



MOUNTAIN PEAKS OF SALVATION HISTORY

**By
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As author of this book, I wish to express my deep appreciation to Shirley Ruiz, who dedicated her great skills, abounding energy, and many hours of her time in typing the entire manuscript of this book. I feel certain that her committed hands will bring great blessings to many persons.

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CHAPTER 1

THE STANDARD FOR RIGHT AND WRONG

OUTLINE

SUBJECT: THE STANDARD FOR RIGHT AND WRONG
SCRIPTURE: Deuteronomy 6:20-25
TEXT: *“Keep My Law and My Ordinances; whoever practices them enjoys life through them. I am the Lord.” (Leviticus 18:5)*

INTRODUCTION:

The knowledge gained about God’s character in the Exodus, determined the faith of Israel. For contemporary man, the revelation of God’s character is the controlling factor in shaping man’s behavior. It is the standard which determines the rightness or wrongness of his actions.

PROPOSITION:

In the story of the Exodus we confront a standard of morality which is fixed and unchangeable.

I. ISRAEL’S HISTORICAL SUMMARY FROM ABRAHAM TO SINAI

II. GOD’S SELF-DISCLOSURE IN THE EXODUS

A. God’s Nature

1. God’s Power in Action

- a. God’s Power was revealed in the plagues that befell Egypt.
- b. God’s Power in action was shown at the crossing of the Red Sea.

2. God’s Compassion

3. God’s Holiness

B. God’s Commands

1. The first four speak directly about man’s relationship to God.

2. The last six commandments speak about man’s relationship to his neighbor.

III. MAN’S NEED FOR AN OBJECTIVE STANDARD

CONCLUSION:

In the Exodus account, we have revealed the character of God, which is the ‘north star’ of all morality. In our age of relationships, in which right and wrong are not clearly defined, we need a reliable guide. That guide is the Ten Commandments, which are an expression of God’s nature.

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SCRIPTURE: Deuteronomy 6:20-25
TEXT: *“Keep My Law and My Ordinances; whoever practices them enjoys life through them. I am the Lord.” (Leviticus 18:5)*

INTRODUCTION:

The story of the Exodus is very significant, not only in the history of Israel, but also for contemporary man. God’s redemptive purpose cannot be understood apart from it.

Wright notes that it was the center for Israel’s faith. “The very existence of the nation was due solely to this act; the beginning of Israel’s history as a nation was traced to this miraculous happening.” (The Book of the Acts of God; p. 74)

The knowledge gained about God’s character in the Exodus, determined the faith of Israel. For contemporary man, the revelation of God’s character is the controlling factor in shaping man’s behavior. It is the standard which determines the rightness or wrongness of ones actions.

In an age in which sin is an antiquated term in our modern vocabulary, we need to be confronted by the awesome holiness of God. Because morality is relatively determined according to the situation or circumstance, we need to clearly understand the Biblical standard of righteousness.

PROPOSITION:

In the story of the Exodus we confront a standard of morality which is fixed and unchangeable.

I. ISRAEL’S HISTORICAL SUMMARY FROM ABRAHAM TO SINAI.

Abraham’s life is dated about 2000 B.C. The time of the Exodus is dated in the early part of the thirteenth century B.C. Between these centuries, many events had taken place.

The God of Abraham had appeared to Isaac and Jacob, renewing His covenant-promise which He had made to Abraham. Joseph, the son of Jacob, had been jealously sold into Egyptian bondage by his brothers. However, God mercifully raised Joseph up to be ruler of Egypt under Pharaoh, as a result of Joseph’s revelation of Pharaoh’s dreams concerning soon-coming years of famine. Because of serious lack of food in Canaan, many from this country came to Egypt for sustenance, including Joseph’s father and brothers.

This migration to Egypt took place about four and a half centuries before the Exodus.

The Israelites greatly multiplied in Egypt which so frightened an unfriendly Pharaoh that the Egyptians forced servitude upon the Israelites, making them build cities for the Pharaoh. For about four hundred years the Israelites were in bondage to the Egyptians.

It had seemed the covenant-making God had forgotten His promises. About four centuries had passed since God had spoken to a man. How could Abraham's God permit his own people to be the slaves of a heathen nation, whose gods were worshipped as powerful deities? Many of the Israelites had doubtless forgotten or never learned of the God of Abraham.

But God had not forgotten his people. He had a chosen vessel through which He intended to continue to unfold His plan for human redemption. God chose the infant Moses—what would appear as weakness to man—to confound the plan of Pharaoh, who intended to kill all Hebrew babes. Moses embodies God's plan for man's salvation and Pharaoh embodies the power of evil which attempts to thwart that plan.

God used the sympathetic heart of Pharaoh's daughter to advance His purpose and to save his people out of the clutch of Pharaoh's jaw. Moses received the best in Egyptian education, but forsook the pleasures of royalty to become God's instrument. However, Moses hurried God's plan by prematurely killing an Egyptian, which resulted in his forty year desert sojourn, at the end of which he received a special call from God in the form of a burning bush.

After some hesitation, Moses, with his brother Aaron made his first visit to Pharaoh to fulfill his God-given commission. Because Pharaoh failed to keep his promise in freeing the Israelites from their servitude, Moses and Aaron made repeated visits to Pharaoh, each time predicting another plague to come upon Egypt.

After a succession of ten plagues, the last of which was the death of the firstborn in each Egyptian family, Pharaoh let the Israelites depart. With hatred and jealousy, he pursued them even to the Red Sea.

It was at the Red Sea that God's mighty power was manifested before the eyes of Israel. God made a wall of water on each side, He led His people safely through on dry land. Pharaoh followed, and he and his army found their graves at the bottom of the sea.

God cared for His people in the wilderness, despite the lack of food and water found there. God rained manna down from heaven, and gave quails for the people to eat. God brought water out of the rock in Horeb when Moses struck it.

Following these miracles, the Israelites came to Mt. Sinai, where God gave to Israel the Ten Commandments and the Laws.

II. GOD'S SELF-DISCLOSURE IN THE EXODUS

1. God's Power in Action.

The Israelites were engulfed by Egyptian idol worship. In the midst of this paganism, the God of Abraham directly intervened to reveal that He was not a god among gods, but rather the God of gods and the Lord of lords—the Sovereign Ruler who alone deserved man's worship.

a. God's Power was revealed in the plagues that befell Egypt. Rebellious Pharaoh with his Egyptian gods and magicians embodies the power of evil which resists God's purposes. Through the trickery of the magicians' enchantments, they were able to copy Moses' action of changing the rod into a serpent (7:11), as well as changing water into blood (7:22) and bringing frogs upon the land (8:7). However, when the magicians were unable to change dust into lice, they proclaimed to Pharaoh, *"This is the finger of God"* (8:19)

b. God's Power in action was shown at the crossing of the Red Sea. God's power was tested and proved to be authentic in the face of what appeared certain defeat for the Israelites. God's ability to control nature showed his uniqueness from all the gods of the Egyptians. Israel's crossing of the sea and Pharaoh's certain death, symbolically signaled God's final triumph over the forces of evil. Moses' song (Exodus 16) was an anthem to God's power. He exclaimed, *"I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea."* (15:1)

2. God's Compassion.

Israel was not delivered out of Egypt and brought into the land of Canaan because God had an obligation to them, but rather because God loved them and wanted to show His kindness and compassion. It was not because Israel was more righteous than other nations, but rather "it is central to his nature to love, to save, to redeem, to restore." (Wright, p. 83) God was grieved at the affliction of the Israelites, and saved His people "with a strong hand and an outstretched arm."

God manifested his loyalty in covenant-keeping when He delivered Israel. Deuteronomy 9:5 says, *"It cannot at all be laid to any goodness or uprightness on your part. He will be driving them out on account of their wickedness and to establish the word which the Lord swore to your fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."*

God's relationship to Israel was not a contractual relationship but rather a relationship of underserved goodness. Two men, who become partners in business, sign a contract, with each having an obligation to the other. This contractual relationship is vastly different than the relationship between child and parent, in which the child is the recipient of goodness which he shall never be able to fully repay to the parent.

Israel's relationship to God was of this latter type. Israel was simply the recipient of God's undeserved kindness, and was chosen as an instrument through which all people of the earth could be saved. This attitude of God's undeserved kindness is reflected in Psalms 136. *"O give thanks to the Lord of lords for his mercy endureth forever. To him who alone doeth great wonders".* (vs. 3, 4)

3. God's Holiness.

God showed that He was totally different than man and separate from what is common. This aspect of God's otherness is a manifestation of God's holiness. Because no other god could do what He did, He commanded man's attention, respect, and worship. After viewing the miraculous Red Sea crossing, Moses explained, *"Who is like thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?"* (Exodus 15:11)

God further revealed His awesome majesty at Mt. Sinai, when the Law was given. *"On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightning and a heavy cloud on the mountain and a trumpet blast so unusually loud that all the people in the camp trembled."* (Exodus 19:16)

God established an intimate relationship with Israel in which He expressed love and compassion. However, to avoid disrespect in this close relationship, God revealed His holiness to remind man that He was infinitely greater than man and commanded man's worship. This characteristic of God dispels the possibility of undue familiarity and causes man to awesomely behold the glory of God "with wonder, love, and praise.

B. God's Commands

The Ten Commandments are a direct outgrowth from the nature of God. The commandments are what they are because of what God is. Each commandment reflects something about God's nature.

1. The first four speak directly about man's relationship to God.

a. The first commandment declares, *"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."*

b. The second commandment declares, *"You shall not make yourself a graven image."* On the basis of God's unique power and compassion, Israel was to worship God with undivided loyalty, forsaking all the gods of Egypt. In the light of God's wonders and miracles, all other gods are, in reality, declared dead, and incapable and undeserving of man's worship. The God of the Exodus created man for Himself, and is jealous for man's undivided devotion.

c. The third commandment is, *"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain."* Because God is holy and is mysteriously separated from man, He is to be feared and honored. To carelessly and thoughtlessly use His name, is to attack God's sovereign honor.

d. The fourth commandment says, *"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."* On this special day man is to rest and reflect upon the God of power, compassion, and holiness. This day reminds man of his unique creation, and

points man to the day of eternal rest, which shall be given to all who obey God.

2. The last six commandments speak about man's relationship to his neighbor.

a. The fifth commandment says, "*Honor your father and your mother.*" The God of the Exodus is also the God of Creation, who instituted the human family, and ordained parents as the integrators and guardians of that basic unit of social structure.

b. The sixth is, "*Thou shalt not kill.*" God created life in His own image, and therefore life is sacred. God is compassionate and loving. His creatures are made with the same capacities that are to be exercised in like manner.

c. The seventh is, "*Thou shalt not commit adultery.*" God created sex to be used solely between the human couple whom God hath joined together. It is the highest expression of human love that sets man apart from all other creatures as a rational being.

d. The eighth is, "*Thou shalt not steal.*" To exploit or deceive another is to deny man's God-given capacity for compassion, which, when exercised, declares man's unique creaturehood and glorifies the God who poured out his compassion on Israel.

e. The ninth is, "*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*" To bear false witness is to deny loyalty and truth. God was loyal to Israel, and expects that each Israelite be loyal to the character of his neighbor.

f. The tenth is, "*You shall not covet.*" Covetousness is the seed of murder, theft, and adultery, the fruits of an uncompassionate, disloyal rebel of God, who has denied his privileges of brotherhood as a creature made in God's image.

