and they shall set every one his throne at the entering of the gates of Jerusalem and against all the walls thereof round about, and against all the cities of Judah" (Jer. 1:14,15).

To be certain we understand, Joel repeats his message using plain language: "For behold, in those days and at that time when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat and I will enter into judgment with them there on account of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations and have divided up my land" (Joel 3:1, 2)

The word "Jehoshaphat" means "Jehovah judged." There is no other reference to this valley except in the book of Joel. But there are many other references to the great "day of the Lord" and the battle of that time.

Day of the Lord

"And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon. . . . And there were voices and thunders and lightnings and there was a great earthquake such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake and so great" (Rev. 16:16, 18).

"And it shall come to pass in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. . . . In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem . . . in the valley of Megiddon" (Zech. 12:9, 11).

This is where we get the expression "the battle of Armageddon." It is the great time of trouble that ends the Gospel age. Joel calls it the "day of the Lord" and uses that expression five times in the 73 verses of his book. John uses a similar expression in Revelation when he says "to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty" (16:14).

This was a common theme among the Old Testament prophets. Nearly all of them talk about this period of time.

"Let the nations bestir themselves and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the nations round about. Put in the sickle for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the wine press is full. The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision" (3:12-14).

These multitudes constitute the Lord's great army. Although Joel 2:25 says the locusts are the Lord's great army, we believe he is using this plague as an allegory for the multitudes caught up in the battle of Armageddon. This is made clear in the second chapter: "Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful people; their like has never been from of old nor will be again after them through the years of all generations. The Lord utters his voice before his army, for his host is exceedingly great" (2:2, 11).

It reminds us of the words of Jesus: "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matt. 24:21).

When these multitudes come up against Jerusalem, it is not with the idea of serving God. Yet it does accomplish his purpose.

Blessings of the Kingdom

God's plan does not end with the destruction of that great day. In fact, it is just beginning. The united testimony of the prophets is that Israel will be restored to a condition of prosperity, and blessings will flow to all the world of mankind in the kingdom arrangement. The Battle of Armageddon humbles the world and does away with human institutions.

"I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel and rebuild them as they were at first. . . . And this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I do for them" (Jer. 33:7, 9 [RSV]).

Joel also speaks of the blessings of the kingdom. "And in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water; and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord" (3:18).

Although Joel talks about the terrible punishments from the hand of the Lord, he holds out a hope of escape: "And it shall come to pass that all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered" (2:32).

Joel certainly is not suggesting a "last resort" call for help. The Pharisees were good at outward appearances although their hearts were far from God. Joel saw the same things in his time and wrote: "Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments" (2:12, 13).

In other words, examine your heart attitude and forget about making an outward show of contrition. Only one's true heart attitude has value to God.

Peter at Pentecost

When the holy spirit came upon the assembled disciples on the day of Pentecost, the people wondered what was happening. To explain it Peter quotes five verses from Joel:

"This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel: And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my spirit and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:16-18).

Because God was clearly not pouring out his spirit "upon all flesh" at Pentecost, why did Peter quote this text? One suggestion is that he did so because the principle applied: what would happen in the future was starting to happen then. The people saw evidence that God's spirit had come upon the few. Although Peter did not say so, the complete fulfillment of this prophecy would be later, in the kingdom, when God's spirit would come upon many.

Appendix 183 of *The Companion Bible* suggests a different answer. Because the context of Joel 2:26-28 shows that this pouring out of the spirit occurs after temporal blessings have returned to Israel, Peter is not saying that speaking in tongues fulfills Joel's prophecy. He is defending the disciples against a charge of drunkenness by saying that what is happening then is like what will happen in the future. Just as one could never sustain a charge of drunkenness against those upon whom the spirit will be poured in the future, in like manner it cannot be sustained against these who have received God's spirit. Peter then goes on to urge repentance.

"And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. . . . For the promise is unto you and to your children and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:21, 39).

Peter here gives the first hint that the promise might not be the exclusive possession of the Jews. It will be in the Millennial age that God will pour out his spirit on all flesh. It will be the same spirit coming from the same source. Dreams and visions symbolize communication between God and all mankind in the kingdom, something the world has never had before. Then will be fulfilled the "wish" of Moses: "And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them" (Num. 11:29).

Key Verses from Joel

"The word of the Lord came to Joel" (1:1) It was Joel's pen but it was God's word!

"Blow the trumpet in Zion, sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near" (2:1).

"Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me . . . and rend your hearts and not your garments" (2:12).

"Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, I am a warrior" (3:10).

"Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision" (3:14)!

"And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh" (2:28).

The theme of the book of Joel is the Day of the Lord and his great army: first punishment, then blessing. And we see the preparations on every side for this great battle. But afterward, the prophecy of Isaiah will be fulfilled: "And he shall judge among the nations and shall rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation neither shall they learn war any more" (Isa 2:4).

Obadiah

The Punishment of Edom

"Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because that Edom hath dealt against the house of Judah by taking vengeance, and hath greatly offended, and revenged himself upon them; Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; I will also stretch out mine hand upon Edom, and will cut off man and beast from it; and I will make it desolate from Teman; and they of Dedan shall fall by the sword."—Ezekiel 25:12, 13

Joseph Megacz

Very little is known about the prophet Obadiah, whose vision of the doom of Edom and the restoration of Israel comprise the shortest book of the Old Testament. Yet his message is not obscure, because his words are quoted and his thoughts are repeated by other Bible authors, such as Jeremiah and John the Revelator. We are going to analyze the book of Obadiah verse by verse and compare certain verses with passages in other books of the Bible, but first, a brief overview of the book. The book of Obadiah is twenty-one verses long. The first sixteen describe God's punishment upon Edom because of their actions when Israel was under attack by other enemies. The Edomites joined the attackers, taking a spoil in Jerusalem and blocking the way of the fleeing Jews, instead of helping their relatives, the Israelites.

The next five verses are a sharp contrast to verses 1-16, describing blessings from God upon the house of Jacob—deliverance from captivity, a return to their land, a triumph over their enemies, and holiness upon mount Zion.

Bible historians are divided between two possibilities as to when Obadiah wrote this prophecy. One group of historians says that the attack upon Israel mentioned by Obadiah was the attack of Nebuchadnezzar in 606 B.C., so they conclude Obadiah must have written his prophecy around 600 B.C.

The other group notes that the prophet Jeremiah quotes Obadiah, and since Jeremiah's prophecy is known to be shortly after 600 B.C., Obadiah's prophecy must have been much earlier, or else Jeremiah would not have known of Obadiah's vision. This group holds that the attack Obadiah describes was not by Nebuchadnezzar, but by the Philistines and other Arabians recorded in 2 Kings 21:16, 17. Such reasoning would put the time of Obadiah's writing back around 900 B.C., some 300 years before Nebuchadnezzar's attack.

From Obadiah's brief and vague description of the attack upon Israel, it is difficult to say whether it was Nebuchadnezzar's attack in 606 B.C. or some other. But there are some hints, and perhaps an interpretation of the symbolic aspect of Obadiah's prophecy will give us a clue.

The land of Edom lay to the south of the two tribe kingdom of Judah, between the Dead Sea and the Red Sea. Modern day Israel includes the western half of ancient Edom. The eastern half of ancient Edom is in modern day Jordan. The capital city of Edom was Bozrah.

Verses 1-9 of the prophecy tell of God's judgment and punishment of Edom. Edom is being spoken to here, so it should be remembered that the words thee or thy refer to Edom. The next seven verses tell why Edom is to be punished.

The Historical Setting

We will first note the literal historical events of verses 10-16 before applying any symbolic meaning to them.

In verse 10 Obadiah rebukes the Edomites for violence against their brethren the Israelites, referred to as "thy brother Jacob." Edom, of course, was the name given to Esau after he sold his brother Jacob his birthright as firstborn son of Isaac (Gen. 25:30). There was ill will between Jacob and Esau, and it continued through their children and their children's children for over a thousand years down to the time of Obadiah.

In verse 11, we suggest that the words, "in the day that thou stoodest on the other side" imply that, geographically, Edom was on one side of Jerusalem and the attackers came from the other side. Jerusalem was in between. Since Edom is to the south of Jerusalem, it would imply that the attackers came from the north. This thought is supported by the words of verse 14: "Neither shouldst thou have stood in the crossway, to cut off those of his that did escape; neither shouldst thou have delivered up those of his that did remain in the day of distress."

As the Jews fled southward to escape their attackers from the north, the Edomites, to the south, blocked their escape path and instead of helping the Jews to fight or at least hide they hunted them out of their hiding places, putting them into the hands of their attackers.

I think the attackers were the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar because they would have come from the north, while the Philistines and other Arabs would have come from the south, the same side as Edom. This would contradict the clues in verses 10 and 14 about Edom being on the opposite side of the attackers and hindering the fleeing Israelites. Israelites fleeing an attack of Philistines, who lived in what is today the Gaza strip, would have fled northward, not encountering any Edomites.

The Babylonians, on the other hand, would have followed the banks of the river Euphrates northward to the hills of modern day Turkey, then turned southward along the Mediterranean coast and attacked Israel from the north. The Edomites joined the attack both to curry favor with the attacking Babylonians as well as to carry off a spoil and avenge a thousand-year-old grievance. No doubt the Edomites were opportunists and did not stop to think that if Babylon was come to take a spoil of Israel, what would stop them from doing the same to Edom?

The Judgment on Edom

The Babylonians first welcomed the alliance with the Edomites against Israel, then they turned and conquered them also (vs.1-7). "The vision of Obadiah: Thus saith the Lord GOD concerning Edom; We have heard a rumor from the LORD, and an ambassador is sent among the heathen, Arise ye, and let us rise up against her in battle. . . . All the men of thy confederacy have brought thee even to the border: the men that were at peace with thee have deceived thee, and prevailed against thee; they that eat thy bread have laid a wound under thee: there is none understanding in him" (vs. 1, 7).

The conquest was complete. "If thieves came to thee, if robbers by night, (how art thou cut off!) would they not have stolen till they had enough? if the grapegatherers came to thee, would they not leave some grapes?" (v. 5). Mere thieves would have been easier on Edom. Thieves take as much as they can carry and leave the rest. Similarly harvest workers take most of the grapes but leave some grapes, or gleanings as in the margin. But Babylon left nothing after its conquest of Edom. The once proud Edomites of verses 3 and 4 were cut off completely forever as we read in verses 8 and 9. Edom is no more. Her treachery in assisting the Babylonians against their brethren, the descendants of Jacob, was repaid in kind by Babylonian treachery of turning upon their former allies, the Edomites, and conquering them, too. Notice the last part of verse 15 again: "as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head."

The Symbolic Application

Corresponding to Obadiah 1 and 2 are Revelation 17:4, 16. "And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet color, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: . . . And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire."

Here the woman symbolizes Babylon and the beast represents the nations who were allied with the churches from A.D. 539 to A.D. 1799. Verse 16 describes an event still future after a second uniting of the church and state systems when the ten horns of the beast representing the ten divisions of Christendom, the people of the so-called Christian nations, rise up against the nominal church systems with destructive fury as verse 16 declares.

Obadiah 3 through 6 are almost word for word the same as Revelation 18:7, 8. "How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow. Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her." The completeness of the destruction is vividly described in both the Old and New Testament prophecies.

Obadiah 8 and 9, which speaks of the dismay of the leaders of Edom has its parallel in Revelation 18:9-11: "And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning, Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come. And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more."

