

October to December 2014

“Minor Prophets” (Part 3)

by

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About the Author



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THE COMING OF JUDGMENT ON NINEVEH

It was about a century after the spiritual revival under Jonah’s preaching that a new generation rose up in Nineveh. They did not know God and returned to idolatry. The nation of Assyria enslaved other nations. Her king (Sargon II) was the instrument that God used to banish Israel in 722 BC. He overtook Samaria after Jonah’s prophecy. Nahum, described only as *“the Elkoshite”* (Nah 1:1), delivered his message to the surviving tribe of Judah. He showed that the Lord was in control of all affairs. They needed an assurance from the Lord for Judah was the next target. Thus he delivered the message declaring God’s judgment on Nineveh.

He began by saying *“the burden of Nineveh.”* Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria. During Jonah’s time, there were 120,000 people in Nineveh. It was big enough to house 600,000. According to Graham Scroggie, the city lay on the eastern side of the Tigris and was one of the greatest cities then. It had 1,200 towers, each 200 feet high, and its wall was 100 feet high, and of such breath that three chariots could drive on it abreast. It was surrounded by a moat 150 feet wide and 60 feet deep. It was 60 miles in circumference and had the agricultural potential to feed 600,000 people.

Judah saw herself as vulnerable to this mighty power of Assyria. God however had declared its failure. There is no date given for the prophecy of Nahum but several considerations puts it at about 654 BC. The fact that no king of Judah is mentioned indicates that it may have been during the reign of the wicked king Manasseh. It was during the reign of Hezekiah, Manasseh’s father, that Assyria attempted to capture Jerusalem. The message of Nahum is understood in this historical background. The prophet declared that God who is jealous against those who deny His name will avenge, and reserves His wrath for His enemies.

THOUGHT: God is great in power and will punish the wicked.

PRAYER: Lord, let me always trust in Thee only.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 2

NAHUM 1

NAHUM 1:4-7

*“The LORD is good, a strong hold
in the day of trouble; and he knoweth
them that trust in him.”*

GOD HAS INFINITE POWER

The whirlwind, the storm and clouds are the causes of natural calamities and man has no control over them. However, in the sight of the Lord, they are as the dust of His feet. The Lord has power over nature, as shown in verses 4 and 5, and the prophet used this to illustrate the infinite power of God. The prophet used this truth to demonstrate that even the seemingly impregnable stronghold of Nineveh would one day be destroyed. Nahum was preparing his audience not to be afraid of human power. All man-made structures would be destroyed. They are no assurance of protection.

The burden of Nineveh was conclusive and it would surely come to pass. Subsequent events would affirm the accuracy of this prophecy. The message was for the comfort of the kingdom of Judah. The Assyrians were a threat to them as they were the next target after the fall of Samaria. The only salvation for them was to depend on the Lord. God is a perfect substitute for strong walls. No nation in the world can survive without God.

“Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov 14:34). In recent world history, the fall of the Soviet Union came out of nowhere, and then the mighty nation was gone. This was because she was founded on Communistic philosophy which is atheistic. Also, the attack on the Twin Towers in New York and the Pentagon on September 11th 2001 was an eye-opener for the USA that their powerful defence could not protect them from their enemies, let alone natural calamities. In the same manner, the king of Nineveh could not sleep in peace and think that his city was safe. The Lord had already declared her fall. The walls of Jerusalem could not compare with those of Nineveh, and Judah could not depend on them for protection. The Lord, however, gave assurance of His protection through Nahum.

THOUGHT: The judgments of the Lord are sure.

PRAYER: Lord, let me always recognize Thy infinite power.

THE REASON FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF NINEVEH

Historians affirm that Nineveh was subsequently destroyed by flood and fire. Nahum 1:11 tells us that the people of Nineveh were evil. The preaching and the revival under Jonah were long forgotten and the Ninevites were back in opposition to the Lord. The people who were supposed to proclaim the message of the Lord were wicked counsellors. Instead of leading the people to God, they led them to deny God and worship idols. The denial of God is the beginning of all evils. The first of the Ten Commandments says, “*I am the LORD thy God... Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*” God knows the results of such denial. Idolatry was the main sin of Nineveh. Within one generation, they had returned to the same sin which caused the Lord not to spare the city. The fate of the city was also the fate of the whole nation. It was erased from the map of great nations and assimilated into Babylon which became the new superpower.