III. MAN'S NEED FOR AN OBJECTIVE STANDARD

We have noted that God's commandments reflect God's character. Because God made man for Himself, He alone has authority to impose regulations upon man's conduct. God's character and will, as revealed in the Ten Commandments, is the only true standard by which man's actions can either be judged right or wrong.

There can be no morality apart from God. God alone is the source of our system of morality and code of ethics. We have no knowledge of right and wrong without resort to the self-disclosed God, who actively revealed His will to man. God's personal initiative is the basis for man's knowledgeable development of moral capacities.

To understand man's innate sense of 'oughtness' is impossible without reference to the account of man's creation and God's self-disclosure in the Exodus.

C.S. Lewis in Mere Christianity has pointed out that in common conversation, men act as if there was a standard of behavior. Expressions, such as “Leave him alone, he isn’t doing you any harm,” or “Come on, you promised” refer to an objective standard. (p. 17) These phrases are meaningless unless conduct can be judged by a lasting and unchangeable quality.

To illustrate this, one may refer to the North Star. Because it is on the same plane as the earth’s axis, it appears to be constantly and directly in the northern sky. This star is a fixed point by which other stars can be located.

God’s character as revealed in the Ten Commandments is the ‘north star’, remaining constant and fixed, by which all conduct is judged. Just as the other stars are constantly changing position in the sky, so circumstances of life change throughout the ages, but God’s character remains eternally contemporary and relevant for all ages as the final standard for all morality.

How then does one tell right from wrong? By looking at the ‘north star’ of all morality, which is God Himself.

Man’s futile attempt to construct a system of morality, independent of God, will always result in social chaos and conflict. All terms such as love, peace, justice, goodness, right and wrong lose their meaning without reference to the God of the Exodus. Only as God’s power, compassion, and holiness are experientially understood, can man effectively judge his attitudes and actions.

CONCLUSION:

In the Exodus account, we have revealed the character of God, which is the ‘north star’ of all morality. In our age of relativism, in which right and wrong are not clearly defined, we need a reliable guide. That guide is the Ten Commandments, which are an expression of God’s nature.



CHAPTER 2

SIGNIFICANCE OF DAVIDIC MONARCHY

OUTLINE

SUBJECT: SIGNIFICANCE OF DAVIDIC MONARCHY
SCRIPTURE: I Kings 2:1-4
TEXT: *“Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David; and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever.” (Isaiah 9:7)*

INTRODUCTION:

The formation of the monarchy under King David was important, not only for Israel’s immediate situation, but also for Israel’s future spiritual heritage.

PROPOSITION:

- I. Summary of Israelite History from Moses to David
- II. Significance of Davidic Reign
 - A. Structural Changes in Davidic Reign
 - B. Spiritual Heritage of Davidic Reign

CONCLUSION:

Many significant changes in the political and social structure of Israel were over inaugurated by the rule of David. However, more important than this was the imagery provided by David—such imagery as ‘Throne’, ‘Temple’, ‘Kingdom’, and ‘Jerusalem’. All of these earthly categories centering on the rule of David, were translated into spiritual categories and received their greatest meaning in the New Testament.

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SCRIPTURE: I Kings 2:1-4
TEXT: *"Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David; and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from hence forth even for ever." (Isaiah 9:7)*

INTRODUCTION:

In our study of the 'Biblical Peaks of Revelation', we have thus far studied the meaning of objective morality as given in the Ten Commandments. Today we must continue our study of progressive revelation by looking at another peak of Biblical revelation.

The formation of the monarchy under King David was important, not only for Israel's immediate situation, but also for Israel's future spiritual heritage. The categories which were popularized during King David's reign—Kingdom, Throne, etc.—became the standard categories around which Old Testament theology was solidified in the future after the days of David. The earthly categories of royalty eventually were translated into spiritual categories, especially during the time of the New Testament. We must understand the significance of the monarchy, if we intend to understand the unfolding purpose of God in history.

PROPOSITION:

Let us first summarize the history of Israel from the time of Moses to the time of David and let us then seek to understand the significance of the Davidic reign.

I. SUMMARY OF ISRAELITE HISTORY FROM MOSES TO DAVID

The approximate date of the Exodus is 1300 B.C. The approximate date of the Davidic Kingdom is 1000 B.C. Many events took place during these centuries.

After Moses led the children of Israel through the wilderness for about forty years, Moses died and his leadership was turned over to Joshua. Joshua was a great man of God whose courage was early shown when he was sent to spy out the land of Canaan. He demonstrated great faith in God when he brought back an optimistic report. Joshua led the children of Israel miraculously through the Jordan River into the land of Canaan, where the Israelites were confronted by various pagan tribes. It was God's promise that Canaan should be given to Israel, and it was God's command that Israel should destroy the pagan nations which infested the land of Canaan. Why should God give such a stern command to kill the heathen tribes of Canaan? "This is the only way of preserving them (Israel) from rapid assimilation, and of maintaining the integrity of their message of Salvation," says Suzanne de Dietrich. It was important that Israel maintain cultural, racial, and religious purity, and to do this, all paganism must be destroyed.

Israel's purification of the land of Canaan was not sudden or complete, as shown by the existence of pagan tribes even in the time of David. However, under the leadership of Joshua, various military campaigns were carried out, and Israel became established in the land of Canaan.

After Joshua's death, God raised up several Judges to meet the challenges and threats of internal corruption and of external oppression. Such Judges as Samson, Gideon, Deborah and Barak rallied their people together to form a united front in the wake of a national emergency. These Judges were not hereditary leaders but received a special call from God to unite Israel's tribes against a common enemy.

In contrast to the surrounding nations, it was the belief of Israel in the early days of its history, that God alone should be king, and that to have a human king would show a lack of faith and confidence in God. However, when the Philistines threatened to make Palestine into a Philistine state during the time of Samuel in the 11th century B.C., the elders of Israel decided that Israel's political life could only be maintained under a monarchy.

Samuel took the wishes of Israel for a king before God and God accommodated himself to the wishes of Israel. Samuel always felt, however, that this action of choosing a king was a sign of faithlessness and sin on the part of Israel, but Samuel consented to fulfill their desire for a king. Saul was first chosen as king, but because of his faithlessness and disobedience to God's commands, Saul was eventually replaced by David as king.

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF DAVIDIC REIGN

David was the greatest of all Israelite kings, and, despite his moral failures, was said to be a man after God's own heart. David's reign signaled some very significant changes and his reign provided imagery for later New Testament teaching.

A. Structural Changes in Davidic Reign

John Bright well describes the significant changes that were brought about during the reign of David. David, a military hero and powerful king, solidified and expanded the borders of the Kingdom of Israel through his conquest of Canaanite cities. The old order of the tribal league gave way to the new order of the military monarchy. The need for a standing army, administrative and judicial machinery, and the levying of taxes resulted in a more sophisticated and complex political structure. The kingly dynasty replaced the charismatic hero; and commercial, industrial life replaced agrarian life. No longer was there the ancient tribal simplicity in which all were more or less equal in class and status, but instead a growing division in classes and in wealth was forming. Bright goes on to say, "In one brief generation she (Israel) had been transformed from a loose, disjointed tribal league, fighting for its life, into a united, self-conscious nation of some importance in the world...Literature and culture flourished as never before, and there was unexampled material prosperity. It was a proud thing to be an Israelite in the tenth century B.C." (The Kingdom of God, p. 40) Israelite worship became tightly

centralized when David brought the Ark to Jerusalem. The history of Israel reached its highest peak during the reign of David, and many changes brought about – politically, socially, and religiously. Israel experienced her Golden Age under the reign of David.

B. Spiritual Heritage of Davidic Reign

Because David was Israel's greatest king, it is little wonder that Israel considered the coming Messiah as a great Son of David. After David's glorious reign, the nation declined and the darkness deepened. However, even while Israel was in the valley of oppression, she never forgot the great days of David and she longed for another David to establish justice in Israel again.

Much of the later Old Testament and New Testament imagery is borrowed from the Age of David. Such words as 'Kingdom', 'throne', 'temple', and 'Jerusalem' go back to the days of David and are used in a spiritual context to describe the future of God's will. Let us look at specific examples.

The earthly kingdom of David is prophetically translated into a spiritual kingdom, with a spiritual king as its leader. *"Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever."* (Isaiah 9:7) Daniel also prophesied of Christ's power and spoke of this power in royal, kingly categories, reminiscent of David's kingly power: *"I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed."* (Daniel 7:13, 14) The kingdom and throne of David were categories used by the angel in explaining to Mary the mission of Jesus: *"He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end."* (Luke 1: 32, 33)

The Temple which was built by Solomon was considered the dwelling place of God where His glorious presence was manifested. The idea of the Temple was translated into a spiritual meaning in the New Testament. On one occasion Jesus said to the Jews, *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."* The Jews failed to see the spiritual meaning of Jesus' statement, and interpreted it with crude literalism: *"Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?"* (John 2:19, 20) Jesus, of course, was speaking of the temple of His own body. Paul also put a spiritual interpretation upon the idea of the Temple: *"What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?"* (I Corinthians 6:19) Whereas the Old Testament Temple was considered the dwelling place for God's presence, Jesus reinterpreted the Temple as being man's body which is intended to be the dwelling place of God. The idea of the Temple found its physical fulfillment

in the building by Solomon, but it found its spiritual fulfillment in Christ. It was David who conceived of the idea of a Temple for God. Again this is an example of imagery which was borrowed from the Davidic reign, and which was used effectively in the New Testament to teach a spiritual truth.

Another example of imagery which was borrowed from the Davidic reign and used in the New Testament is the idea of Jerusalem with its associations. The earthly Jerusalem was considered God's dwelling place and it was the joy of the devout Israelite. *"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord...Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that love thee."* (Psalms 122:1, 6) *"If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my tongue; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy."* (Psalms 137:6, 6)

In the New Testament, 'Jerusalem' is considered a type or symbol of heaven itself. The writer of the Hebrews wrote, *"But ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels."* (Hebrews 12:22) John described heaven in terms of a 'New Jerusalem,' reminiscent of the joys experienced by the Jews in the earthly city of Jerusalem. *"And I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband...And He carried me away in the spirit to a great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven."* (Revelations 21:2)

CONCLUSION:

Suzanne de Dietrich well summarized the life of David and shows the place and significance of the Davidic reign in the scheme and purpose of God: "Actually this king (David) represents the living incarnation of his people, for the Lord took him *'from the pasture, from following the sheep'* (II Samuel 7:8), and chose him by the free choice of his grace. The Lord was with him in his battles, he punished and humiliated him, and he raised him up and comforted him. Thus the promise made to Abraham begins to be fulfilled in David. It is renewed and clarified. But, as in the case of Abraham, the promise goes beyond the bounds of a single life and even beyond the bounds of the history of a single nation. The words of the psalms attributed to David evoke and foretell one greater than David – he who will make expiation for all the people, he who God will not permit to know corruption, he who will be the King of Glory, the Savior to whom the Lord will say, *'Sit at my right hand,'* he who will receive all these nations as an inheritance. The Psalter, throughout, shows us in David a forerunner of the Messiah to come." (God's Unfolding Purpose; pg. 96, 97)

Many significant changes in the political and social structure of Israel were inaugurated by the rule of David. However, more important than this was the imagery provided by David – such imagery as 'Throne', 'Temple', 'Kingdom', and 'Jerusalem'. All of these earthly categories centering on the rule of David, were translated into spiritual categories and received their greatest meaning in the New Testament.