Obadiah 10-14, which we considered in detail earlier speaks of the treachery Edom committed against their blood relations, natural Israel. Parallel to these verses are the many verses in Revelation that speak of the persecution of true spiritual Israel at the hands of the whore, the harlot, Babylon, nominal spiritual Israel. And among these scriptures is Revelation 18:24: "And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth."

Obadiah 15 and 16 are the last two verses in the first part of the prophet's vision which speak of the doom of Edom. Their parallel is in Revelation 18:3, 6: "For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. . . . Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double." In Obadiah's account, both ye, Edom, and the heathen which later rose up against Edom, drank the intoxicating wine of triumph and conquest over God's literal holy mountain, the city of Jerusalem in 606 B.C. In the Revelation 18 parallel passage, both the nominal churches and the civil governments drink the wine of fornication and celebrate their temporary triumph over the true church, the symbolic holy mountain of God. For a time, they drink together in unholy union of church and state. But at the end, as the sequence of Obadiah 16 indicates, the civil governments drink alone in the nominal church's place, "as ye have drunk," and then they (the heathen in verse 16 symbolizing the civil governments after the church systems are destroyed) "shall be as though they had not been" when the kingdom is established, and the nations are overthrown. The parallel passage to this is in Revelation 19:15-21. The parallels and similarities between Obadiah's vision of the doom of Edom and John the Revelator's vision of the destruction of Babylon are striking.

An Apparent Inconsistency

There is one apparent inconsistency in this application of the literal events in Obadiah. We said the literal country of Edom was attacked and destroyed by the literal country of Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar shortly after 606 B.C. Now if literal Edom symbolizes Babylon, who does literal Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar symbolize? Can Babylon attack Babylon?

Babylon is a term that has more than one meaning. Sometimes Babylon has a narrow, specific meaning, such as the Catholic church by itself or perhaps the Catholic and Protestant churches together. And sometimes Babylon has a wider or general meaning

including not only the Catholic and Protestant churches but also the nations and their civil organizations as well. So in Obadiah as in Revelation, we have a picture of the civil elements of Christendom rising up against the ecclesiastical elements with which it formerly cooperated.

Restoration

"But upon mount Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions. And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall kindle in them, and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau; for the LORD hath spoken it. And they of the south shall possess the mount of Esau; and they of the plain the Philistines: and they shall possess the fields of Ephraim, and the fields of Samaria: and Benjamin shall possess Gilead. And the captivity of this host of the children of Israel shall possess that of the Canaanites, even unto Zarephath; and the captivity of Jerusalem, which is in Sepharad, shall possess the cities of the south. And saviors shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the LORD'S." (vs. 17-21).

The return of the house of Jacob to its possessions of land mentioned in verse 17 had the beginning of a literal fulfillment in 536 B.C. when Cyrus the Persian gave his decree that Jews taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar could return to their former country. Verse 18 describes a vengeance of the Israelites upon the literal Edomites when they returned, and this may have had a literal fulfillment. The historian Josephus recounts how Judas Maccabeus led an army against the descendants of the few Edomites who survived Babylon's attack and slew most of them. The apocryphal books of first and second Maccabees also include a record of Edomites being taken captive into slavery to serve the Jews.

Verse 19 is interesting in that it describes the land Israel shall repossess with a description of the four points of the compass. Esau or Edom is the southern extremity, the Philistines as we said before were to the west in what is now the occupied Gaza strip, Ephraim was to the north of Jerusalem although there were tribes even further north than Ephraim, and Gilead was to the east, on the eastern bank of the Jordan river. Most but not all of this land Obadiah describes is presently part of the country of Israel or under its control, and we expect even more land and returning Jews to be added to that nation.

Verse 20 hints at this with the reference to the captivity of Jerusalem, which is in Sepharad. Bible expositors give various interpretations to the location of Sepharad. Some say Spain and France, far to the west, others say a region of Babylon near the Euphrates far to the east. Perhaps the vagueness of this reference, Sepharad, is meant to convey that wherever the captives are, from east to west, they will return. This and other prophecies of the return of the Jews to the land God gave them have yet to see their complete fulfillment. Then will come the full extent of "Jacob's Trouble" upon regathered Israel, followed by the establishment of the kingdom as verse 21 describes.

Earth's Kingdom Established

In the symbolic application of these final five verses of Obadiah, Mount Zion symbolizes the heavenly phase of the kingdom of God. When the kingdom on earth is established, deliverance, redemption from sin through Christ and the resurrection power, will issue forth from Mount Zion upon the inhabitants of earth. And there shall be holiness—righteousness— under the terms of the Messianic reign.

But before that kingdom of holiness is fully set up, verse 18 tells us that the last remnants of the old order, this present evil world, must be destroyed and swept away. Perhaps the house of Jacob and the house of Joseph mentioned in verse 18 refer to the restored nation of Israel and the resurrected ancient worthies respectively in their early work of drawing all nations to Jerusalem and putting down any last rebellion to the new kingdom arrangement. And when their work is done, "there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau," meaning that the last vestiges of Christendom will be done away with and the kingdom of peace and righteousness will be established, "for the Lord hath spoken it."

Symbolically, verse 19 seems to say that the kingdom's borders will extend throughout the world from north to south and east to west, including mountains, plains, fields and Gilead. It was in Gilead that healing balm was produced. Indeed the Kingdom will heal mankind of all their sin. The mention of the Philistines and Esau suggests that the former enemies of God will be brought under subjection to kingdom rule.

Verse 20 speaks of the returned captives of Israel: literally the exiles of the Babylonian captivity and symbolically all of mankind, which has been captive to Satan in the great prison house of death, the gates of which will be opened and all who are in their graves will come forth.

Obadiah saves the best and most beautiful words of his vision for last. The saviors of verse 21 are, in the writer's opinion, the ancient worthies—the earthly, visible representatives of the heavenly phase of the kingdom. The true saviors are of course our Lord Jesus and his bride, the church class, who will be priests and kings on mount Zion, in heaven. But the ancient worthies will be as judges on earth, what was formerly the mount of Esau, the old order. And the ancient worthies will instruct the people in righteousness and teach them to walk up the highway of holiness. What a beautiful picture of the kingdom!

A final comment about Obadiah has to do with the meaning of the prophet's name. The ending "IAH" means "of God." In Hebrew God's name is Yahweh or Yah for short. "Obad-i-jah" means "servant of God." The Arabic counterpart of Obadiah is Abd-u-Allah or Abdullah or Abdul, which is a common name in the Middle East.

Obadiah's name declared that he was a servant of the most high God. We likewise are servants of God. Obadiah was a prophet, an ambassador of God. We, likewise are ambassadors for Christ. Obadiah saw the persecution of Jerusalem and was given a vision

of the destruction of the old order of things as well as the establishment of the new. We are members of spiritual Israel and partakers of the sufferings of Christ, and we have the vision of the divine plan of the Ages as well as a more sure word of prophecy now in process of fulfillment, which will shortly culminate in the final destruction of the old order, the complete restoration of Israel, and the full establishment of the Kingdom of God.

Obadiah said in closing, "the Kingdom shall be the Lord's." This was Obadiah's vision; this is our vision as well.

Jonah

Three Galileans

"Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet."—John 7:52

Carl Hagensick

Scribes and Pharisees, the religious hierarchy of Jesus' day, looked down with great scorn on the people of Galilee. Many of the Galileans were not Hebrews. From the days of Joshua, many Canaanites continued to live there (Jud. 1:30-33). The people spoke with a distinct accent (Matt. 26:69, 73). The area was popularly known as "Galilee of the nations" (Isa. 9:1; Matt. 4:15). In colloquial terms, the Galileans were viewed as the "hill-billies" of their day.

While no future prophet was predicted to arise out of Galilee, two noted Old Testament prophets are identified with the area, Nahum and Jonah. Not only did they come from Galilee but their cities were closely connected to the life of Jesus.

Nahum was from the small village of Elkosh (Nahum 1:1), a small fishing village at the northeast corner of the Sea of Galilee. However, his preaching ministry may well have been in the larger city some six miles to the east, a city which still bears his name, Capernaum, or Kfar Naum ("city of Nahum").

Jonah was from another small village, Gath-Hepher (2 Kings 14:25). By the time of the first advent this village had disappeared and had been replaced by another one only three miles distant, Nazareth.

Thus we see the linkage between these three Galileans. Jonah was from the area of Jesus' boyhood home and Nahum preached where Jesus preached, in Capernaum.

Both Jonah and Nahum have two other points in common. They were both prophets to the northern kingdom of Israel and are the only minor prophets to address their prophecies to Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria.

While Nahum contented himself with remaining in Israel while prophesying the doom of Nineveh, his predecessor Jonah was sent from Israel to Assyria to preach his message of destruction, and succeeded in producing repentance.

The books which bear the names of these two prophets also show another striking difference. The book of Nahum, as the other books of the minor prophets, contains a detailed message from God pertaining to his subject. The book of Jonah, on the other hand, is written more as a history. Yet it is more than history, for it contains a prophecy in allegory, a prophecy that is acted upon a stage rather than spoken from a pulpit.

This article will concentrate on Jonah and that other Galilean he so aptly prefigured, Jesus of Nazareth.

Jonah, the Prophet

Jonah was a reluctant prophet and was in many ways an enigma. He was the only Hebrew prophet specifically sent to a heathen city; he was disobedient; he fled from his assigned mission. His mission was, however, successful; he achieved in Nineveh what few prophets ever achieved in Israel—repentance. His predictions failed to come to pass. He was sent to a wicked king of Israel—Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25) —for whom he prophesied prosperity, and that prophecy did come to pass.

The meaning of the names of the two Galilean prophets, Nahum and Jonah, were in sharp contrast to their messages of doom and destruction. The name Nahum means "compassionate." The name Jonah means "dove," the symbol of peace.

Jonah, the Story

The story related in the book that bears the name of Jonah is a simple one. Jonah, a prophet of God, is sent on a mission to Nineveh. Rather than accept, he flees in the opposite direction by taking a ship from Joppa heading for far-off Tarshish. A storm develops on the sea. After all attempts to save the ship appear to fail, Jonah is chosen by lot to be thrown overboard. A giant fish swallows him and after three days spews him out on dry land. Chastened, he makes the journey to Nineveh where he preaches a message of impending destruction. All of the inhabitants of the city repent and the destruction is averted. Frustrated by the fact that his predictions failed to be fulfilled, the reluctant prophet retires to a nearby hillside to mope and await further developments. There Jonah is given a lesson from God about compassion through the provision and later the removal of a sheltering gourd.

The drama unfolds as a four-act play, each chapter of the book requiring a different stage setting. In the first chapter, the setting is the seaport of Joppa and later in a boat on the Mediterranean. Chapter two occurs completely within the belly of a great fish. In chapter three the scene changes to the environs of Assyria in the capital city of Nineveh. The final scene, chapter four, takes place on a nearby hillside.

Jonah, the Interpretation

There are two clues to the interpretation of this prophecy. The first is given by Jesus in Matthew 12:39-41: "But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here." Here we are furnished a direct linkage between Jonah and Jesus.

The second clue is found in the meaning of Jonah's name, "dove." The dove is a symbol of the holy spirit of God. It is with this significance that we see it lighting upon Jesus at his baptism (Matt. 3:16), and flying forth from Noah's ark to bring the good news that it was safe to disembark (Gen. 8:8-12). It is in this symbology of the dove that we have a clue to the meaning of the book of Jonah. The message of the prophecy relates to the work of the holy spirit.