CHAPTER 3

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROPHETS

OUTLINE

SUBJECT: SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROPHETS

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 42:1-9

TEXT: *"This salvation was something the prophets did not understand. They wrote about it, but they had many questions as to what it all could mean." (I Peter 1:10, Living Bible)*

INTRODUCTION:

The period of the classical prophets from the eighth century to the sixth century B.C. is a very important period to study, in an attempt to understand God's unfolding purpose in history. Through the prophets, God continued to unveil His purpose to mankind.

PROPOSITION:

Let us first summarize the history of Israel from the time of David to the time of the Exile. Let us secondly note some of the general characteristics of the prophets' message, and then let us thirdly look at what one of the many prophets had specifically to say about the ministry of the Coming Messiah.

I. SUMMARY OF ISRAELITE HISTORY FROM DAVID TO EXILE

II. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROPHETS

III. MESSIANIC PROCLAMATION IN PROPHETS

A. Purpose of the Exile

B. Messianic Hope Amidst Exile

CONCLUSION:

The Prophets are very important in understanding the plan and purpose of God as it is progressively unfolded in history. The prophets revealed God's will for their particular age. While the prophets do not speak of the twenty-first century, they do speak to the twenty-first century, for the nature of man has never changed and many of the same general conditions exist today as existed in the eighth to sixth centuries B.C.

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SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 42:1-9

TEXT: *“This salvation was something the prophets did not understand. They wrote about it, but they had many questions as to what it all could mean.” (I Peter 1:10, Living Bible)*

INTRODUCTION:

In our study of the ‘Biblical Peaks of Revelation’, we have thus far studied the meaning of objective morality in terms of the Ten Commandments, and the significance of the Davidic terminology which became the standard terminology for the later solidification of Old and New Testament thought. Now we must continue our study of Biblical Revelation by studying another significant period of Israelite history.

The period of the classical prophets from the eighth century to the sixth century B.C. is a very important period to study in an attempt to understand God’s unfolding purpose in history. Through the prophets, God continued to unveil His purpose to mankind.

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I. SUMMARY OF ISRAELITE HISTORY FROM DAVID TO EXILE

After David’s death, his son Solomon became king. Solomon’s reign is remembered as the richest and most glorious reign in the ancient world. Surrounding nations were awed by the extravagant wealth, the extensive commerce and trade, the many horses and chariots, and the consolidation of power which were Solomon’s. Culture and literature were developed in Israel and Solomon was noted for his great wisdom.

However, below the external strata of unparalleled prosperity, there were the seeds of weakness and financial strain. Solomon’s elaborate government and his nation’s luxurious way of life outweighed his financial resources. As a consequence, heavy taxation was imposed upon his subjects. When Solomon died, his nation was breaking under the heavy burden of financial obligations.

When the people of Israel requested Rehoboam to lighten their financial burdens, Solomon’s son refused to grant their request. As a result, ten of the twelve tribes of Israel forsook Rehoboam and pledged their allegiance to one named Jeroboam. Thus began the history of two kingdoms – the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judah – and thus began two centuries of periodic civil strife and wars between the two rival kingdoms.

History of the Divided Kingdoms from the tenth century to the eighth century B.C. fills many dark and drab pages in the history of the Jewish people. Corruption and instability ruled the day, with the quick rise and sudden fall of many kings, most of whom were evil in their practices and rule. Plots, counterplots, and assassinations were the commonplace events of the day, accompanied by a quick succession of kings.

Among the early prophets who fearlessly proclaimed God's message during these murderous days, were Elijah and Elisha. Both were faithful to their call, despite the tendency for many to succumb to the desires of royalty and priesthood. They stood up fearlessly and sometimes alone in their struggle for righteousness and purity.

In the early part of the eighth century B.C. Israel enjoyed a period of material prosperity, almost parallel to that of the time of Solomon. It was Amos who was enabled as a prophet of God, to see below the strata of outward material prosperity and security to discern the true condition of Israel. Amos fearlessly exposed Israel's social injustice and class discrimination which was formed by affluence and wealth. Amos exposed the personal indulgence and the pretentious religious practices of Israel. Amos gave Israel a choice. Either Israel must repent of her evil ways and forsake her gods of materialism, or God's just judgment and wrath would be poured upon Israel. Isaiah, Hosea, and Micah also prophesied in a similar vein during this same general period in the eighth century.

The remains of destroyed cities are silent reminders of God's judgment which befell Israel in 721 B.C. as a result of Israel's refusal to listen to the prophets' warning. Assyria was the instrument of God's judgment upon Israel.

The kingdom of Judah lasted for about one hundred fifty years after Israel fell. Judah repented at times of her wicked ways, but these periods of national repentance were only temporary and partial. Judah's reform under Josiah proved to be shallow, as shown by the return to former wicked ways after Josiah's death. Jeremiah's message fell on stopped ears and hardened hearts, and because Jeremiah was unsuccessful in shattering Judah's false confidence and presumption, Judah finally became the object of God's special judgment. The inhabitants of Judah were exiled to Babylon in 597 B.C. and in 586 B.C. For seventy years Judah was exiled from her homeland.

II. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROPHETS

To understand God's unfolding purpose in history from the eighth to the sixth centuries B.C., it is essential that we understand the place and purpose of the prophets. In fact, it was the prophets through whom God revealed his message, plan, and will. Prophetism is one of the majestic peaks of Biblical Revelation and therefore it is essential for one to understand the general characteristics of the prophets' message.

Primary to an understanding of the prophets' message is a realization that prophecy is basically forth-telling rather than fore-telling. It is true that there was an element of fore-telling in prophets' message, but this element was only incidental to the prophets' main message of forth-telling the will of God as it specifically related to the moral and social situation of the time. The prophet did tell of the fall of Samaria and Jerusalem, but this

message was based upon the prophets' understanding of the nature of God and the inevitable consequence of sin. The prophets' main job was to forth-tell God's message for the actual moral, social, political situation of their day. Prophecy is so relevant for our modern society, not primarily because it has elements of fore-telling in it—although this is important—but mainly because its message speaks to conditions that exist in any urban society. Thus, while the prophets' message doesn't speak of the twentieth-first century, it does speak to the twentieth-first century. There are principles from the prophets concerning man's relationship to God and others that are always contemporary and relevant to any age.

There are three characteristics or distinctive notes that appear in the writings of almost every prophet, to a greater or lesser degree.

First, the prophet gives some description of the predominant sins that exist among the people to whom he is speaking. The sins may manifest themselves in various forms—social injustice, political corruption, personal indulgence, religious pretension, etc., - but nevertheless there usually appears in the prophetic writings some type of analysis of sin.

Secondly, the prophet warns the people of the consequence of unrepentant sin. Says Amos, *"Listen, you people of Israel, to the charge which the Lord brings against you—against the nations of the earth." Therefore it is you whom I will punish for all your wrongdoings.*" (Amos 3:1-2) This is a characteristic prophetic warning of oncoming judgment to unrepentant people. It is very important, however, to understand that God is never bound in His pronouncements of judgment. The execution of God's judgment is contingent upon man's moral response to God's moral demands. If the people truly repent and turn to truth, justice, and righteousness, God will spare judgment. With the pronouncement of judgment, there comes a call to repentance. This is the third note in the prophetic message.

The prophet not only warns of God's judgment, but the prophet also emphasizes God's love. Through Hosea, God tells of His love for Israel:

*"When Israel was young I came to love him,
And I called him out of Egypt to be my son.
But the more I called them
The further they went from me.
They made sacrifices to the Baal's
And burnt incense to idols.
Yet, it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, picking them up in my arms.
Yet, they never knew that it was I who healed their bruises.
How, oh how, can I give you up, Ephraim!
How, oh how, can I hand you over, Israel! (Hosea 11:3, 8)*

God's love restrains Him from completely destroying his people. He will save a remnant through whom He may continue to carry on His purposes in history.

*"I will not give vent to my fierce anger—
I will not destroy Ephraim again.*

*For I am God and not man,
I am the Holy One in your very midst,
And I have not come to destroy.
And I will bring them back to their homes,
Says the Lord.” (Hosea 11:9, 11b)*

III. MESSIANIC PROCLAMATION IN PROPHETS

In our attempt to understand God’s unfolding purpose in history, we must seek to understand the significance of the Exile.

A. Purpose of The Exile

To the Jew the Exile to Babylon was the darkest time in Israelite history. However, in God’s wisdom, the Exile fulfilled a definite purpose.

First, the Exile proved to the Jews that the Kingdom of Israel was not identical with the Kingdom of God. It is true that Israel was chosen by God from all the nations of the earth as God’s special instrument through which He would work out His eternal purposes. However, Israel’s failure was her preoccupation with her special election, with a consequent disregard for her covenant obligations. In short, Israel failed simply because she failed to remember that her covenant with God was a bilateral obligation with moral responsibilities. Israel ignored the prophets’ warning because she thought that in some way God was indissolveably ‘married’ to Israel. The Exile proved to Israel that the Kingdom of God transcended the nation of Israel, and it proved that God was not bound to the nation of Israel to carry out His purposes.

Secondly, the Exile proved to Israel that she was not self-sufficient, but that she must depend wholly upon God. Suzanne de Dietrich describes this point very well: “The task of the prophets of the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. is to undermine the false security of the chosen people. Israel becomes established in the Promised Land, secure in its possessions, its victories, its way of doing things, secure even in its faith. But from the moment that Israel believes that it is ‘the master of its fate,’ it begins to lose its own soul. It is subtly corrupted by its Canaanite surroundings. It compromises with the Canaanite ways of doing things. It seeks military security by the number of its chariots, political security by alliances with foreign nations, and spiritual security by sacrifices offered on the one hand to the foreign gods (the baals), and on the other hand to the Lord.

In the midst of all this, a strange conviction gets a hold of the prophets: in order for Israel to find God again, Israel will have to lose everything else. Everything, this means all those possessions of which it had been so proud, everything that, without Israel’s even being aware of what was happening, had crowded the Living God out of Israel’s heart. This means that Israel must lose its riches, its glory as a free and independent people, its land, its king – everything, even up to and including the Holy City, which it believed could not be destroyed, and the Temple, the visible sign

of God's presence. Israel must go back 'to the wilderness,' into a dreadful solitude, where, no longer having anything of its own, it will learn to look to God alone for everything." (God's Unfolding Purpose; pg. 108, 109)

B. Messianic Hope Amidst Exile

It may seem very strange that during the darkest days of Israel's history (the Exile), Israel received her brightest hopes for the future. Amidst the darkness of the Exile, the prophets spoke about the glory of the coming Messiah.

Notes Suzanne de Dietrich regarding this paradox: "God's activity among His chosen ones usually runs counter to the mood of the moment. When everyone is optimistic and the word is 'All is well!' the prophet speaks of doom. But when Israel is at the bottom of the pit, when there is nothing but desolation and ruin, the solitary voice of the prophet is lifted up afresh, this time to proclaim the God of all comfort...The man of God often speaks out of season. For the Holy Spirit who speaks through him enables him to puncture illusions. The prophet smells death in the air at just the place where others are dazzled by the brilliance of a civilization still at the heights of its glory. And on the other hand, just when life seems buried and condemned, he perceives the secret work of God and receives the promise that resurrection lies ahead." (Ibid; p. 112)

Time will not permit us to give a detailed record of the Messianic promises, but let us at least look at a few of the great promises. We will center our attention upon the Messianic promises as given in the book of Isaiah.

The Messiah will bring peace on earth: *"He shall arbitrate between the nations and shall decide (disputes) for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning shears; nation will not lift up sword against nation, nor shall they learn war any more."* (Isaiah 2:4) *"For to us a Child is born, to us a Son is given; the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."* (Isaiah 9:6)

The Messiah will judge righteously: *"He shall not judge by what His eyes see, or decide by what His ears hear; but with justice shall He judge the poor, and with fairness shall He decide for the meek of the land. He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and the wicked He shall slay with the breath of His lips."* (Isaiah 11:3, 4)

The Messiah will satisfy the longings of man's heart: *I will pour water upon the thirsty and streams upon the dry; I will pour out My Spirit upon your seed and My blessing upon your offspring; they will spring up in the midst of grass like willows by running streams."* (Isaiah 44:3)

The life of the Messiah will be redemptive and He will be called the 'Suffering Servant'. Through His suffering and death, He will bring healing and salvation to the nations. *"I gave my back to the smiters, my cheeks to those who plucked off my*

beard; I did not shield my face from insult and spitting.” (Isaiah 50:6)

Read Isaiah 53 for the most vivid picture of the ministry of the Suffering Servant.

CONCLUSION:

The Prophets are very important in understanding the plan and purpose of God as it is progressively unfolded in history. The prophets revealed God’s will for their particular age. While the prophets do not speak of the twenty-first century, they do speak to the twenty-first century, for the nature of man has never changed and many of the same general conditions exist today as existed in the eighth to sixth centuries B.C.



CHAPTER 4

ALTERNATIVES DURING CRISIS

OUTLINE

SUBJECT: ALTERNATIVES DURING CRISIS
SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 7: 1-25
TEXT: *"Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be fainthearted."*
(Isaiah 7: 4a)

INTRODUCTION:

It is helpful to have some understanding of the historical context (the dramatic events) surrounding the crisis which Judah faced during the reign of Ahaz, who was encouraged by Isaiah the Prophet to ask God for a sign, to prove God's power to deliver Israel from impending danger from a heathen king.

PROPOSITION:

The most important lesson which we may learn from this period in Isaiah's ministry is the tragedy of distrusting God and instead trusting in human wisdom alone, while facing a personal or national crisis. The alternatives to choose from during a crisis are faith and fear. Faith is the only secure way to live.

I. ALTERNATIVE TO FEAR - FAITH

- A. Quiet Confidence In God's Sovereignty – Isaiah 7: 1-6
- B. Distain for Men Who Disregard God's Will – Isaiah 7: 7-9

II. ATTITUDE OF FEAR

- A. Resort To Human Power Instead of Resort To God's Power
 - 1. God Does Not Exist
 - 2. God Is Weak
 - 3. God Is Unconcerned With Human Beings

III. RESULTS OF FEAR - BONDAGE

- A. Vindication of God's Cause
- B. Prediction of Bondage
 - 1. The Name of Isaiah's Son
 - 2. Shame and Desolation Predicted – Isaiah 7: 18-25

CONCLUSION:

The wholesome fear (reverence) of God leads to quiet confidence and fulfilled promises; the fear that fails to trust God brings condemnation and utter desolation.

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The Assyrian King, Tiglath-pileser III (745-727 B.C.), was increasing in power, and to counter his power, a large western coalition of forces headed by King Uzziah (783-742 B.C.) of Judah had been formed. Isaiah's call came shortly after Uzziah's death. Following Uzziah's death, Tiglath-pileser put on new pressure against the coalition. The new King on the throne in Jerusalem was Ahaz, a young and very weak King of unstable character. One of his first acts was to withdraw Judah from the coalition. This action brought upon Ahaz the wrath of two kings in the coalition – Pekah, King of Israel, and Rezin, King of Damascus. These two kings declared war on King Ahaz of Judah to force him to remain in the coalition. Ahaz, learning of this plot, became terribly fearful (Isaiah 7: 2), along with the people of Judah, and therefore Ahaz turned to the very enemy of the coalition for protection and aid – Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria (II Kings 16: 7). Tiglath-pileser quickly took advantage of the confused situation, and by several military maneuvers, conquered and took away from Israel all of Galilee and Transjordan and laid waste Damascus, as Isaiah had prophesied would happen (Isaiah 7: 1-6). The conquered territory was reorganized as Assyrian provinces, ruled by Assyrian governors. Judah and Jerusalem were saved, but at the cost of losing independence and becoming a vassal of Assyria, paying heavy tribute to the Assyrian king. Ahaz had to adopt some parts of the pagan Assyrian religion, resulting in a betrayal of the true Hebrew religion and succumbing to foreign practices and superstitions and much moral and social decay.

The only place where Northern Israel retained any independence was around the hill country of Samaria, and that because one named Hoshea murdered Pekah, the king of Israel, and took over the Israelite throne and quickly paid tribute to Assyria. That was in 732 B.C. In 724 B.C. Israel, reduced and crippled, again foolishly rebelled, resulting in Assyria's destruction of every remaining Israelite city. The heavily fortified Israelite capital of Samaria finally fell in 721 B.C., following a starvation siege by the Assyrians. Sargon II, the new Assyrian King, took into exile, as he claims, 27,290 people. Much of the Israelite population was killed. Israel as a kingdom was at an end and in the following years Assyria placed various people from its kingdom in the land of Israel.

PROPOSITION:

With this brief historical background, telling of the fall of Israel and the subjugation of Judah, as a backdrop for a study of Isaiah, let us look at the events surrounding the reign of King Ahaz of Judah. The most important lesson which we may learn from this period in Isaiah's ministry is the tragedy of distrusting God and trusting in human wisdom alone, while facing a personal or national crisis. The alternatives to choose from during a crisis are faith and fear. Faith is the only secure way to live. The most important lesson which we may learn from this period in Isaiah's ministry is the tragedy of distrusting God and trusting in human wisdom alone, while facing a personal or national crisis. The alternatives to choose from during a crisis are faith and fear. Faith is the only secure way to live.

I. ALTERNATIVE TO FEAR - FAITH

A. Quiet Confidence In God's Sovereignty – Isaiah 7: 1-6

The God of providence who providentially led the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, and the God who established the children of Israel in the land of Canaan, is the same God whom Isaiah commands Ahaz to trust during this crisis. *"Take heed and be quiet"*. (v. 4) Are not words of suggestion but words of command, given by a faithful prophet to a fearful king? The "two tails of these smoking firebrands", (v. 4) were the "fag-ends of flickering torches" (Moffatt) which describes the smoldering, charred, dying-out nations of little importance which were considered as such great threats to Ahaz. God will make the wrath of men (*"the burning anger of Rezin and Syria and of the son of Remaliah"* – v. 4) To praise Him. The little nation of Judah which was miraculously delivered from its enemies in the past would again be delivered. (Recall Proverbs 3: 25, 26; Joshua 1:6, 7; Luke 1:13, 30; 2:10; 5:10; 12: 32; Mark 4:40; II Timothy 1:7)

B. Distain for Men Who Disregard God's Will – Isaiah 7: 7-9

The man or nation who makes plans with no resort to God's counsel is planning in vain, for his plans will come to naught. *"It shall not stand neither shall it come to pass"* (v. 7). To go against God is like a sparrow attacking a modern jet. The man, who plans without first probing God's mind, is a fool and is to be looked upon with distain.

II. ATTITUDE TO FEAR

A. Resort To Human Power Instead of Resort To God's Power

Ahaz, fearful of the Israelite-Damascus coalition, made overtures to Assyria to come to Judah's aid. Resorting to human power instead of resorting to God's power, assumes one of three things about God:

1. **God Does Not Exist.** One may say ever so much about faith in God, but when he acts on the basis of fear, he is acting as if he had no one outside of himself to help him.
2. **God Is Weak.** When the odds were against Ahaz, he put more trust in the might of men than he did in the might of God. When we spend more time developing weapons to defend our nation against terrorism than we spend time on our knees, we are thinking either consciously or unconsciously that God is too weak to defend a righteous cause. When men act as Ahaz did, they are saying that the weapons of steel are stronger than the weapons of the spirit. Let America heed the advice of Isaiah 31: 1-5!
3. **God Is Unconcerned With Human Beings.** Failure to resort to God's power in periods of crisis may be based on an assumption that the infinite, transcendent God is too far removed to be concerned in finite creatures of clay. H.G. Wells tells of an emotionally distraught man who was told by his doctor that the only way he could be delivered was to find the peace which fellowship with God gives. Answered the emotionally sick man: "What! To think of that, up there, having fellowship with me! I would soon think of cooling my throat with the Milky Way or shaking hands with the stars!" Many are paralyzed by fear because they don't resort to God, and many don't resort to God because they think God is unfindable.

B. Hypotritical Rejection of a Sign From God — Isaiah 7: 10-12

For Ahaz to ask for a sign would give God an opportunity to authenticate Isaiah's message before Ahaz, and it would inspire faith in the heart of Ahaz. Such an offer was an act of God's mercy to an ungodly man. Ahaz' very act of asking for a sign would have demonstrated his faith in a God who can do the miraculous. God wants man to put His power to the test. To hide his lack of real faith, the "practical" Ahaz who was submerged in religious syncretism and thus cared little about the true God, used the pretense that he did not want to tempt God, and therefore he refused to ask for a sign. Hypocrisy in the extreme! The way of faith is still considered "impractical" too many.

III. RESULTS OF FERA - BONDAGE

A. Vindication of God's Cause

Isaiah's giving of a sign when Ahaz refused to ask for a sign (7: 13-17), shows the vindication of God's cause, despite man's failure to cooperate with God in that divine cause. The immediate significance of the sign which Isaiah gave to Ahaz does not appear to refer to the Virgin Birth of Christ (for that would be no meaningful sign at the time to Ahaz), but it seems immediately to refer to the fact that a young child would soon be born whose name would mean "With us is God"

(symbolizing God's protection of Judah), and that this soon-to-be-born child would not reach the age of moral accountability (7:16) before God would vindicate His divine cause against the threatening coalition powers. Man must suffer for his disobedience, but God, as Sovereign, will not let man's disobedience thwart His ultimate causes. This verse (Isaiah 7:14) later came to be interpreted in terms of a prophecy of Christ's coming, which coming ultimately fulfilled God's cause for His people and the people of all the world, in terms of Salvation.

B. Prediction of Bondage

1. **The Name of Isaiah's Son.** The meaning of the name of Isaiah's son which Isaiah took with him when he confronted Ahaz (7:3) is "*only a remnant shall return*". The oncoming judgment of God is vividly dramatized in the son's name.
2. **Shame and Desolation Predicted – Isaiah 7: 8-25.** Shame and Desolation are described in terms of the flies (Egypt) and the bees (Assyria) lying waste the honor (7:18-20) and the possessions (7:21-25) of Judah. Fear and distrust of God always ultimately lead to a devastating life, either for a nation or for an individual. Fear and anxiety actually render one helpless in the face of crisis, and destroy creativeness. It has been well said, "Anxiety never baked a cake, built a bridge, won a battle, or solved a problem. Important as we are, we really render ourselves less useful, and less important, if we let worry stall our actions."

CONCLUSION:

The wholesome fear (reverence) of God leads to quiet confidence and fulfilled promises; the fear that fails to trust God brings condemnation and utter desolation.