We suggest that the harmony between these two clues is that Jonah represents the action of those through whom the holy spirit operates at various periods of time. With this premise, we will proceed to examine the book of Jonah.

Ancient Israel was given a mission by God. As the natural seed of Abraham, they were to "bless all the families of the earth" (Gen. 22:18). Their prophets were led by the holy spirit (2 Peter 1:21). Through unfaithfulness they fled this mission, centering their efforts on preserving their "place and nation" (John 11:48-50).

In the second act of the drama, we see the holy spirit as it works through Jesus. Here we find the correspondence between Jonah and Jesus most striking. These parallels are strikingly stated in *The Bible with Notes* by Wordsworth, "As Jonah went from the wood of the ship into the depth of the sea, so Christ went from the wood of the cross into the depth of the earth. As Jonah gave himself to death for those who were tossed by the storm in the Mediterranean Sea, so Christ gave himself to death for those who are tossed by the storm in the seas of this world. As Jonah rose from the whale's belly and from the depth of the sea, so Christ rose from the dead. . . . The reality of the antitype confirms the historical truth of the type. Jonah is proved by Christ" (Vol. VI, Sec. II, p. 66).

In a larger sense, Jonah here represents not only Jesus but his followers as well. In a parallel illustration to the three days Jonah spent in the belly of the fish, Jesus spoke of the great temple of Herod being destroyed and that he would build it again in three days. John informs us that his listeners did not understand that he "spoke of the temple of his body" (John 2:21). While Jesus did receive a new spiritual resurrection body when raised from the grave, it is worth noting that, in the larger sense of the word, the entire church of Christ, "the body of Christ," will also be given similar spiritual resurrection bodies (1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 5:30; Col. 1:24). As Jesus spent parts of three literal days in "the belly of the earth," so his church has spent a part of three thousand-year days in the same condition (2 Pet. 3:8). As Jesus willingly let men throw him overboard into death, so those who follow him willingly surrender their lives even unto death, reckoning that "if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him" (2 Tim. 2:11).

The third act of the drama is yet to be enacted. It will be in the Millennial kingdom of Christ that a message will be given to all nations and repentance will follow. We are assured of this in the words of Isaiah 11:9, "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."

The final scene is the moral of the story and applies at all times, conveying the lesson that our God is a God of compassion. Another of God's prophets summarizes the principle behind this lesson. "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them" (Jer. 18:7-10).

Why Did Jonah Run?

Having looked at the overview of the book, we will proceed to specific areas. The first deals with the motivation for Jonah's flight. We are not left in doubt about this motive. It is clearly stated in Jonah 4:2, "And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil." (Emphasis added.)

Jonah did not flee because of the perils of the journey to Nineveh. Nor did he flee from the fear of what the Assyrians might do to him as a Hebrew prophet proclaiming destruction of their city. Jonah fled because of the grace of God! He had no desire to save the Ninevites. They were the enemies of Jonah's people of Israel. They had been rapacious in their attacks (2 Kings 8:12). Jonah desired their destruction. He was an Israelite nationalist. Yet he knew Jehovah was a God of compassion and infinite grace.

This is the closing lesson of the book. "And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?" (Jonah 4:11). The population of Nineveh proper at that time has been estimated at about 600,000 in the city and up to two million including the suburban environs. God was not calling Jonah's attention to the ignorance which all the people had of him. Rather, the term "that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand" was an idiom, meaning children who were as yet unable to discern between good and evil. They could not be held accountable for the crimes of their parents. Could not Jonah have compassion on these. And, if not on the children, what had the cattle done to merit their destruction?

The Great Fish

Much has been said of the great fish which swallowed Jonah. We will suffice it here to remark that parallel accounts have been recorded in New York newspapers as recently as 1911, and a very detailed account of a similar experience happening to a sailor, James Bartley, appears in the August 25, 1891 edition of the French *Journal des Debats*. A. O. Hudson, in his *The Mission of Jonah*, painstakingly reconstructs the story from the ancient secular historians Pliny, Strabo, Ovid, and Herodotus.

Three Days and Three Nights

Jesus said that "the sign of Jonah" would be that the "the Son of man [shall] be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Critics have pointed to the fact that if Jesus was buried at sundown on Friday and raised Sunday morning near sunrise he would have been in the tomb over only two nighttime periods (Friday and Saturday) and one daytime period (Saturday) for a total of approximately 36 to 38 hours.

Some commentators point out that "three days and three nights is a current Hebrew expression which does not describe with chronological exactness the space of seventy-two hours, but corresponds to our mode of designating time by such phrases as 'the day after tomorrow' or 'the day before yesterday.'" (1Sam. 30:1; comp. v. 12; Esth. 4:16; 5:1; Matt. 12:40)" (Lange, Commentary on Jonah, p. 25).

In the New Testament the term "the third day" is used some eleven times. It is worthy of note that on every occasion the three day period includes the betrayal in Gethsemane, the trial and scourging, as well as the actual crucifixion and burial.

In examining the term "in the heart of the earth" we note that it is not a literal expression. Jesus was not buried in the "heart" of the earth but laid in a cave tomb dug into the face of a hill. When Jonah was in "the belly of the fish" he was not dead. What was true of Jonah is that he was no longer in control of his own movements. Where the fish went, Jonah went. Similarly, when Jesus was arrested in the garden, he exclaimed, "this is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53). From that point onward the fate of Jesus was in the hands of others. Where they went, he went.

Dating the three days and three nights from his arrest lengthens the period "in the heart of the earth" by nearly 24 hours. The period still does not equal a full 72 hours, but does include portions of three calendar day periods (the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth of Nisan by Jewish reckoning).

The Size of Nineveh

Jonah 3:3 describes Nineveh as being a city of "three day's journey." The first century historian Diodorus Siculus in his *Bibliotheca Historica* describes Nineveh's walls as being "150 furlongs long and 90 broad, and 480 in compass; the walls 100 feet high, and so thick that three chariots might go a-breast upon them; on them were 1500 towers, each of them 200 feet high." Four hundred eighty Greek furlongs would be about 60 miles in circumference.

However recent archaeological digs have unearthed the walls of the city and found them to be only seven and a half miles in circumference. The harmony between the two views is apparently that there were inner city walls and then a second set of walls around the suburban area, including fields for crops to withstand any potential siege (*International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, "Nineveh").

The Conversion of Nineveh

Amazingly, a heathen city, especially one with its own gods and not recognizing Jehovah, repented after just a few days of preaching. However, their worship of these other gods could have made them amenable to the preaching of Jonah.

Camel caravans frequently traversed the trade routes between Egypt and Assyria. These would pass through the city of Joppa. Undoubtedly the miraculous deliverance of Jonah through the medium of a great fish would have become common gossip. This would have been reported by the caravan drivers in Assyria.

One of the chief gods in the Assyrian pantheon of deities was Rammon, or Rimmon. Rimmon the storm god was considered to be in control of cyclones, tempests, and rains. The fact that Jonah had been delivered from the midst of Rimmon's domain would certainly have yielded much to his stature. Therefore there is an ironic twist to the story of this prophet. His act of running from the grace of God may well have contributed to the success of his mission.

In Jonah 3:7 we read that even the cattle were to fast as a sign of the city's repentance. *The Biblical Encyclopedia* of McClintock and Strong, notes that "the compulsory mourning of the brute creation has at least one analogy in the lamentation made over the Persian general Masistius: 'The horses and beasts of burden were shaved' (*Herodotus*, ix, 24). According to Plutarch, also, Alexander commanded the observation of a similar custom on the death of Hephaestion" (Vol. IV, pp. 991, 992).

The Gourd and the Wind

In the final chapter, when Jonah climbs a nearby hill to see what God will do after he fails to destroy the city in forty days, a sheltering gourd is used to teach him a lesson. The heat is almost unbearable. The gourd is thought to really be the castor oil plant, a tree that usually grows eight to ten feet in height, but can reach as high as 40 feet in the tropics. Jonah was appreciative of its shade.

However, the gourd was attacked by a worm and withered overnight. Not only was the worm "prepared" by God for this very purpose but God also "prepared" a violent east wind to intensify the heat. All this was to prepare the reluctant prophet for the lesson: the Lord's primary concern is for the good of people—all people—and not just those of Israel.

The story of Jonah is bracketed by two east winds. In the first chapter an east wind caused the sailors to throw him overboard. In the final chapter an east wind enforced the lesson of the whole experience. What a wise teacher is our God! He repeats his lessons over and over until we learn from them. As Job wisely remarked, "Lo, all these things God worketh oftentimes with man" (Job 33:29).

Jonah boldly proclaimed: "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." Forty days passed, the prophecy failed of fulfillment. Forty years passed, the prophecy still was unfulfilled. But a time did come when God brought about the destruction of that great city through the invasion of the Babylonians.

God's words are sure of fulfillment. He may delay them for a season to give ample time for repentance. But they will be fulfilled. As another of God's prophets phrased it, "The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry" (Hab. 2:3).

Habakkuk

The Vision is Sure

*"Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he."
—Proverbs 29:18*

Charles Redeker

Habakkuk is considered one of the "minor" prophets of the Old Testament; his entire book consists of but three short chapters. But his inspired vision and pronouncements are by no means minor in their significance. They were designed to offer encouragement and strength to the household of faith in its deepest moments of distress.

This book gives insights into God's plan, teaching on time features, the permission of evil, the perseverance of the faithful, and special blessings to come. It does all this against a backdrop of Israel, with the immediate threat of an invasion by the despised Chaldeans (Babylonians)—a fierce and dreaded people from the east. And yet, remarkably, its message is coded in such a way as to elude the casual reader, to conceal its grander purpose, and veil a greater fulfillment.

The Prophet's Complaint

The book opens with the prophet's concern over the sins and decadence of his own people. The poor were being oppressed, the wealthy were cleverly circumventing the law for their own selfish ends. Moral behavior had dropped to an all time low, deceit and wrong doings were even exalted. How characteristic this has been of every nation in every age—and yet such were the shameful conditions flourishing among God's typical people. Even the priestly class had become corrupted and the people languished—where could they find relief? And so the prophet expectantly turns to God, appealing for an explanation of why such evil should be permitted. But surely he was not prepared for the answer that came from the Lord!

Starting in verse five, the Lord replies and instead of quieting the fears of the prophet, begins to detail what he would do. He would raise up the dreaded forces of the Babylonians and permit them ruthlessly to invade Judah and avenge God, although unwittingly, for the sins of his people. "Terrible and dreadful" would be their recompense, "for violence" would they come, their faces "as the east wind," "more fierce than the evening wolves," "deriding every stronghold," "gathering captivity as the sand."

At the time, this must have seemed like an incredible prophecy. The Babylonians were not yet recognized as a world power, for Egypt reigned supreme. Necho, King of Egypt, had seized the kingdoms around the Mediterranean area, and placed a puppet, Jehoiakim, on the throne of Judah. The Egyptian armies had proven themselves invincible and would surely defend Jerusalem from all enemies. Who, then, could believe such a forecast?

But in quick succession Nineveh fell to the advancing Babylonians and their ensuing victory over the Assyrians at Carchemish also meant the weakening of Egypt. Judah thereupon came under the sphere of Nebuchadnezzar and was forced to pay tribute after Jerusalem had been besieged and Jehoiakim bound. Within less than 20 years Jerusalem would be utterly devastated and the people taken captive.