CHAPTER 5

DELIVERANCE FROM DESTRUCTION

OUTLINE

SUBJECT: DELIVERANCE FROM DESTRUCTION

SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 36 and 37

TEXT: *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” (Psalms 46:1)*

INTRODUCTION:

It is helpful to have some understanding of the historical context in which Hezekiah received an amazing divine intervention that resulted in the survival and triumph of Judah, in the facing of seemingly overwhelming evil powers.

PROPOSITION:

In Isaiah 36 and 37 we find that the threat of the enemy was countered by intercessory prayer, which resulted in miraculous deliverance for Judah. The same principle still applies! Sin seeks to destroy, the believer trusts God through prayer, and the result is that sin is defeated and the believer gains the victory.

I. ENEMY’S THREAT

- A. Psychology of Despair
- B. Psychology of Deception

II. HEZEKIAH’S RESPONSE

- A. Consternation
- B. Counsel
- C. Prayer
 - 1. Acknowledgement of Yahweh’s sole Lordship
 - 2. Divine Response
 - 3. Evaluation
 - 4. Petition
- D. God’s Deliverance
 - 1. God’s Indictment
 - 2. God’s Verdict

CONCLUSION:

When sin seeks to destroy, the believer has access through intercessory prayers to God – the same God who miraculously delivered Hezekiah from destruction and who will also deliver every other person who trusts solely in Him.

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As outlined in the last message, Ahaz was responsible for selling the independence of Judah to pagan Assyria. There was however increasingly manifest in Judah a dislike for the Assyrian cult of paganism which was religiously offensive and nationally humiliating to Judah. As long as Assyria held a sway over Judah, there was no hope of setting aside the worship of Assyrian gods or discontinuing payment of Assyrian taxes. Evident among the common populace in Judah during Ahaz' reign was the increasing longing for the appearance of a Messiah (Isaiah 9: 2-7; 11: 1-9; Micah 5: 2-8), who would be an ideal Davidic, endowed with a special power to lead Judah to victory and thus fulfill Yahweh's eternal covenant with David.

Ahaz' son and successor, Hezekiah (715-687), shared the sentiments of the independence movement in Judah, and gradually and cautiously he plotted to free Judah from the Assyrian grip. The ground swell of discontent in Judah reached open rebellion when Sargon was succeeded by his son Sennacherib (705-681), and Judah, thinking the time was ripe, formally refused tribute to the latter. Many other parts of the empire revolted against Assyria and it took several years before Sennacherib crushed the revolts. Assyria, regaining her strength, put down the revolts one by one. Judah was the last to hold out against Assyria, but in 701 B.C. Sennacherib came against Judah in great force, and he says that he laid siege to 46 of Judah's strong cities and shut up Hezekiah and the remnant of his troops in Jerusalem "like a bird in a cage." Hezekiah had to pay very heavy tribute to Sennacherib (II Kings 18:13-16).

While there is some question as to the sequence of historical events following 701 B.C., the following seems to have taken place. By 691 B.C. all Babylonia disrupted in widespread rebellion against Assyria and Assyria was administered a serious defeat, all of which appears to have moved Hezekiah once more to rebel. In 689 however, the Babylonian rebellion was mastered, and now Assyria turned again against Judah, blockading Hezekiah once more in Jerusalem. The Egyptian Pharaoh was marching to Jerusalem to aid Hezekiah, and, because Sennacherib wanted to get Hezekiah off his hands before facing the Pharaoh, Sennacherib sent his commanding general to Hezekiah demanding surrender. It is in this context that Isaiah 36 and 37 best fit. Jerusalem was not taken and the Biblical explanation for this lies in God's answer to Hezekiah's prayer.

Although Jerusalem was not taken, Judah did not regain her independence, and Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, gave up the rebellion and made peace. Judah's attempt under Hezekiah at regaining independence was unsuccessful.

PROPOSITION:

In Isaiah 36 and 37 contain abiding truths regarding the believer's struggle against evil and the method by which victory is gained. In these chapters we find that the threat of the enemy was countered by intercessory prayer, which resulted in miraculous deliverance for Judah. The same principle still applies! Sin seeks to destroy, the believer trusts God through prayer, and the result is that sin is defeated and the believer gains the victory.

I. ENEMY'S THREAT

A. Psychology of Despair

Assyria attempted to undercut in Judah any basis for confidence:

1. By showing the weakness of mere words in a war. (v. 36:5)
2. By showing the futility of dependence upon Egypt, that broken reed. (v. 36:6)
3. By persuading Judah of her inability to get an oracle from her God, since all the altars but the one in Jerusalem had been removed by Hezekiah during the reform movement. (v. 36:7)
4. By showing the weakness of Judah's remaining military force and inability to even repulse a single Assyrian company. (v. 36: 9)
5. By claiming Yahweh's support for the present Assyrian plot to destroy Judah. (v. 36:10)

By claiming that Judah has no defense in terms of diplomacy, alliances, military power, or religion, Sennacherib's official representative demanded Judah to surrender. The Enemy of man's soul uses the same strategy – telling the believer that he is forsaken of God and has no basis for confidence, and therefore must surrender immediately.

B. Psychology Of Deception

The Assyrian representative spoke in the common man's language of Hebrew, rather than the official Aramaic language of diplomacy, in order that terror would seize the hearts of the common populace (36: 11-12). The Assyrian psychology of deception is further shown as Hezekiah is denounced (36: 14, 15), the benefits of surrender are glamorized (36: 16-17), and the inability of any god – including Judah's God – to give victory over Assyria is asserted (36: 18-20).

Defiance of a person's God, and denouncement of God's messenger, and that expressed in words of terror, is the strategy that Satan uses to break down morale and induce surrender in a person. Satan then glamorizes the benefits of serving him.

II. HEZEKIAH'S RESPONSE

- A. Consternation – The threat to the very existence of Judah brought great mourning (37:1).
- B. Counsel – “Fear not” – for God will sovereignly use circumstances to confound and eventually to destroy the king of Assyria (37: 6-7)
- C. Prayer –
 - 1. Acknowledgement of Yahweh’s sole Lordship and mighty Creatorship of earth (37: 16) in contrast to all other gods (37: 10-13) which were unable to deliver other nations from Assyria’s power.
 - 2. Divine Response – is the only answer to the serious threat to Judah’s very existence (37: 17), and is expected because God’s name is being mocked.
 - 3. Evaluation. In light of the Rabshakeh’s challenge (36: 18-20; 37: 12), Hezekiah reminds himself that the God to whom he is praying is the only true and living God (37: 18-19).
 - 4. Petition. To vindicate God’s righteousness and to honor His name among the nations, Hezekiah asks God to save Judah from the enemy (37: 20).

III. GOD'S DELIVERANCE

- A. God's Indictment
 - 1. Assyria’s mockery of Judah is no less than mockery against God, for Judah is God’s chosen people (37: 21-23).
 - 2. Assyria’s pride and self-sufficiency has denied God’s sovereign control over nations, and has invoked God’s anger against Assyria (37: 24-29).
- B. God's Verdict
 - 1. For Judah. V. s 30-32 express a promise that this threatened remnant of Judah will survive the disasters; the sign being that by the third year Judeans will be planting and reaping as if nothing has ever happened. For the sake of David, God will miraculously protect Judah (37: 33-35).
 - 2. For Assyria. The Assyrian army perished (II Kings 19: 35) in what Herodotus claims was a plague (perhaps bubonic plague). Sennacherib was murdered at the hands of his sons in 682 B.C., some five years after Hezekiah’s death, thus fulfilling prophecy (Isaiah 37:7).

CONCLUSION:

When sin seeks to destroy, the believer has access through intercessory prayers to God – the same God who miraculously delivered Hezekiah from destruction and who will also deliver every other person who trusts solely in Him.



CHAPTER 6

AMOS THE HERDSMAN – ‘JUSTICE OR JUDGMENT’!

OUTLINE

SUBJECT: AMOS THE HERDSMAN – ‘JUSTICE OR JUDGMENT’!
SCRIPTURE: Amos 5: 18-27
TEXT: *“Let justice roll on like a mighty river, and integrity flow like a never-failing stream”! (Amos 5:24, Phillips)*

INTRODUCTION:

It is helpful to briefly look at the historical and biographical background of the times and life of Amos the prophet, to better appreciate the powerful message of the Book of Amos.

PROPOSITION:

Amos speaks to every pleasure-loving, indulgent, and secularized society which has sold its spiritual heritage for material gain.

I. GOD’S EXPOSURE OF SIN

- A. Social Injustice
- B. Personal Indulgence
- C. Pretentious Sacrifices
- D. Psychology of Deception

II. GOD’S THREAT OF JUDGMENT

- A. Reason for Judgment
- B. Revelations of Judgment
- C. Realization of Judgment
- D. Repeatability of Judgment

III. GOD’S OFFERING OF MERCY

- A. God’s Attempts to Invoke Israel To Repent
- B. God’s Faithfulness In Warning Preceding Judgment

CONCLUSION:

The essence of religion is social in nature and consists in mercy and love.

God has no favorite nation which He will unconditionally bless; a nation which has received special privileges, also bears special responsibility, and will be inflicted with special judgment if those privileges are flaunted. God never sends judgment without first warning and offering forgiveness and life.

SUBJECT: AMOS THE HERDSMAN – ‘JUSTICE OR JUDGMENT’!
SCRIPTURE: Amos 5: 18-27
TEXT: *“Let justice roll on like a mighty river, and integrity flow like a never-failing stream.” (Amos 5:4, Phillips)*

INTRODUCTION:

It is helpful to briefly look at the historical and biographical background of the times and life of Amos, the prophet, to better appreciate the powerful message of the Book of Amos.

A. Historical Setting

From 850-800 B.C. Israel experienced defeat. Damascus was at the height of her strength and Israel couldn't cope with this power. However, during this period of time a nation which had been on the stage of history for many centuries was increasing in power and military conquests. This ancient nation was Assyria, whose shadow in the East was beginning to be seen in the West. By 802 B.C. Assyria conquered Damascus and laid it under heavy tribute. Israel escaped the Assyrian blow and remained free and independent. During the next half century (800-750 B.C.), Assyria was weakened and lost nearly every foothold west of the Euphrates.

Through the combined efforts of Jeroboam II, King of Israel (786-750 B.C.) and Uzziah (783-742 B.C.), King of Judah, the area of the combined kingdoms was extended to include almost as much territory as was included in Solomon's realm, a century earlier.

A rich and prosperous society resulted when the trade routes which Solomon had controlled were again in Israelite hands. Great palaces were built and fine ivories were the possessions of the wealthy. Materially speaking, the period was one of the richest in the history of Israel.

Riches often corrupt a society, and Israel was no exception. Wealth produces greed, and greed often results in great class distinctions. At this time in Israelite society, many in Israel were becoming very wealthy; others were becoming extremely poor. Religion tolerated social injustice and the religious shrines became the centers of gross immorality. Society and religion were both sick and needed desperately to be awakened and renovated.

B. Biographical Setting

Little is known about Amos' background, or personal life. We do know that Amos was a stern, austere, rustic shepherd from the wilderness of Tekoa, about twelve miles south of Jerusalem. Realizing the great social injustices that existed in Israel, this wilderness man felt an inner compulsion to announce God's message to Israel.

Amos justifies his prophecy: *"The Lord God has spoken, who can but prophesy?"*(3: 8)

Amos was bitterly opposed because of the truth which he fearlessly proclaimed (7: 12). On the basis of God's call, Amos defended his actions (7: 14-15). Amos analyzed specific problems of his day, and defined these problems, not in political or economic terms, but in moral terms.