Habakkuk understandably was perplexed by this revelation. While recognizing that Judah had been unfaithful and deserved punishment, he could not understand why the Lord would permit such a catastrophe at the hands of a nation even more wicked than they. Fervently he prayed: "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdeth thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?" (1:13).

And thus, the setting for the moving words of the second chapter.

A Vision of the End Time

In Habakkuk 2:1-3 we read:

"I will stand upon my watchpost
And will set myself upon the tower,
And I will watch to see—
What he will say unto me and
How I shall answer the objection raised,
Then the Lord answered me, saying,
Write down the vision
And make it plain upon tables,
That one may read it fluently.
For there is yet a vision for the appointed time,
And it speaketh of the end
And I will not deceive:
Though it [seem to] tarry, wait for it,
Because it will surely come,
It will not delay" (composite translation).

Certainly, that the prophet did not fully understand these words, and yet he surely received a blessing. In a general way God was revealing to Habakkuk that he had worked out a master plan for righting the wrongs and injustices of both the conqueror and the conquered of all nations in every age. In due time the details of this plan would be revealed and in the end its outworking ensured.

More specifically, we believe a major fulfillment of this prophecy is taking place in our day. In Hebrews 10:35-39, Paul quotes from Habakkuk and applies the vision to the second coming of Christ. Primarily we believe it is the promised kingdom, as it is inaugurated during the period of Christ's presence, that is alluded to by the prophet.

Many Bible Students feel that Pastor Charles Taze Russell was a faithful watchman upon the antitypical watchpost and upon the tower. He was privileged to "write down" a vision of biblical truth and "make it plain upon tables." The book *The Divine Plan of the Ages*, with its illuminating chart and explanation of the times and seasons, has served as a key for unlocking the Bible. God's loving plan of salvation and the truths of the ransom, restitution, high calling, and nearness of the kingdom have all been made plain.

But we notice that the prophecy seems to make reference to a time delay with respect to the fulfillment of the vision: "though it tarry, wait for it." We are keenly aware of the high hopes and expectations which have been set forth in the past by faithful and watchful followers for the deliverance of the church at various dates. With the benefit of hindsight, now we can see that these expectations of the church's exaltation and establishment of the kingdom were merely surmisings and honest deductions, but were not founded on clear scripture. Unquestionably, there was great disappointment, and the whole concept of a divinely planned earthly kingdom was discredited in the minds of the worldly-wise. But what a comfort the words of the prophecy bring to us today, who are still patiently waiting for the Lord's appointed time: "though it [seem to] tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not delay!"

Faith of the Just Rewarded

Verse four of chapter two contains these sublime words: "Behold the soul of the wicked one is disturbed and not at rest; but the righteous one ever liveth in his trustful faith" (composite translation).

Throughout the age these words have been true, that the just would live by their faith. This would not be by confidence in their own might or status but by faith in the promises of God. The Apostle Paul was so impressed by these words that he quoted them, and drew applications based upon them no less than three times (see Rom, 1:17; Gal. 3:11; and Heb. 10:38).

In the remaining verses of chapter two, there is set forth a five-fold woe against the proud invaders (vs. 6, 9, 12, 15, and 19). In considerable detail the insidious evils of the oppressor are spelled out. These descriptions are fitting not only of the Chaldeans of old but of the cruel and selfish power groups and evil institutions of our day and throughout history: "He increaseth that which is not his," "hast spoiled many nations," wreaked "violence to the land [and] city," "coveteth an evil covetousness . . . that he may set his nest on high," "cutting off many people and . . . sinned against thy soul," "buildeth a town with blood and establisheth a city by iniquity," giveth his neighbor drink [and is] filled with shame for glory."

The end of the oppressor is sure, for the Lord is sovereign over all and will work his righteous will in due time. Again we see illustrated the general principle that God will bring down the proud and honor the humble and upright. Happily, as the chapter closes, we are given a cursory glimpse of the beauties of the kingdom blessings. Verse 14 reads, "For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters

cover the sea," and verse 20, "But the Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him." God is to be universally worshipped by a grateful creation and all false gods and evil systems will be destroyed. What a contrast to present conditions, with the restless masses of humanity in open rebellion and a veritable famine in the land for spiritual truth and the knowledge of God. Preview of God's Mercies

The concluding chapter takes the form of a prayer by Habakkuk, which in the Hebrew is expressed in beautiful poetic style and sublime terms. By inspiration and the use of highly symbolic language, the prophet graphically portrays the day of Jehovah's vengeance when he punishes not only his wayward typical people but all the nations of the earth. As all evil systems are swept away by the Lord's indignation, the mountains (kingdoms) shake, the tents of Cushan are afflicted, and the curtains of Midian tremble—picturing God's interposition and deliverance of his people from their foes. In the darkness of the mounting clouds of trouble, even the sun and moon stand still: the light of the gospel and its reflection in the law are, for a time, not discernible. But the destructive work of that day is designed merely to prepare the earth for the restoration of righteousness and the blessing of all mankind to take place in the kingdom to follow.

Early in his closing prayer, the prophet, fearful of the calamity about to befall Judah, pleads to God: "O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known: in wrath remember mercy" (3:2).

"The midst of the years" may refer to the chronological mid-point in God's 7,000 year program of redemption, extending from the fall of Adam to the restoration at the close of the mediatorial reign. Habakkuk may have been requesting, in the very day of God's wrath in which he lived, that God would demonstrate his love and mercy toward mankind in some tangible way. A majority of Bible scholars think that Habakkuk prophesied early in the reign of Jehoiakim, about 20 years prior to Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem. According to the Bowen/Russell chronology (Volume 2 of Studies in the Scriptures), the mid-point of the 7,000 year period was 626 years plus three months prior to the B.C.-A.D. dividing point, or the year 627 B.C. How fascinating that, if we trace out the actual years of Jehoiakim's reign (628-618 B.C., according to the above chronological framework), the mid-point of the 7,000 years falls precisely within this range.

We think the Lord heeded the prophet's request to make known his mercy "in the midst of the years" in several ways. The mid-point of the 7,000 year plan of God brought to a close the 3,500 year "evening" (or beginning) aspect of the system of types that foreshadowed grander things to come and opened up the 3,500 year "morning" (or later) system of realities and fulfillments. Thus, in the very day of God's wrath upon Israel, the grand hope of that which is to come, based upon the sure word of God's promise, was highlighted.

A vision of the end time kingdom had already been given; now the Lord enlarged upon it by revealing the role of the Anointed One: "Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy

people, even for salvation with thine anointed; thou woudest the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck" (3:13).

Our Lord was revealing in couched terms that his anointed (the Messiah, the Christ to come) would carry out the key role in the divine plan of salvation. We, of course, can appreciate this more fully in the aftermath of our Lord's first advent and the teachings of the New Testament. We see Jesus, who gave himself as the ransom, as that "once for all" sacrifice so crucial to the outworking of redemption for the human creation. And we also have greater knowledge of how our Lord eventually will deal the death blow to the wicked one who for a time has been permitted to usurp God's authority in ruling the earth. Satan's empire also is to be thoroughly demolished, from "the foundation to the neck."

A Final Admonition

The name Habakkuk means "an embracer, one who takes another in his arms and presses him to his heart." Surely such a name for this prophet could not have been by coincidence. In the closest, most tender terms Habakkuk offers his message of comfort for us today. "For there is yet a vision for the appointed time, and it speaketh of the end, and it will not deceive." As the Lord's people, let us respond to the prophet's embrace and ever be mindful of the vision of the kingdom in all its beauty. This vision has not deceived our predecessors laboring through the harvest period; neither does it deceive us today.

May we emulate the prophet who, though he began his final prayer with trembling, ended in a song of triumph: "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (3:17, 18). The prophet's faith was so well established that he could reach out in rejoicing to the fulfillment of the vision, even though its tangible evidences seemed elusive. It mattered not that the prosperity of Israel would tarry; that the church would not be yet blessing the world and seemed impotent and ineffective; nor that mankind's restoration to perfection remained an unaccomplished goal. May Habakkuk's confident faith in the sure outworking of the Father's plans be our portion as well!

Zephaniah

Removing All Things

***"I will completely remove all things from the face of the earth, declares the Lord."—
Zephaniah 1:2 NAS***

Leonard Griehs

What a powerful statement God makes in this opening scripture! If Zephaniah's prophecy referred only to his own day—a few years before Israel's captivity in Babylon—then it was never fulfilled. Perhaps it might have seemed to the two-tribe kingdom of Judah that everything was gone when it went into captivity, but we must conclude that this prophecy goes beyond the days of Zephaniah into a time still in our future and beyond the land of Israel into our own world.

The overthrow of Israel which Zephaniah prophesies must refer to the divine overthrow of all evil and evil institutions. This attaches great meaning to the prophecy for our own day.

The Prophet

"Zephaniah son of Cushi, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of Judah."— Zephaniah 1:1

Zephaniah was probably the first of the true prophets of Jehovah to break silence after the reign of Manasseh. His first chapter, detailing the worship of Baal and the stars, indicates that his initial proclamations were given before Josiah's reformation in 622 B.C. When King Josiah instituted a sweeping reformation of worship in Judah, which ended with the restoration of Passover (2 Kings 23:3-23), Baal worship was officially abolished. If Josiah's reforms stirred Jeremiah to prophesy, it may well have been Zephaniah who stirred Josiah to consider reforms.

While it cannot be determined where Zephaniah lived precisely, his language suggests a residence in Jerusalem. Here the prophet would have observed very carefully the attitude and degradation of the people, and his words would have come from a base of personal observation.

This first verse is all that is known about the prophet and his family. His name means "Yah(weh) protects." Perhaps it was derived from some early form of confession—"Zaphon is Yahweh"—Zaphon being a Canaanite mountain associated with the Lord. With the exception of Zechariah, Zephaniah's introduction is unlike that of any other prophet. He goes far beyond the usual custom of tracing ancestry only to his father. He goes back to his great-grandfather—a man named Hezekiah. Could this be the Hezekiah who was the great king and deliverer of Judah during the late eighth century when Isaiah

was active? (2Kings 18-20). If so, Zephaniah was of royal blood and would have a special place in the heart of Josiah!

Hezekiah, however, was a common name and the prophet never identifies his ancestor as a king. Since Zephaniah's father, Cushi, means "Cushite" or "Ethiopian," it may be that Zephaniah traces his ancestry four generations to prove that he is legitimately an Israelite. Whichever might be true, it is evident that the prophet had a tremendous impact on young king Josiah.

Date Of Prophecy

According to the first verse, Zephaniah's ministry took place during the reign of Josiah. In 2 Chronicles 34, we are told that Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign and that he reigned for 31 years. There is abundant historical evidence, discovered only in recent times, that King Josiah was killed by Pharaoh Necho in 609 B.C. Jehoiaquim then took the throne and three years later subjected himself to the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, thus ending the independent monarchy of Judah.

Zephaniah began his preaching sometime after Josiah ascended to the throne but before his reforms began. According to 1 Chronicles 34:3, Josiah sought the Lord in the eighth year of his reign; in the twelfth year he instituted the cleansing of the land from idols.

Putting these dates together, we can determine precisely when Zephaniah prophesied:

Event Year B.C. Josiah reign begins 640 Turns to the Lord— eighth year of his reign
632 Reforms begin— twelfth year of his reign 628 Year of death 609

Zephaniah's ministry most likely spanned the four years between 632 and 628 B.C. It is important to know that Zephaniah preached precisely at this time because his prophecy occurs at a time when the king is preparing to make sweeping changes in the land. This time with the prophet would have been used to prepare the king for his work through a careful restoration of the truth of the law and the one true God. During this time Josiah's high priest Hilkiah discovered the book of the law in the temple. He did not even know what it was! The prophet's words for those few short years helped to restore the worship of the king's court and prepare them for the great reformation.