PROPOSITION:

Amos speaks to every pleasure-loving, indulgent, and secularized society which has sold its spiritual heritage for material gain. Amos' message can be understood from three viewpoints: (1) God's Exposure of Sin, (2) God's Threat of Judgment, (3) God's Offer of Mercy.

I. GOD'S EXPOSURE OF SIN

As a light shines in the darkened corner of a musty attic, exposing filth and dirt, so the light of God's truth exposed the corruption and sin of Israelite society.

A. Social Injustice

Through Amos, God exposed the dishonest practices of the rich, who oppressed the poor (Note 5: 10-12; 2: 6, 7a; 3: 10; 8: 4-7). The 'thingfication' of a person – treating one as a means to an end – is a renouncement of individual sanctity, and thus the worst sort of sin. Selfishness is often bred by riches. The rich man thinks that more money would give him more security, and therefore there is a continual striving to greedily amass greater riches, even at the expense of other people.

B. Personal Indulgence

The undisciplined, indulgent society is the society which is sick. The austere Amos spoke with sternness to the luxury-loving society of Israel (6: 3-7). Amos' message is relevant indeed to America. The present era in American history might be entitled the era of consumption. Americans consume: food, clothes, beverages, pleasures, trips, and even look at love in terms of a thing to be consumed. Too many people feel that everything has its price. May God help America to turn from its indulgent, pleasure-loving practices to God, lest God say to America as He said to Israel, *"For these very reasons you will be the first to go into exile."* (v. 6:7)

C. Pretentious Sacrifices

Religion of the Israelite was extremely extravagant but inwardly shallow. Israel failed to realize that no amount of religious acts will substitute for the need of treating one's fellow man with mercy and justice (5: 21-24).

Many today still have a form of religion, but they deny the power of religion which issues forth in personal integrity and social justice.

II. GOD'S THREAT OF JUDGMENT

A. Reason for Judgment

The reason is found in Israel's presumptuous attitude towards its covenant of special election. Amos agreed with the premise of Israel's special election, but drew an opposite conclusion from this premise (3:12). Israel forgot that the covenant was conditionally maintained on the basis of obedience. The covenant was based upon the brotherhood of men. When inhumanity existed, this covenant was broken and Israel no longer remained in God's favor. The Day of Yahweh, when God would intervene to destroy Israel's enemies, would not be a day of rejoicing for Israel, but instead a day of sorrow, for Israel would be among God's enemies that God would punish (5: 18-20).

B. Revelation of Judgment

Amos' visions which conveyed the dark message of Israel's impending doom: (1) Lamb consumed by lion (3:12); (2) Plumb line (7: 8-9); (3) Basket full of ripe fruit (8: 1-2). God's revelation to Amos of Israel's coming judgment was cause of much mourning to Amos (5: 1, 2).

C. Realization of Judgment

The prophecy of Amos came true less than fifty years after he gave it. The kingdom of Assyria in the north again grew powerful and eventually over swept the small nations in the West – including Israel. In 721 B.C. Samaria, the capital of Israel was destroyed and many Israelites were taken captive to Upper Mesopotamia where they were intermingled with foreign people. These captive Israelites lost their identity and never returned to their homeland. The patience of God was great, but the consequence of continued rebellion was fatal.

D. Repeatability of Judgment

What does Amos have to say to America today? As Americans it is easy to feel that God unconditionally favors the destiny of our nation. We can forget, just as Israel forgot, that God eventually brings judgment upon a nation which has become complacent and presumptuous. Every nation will receive just judgment. The nation with a special light and privilege bares double responsibility for strict obedience. The judgment of God can be repeated in modern times.

III. GOD'S OFFER OF MERCY

Amos' message of threat to Israel cannot be fully understood without also seeing the interspersed pleas of mercy. A compassionate call to repentance is always issued

forth in conjunction with a threat of judgment.

A. God's Attempts to Invoke Israel to Repent.

1. Appeal of Love – God reminded Israel of His past goodness in delivering Israel from their enemies and in leading them to the Promised Land (2: 9-11).
2. Appeal of Fear – God sent a series of local disasters to Israel – famine, drought, blight, destruction of cities (4: 6-11) – hoping to save Israel from wholesale judgment.
3. Appeal of Power – Amos appealed to God's sovereignty as a reason why Israel should fear God and seek His favor (5: 6-9). Amos contrasted the power of God with the weakness of man and thus showed the futility of rebellion.

B. God's Faithfulness in Warning Preceding Judgment.

1. God never sends judgment without warning and that warning comes through His prophets (3:7).
2. The nation which seeks God will be spared of God's judgment and will live (v. s 5:4, 6, and 8).

C. Amos teaches us important truths about man's relationship to God.

1. The essence of religion is social in nature and consists in mercy and love. Man cannot make a separation between secular life and religious life, and hope to justify practices in the former by unusual zeal in the latter.
2. God has no favorite nation which He will unconditionally bless; a nation which has received special privileges, also bears special responsibility, and will be inflicted with special judgment if those privileges are flaunted.
3. God never sends judgment without first warning and offering forgiveness and life.

CONCLUSION:

Because God, by nature, is a God of love, He desires to save all people from their sins. But, only those persons who respond to God's call to repentance will enjoy God's bestowal of actual forgiveness, and God's gift of peace and reconciliation. Because God is lavish in His gift of mercy to all persons, none need be lost in sin, either in time or ultimately in eternity. But God has certain moral conditions that mankind must accept, and God has certain moral warnings that mankind must seriously heed. Only as these warnings are heeded, and as these conditions are met, can God's promises of life and freedom and contentment and prosperity be fulfilled in the personal life of an individual (or of a nation)! God, through Amos the prophet, taught that "mercy spurned is judgment earned"!



CHAPTER 7

MICAH – ‘THE SUPREME AUTHORITY OF GOD’

OUTLINE

SUBJECT: MICAH – ‘THE SUPREME AUTHORITY OF GOD
SCRIPTURE: Micah 6: 1-8
TEXT: *“He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Micah 6:8)*

INTRODUCTION:

Micah’s concern was with man’s false authority as contrasted to God’s true authority. It was Micah’s strong conviction that God had supreme authority in matters of personal behavior, social relationships, and human destiny.

PROPOSITION:

God’s authority is not only Supreme, but it is True. To accept God’s authority is to personally and nationally prosper; to reject God’s authority and to replace it with mere human authority is to be found false and is to incur God’s Judgment.

I. SINS DESCRIPTION

- A. Leaders’ Cruel Oppression of Poor
- B. Religious Ritualism Divorced From Ethics

II. PROPHET’S PRONOUNCEMENT OF DOOM

- A. Samaria’s Impending Doom
 - 1. Reasons
 - 2. Descriptions
- B. Jerusalem’s Eventual Doom

III. NATION’S FUTURE RESTORATION

CONCLUSION:

The God that Micah knew and spoke of was the God whose authority was Supreme and True. To defy that authority was to throw ones self individually and nationally, upon the rubbish heap of history. What a God was Micah’s, and He is the same God we serve, for God is the same yesterday, today and forever. He is still the God of Supreme Authority.

SUBJECT: MICAH – ‘THE SUPREME AUTHORITY OF GOD’

SCRIPTURE: Micah 6: 1-8

TEXT: *“He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Micah 6:8)*

INTRODUCTION:

Micah’s ministry was during much of the same time as Hosea’s ministry and was almost identical to Isaiah’s ministry (740-700 B.C.) Micah’s concern was with man’s false authority as contrasted to God’s true authority. “The sins he rebukes are peculiarly those of cities: Oppression and violence, corruption of princes, prophets and priests, bribery, robbery, dishonesty, pride.” (The Minor Prophets; by G.C. Morgan; pg. 75, 76) It was Micah’s strong conviction that God had supreme authority in matters of personal behavior, social relationships, and human destiny. God has authority to search out the secret thoughts and actions of men, and to bring judgment upon the evil of men, whether those men be private citizens or leaders – princes, prophets, priests. God has authority to destroy (Samaria, Jerusalem, or any other city which corrupts a nation’s thought and action), and God also has a right to restore (as God promised would happen eventually to Jerusalem). God’s authority is climaxed and seen for its beauty and power, in His promise of future deliverance through His specially-chosen Deliverer (5: 1-8).

PROPOSITION:

God’s authority is not only Supreme, but it is True. To accept God’s authority is to personally and nationally prosper; to reject God’s authority and to replace it with mere human authority is to be found false and is to incur God’s Judgment.

I SIN’S DESCRIPTION

Although he was well aware of it, Micah did not spend much time describing Israel’s political upheaval. Both Amos and Hosea put more emphasis in their messages upon this. Micah did however put considerable emphasis upon social corruption and religious corruption.

A. Leaders’ Cruel Oppression of Poor

Micah had a special concern for the poor man who was the object of cruel exploitation. When the rich were assessed high taxes, they paid these taxes by seizing the land of the poor farmers. (2: 1-2) Stealing, oppression and violence were tragic sins, vividly described by the Prophet (2: 8-9). The exploitation of the poor by rich princes caused Micah’s anger to flare up and his pen to sear with words of most vivid description (3: 1-3). The treatment of the poor was so bad that it must be described in terms of human cannibalism!

Micah pronounced strong words of condemnation to the false prophets also. (3:5-7). These prophets were completely swayed by the people and had no message at all from God. They either sooth or sear the people, depending upon monetary payment or lack of it from their hearers. Their end will be darkness, and God's true authority pitted against their false authority will force them to acknowledge the falsehood of their prophecies.

The corruption of the leaders is further shown by bribe-taking in the seats of judgment. They hate justice and love unfairness and fill Jerusalem with murder and sin of every kind (3:9-10, Living Prophecies).

B. Religious Ritualism Divorced From Ethics

Sin is further described by Micah in terms of mere religious ritual divorced from ethics. (6:6-7) Micah, reminiscent of Amos' message, makes it very clear that religious ritual that is not accompanied with justice and compassion, is futile and will reap God's harsh judgment. Dishonesty in business, extortion, violence, and lying all point their fingers of accusations. They make any religious ritualism a mere pretense and simply add fuel to God's anger. (6:9-12)

It is not elaborate ritual and sacrifice that God desires, but righteous lives – fairness, justice, mercy, humility. (6:8)

II. PROPHET'S PRONOUNCEMENT OF DOOM

In light of Israel's and Judah's sins (and especially the sins of the big cities such as Samaria and Jerusalem), Micah pronounces doom to come.

A. Samaria's Impending Doom

1. **Reasons.** Obviously the reason for impending judgment is found in the previous description (social injustice and religious pretension). Micah goes on to describe the low moral condition of his day in (7:1-6). Look at the category of sins, all of which will bring judgment upon Samaria: Dishonesty which is so prevalent that an honest man is as rare as grapes that are out of season; Murder even in families; Bribery by high officials; Crooked deeds; Lack of trust even among so-called friends; family disorder and disrespect! Basic inhumanity in all human relationships is the obvious reason why judgment is soon to come to Israel.

Also, Micah points out insensitivity to God's mercy in the past as well as in the present, as another reason for Samaria's impending doom. (6:1-5) Considering God's great mercy and wonderful deliverance of Israel throughout the centuries, Israel stands defenseless in the face of God's accusation.

2. **Descriptions.** Note the following Scriptures which vividly describe the fate of Israel, of which Samaria was the capital. (1:2-7; 2:3-5; 6:13-18)

B. Jerusalem's Eventual Doom

The southern kingdom of Judah of which Jerusalem was the capital did not have as many wicked kings as the northern kingdom of Israel, and neither did Judah decline in morals nearly as fast as Israel. However, the corruption which was so obvious in northern Israel was beginning to be seen and felt in southern Judah. Micah was from southern Judah, and he was gripped with the fact that in Jerusalem could be found many of the same sins which were so obvious in northern Samaria. "Because Judah had gone on stubbornly in her defiance and disobedience, the same fate would overtake her as her northern sister. Jerusalem's sentence was strikingly similar to Samaria's". (Meet the Minor Prophets; Earle; 60) "It is because of you that Jerusalem will be plowed like a field, and become a heap of rubble; the mountaintop where the temple stands will be overgrown with brush." (v. 3:12) This prediction of Micah's was made over one hundred years before its fulfillment in 586 B.C. when Jerusalem was destroyed! Micah even prophesied who the captors of Jerusalem would be and what the fate of the people of Judah would be (4: 9-10). Micah's love for Judah caused him much pain and anguish, as he thought of the fate of Jerusalem. (1:8)

III. NATION'S FUTURE RESTORATION

God has authority to tear down and He also has authority to build up. Although judgment must come upon Samaria and Jerusalem because of their gross sins, God's last word is not judgment but restoration.

One of the great prophecies of Micah regarding the future, concerns itself with the future Deliverer of Judah. Micah speaks of the universal rulership of God who shall bring the knowledge of the true God to all people. (4: 1-3a)

This Rulership of God will bring peace to all nations. (4: 3-5)

God's people will be restored to their land and once again enjoy great power. (4: 6-8)
Israel will be vindicated of her enemies. The enemies of Israel will be subject to Israel. (4: 11-13)
Israel will be brought out of her darkness into the glory of God's light and power. (7:9-10)

Because of God's mercy, He cannot retain forever His anger towards His people, but will restore them to an honorable position in the world. (7: 11-20) While the full implications may not be now understood, we can be sure that God's Word will be fulfilled in every detail.

The brightness of Israel's future in the midst of her present darkness and doom is seen in the beautiful prediction of a Coming Deliverer. (5:1-8) This Deliverer will restore to Israel her former glory and, through Israel, all the nations of the earth will be blessed. "Then the nations of Israel will refresh the world like gentle dew or the welcome showers of rain."

(5:7) Surely this prophecy was fulfilled in the coming of the Saviour into the world. The unfolding of the future will perhaps reveal a further meaning to this rich portion of prophecy.

CONCLUSION:

The God that Micah knew and spoke of was the God whose authority was Supreme and True. To defy that authority, was to throw ones self individually and nationally upon the rubbish heap of history. God's authority is absolute. He searches the secret hearts of all men. He pronounces judgment and brings that judgment to pass. He restores the downfallen and brings deliverance to the sin-oppressed, and He did this supremely and superbly in the coming of His own Son, of whose coming Micah prophesied some seven hundred years before the event took place in history! What a God was Micah's, and He is the same God we serve, for God is the same yesterday, today and forever. He is still the God of Supreme Authority.



CHAPTER 8

NAHUM – ‘THE WRATH OF GOD’

OUTLINE

SUBJECT: NAHAM – ‘THE WRATH OF GOD’
SCRIPTURE: Nahum 1: 7-13
TEXT: *“He is slow in getting angry, but when aroused His power is incredible.”* (Nahum 1: 3a; Living Bible)

INTRODUCTION:

It is important to understand the historical context during which time the prophet gave his fearful prophecy against the cruel Assyrian empire.

PROPOSITION:

The purpose of the book of Nahum is to describe God’s vengeance for proud and cruel Assyria, and to predict the complete overthrow of Ninevah. From Nahum, one learns of an often overlooked aspect of God’s love – love that finds its expression in the vindication of vengeance on a rebellious and proud nation.

I. GOD’S WRATH – CHAPTER 1

- A. God’s Omnipotent Vengeance (v. 1-11)
- B. Judah’s Vindication (v. 12-15)

II. NINEVAH’S ANGUISH – CHAPTER 2

- A. Ninevah’s Desolation (v. 1-7)
- B. Ninevah’s Looting (v. 8-13)

III. NINEVAH’S UNLAMENTED DOOM – CHAPTER 3

- A. Ninevah’s Shame (v. 1-7)
- B. Ninevah’s Vulnerability (v. 8-19)

CONCLUSION:

1. God’s character is unchangeable – merciful, yet jealous.
2. God has sovereign control over the actions of men and nations.
3. God’s love is not a sentimental love, but a just love.

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TEXT: *“He is slow in getting angry, but when aroused His power is incredible.”* (Nahum 1: 3a; Living Bible)

INTRODUCTION:

It is important to understand the historical context during which time the prophet gave his fearful prophecy against the cruel Assyrian empire.

Assyria was successful in destroying Samaria, the Northern capital of Israel, in 721 B.C. Later, in 688 B.C., Assyria planned to utterly destroy Jerusalem, the capital of Southern Judah. However, Jerusalem was miraculously saved, the Assyrian army was destroyed and Sennacherib was assassinated by his own sons. (Isaiah 37: 33-38) Although Jerusalem escaped destruction, Hezekiah’s attempt at freeing Judah from Assyrian domination was unsuccessful, and Hezekiah’s son and successor, Manasseh, gave up rebellion and made peace with Assyria.

Throughout the first half of the 7th century B.C., Assyria’s power increased greatly. Sennacherib’s successor, Ashurbanipal (669-627 B.C.), ruled the known world with an iron hand and inflicted acts of unthinkable cruelty on his enemies. Ralph Earle in *Meet the Minor Prophets* makes note that Ashurbanipal “tore off the limbs of kings, compelled three captured rulers to pull his chariot through the streets, forced a prince to wear around his neck the bloody head of his king, and feasted with the head of a Chaldean monarch hanging above him.” (p. 65) The recently discovered Assyrian law book reveals the prescribed penalties for the enemies of Assyria: gouging out eyes, hacking off hands, slitting noses, cutting off ears, pouring boiled tar on the heads.

Under Manasseh’s rule (687-643), Judah greatly declined in spirituality. Note a description of Manasseh’s wickedness (II Kings 21: 9-15; 24:13; Jeremiah 15: 1-4). Judah again made homage to Assyrian deities, and the practice of fertility religion with the ritual of sacred prostitution was again tolerated in Judah, even within the Temple.

During the last half of the 7th century B.C., Assyria began gradually to decline in power. This was mainly due to an over-extension of her power and a consequent inability to suppress outbreaks of scattered opposition throughout her vast Empire. Finally in October, 626 B.C., the Babylonian prince Nabopolassar (626-605) defeated the Assyrians outside Babylon and a month later he took over the throne there. Assyria was on her way out as the world power. Some time later Assyria’s long-standing enemy – Egypt – out of fear of the new threatening power – Babylon – came to Assyria’s aid. This help to Assyria was of no avail, for finally in 612 B.C., Assyria’s end came when Ninevah, the Assyrian capital, fell to Babylon.

PROPOSITION:

The purpose of the book of Nahum is to describe God’s vengeance for proud and cruel Assyria, and to predict the complete overthrow of Ninevah. From Nahum, one learns of an

often overlooked aspect of God's love – love that finds its expression in the vindication of vengeance on a rebellious and proud nation.

I. GOD'S WRATH – CHAPTER 1

A. God's Omnipotent Vengeance (v. 1-11)

This section describes God's character and God's actions which are consistent with that character. God is jealous of His Name and Honor. When that honor is trampled in the dust by a proud nation which forces others to give allegiance to its pagan gods, then the jealousy of the True God gives vent to fierce anger.

God, by nature, is slow to anger (v. 3a) and has mercy on all who repent (like as He had mercy on ancient Ninevah which repented when Jonah earlier had preached to it), but when a nation directly defies and challenges God then God's patience has come to an end, and all of nature trembles before His wrath (1: 3b-5) as it is poured out upon the obstinate (v. 6).

When a nation repents and accepts God's offer of mercy, there is safety (v. 7), but when a nation rejects God's offer of mercy (v. 8), quick destruction (*"devoured as stubble fully dry"*, v. 10), and absolute destruction (*"utter end"* – v. 9) comes to that nation, like as it did to Assyria (612 B.C). Such a nation is defenseless before God's wrath (*"they are drunken as drunkards"*) (v. 10)

At the present time, when God's love is sentimentalized, Nahum's prophecy reminds us that God's love sears as well as soothes, condemns as well as consoles, destroys as well as delivers. Because the true and living God of love is concerned with justice and compassion, He must punish acts of inhumanity, cruelty, and wickedness.

B. Judah's Vindication (v. 12-15)

The sovereign God whose purposes are served by nature's processes (v. 3a – 6) and by history's events, will now vindicate His wrath on proud Assyria – the very nation which God had chosen earlier to punish and to purge His own people – Judah. To Judah, God says, *"Oh My people, I have punished you enough!"* (v. 12b, Living Prophecies). To Assyria, God says, *"I have ordered an end to your dynasty...I will destroy your gods and temples, and I will bury you! For how you stink with sin"* (v. 14, Living Prophecies) This is Judah's day of Thanksgiving when she is called upon to reaffirm her loyalty to the True God (v. 15).

II. NINEVAH'S ANGUISH – CHAPTER 2

A. Ninevah's Desolation (v. 1-7)

The cruel power which destroyed defenses, razed cities, and left inhabitants dead and entire areas desolate (v. 2), is the power whose capital soon will be surrounded by enemy armies with swift glittering chariots (v. 1, 3), and captured and destroyed

in the upheaval of a panic (v. 4-7). She who rendered many desolate, will herself now be rendered desolate.

B. Ninevah's Looting (v. 8-13)

Ninevah, which had boasted of her mighty armies, will find her own armies deserting her (v. 8). She, who had filled her own treasures with the loot from conquered lands, will be stunned and aghast to find her own treasures drained by looting from her conquerors.

The once Mighty Lion which fattened herself on the blood of her enemies now is delivered into the Hands of her Killer – “the Lord of Hosts”. (v. 11-13)

III. NINEVAH'S UNLAMENTED DOOM – CHAPTER 3

A. Ninevah's Shame (v. 1-7)

The overwhelming power and bitter vengeance of Assyria's enemies is vividly described by words of action (Living Prophecies): whips cracking, chariots rushing, wheels rumbling, horses' hoofs pounding, chariots clattering, swords flashing, spears glittering. (v. 2, 3) Then a dismal, pale silence: *“The dead are lying in the streets – bodies, heaps of bodies, everywhere.”* (v. 3)

Why will Assyria be reduced to such shame? Because she has bewitched people everywhere to enter into her ‘whoredoms’ (worship of false gods) – (v. 4). As God reveals her filth and vileness (v. 6), all the world will see her nakedness and shame (v. 5), and will rejoice at being rid of the tyrant (v.7)

B. Ninevah's Vulnerability (v. 8-19)

Assyria's cruelty and rejection of the Living God has rendered her unhealable (v. 19) and unsaveable (15b). The impregnable Ninevah will in reality be no more impregnable than Thebes, the capital of Egypt, which Assyria destroyed in 663 B.C. (v. 8-11). Assyria is just as vulnerable to destruction as first-ripe figs are vulnerable to opened mouths (v. 12). Elaborate preparations for the enemy (v. 14) will be of no avail, for Ninevah will quickly be destroyed by the sword and fire (v. 15). None can save the city, neither her merchants nor princes (v. 15, 16), nor her troops (who are weak and helpless as women. – (v. 13).