Similarly, the end time prophecies of Zephaniah apply when God's appointed ruler, Jesus, prepares to make sweeping changes throughout the earth. He first restores true worship within his own house, preparing his church for their role in the great restoration of earth. If we consider the prophecy in this light, how much more relevant becomes Zephaniah and the other minor prophets to our own study and consideration!

Outline Of The Prophecy

Zephaniah's most striking words appear early and they alert us to the nature and significance of his prophecy. Not only does he predict punishment upon Jerusalem but, as

indicated in the theme text, upon the whole world. His prophecy centers around "The day of the Lord." Against the backdrop of Jerusalem, Zephaniah predicts world-wide changes. The overthrow of Israel for its sins is important, but it only serves as an illustration of a far greater reformation—the divine overthrow of evil and evil institutions at the end of this present age and the restoration of true worship in the promised millennium.

Note the world-wide context of the prophecy in this outline of the book:

I. God's Warning of Worldwide Judgment (1:2-3:8)

A. God's day of judgment coming (1:2-2:3)

1. His judgment includes all mankind (1:2, 3)
2. His judgment includes his own people who forsake him (1:4-6)
3. The Day of the Lord is the day of God's judgment (1:7-11)
4. God's skeptics will see him in action on his day (1:12-13)
5. God's wrath will be poured out against sin on that day (1:14-17)
6. Wealth is good for nothing on his day (1:18)
7. God calls his humble people to seek him before the coming day (2:1-3)

B. God's judgment will subject his enemies and bless the remnant of his people (2:4-15)

C. God's righteous justice will be impartial (3:1-8)

II. God Promises to form the people into his own special people (3:9-20)

A. The nations will call on God (3:9-10)

B. A purified remnant will worship him in humility and with joy (3:11-13)

C. God will remove his people's fears through the King's reign (3:14-17)

D. His oppressed people, Israel, will be exalted (3:18-20)

Truly Zephaniah's prophecy goes beyond the events of his day!

The Prophecy Given in Seven Discourses

The structure of Zephaniah is unlike any other prophecy. While other prophets speak directly to the people of Israel or Judah, this book is a dialogue between God and the prophet. Six separate speeches occur in which God's statements are answered by the prophet—followed by a seventh, the last one, which contains only God's statement concerning the salvation and blessing of Israel with no response from the prophet.

Zephaniah can be likened to the end-of-the-age true Christians who proclaim God's coming judgment. This statement about the blessing of Israel coming from God only suggests a fulfillment when the last of these Christians are no longer present and shortly before the overthrow of all evil.

In the immediate context, it is Zephaniah the prophet who understands the significance of God's message and interprets it for the people surrounding him. We can here only briefly examine these six conversations between God and the prophet.

1. God's speech (1:2-6) announces that his judgment is to be over all creation. Zephaniah calls the world to silence (1:7) to have them note that a change will occur and indicates a frame of reference for the sequence of events that will follow. He puts a name on the judgment: "the day of the Lord."

2. God's anger increases as he sees the sins of the people, especially those with power over the people (1:8-13), and he condemns those who have used their wealth to cause evil. Zephaniah expands his picture of the day of the Lord (1:14-16). It will be particularly hard on those who have oppressed the people. Revolution and social uprising will be the rule of the day.

3. God insists that sin will cost the people their life (1:17) despite their efforts to bring reform. Zephaniah incorporates many other nations besides Israel in the condemnation. The four cities of the Philistines are mentioned in 2:4 to indicate the world-wide significance of God's judgment; however, the humble will be at rest and will escape (1:18-2:7).

4. God continues the message (2:8-10) by pronouncing judgment on Ammon and Moab for their pride; their land would be taken away and possessed by their enemy, Israel. Zephaniah notes that the nations will be brought low and expected to worship God (2:11).

5. God includes Ethiopia to the south in the judgment (2:12), indicating the utmost area of the known world. Zephaniah includes Assyria as being totally devastated alongside Israel (2:13-3:5). The ruins of the city will be a spectacle for all to see, reminiscent of the prophecies of Revelation, that the great city of Babylon will be laid waste and open for all to see.

6. God's discourse shows a resolution to the problem (3:6-13) by the execution of judgment and destruction, followed by mercy; Zephaniah calls Israel to rejoice in God's presence with them (3:14-17). God's judgment causes severe strain on the powerful of the world, but his people rejoice to see the final overthrow of sin and the blessing of the people.

God's last discourse (3:18-20) summarizes the salvation he promises Israel, delivering her from oppression and restoring those who had been dispersed. Zephaniah has no response as the judgment is over and he is no longer on the scene.

While these discourses contain many specifics worth considering, we have space here to highlight only a select few having a significance in the prophecy and having a special relevance for our day.

The Day of the Lord

The early introduction of this phrase, the "day of the Lord," indicates its special significance to the prophecy. It occurs in other prophecies as well and is always connected with judgment and justice. The prophet here (1:14,15) presents it as "a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess." This is hardly a day to which anyone would look forward! Joel used very similar language in his prophecy when he called this prophetic time "a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness" (2:2). There it is associated with a time when great changes occur in the sentiment of the common people of earth. Zephaniah identifies this same day as a time when the wealthy suddenly find themselves unable to use their means to cure the problems and relieve their fear—money cannot buy deliverance from sin! "Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy" (1:18).

Our day has witnessed much progress in fulfilling this prophecy. Two great world wars erased class distinctions in the Western world. Today wars throughout the "third world" countries promise to do the same there. The masses of people that have been delivered from the restraint of oppression have demanded equal rights, equal treatment under the law, and equal access to the resources of the country. The increase of knowledge, especially in the way of mass communication, has created intolerance with oppression and class distinction. In country after country during the past 50 years, revolution has sparked democracy. Who would ever have thought Nelson Mandela would become the president of South Africa!

The frantic efforts by despotic governments to shore up their hold over the people through limited reforms have only been met with added discontent and the people have finally revolted to seek complete removal of oppression and social injustice.

The prophetic statement, "neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them," could be written from current newspapers. The world is fast becoming one dominated by money.

Never before have countries depended so much on the influx of investment from one area of the globe to another. The expansion of trade and telecommunications has resulted in growing economic output all over the world. Leaders are selected based on their ability to secure economic gain.

New democracies from the Baltic to South Africa are emerging along with once backward countries such as Brazil and China. When the U.S.S.R. collapsed several years ago, the traditional balance of power ended that had been prevalent since World War II. Today, increasing numbers of mankind are living with the prospect of political and economic freedom. A dramatic shift has occurred from political rule to economic rule. Money flows all over the world in instant communications, enticing people to seek a better life in economic gain—a faith built on "silver and gold."

Gathering of Nations

In God's discourse of chapter 3, verse 8, he utters a profound statement relating to this day of the Lord. "Therefore wait for me, declares the Lord, for the day I will stand up to testify. I have decided to assemble the nations, to gather the kingdoms and to pour out my wrath on them—all my fierce anger." If we consider that Zephaniah's prophecy focuses on the world's remedy for deliverance being wealth, then this part of the prophecy comes to life in our own day. Access to world capital through strong competitive positions far outweigh the ideals that were once important enough to justify slaughter of innocents and the death of men in war. Today, people want leaders who will provide a means of personal prosperity.

The interdependency of one nation with another to sustain its wealth by trading, makes it possible for a disaster in one nation to cause major disruption to all. In our modern world, we have seen substantial "gathering" of nations through the desire for open trade and world-wide economic prosperity. The value of goods traded now totals close to \$5 trillion dollars annually. There are over 100 arrangements for nations to exchange goods. New nations have emerged as insatiable borrowers on the world's capital markets. In the most recent year reported, China alone imported over \$25 billion in capital.

What does this common goal of economic gain mean relative to the prophecy?

Bankruptcy of one country no longer impacts just that country. With investment coming from all over the world, substantial failure impacts all countries. The pressure is growing upon fellow nations to follow the rules of a "one-world" economy. The link between nations of common wealth and world-wide prosperity is gathering these nations for a common cause as identified so vividly in Zephaniah, and which will culminate in the prophecies of other books—a backlash and fight against God's people in Israel.

A Pure Language

"For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent" (3:9).

Like other minor prophets, Zephaniah ends with encouragement and promised blessing. God's purpose is not to judge and destroy the human race but to purify it through that judgment. When the effects of Satan's influence on the present world are taken away, Christ's kingdom of righteousness will take over and the nations will operate under the influence of justice, tempered with love.

The people will learn about God and approach him in truth. Uncontaminated by human conditions and greed, they will learn that God not only cares for them but that he provides far more than their gold and silver ever gave them—everlasting life in a society unmarred by sin.

Haggai—"Echoes from the Past"

Rebuilding God's House

***"Now therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake."—
Daniel 9:17***

Excerpted from "Notes from the Bible of John A. Meggison"

The name Haggai means festive or a feast. Similar names are found of the descendants of Gad in Genesis 46:16 and Numbers 26:15. The name does not occur elsewhere in the Old Testament.

We do not know if Haggai was a native of Judea or of Babylon, whether he was born before the captivity or after. Some think from the third verse of the second chapter that he saw the temple of Solomon, but this is not necessarily true. Tradition says Haggai returned to Jerusalem with the other exiles, being then a young man; that he lived to see the temple completed and was buried with priestly honors close to the burial place of the priests.

His prophecies cover a period of four months, during the latter half of which he enjoyed the cooperation of Zechariah. He began this prophecy in the second year of Darius Hystaspes, the fourth king of Persia. Cyrus, the first king of Persia, who issued the decree to rebuild the temple, was killed in battle against the Massagetae. Smerdis, a Median, seized the throne, claiming to be the son of Cyrus. Darius Hystaspes, with six Persian chiefs, overthrew the impostor and became king in 532 B.C.

Haggai was the earliest of the prophets of the restoration, preceding Zechariah by about two months (Hag. 1:1; Zech. 1:1). At the time of his appearance a divine messenger was greatly needed among the Jews.

The first religious acts of the returned Jews held favorable promise. They reestablished the religious festivals in the seventh month of the first year of their return, which was also the first year of the reign of Cyrus. They hired workmen and purchased building material and laid the foundation of the second temple in the second month of the second year, 537 B.C.

However, they soon became discouraged. The slow progress and lengthened intermission in the work were not wholly due to the opposition of the Samaritans. The Jews were not zealous themselves.

Although most commentators regard the whole of chapter one as one message, we will treat verses one to eleven and twelve to fifteen as two messages, because of their different tone and nature.

The First Message (1:1-11)

The months are named according to the sacred order. The sixth month is Elul (September-October) from the sixth to the seventh new moon. The first day was particularly suitable to give the message. It was the feast day of the new moon when many people would be gathered together.

The message is described as "a word from Jehovah," indicating a freedom from all human mixture. Haggai himself was merely an instrument. The "word of Jehovah" simply passed through his hands.

The message is directed to Zerubbabel. In Ezra 1:8 and 5:14, he is called by his Persian name, Sheshbazzar. Joshua is the same one mentioned in Zechariah 3, prefiguring the Messiah.

In verse two it is this people, not my people, who say "it is not the time. They had lost God's confidence and were not referred to as his people. The time that was "not come" was the time to resume rebuilding the temple. The people had been urging as an excuse that the relations with Persia were not favorable to resume work on the temple but that was a mere pretext. They had made no effort to discover whether the new and legitimate king, Darius Hystaspes, would regard them with favor although they had the easy and selfish indifference of a people who had forgotten to be grateful and faithful. The builders had become discouraged because of opposition (Ezra 4:21-24). Cambyses, who had succeeded Cyrus as ruler of Persia, passed through Palestine with his hordes of soldiers on going to and returning from Egypt. His soldiers may have looted the people and discouraged the hopes of those who had been looking for a return of prosperity.

While they felt their own wants, and even luxuries, to be matters of pressing demand, they thought any time would be suitable to attend to the claims of their God. While their own homes had been regained, there was yet no house of worship for the God of Israel. While their wealthy members were using their superfluous means to adorn and beautify their dwellings, God's dwelling place still lay desolate. Appeals to their piety and patriotism had been in vain, overcome by selfishness and lethargy. The message could not fail to expose the insincerity of their excuses. Houses wainscoted with cedar were the residences of kings. If some of them now had command of such resources as to enable them to live in princely splendor, they might surely have reserved a portion for the temple.

Haggai and Zechariah put their fingers on the source of the trouble. Faith and zeal were at low ebb. There was no longer the heavenly vision, which had inspired the first immigrants to wend their way across the desert with songs and thanksgiving on their lips and their faces turned toward Zion. Because faith and zeal waned, the enemies of Israel and of God loomed nearer and more menacing. In fear and doubt, the work of God stopped.

They were urged to go to the mountains, probably to seek building material where it could best be obtained. It was upon the highlands that the most suitable timber grew. The lesson for us today is that we need to go to the Word about God's kingdom and gather the material wherewith to build characters suitable for God's spiritual temple.

In verse 8, the Hebrew word for "glorified," ekkabdah, appears without its final letter. This letter, he in Hebrew, represents the number five. Later Talmudists suggested that its omission meant that five things were lacking: (1) the ark; (2) the sacred fire; (3) the Shekinah; (4) the holy spirit; and (5) the Urim and Thummim.

The message of this verse is reiterated as being directly from Jehovah because, though the condition of affairs could be explained by the people in their own way, God gives the real explanation—that while their own affairs had absorbed all their attention his claims had been disregarded.

He continues by saying that not only was their labor to a large extent profitless but that even what their fields and manual toil did produce gave little enjoyment. The small quantity gathered was of little value because of the absence of God's blessing. All of this was in accord with the Law Covenant. Misfortune threatened ruin because of the unfaithfulness of the people (Deut. 28).

The Second Message (1:12-15)

The effect of the first message was powerful and lasting. Just such a special message was needed. Upon the first indication of a change in their attitude, Haggai was commissioned to tell the people that God's favor had already returned. The work was recommenced under the influence of the zeal Jehovah inspired in both leader and people.

They discerned in the word of Haggai the voice of God and they listened to his message because he attested himself to be God's messenger. The people revered Jehovah.

God could now promise his presence with them, showing that their reverential fear was followed by sincere repentance and obedience.

Twenty-three days after the first message, spent in gathering and preparing material sufficient to justify starting or continuing the work, the walls of the Second Temple began to rise from the foundations which had been laid 15 years before by the same people (Ezra 3:8, 10; 4:24).

The Third Message (2:1-9)

The third message was delivered about four weeks after the second message. It was given on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, also called the Feast of Ingathering, when thanks were to be rendered for the bountiful harvest. The harvest in this year was scanty, so there was the more urgent need of some word of comfort and cheer.

The ark and the Urim and Thummim were gone. The sacred fire of the brazen altar had long been out. More than 87 years had elapsed since it last burned. Old men wept (Ezra 3:12, 13). Looking forward Haggai predicts a shaking of the heavens and the earth yet once more (Heb. 12:26; 2 Peter 3:7) that would affect both the sea (restless mankind, the workers) and the dry land (organized society in all nations). This would result in the "desire of all nations," or the "treasures of all nations (RSV)" (the church) filling the house with glory in the resurrection morning (Eph. 2:19-22; Exod. 40:34, 35; 1 Kings 8:10, 11).

As silver and gold seem to have been lacking in the restoration of the temple, so in the building of the antitypical temple, the church is not a wealthy class in literal gold.

"The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the *LORD* of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the *LORD* of hosts" (Hag. 2:9).

This must have seemed a riddle, an extravagant statement, to the Israelites who heard it, because the treasures supplied by order of Darius were too small to warrant such a statement.

The "latter house" is a prophetic reference to the church glorified. This church will be greater than any earthly glory. When they are glorified, they will bring peace to all nations and be a house of prayer for all people (Isa. 56:7). In the church the antitypes of all the glories of Solomon's temple will dwell—the ark, the Urim and Thummim (Deut. 33:8) and all.

The Fourth Message (2:10-19)

Sixty-three days after the first message, in the month of Chisleu (November-December) the fourth message was given.

The ministry of the prophet had at last achieved its most important object, instigating new zeal and devotion to God's service. Another message was now due for two purposes: to forewarn the people against conduct that would alienate them from God and to further secure them against despondency, which might occur if rich and speedy blessings were delayed following their repentance and obedience. The people were probably still feeling the pressure of temporal distress and therefore needed an encouraging message.

"Thus saith the *LORD* of hosts; Ask now the priests concerning the law, saying, If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No. Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean. Then answered Haggai, and said, So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the *LORD*; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean."—Haggai 2:11-14

The blood of the sacrificed animal made the garment and the person holy (Lev. 6:20, 27); but this could not be given to a third person or thing. Each one must come for himself.

Likewise, the same is true with contact with the dead. Too intimate an association with the dead world makes one tainted with the spirit of selfishness. One becomes unclean himself and cannot be a good influence upon others. As ink permeates water, so does the fallen condition of humanity affect those who come in constant contact with it.

The people had become infected with this selfish spirit and forgotten the claims of God upon them. Even the withholding of blessings and the scarcity of crops did not awaken them. But now that they returned to God, he would bless them.

As he who was ceremonially unclean tainted everything he contacted, so they, suffering from God's displeasure on account of their disregard of his claims, communicated the effect of his displeasure to all the labor of their hands so that it profited them nothing. As consecrated flesh did not convey its sacredness to any object beyond those immediately in the service, so all their external good works, even their offerings upon God's altar, could not secure those blessings which are the reward of living holiness.

The temple was founded in the second year of Cyrus, 15 years before (Ezra 3:10). Comparing Ezra 4:4 with 4:23, 24, we see that the work upon it was feebly continued until within two years of Haggai's prophecy, explaining why the foundation did not fall into decay.

As John Calvin wrote, "Whoever intrudes external ceremonies on God, to pacify him, trifles most childishly. The foundation of good works is integrity of heart and the purpose to obey God and consecrate one's life to him. Whatever we touch is polluted by it, unless there be purity of heart to sanctify our works." Disappointment of our hopes on earth should make us lift our eyes to heaven to learn the reason. Affliction may harden the heart if we do not take it to the Lord in prayer.

The Fifth Message (2:20-23)

Given the same day as the fourth message, the fifth message repeats portions of the third message about the shaking and destruction of the present order at the end of this age. The kingdoms and their military power are to be destroyed (Isa. 10:5-27; 13; 17:12-14).

Jehovah will overthrow Satan's throne as the god and ruler of this world. The overthrow of the horses and riders shows the destruction of the gentile nations. The chariots represent organizations for war and commerce and those who ride them are the leaders and princes of finance and the military. This will come about through the "sword of his brother," by mutual distrust, confusion, and hatred. Instead the signet, or seal, will be given to a new king or ruler, Zerubbabel, representing Christ as God's instrument to work out his plan.

So in Haggai's prophecy we see the five messages designed to bring God's people back into an intimate association with him. In this respect, it speaks to each one of us today.

A Mother's Prophecy

Wise Words to a Wayward Son

"And [Bathsheba] said unto [David], My lord, thou swarest by the LORD thy God unto thine handmaid, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne."—1 Kings 1:17

Verse by verse Bible study in Proverbs 31

Minor prophecies are not confined to books written by those we call the "minor prophets." Many holy men and women of God were used by Jehovah to utter words of prophecy. Sometimes these prophecies are contained in a single verse of scripture, on other occasions they occupy an entire chapter. Sometimes the prophets address their words to a large group or even an entire nation; on other occasions their words are meant for an audience of one. In Proverbs 31, the prophecy is addressed to a particular person, the son of the prophetess.

Even though the individual to whom the prophecy was given has long since died, the principles delineated in the prophecy are timeless. They have numerous applications to many people at many different periods of time.

The Prophetess—Verse 1

The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him.

There has been much dispute as to the identity of this Lemuel. The oldest definition, and the one we prefer, is given in the Hebrew Talmud: "Solomon was called by six names: Solomon, Jedidiah, Koheleth, Son of Jakeh, Agur, and Lemuel" (Avoth d'Rab, Nathan c. 39). Both Strong's Concordance and the Brown-Driver-Brigg's Lexicon agree with this identification. If this is true, the author of this one chapter prophecy is Bathsheba.

The word translated "prophecy" in this verse would be better translated "burden" or "oracle." As an "oracle" it is to be understood as a message commissioned by God. As a "burden" it is a responsibility that weighs on the heart. A "prophecy," on the other hand, is usually associated with predictions of the future, though it can refer to any word from God. In this passage we have a warning of dangers that can affect the future.

Bathsheba appears to have been a caring mother. Although she had numerous children, her love seems to have been centered on Solomon, her second child by David. Their first child died as a chastisement of God for their sin of adultery. Solomon became to them the assurance of God's continued acceptance despite their earlier sin. This was confirmed to them when Nathan, the prophet who had berated them for their adulterous relationship, sent a message after the birth of the second child, bestowing on him the name Jedidiah (2Sam. 12:25). This name signifies "beloved of God" and not only demonstrated the

forgiveness of God for their shortcoming but also prefigured the words of Jehovah over his son, Jesus: "this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17).

In the book of Proverbs, Solomon credits both his father and mother for their roles in his upbringing. "For I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live" (Prov. 4:3, 4).

His mother, at the insistence of Nathan, preserved the kingship for Solomon when his step-brother Adonijah laid claim to it (1 Kings 1:11-30).

Preview of the Prophecy—Verses 2 and 3

What, my son? and what, the son of my womb? and what, the son of my vows? Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings.

Not only does she address her words to Solomon as her son but specially as "son of my womb," an idiom referring to a firstborn. In fact Solomon was not the first born. We do not know if she had children by Uriah, her first husband, but we know that the first child she bore David died. In any case, he was now regarded as her firstborn, the one upon whom special attention would be focused. He was also the "son of my vows." The preceding child had been begotten outside of the marriage bonds. Solomon, as a child begotten within the marriage arrangements, could be looked upon with full dignity with no blight of illegitimacy on his reputation.

As an observant mother, Bathsheba notes the weaknesses of her son. This causes her to emphasize two specific warnings in her oracle: a weakness for the opposite sex and a fondness for "that which destroyeth kings," probably wine, as suggested in the succeeding context.

Use of Alcohol—Verses 4-7

It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted. Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.

The first part of this counsel is easier to understand than the latter portions. Wine and strong drink, so often used at royal festive parties, is bad for a king to drink, not only because it perverts sound judgment but also because it lowers the dignity of the throne.

While it is true, as many commentators note, that strong drink was used to numb the senses of condemned prisoners, this does not appear to be the class being discussed in these verses.