Will the surrounding nations be sorrowful over Assyria's fall? Never! *“All who hear your fate will clap their hands for joy”.* (v. 19)

CONCLUSION:

1. God's character is unchangeable – merciful, yet jealous. God forgives all who repent, but on those who obstinately dishonor God's Name, God's wrath is poured out.

2. **God has sovereign control over the actions of men and nations. God used Assyria as His instrument of purging for Judah, but when Assyria became drunken with pride, God turned on Assyria.**
3. **God's love is not a sentimental love, but a just love. God is concerned for righteousness and human dignity, and therefore will not let cruelty and wickedness go unrestrained. God's forbearance has a limit. When God's full opportunity is refused, then God's full and fearful judgment comes.**



CHAPTER 9

INAGURATION OF THE KINGDOM – THE INCARNATION

OUTLINE

SUBJECT: INAGURATION OF THE KINGDOM – THE INCARNATION
SCRIPTURE: Luke 4: 16-21
TEXT: *“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.” (Mark 1: 15)*

INTRODUCTION:

So far we have traced the unfolding plan of God throughout history. Put in different terms, we have viewed the mountain peaks of Biblical Revelation.

PROPOSITION:

The meaning of the Incarnation is found in Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God was inaugurated through Jesus’ Coming.

I SUMMARY OF ISRAELITE HISTORY FROM SIXTH CENTURY B.C. TO CHRIST

II. CHRIST’S INVASION OF SATAN’S REALM

A. Proclamation of Kingdom’s Present Reality

B. Signs of Kingdom’s Present Reality

1. Jesus’ Authoritative Words
2. Jesus’ Miraculous Works

III. CHRIST’S IDENTIFICATION WITH MESSIANIC ROLE

A. Jews’ Messianic Expectations

1. Restoration of Davidic Monarchy
2. Intrusion of Son of Man

B. Jesus’ Messianic Interpretation

CONCLUSION:

We have seen that Jesus is the focus of all ‘salvation history’. He was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Jesus proclaimed that the Kingdom of God was now inaugurated by His Coming.

Instead of a restoration of an earthly kingdom or an abrupt intrusion of a militaristic figure, the Messiah must come as a lowly servant, whose role must be redemptive.

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INCARNATION
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repent ye, and believe the gospel.” (Mark 1: 15)*

INTRODUCTION:

So far we have traced the unfolding plan of God throughout history. Put in different terms, we have viewed the mountain peaks of Biblical Revelation. We viewed the peak of divine revelation in the Ten Commandments followed by the valley of Israelite wanderings and Canaanite Chaos during the time of the Judges. We viewed the peak of kingly glory in the Davidic Monarchy, followed by the valley of the kingdom division. We viewed the peak of classical prophetism followed by the valley of dark exile and Jewish exclusivism. Now we view the towering and majestic peak of New Testament revelation – the Incarnation.

PROPOSITION:

The meaning of the Incarnation is found in Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God was inaugurated through Jesus’ Coming. Before we speak specifically about the Kingdom of God, let us first briefly review Israel’s history from the sixth century B.C. to the time of Christ. Then we shall discuss secondly, Christ’s invasion of Satan’s realm, and thirdly, Christ’s identification with Messianic role.

I. SUMMARY OF ISRAELITE HISTORY FROM SIXTH CENTURY B.C. TO CHRIST

We learned in a previous chapter that the Jewish Exile to Babylon in the sixth century proved two things to the Israelites: (1) The Kingdom of Israel was not identical with the Kingdom of God; (2) Israel was not self-sufficient but she must depend wholly upon God. The sadness of the Jews during their exile was great, as shown by one of the Psalms written about this time:

By the waters of Babylon,
There we sat down and wept,
When we remembered Zion.
On the willows there
We hung up our lyres...
How shall we sing the Lord’s song
In a foreign land?
If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
Let my right hand wither!
Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth,
If I do not remember you,
If I do not set Jerusalem

Above my highest joy!

The Persians conquered the Babylonians and became the powerful rulers of the ancient world. The Persians were less severe to subject nations than the Babylonians were, and the Persians showed more respect for the traditions and customs of conquered populations than what the Babylonians did. Cyrus, a king of Persia, permitted the exiled Jews to return to their homeland, and Cyrus even gave consent to have the Jerusalem Temple built at his own expense.

After the Jews returned to their homeland, there was a conflict between the returning Jews and the people who had remained in the country, particularly the Samaritans. This dispute between the Jews and the Samaritans, along with a preoccupation on the part of the Jews with the affairs of daily living, resulted in a delay of the Temple rebuilding. It is at this time that Haggai spurs the Jews on to action by asking them the penetrating question *"Is it time for yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house (The Temple) lies in ruins?"* (Haggai 1: 4) The book of Haggai then reports: *"Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua, the son of Jehozadah the high priest, with all the remnant of the people obeyed the voice of the Lord their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the Lord their God had sent him; and the people feared before the Lord."* (Haggai 1:12) Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the king were responsible for leading the *"remnant of the people"* (Haggai 1: 14) in rebuilding the Temple of the Lord.

II. CHRIST'S INVASION OF SATAN'S REALM

The Scripture says that *"when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law."* (Galatians 4: 4, 5) The coming of Christ was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, and is indeed the focus of all 'Salvation History.' It is important that we understand the significance of Christ's coming.

A. Proclamation of Kingdom's Present Reality

The Gospel according to Mark opens with this significant truth: *"Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel."* (Mark 1: 14, 15) Many times throughout the Gospels, the Kingdom's present reality is proclaimed. *"If I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you."* (Luke 11: 20) *"Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you."* (Matthew 21: 31) *"And He (Jesus) turned unto His disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: For I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard."* (Luke 10: 23, 24) *"The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here."* (Luke 11: 31) In His home town of

Nazareth, Jesus claimed to fulfill the very Scripture which he read.

Jesus often referred to the Kingdom of God. What did Jesus mean by this phrase? A.M. Hunter defines the Kingdom of God as follows: "It is a divine act, not a divine demand. It is the sovereign saving activity of God. It is His Reign becoming manifestly effective in the world of human experience. It is God in action, God in conflict with evil, through Jesus, for men's salvation." (The Work and Words of Jesus; pg. 76)

B. Signs of Kingdom's Present Reality

Christ never used His supernatural power to create a sensational or emotional response. Christ wanted men to seriously consider the cost of following Him before following Him. Nevertheless, Christ did say things and He did do things that were superhuman. Jesus' authoritative words and His miraculous works were both for the purpose of identifying Him as the Messiah.

1. Jesus' Authoritative Words

After Jesus spoke to the people, the crowds felt compelled to say, "Never spoke man as this man has spoken." Why? Because Jesus spoke with an authority all of His own. Jesus pointed to Himself as His own authority and commanded men to leave their secular employment and follow Him. Jesus claimed to be the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and He dared to place His authority above the authority of even Moses. The Sermon on the Mount is a demonstration of Jesus' superior authority.

The old law said, No murder. I say, No angry passion.

The old law said, No adultery. I say, No lustful thought.

The old law said, Divorce on condition...I say, No divorce.

The old law said, No false swearing. I say, No swearing at all.

The old law said, Eye for eye. I say, No retaliation.

The old law said, Love your neighbor. I say, Love your enemy.

(Intro. New Testament Theology; p. 38 by A. M. Hunter)

2. Jesus' Miraculous Works

As has been pointed out, the miracles were not for the purpose of creating a sensational response to Christ. Rather, the miracles were meant to be signs which lent evidence that Jesus truly was the Messiah. The miracles were acts of compassion, but their purpose was even greater than this. The true purpose of the miracles was actively to demonstrate that the Kingdom of God had arrived on earth. As A.M. Hunter so well puts it: "The healing of the sick, the exorcism of evil spirits, the restoration of the maimed, the deaf, the dumb and the blind, the forgiveness of sins – all these were 'works' of the Kingdom...In one phrase, the miracles were the Kingdom of God in action." (A.M. Hunter: Intro. New Testament Theology; p. 30)

III. CHRIST'S IDENTIFICATION WITH MESSIANIC ROLE

Jesus identified Himself with the Messianic role. However, before we can properly appreciate Jesus' identification with the Messianic role, we must first seek to understand the Jews' Messianic expectations.

A. Jews' Messianic Expectations

There were at least two different forms that the Messianic expectation took. The idea of the restoration of the Davidic Monarchy and the idea of the intrusion of the Son of Man, were forms of Messianic expectations.

1. Restoration of Davidic Monarchy. For centuries the Jews had longed for a restoration of the Monarchy which would be patterned after the victorious rule of King David. David was considered the greatest king of Israel and his age was idolized as the Golden Age of Israel. The Jews expected the Messiah to be a great son of David whose glory would lie in his militaristic conquests over the Jews' oppressors.

2. Intrusion of Son of Man. Some Jews also "hoped for the sudden intrusion of God's Kingdom in the clouds of heaven. Closely linked to this hope was the figure of the Son of Man. We encounter the Son of Man first in Daniel (7: 9-14), where we see him coming in the heavens to receive the Kingdom of the Ancient of Days (God) ...In the noncanonical book of I Enoch he seems clearly to be thought of as a pre-existent Being, residing from all eternity with God in the heavens, who should appear in the end time as the divinely sent deliverer." (John Bright: The Kingdom of God; pg. 200, 201)

B. Jesus' Messianic Interpretation

The most profound Messianic pattern in the Old Testament is that of the Suffering Servant. However, the Jews failed to see this Messianic pattern, and centered their attention upon a Davidic Messiah or the Son of Man. The last thing the Jews expected was a Messiah whose chief role was that of a suffering servant. The Jews had always considered the Messiah in terms of glory, power, and military victory.

It was Jesus' identification with the role of suffering servant (Isaiah 53) that gave the Messianic idea its true interpretation. It was because Jesus' interpretation of the Messianic role was so different than what the Jews expected that Jesus was rejected by the Jews.

Jesus identified Himself as the fulfillment of Isaiah's picture of the suffering servant (Isaiah 53). "Refusing the popular messianic patterns he (Jesus) seized upon a pattern which, although in the intention of the ancient prophet it was indeed messianic in character, had not been regarded by the Jews as such: that of the Suffering Servant of Yahweh. He consciously and intentionally adopted that pattern as his own, and, suffusing the other messianic patterns with it, he

announced the fulfillment of the prophetic hope of Israel in the form of a Redeemer who must suffer.” (The Kingdom of God; p. 215)

Jesus identified His mission as a redemptive one and not as a military one, especially when He referred to the portions of Scripture in the Prophets which describe a redemptive role. In Nazareth, Jesus identified Himself as the fulfillment of Isaiah 61: 1-2: *“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn.”*

The Christian commentary on Isaiah 53 is Philippians 2: 5-11, which most vividly describes the humble life of suffering servant which Christ lived: *“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus; Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* (Philippians 2: 5-11)

CONCLUSION:

We have seen that Jesus is the focus of all ‘salvation history’. He was the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Jesus proclaimed that the Kingdom of God was now inaugurated by His Coming. No longer must the Jews wait and long for the coming of the Messiah, but could rejoice that the Kingdom of God had come, as shown by Jesus’ authoritative words and miraculous works.

Jesus chose a Messianic pattern which was written about in the Old Testament but which was not popularly acknowledged. Instead of a restoration of an earthly kingdom or an abrupt intrusion of a militaristic figure, the Messiah must come as a lowly servant, whose role must be redemptive. In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son into the world to die for lost humanity. Christ died that death might die!