The suggestion rather appears to be, not that it is recommended but that it is preferable, for those in hard circumstances to find some relief from their misery in the numbing effects of wine than it is for those in positions of power to do so, for their judgment affects the entire populace.

This verse more than any other in the chapter has led many to the conclusion that Lemuel was indeed a king of a surrounding nation and that the advice here is to be ignored. We are of a contrary opinion; once we begin finding a reason to ignore any portion of God's Word we are setting a precedent for ignoring others. Therefore, we look to interpreting this verse in a comparative fashion rather than one of direct counsel and advice. "If one is going to drink wine, it should be the pauper who has reason to seek release from his poverty rather than the king who may be called upon at any time to offer sound judgment."

A King's Role—Verses 8 and 9

Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.

Strictly speaking, the admonition does not appear to be directed toward unbiased judgment. The poor and needy and those "appointed to destruction" are not always in the right. Nor are the wealthy always in the wrong. But the rich have always, even in Bible times, their advocates to plead their cases, while the poor are usually left to their own defenses. Thus the king's role was to be an advocate for those who were without such. This is even the case today with the right of a defendant to a court-appointed attorney if he cannot afford one for himself.

While those "appointed to destruction" may seem to refer to those who are subject to the death sentence, it is noteworthy that Strong's Concordance suggests that it may refer to orphans. The literal definition of the term would be "sons [or survivors] of destruction." Again the thought is stressed that everyone, particularly the disenfranchised, have the right to the same protection of the law as the wealthiest and most powerful of citizens.

A Virtuous Woman—Verses 10-31

The balance of the chapter is in the literary form of an acrostic poem. Each verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This device is often used in the Psalms (9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119) and is also the structure for the whole of Lamentations. Its purpose appears to be two-fold: first, as a mnemonic aid for the Hebrew reader to better remember the passage; and second, in times of distress to force mental composure before setting one's feeling to print.

Rightly foreseeing the problems Solomon would have as a result of disastrous marriages, his mother here outlines the qualities he should look for in a wife. Many of these are parallel to those possessed by the Shulamite in the love poem that we know as The Song of Solomon.

Condensing the passage, we note the following prominent features of this woman's character:

1. She is a commendable wife and mother. 2. She lives for her home and family. 3. She is constantly industrious. 4. She is self-disciplined and orderly. 5. She is a sharp business woman. 6. She has good, refined tastes. 7. She manifests the grace of hospitality. 8. She is charitable in time of need. 9. She is spiritually-minded.

We proceed now to a more detailed examination of this section:

AS WIFE AND MOTHER: Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life (vs. 10-12).

This comparison of virtue to rubies is a common one in scripture (Job 28:18; Prov. 3:15; 8:11; 20:15; Lam. 4:7). It is no better demonstrated than in the comparison by a man who had a wife named "Ruby" and a second wife he loved even more. The Hebrew word for "ruby" is *paniyim* from which was taken the name of Elkanah's first wife, Peninnah (1Sam. 1:4, 5). Yet it was Hannah whom he considered far more precious than "Ruby" with all her children, saying to her, "am I not better to thee than ten sons?" (v. 8).

He can trust her because her love is constant. It is unmixed affection. Her attitude toward him will be constant and unchanging, not varying in reaction to his moods toward her or reactionary to other external circumstances. Knowing that she will be a full partner in the marriage relationship, he will have no need to look elsewhere for those qualities she lacks. Her industriousness will make it unnecessary to embark on expeditions for spoil, for together they will make their living honestly through hard work.

Many have applied this entire poem to the church, the bride of Christ, the "greater than Solomon" (Matt. 12:42). Certainly it is just this trustworthiness that Jesus desires in his church. He seeks a bride that will not only do good to him when it is to her convenience but will seek to serve him in good times and bad.

INDUSTRIOUS: She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar. She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens (vs. 13-15).

Her zealous activities are shown in her adeptness both at the spinning wheel and in the fields. Not content with feeding her immediate family, she also feeds her servants well.

In the spiritual application, we see the bride of Christ arising industriously during earth's night time of sin, before the Millennial morning wakens all of mankind, to make her "garments of righteousness" (Rev. 19:8; Psa. 45:14). She is willing to seek far and wide for that which is greater than bread, "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). She recognizes her responsibility to not only feed herself and her family but

also her "maidens," "the virgins her companions that follow her" (Psa. 45:14; Matt. 25:1-13).

WISE ADMINISTRATOR: She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard (v. 16).

Not only is the virtuous woman a diligent laborer, she is a business woman as well. Here again she shows her wisdom by not just finding a field and making the purchase but considering whether or not it is an advantageous purchase. Neither is her purchase for the purpose of mere accumulation of land but for a specific purpose, to plant a vineyard so that its fruitage may be used for beverage, medicine, and sacrifice. She does not resort to credit to make her purchase but buys it "with the fruit of her hands," using funds from her own resources.

In the New Testament parables of the talents and of the pounds there is a responsibility for the Christian to invest what the Lord has put at his disposal. These are not to be invested recklessly but wisely, so that they may bring increase to the amount invested. This requires consideration of the use of one's time and talents.

ENERGETIC: She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms. She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night. She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff (vs. 17-19).

When tiredness overtakes her, she girds on extra strength. She insures the quality of her workmanship by spending the extra hours necessary to do her job right. The spiritual lesson is clear. Not only is the Christian to be a full-time Christian, from early morning to late at night, but he is to give great care to the quality of his Christianity. It is only too common for one to be a Christian in name only, content with the form of religion rather than its substance.

PHILANTHROPIC AND PROVIDENT: She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet. She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple. (vs. 20-22).

A genuine care for the less fortunate is always urged upon the faithful. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27).

Her charity however does not impinge on her duty to her own household. This priority is well set forth in Galatians 6:10, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."

The scarlet clothing hardly seems relevant to the cold weather of winter. The thought seems to be that scarlet dye, being very expensive, was used for heavy woolen cloth only. Likewise tapestries were made of heavy material and suitable for warm bed coverings.

Spiritually the thought is much deeper. The only garments that will adequately protect the Christian in winter times of trouble and distress are those dyed with the red of Christ's ransom for all. The adequate covering will not be a plain quilt but one that has the rich tapestry of God's plan woven deeply into it. The garments that will eternally last are the royal (purple) silk robes that will garb the world's kings and priests.

HER HUSBAND'S WORK: Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land (v. 23).

Such a woman deserves an honorable husband and delights in his work and reputation. Here her husband is pictured as one of the elders of the city, sitting in the seat of judgment at the city gate. The husband of the bride of Christ is even yet more fortunate, for there is none higher and more worthy of respect than the Son of God.

HER REAL CLOTHING: She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant. Strength and honor are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. (vs. 24, 25).

In these verses the poet breaks out of his symbolic language and speaks clearly of the garments of this woman of virtue—they are the garments of "strength and honor." This is the clothing that enables one to "rejoice in the time to come." In a similar vein, the Apostle Peter speaks of wives being adorned with "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (1 Peter 3:4).

A FAITHFUL MOTHER: She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her (vs. 26-28).

Great wisdom is required to "train up a child in the way he should go," so that "when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6). Rules and laws must be laid down, but they must be laid down in kindness and love. As the Apostle Paul counsels fathers in Colossians 3:21, "provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged." (See also Eph. 6:4).

The wise parent who can discern and walk the narrow line between strictness and love will find both a child and a spouse that will express their appreciation. No greater opportunity faces any Christian parent than that of nurturing their children in the admonitions of the Lord. The apostle expresses it well in 3 John 4, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."

HER REWARD: Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates (vs. 29-31).

Not merely reputation, but especially the character developed by the virtuous woman will be her reward. "Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain." Reputation is accorded when one's ways please another. Yet it is fickle, for when the other person is not gratified, they quickly turn against the one they so recently praised. Jesus made himself of "no repute" (Phil. 2:7). His followers should be willing to do the same.

Beauty, whether of face or figure, is transient; "beauty is only skin deep." Character lasts forever. Character is the treasure the Christian is to "lay up in heaven" (Matt. 6:19, 20).

Ultimately it is not what another thinks, but it will be "her own works" that will "praise her in the gates." No sermon we give, no words we speak, can be nearly as effective as the life we live. Remember the words of the Master, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).

May the virtues of the virtuous woman be the virtues that each of us strive to gain and apply in our individual lives.

May-June 1997

NEWS AND VIEWS

PBI News

PBI Annual Meeting Notice

The annual meeting of the Pastoral Bible Institute will take place on Friday, July 25, at the Claremont McKenna College, Claremont, California (near the Ontario airport).

The purpose of the annual meeting is to elect directors for the following year and to conduct other business regarding the direction and affairs of the Institute. Anyone having business to propose should contact the Institute chairman, Tim Thomassen. If you plan to attend the meeting, information on the location and arrangements can be obtained from the Institute's Secretary, Michael Nekora, 1425 Lachman Lane, Pacific Palisades, CA 90272 (phone (310) 454-5248; e-mail nekora@aol.com).

Streeter Revelation Books Republished

A year after the death of Brother Russell in 1916, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society published the seventh volume of *Studies in the Scriptures*. It provided an interpretation of the books of Revelation and Ezekiel. In 1923 Bro. R. E. Streeter, a member of *The Herald's* editorial committee, published his comments on the first half of Revelation using extensive quotations from the pastor as well as other Revelation scholars. The second volume followed in 1924. In some respects Bro. Streeter's work was meant as an "answer" to the seventh volume.

Both volumes have long been out of print, but thanks to a generous gift from a friend of the Institute, we have been able to reprint them as a single volume. The words are the same; the appearance of the words is much better. Even if you have the original volumes, you should consider acquiring this new one because it is so much easier to use and read.

The cost is just \$10 per book which includes the cost of postage anywhere in the world. Send your request with payment to the Institute at 1425 Lachman Lane, Pac. Palisades, CA 90272.

Letters from Readers

I just finished reading the November–December issue and the article, "Justified by Faith." Concerning the servant/friend relationship to God concerning Abraham, would you consider "friends" and "sons of God" on the same plane? If so, then how would you explain Jesus' comments to the disciples in John 15:15, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." You mention James 2:23 about Abraham being called the "friend" of God, yet say that Abraham is not a "son," hence not to be considered in the body of Christ. You made reference to Romans 12:1, about presenting our bodies "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God." We know that Paul is talking about a spiritual sacrifice, not our fleshly bodies. Looking back into the Old Testament, the animal was always "without blemish"—our bodies are blemished by sin. We must put the gift of God back on the altar as a living sacrifice. I don't think there is any sacrifice to offer in our physical bodies. Romans 12:1, Luke 7:28, Revelation 13:8, and Hebrews 10–12 require further consideration as to who belongs where. It is solely in God's realm. As Jesus told the mother of Zebedee's sons: "[it] is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father." (Matt. 20:23)

Dan Donnarummo, Ohio

Author's reply:

Jesus' comment in John 15 is an apt illustration of the difference between the relationship one has with God without and with the holy spirit. Under the law, the apostles were considered in the same manner as Abraham (Gal. 4:1–6), as servants. It would be proper to think of them as "ancient worthies" at that time. When the holy spirit came, they would now be adopted into God's family as children, and their relationship—and reward—changed significantly. As to Romans 12:1, we see the term "body" as representing all earthly associations and interests, both past and future, and especially that of earthly will and ambition. There is a constant surrender of our will in a daily offering. Just as Jesus laid down his life daily, we who follow in his footsteps are to do the same. We agree that this can only be acceptable to God through our first taking the merit of Jesus' sacrifice to ourselves so that God can view us as without sin.

Thank you for the interesting and helpful articles in the last two issues. (Sept/Oct and Nov/Dec). The article "The Works that Follow" certainly is interesting, and the forming of any conclusion has to be by correct reading of the "signs." We may not all read them in exactly the same way, nor agree on the timing of them, but every one of us must be deeply interested and be very thankful that our minds are stirred up concerning these things.

W. A. Smith, Australia

Please renew my subscription to the Herald for another year. I am quite alone as to fellowship with others of like precious faith so am so appreciative of *The Herald, Dawn* and *Bible Study Monthly*. I read the articles in every issue several times. I will be 93 the last of January. *The Herald* is a beautiful magazine. I thoroughly appreciate and enjoy every part. May the Heavenly Father and His dear Son bless you as you send out the message of love, truth and encouragement.

Dorothy DeFord, Illinois

My dear wife went home to be with her Lord last year, June 12. Truly the gracious Lord through his blessed Son Jesus Christ was with us. She had her wish, having Alzheimers disease and wanting the Lord to take her home. Her sister died with the same disease. Our love for one another is so deep until one of us is taken home. We would have been married 51 years on June 30. We have been Bible Students all these years, knowing Bro. Paul Thompson and Bro. Read. We learned so much from them. I would appreciate prayer to help me carry on. Thank you for the words in *The Herald of Christ's Kingdom*.

Clayton Marks, North Carolina

Christian love and greetings in our Heavenly Father's name. I am renewing my subscription and a gift for a year to another. My dad used to be an elder in the Polish class in Detroit. He came into the truth while he was young, attending Pastor Russell's speaking the truth in 1911 or 1912. I am so grateful that I've been privileged to understand God's divine plan for the world. I have a February, 1939 *Herald* which I must reread. I used to attend the class in Detroit and have heard Bro. Hagensick several times. I can see by the world's conditions how close we are to the end of the age. If you have something in a booklet you can send my friend, I've given her some. We discussed the trinity over the phone. I sent her "The Lord our God is One Lord" and she was so happy to get it. She said she never believed what was taught about the trinity.

Helen Sawicki

I would like to express my deep thankfulness to all who work in producing *The Herald*. I am isolated from brethren of the truth and find *The Herald* a great blessing. The November/December issue is a joy to read. I have gone through it carefully three times. The only exception being "The Mother of Moses—an Allegory." I don't think we need to make types of Bible characters. Thank you for the help I receive and the encouragement to press on as we come nearer to the Kingdom of Christ.

Gladys Hyorte, England

Around the World

Israel

A war in the Middle East is much more likely today, according to a report from the military. Israel has become the third strongest world power. The Israeli Air Force is seven to eight times stronger than the combined might of the Arab nations. The report suggests that the next few years could produce four possibilities: a limited war between Israel and Syria; an Israeli-Palestinian war with 35,000 to 50,000 armed Palestinians attempting to totally control Judea, Samaria and Gaza; an air strike by Israel against Iran's nuclear missile manufacturing facilities; a general Arab-Israeli war. The report projects that Israel would be able to destroy the Arab armies within 10–15 days.

Jane's Intelligence Review (no date)

Excerpts of an Interview with Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel:

"Israel is making a technological leap ... We're made for high-knowledge, low-discipline industries ... Israel is the Silicon Valley of the Eastern Hemisphere. The only things holding us back are the concentration in the economy and the socialist restraints that have to be discarded ... I expect to see immigration not only from most of the remaining Jewish population of the former Soviet Union, but as income levels rise, Jews from the Western countries will start immigrating to Israel to improve their economic lot ... It's already happening from part of England ... I think you have three economies in the Middle East. The have-nots, who have nothing. Then the haves who have oil, basically a single-crop economy, and Israel, which is increasingly a post-industrial economy ... We don't want war of any kind, and we've made that abundantly clear."

Newsweek, 2/17/97

Prime Minister Netanyahu wants to press ahead toward a goal of bringing free-market ideas to Israel, where government has provided one-third of all jobs. He is inviting Palestinians and Egyptians into a push for a high-tech Middle East. The government will push for selling off stakes in Israel's state-controlled banks. There will also be public offerings of 13 state-controlled companies, including El Al Airlines. Netanyahu wants to raise \$1.2 billion from privatization in 1997. Among his ideas are selling off the water-treatment plants and setting up privately managed toll roads. Netanyahu said that if "Jews once immigrated to Israel to escape persecution in Russia, Iraq or Germany, they will eventually arrive from places such as Chicago and London in search of a better standard of living." Last year alone Israel recorded 1,000 high-tech startup companies. Today, one-third of exports are high-tech products such as microchips and software.

Newsweek, "Remaking Israel," 2/17/97

The growing friendship between Israel and Jordan proposes long-term prosperity for the Middle East. Socialism and communism have been critical obstacles to economic development in the Middle East. In 1993, secret meetings between King Hussein and Israel prime minister Peres were held. Of particular interest is the proposed Jordan Rift Valley Project. Billions of dollars of investment in projects are planned, including a canal linking the Red Sea and the Dead Sea. According to Hani Mulki, president of Jordan's Royal Scientific Society, "Once the dividends come, the people will protect the peace."

Wall Street Journal, 1/97

Israel has approved building in a Jerusalem neighborhood claimed by both Palestinians and Israelis. Housing units will be built on Har Homa, a hill in the part of Jerusalem that was captured during the six-day war in 1967. More than 3,000 units would be built for Palestinians. The Palestinians have warned of violence if apartments are built there.

Associated Press, 2/97

Netanyahu blamed the justice minister for selecting an attorney general whose appointment touched off a scandal that could bring down the government. Roni Bar-On was appointed attorney general in January by Aryeh Deri, justice minister. Deri faced criminal charges on corruption and fraud and Bar-On promised to end Deri's corruption trial if he was appointed. Deri in turn was to deliver two badly needed votes for the Cabinet vote to withdraw Israeli troops from Hebron.

Bloomberg News Service, 2/24/97

Historians studying the issue of dormant accounts of Holocaust victims in Switzerland said more research is needed. Historians said little is known about the transfer of gold, gems and art work looted by Nazis from Holocaust victims. Switzerland has been under great pressure for more than a year to provide information on the location of assets given to them for safekeeping before WW II. Union Bank of Switzerland Chief Executive Mathis Cabiavetta said it is unlikely that there will be vast amounts of assets belonging to Holocaust victims. However, Jewish groups say Swiss banks could hold billions of Swiss francs in dormant accounts. Meanwhile, the Swiss government passed an ordinance that establishes a fund for victims of the Holocaust, effective March 1, 1997. Companies that were important trade partners with Nazi Germany have agreed to contribute to the fund.

Bern and Zurich news service, 2/25/97

A government appointed commission in Sweden will investigate what happened to Jewish property that entered the country before WWII. Another probe is investigating whether gold that may have been stolen by the Nazis remains in the bank's reserves in Sweden. Reports from a U.S. Justice Department document from 1949 released in February indicated the Wallenbergs, a family of industrialists and bankers, may have received gold from Nazi Germany that was looted from victims. Sweden, like

Switzerland, was neutral during the war and both countries have been under pressure to give a final accounting of Nazi victims' property.

Associated Press, 2/21/97

The World

World population growth is slowing dramatically. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that the world population grew by only 79.6 million in 1996, down seven million from 1994, the highest point of growth. The reason for the decline is that family size is shrinking. The Bureau reports that the fertility rate—the number of children born per women during a lifetime—has declined to 2.9, its lowest level ever. Forty percent of the world's population is producing at a rate less than replacement level. Russia, Germany and Italy produce more deaths than births each year. Despite financial rewards to child-bearing women in Japan and Germany, those countries are experiencing severe declines in population. Additionally, 27 developing countries are averaging fewer than 2.2 children per woman. In many areas, schools are closing for lack of students. Much of Japan's continuing economic difficulties is being attributed to a lack of young people to power the economy. The long-term difficulties of a lack of children will be evident in the next 30 years. There will be too few children to fill the schools and universities, too few young people entering the work force, too few couples buying homes and cars. The imploding markets of Europe and Japan will spread to the rest of the world, bringing negative consequences for most economies.

Population Research Institute, 2/97

United States

A new generation of evangelical leaders is emerging from the under-40 population. The evangelicals include singers such as Rebecca St. James and the Christian rock group DC Talk; athletes such as A.C. Green of the Phoenix Suns and Reggie White of the Green Bay Packers; and personalities such as Ralph Reed, executive director of the Christian Coalition. Observers say this new generation represents a change from current evangelicals such as Pat Robertson, in that they are attempting to work more at a local level than through large national organizations. "Most of these folks are going to try to make changes in local communities," said David Neff, executive editor of *Christianity Today*.

Washington Post, 11/23/96

Pakistan

Pakistan is protesting the test-firing of a long-range missile in India. The missile can carry a one-ton warhead and has a range of 155 miles, which poses a new threat in southern Asia. Pakistan claimed that the test-firing was specifically designed to target their country and to heighten tensions. Pakistan and India have fought three wars since their split in 1947.

DPA, 2/24/97

Serbia

An Albanian organization in the Serbian province of Kosovo called for an armed uprising of the people. The National Movement for Liberation of Kosovo said that Albanian leaders are not interested in the people but in controlling the political system. Kosovo is populated almost exclusively by ethnic Albanians who have been severely repressed by the Serbs. Continued outbreaks of violence are expected.

Associated Press, 2/21/97

Book Review

***Exploding the Doomsday Money Myths*, by Sherman S. Smith, Ph.D., 1994, Thomas Nelson Publishing, 244 pages.**

Over the years, books that predict coming calamities in the financial markets have been popular, especially amongst Bible students who hold that one of the four winds of Revelation 7 pictures the financial structure of society. Many have looked at the various crises such as the oil embargoes of the 80s as sure signs of the end (this editor among them). An examination of history shows that it is best not to see the end in every crisis.

In 16th century England, a wood shortage produced predictions of world-wide deaths due to freezing, but as the price of wood rose, conservation occurred and coal was discovered as an alternative. In the 1850s, dire predictions were made that the world was running out of whales and hence whale oil, the primary source of artificial lighting. Prices rose, bringing in the search for alternatives. That led to the burning of kerosene for light.

Beginning in 1914 and continuing to our day, periodic scares relating to shortages of oil strike up doomsday scenarios of wars over the control of this precious commodity. In the 1970s, the end-of-the-world predictions came from computer-simulated scenarios about environmental calamity, spurred by an uncontrollable population growth.

While no serious student of the scriptures would deny Biblical prophecy relating to world-wide economic disaster preceding the final stage of Armageddon, it is well for us to use caution in our application based on our limited point of view—to not to be caught up in the current frenzy of predictions about coming economic disaster. When it is God's time to bring about the final economic downfall, there will be no doubt as to its source and significance—and there will be no protection.

Among the "myths" that it is gratifying to see Smith attack is that of a secret society (the Illuminati, the Trilateral Commission, the Council on Foreign Relations) of wealthy individuals who manipulate world events, install kings and presidents at their whim, create depressions and cause revolution and war for their personal gain. This belief, perpetuated by popular movies and television, has grown amongst Bible students since the publication of the John Birch Society analysis, *None Dare Call It Conspiracy*, in the 1970s. Smith's work is a refreshing look coming from a Christian perspective which says only God has controlling power over world events.