The message of Nahum to the nations was for them to turn to God and repent. The denial of God is an ecumenical conspiracy that comes in many forms to unite people of all religions. Today, the most popular and effective means is to mix secular music with so-called gospel music. The singers share the same platform and they claim to speak for God. A syncretistic society will emerge and will be led to think that they are serving God. Their destruction will surely come. 2 Corinthians 6:17 exhorts believers to “*come out from among them.*”

The prophet’s message to Judah was that upon her mountains were the feet of Him who brings good tidings. This was a reference to the coming Messiah. Judah was to keep the solemn feasts and her vows. She was assured that Nineveh would be utterly cut off and not be a threat to her anymore. Her worship of God might have been disrupted due to the Assyrian invasion, but then the nation was free and ought to be faithful. In times of distress, the people of Judah might have made vows to the Lord and thus were obliged to keep them. When God’s people are faithful, He will always stand with them.

THOUGHT: God has an eye on the affairs of all nations.

PRAYER: Lord, let me acknowledge Thee at all times.

THE DESTRUCTION OF NINEVEH (1)

Judgment had been declared upon Nineveh. Nahum then spoke of the destruction that would befall the city. Assyria was a mighty nation in biblical history. Nineveh, her capital city, was heavily fortified as described earlier. Other nations were greatly frightened by this nation. Only God could destroy her might. He did not only foretell but He also brought it to pass. Its destruction was described in three sections: the means of destruction, the specific nature of destruction and the aftermath of destruction.

(a) The Means of Destruction would be war. Nahum 2:1 says that the city would be dashed into pieces and the natural reaction to any attack would be defence. It was a call to battle. Thus the city was told to rise and protect herself when such a time came. Extra-biblical records tell of the fulfilment of Nahum’s prophecy. The Babylonians and the Medes joined forces against Nineveh, and took it. It was an accurate prophecy that came to pass.

Before the time of Nahum, Assyria had taken Samaria captive. Nahum 2:2 says that it was the Lord who turned away the excellency of Jacob and the excellency of Israel. Their land was emptied and their vine branches were marred. This is descriptive of what Assyria did to the nation of Israel. However, the judgment on Nineveh was in the making. When the Lord decreed, all man-made efforts lost their power.

The mention in verse 3 of the shield of the mighty men being made red and valiant men being in scarlet indicates shedding of much blood. The prophet was looking at the events that were yet to take place, i.e. in the future. The weapons of war included chariots. Chariots offered fast and efficient transport of soldiers and weapons. The magnitude of warfare required many chariots.

THOUGHT: Nineveh had strong defence, but God sealed her end.

PRAYER: Lord, may I always trust in Thy unchanging Word.

THE DESTRUCTION OF NINEVEH (2)

(b) The Specific Nature of Destruction. Nineveh was a strong city and its walls had withstood aggression for hundreds of years. However, as in any warfare, the enemy will always try to find a nation's weak point, i.e. its Achilles' heel. In the case of Nineveh, it was the gate of the rivers.

Nahum 2:6 says, *"The gates of the rivers shall be opened, and the palace shall be dissolved."* The story of the capture of Nineveh by the Babylonians tells of this as the point of attack. A flood or a large flow of water would destroy the city. This goes to tell the wonders of God in revealing Himself through such events. Nahum was not a popular prophet, but his predictions showed that it was God who brought this to pass. The Lord had spoken through Nahum. The city would not only be attacked, but her citizens would be taken captive. This was a common trend in those days. The men of war would be killed, the elderly left to die, and women and children carried captives (Nah 2:7). These came to pass as prophesied. Those carried alive would serve as slaves. The total destruction would ensure the safety of the conqueror as there would be no one to fight back. Nineveh was destroyed and buried for good.

The confusion that would occur during the capture and destruction of the city would see everyone running away and nobody would persuade them to return. This was the usual occurrence in war situations, and the only desire at that point was to save one's own life. Besides people, the other thing that the conquering power desired was the wealth of the city. Silver and gold represented money in those days. Anything else of value would also be carried away. The prophet spoke of this plundering of wealth in verse 9. Such a great city as Nineveh was surely wealthy and its riches were rightly described as without end. However, all these were plundered in one day and the ruins buried in the ground.

THOUGHT: How do I value my riches?

PRAYER: Lord, may I lay my treasures in heaven.

THE DESTRUCTION OF NINEVEH (3)

(c) The Aftermath of Destruction. If the people of Nineveh had maintained their faith after the preaching of Jonah, they would not have suffered loss. They would thank God that their lives were spared. The pain of loss of their homes was overwhelming.

The city is now described as empty, void and waste. It was a sight to behold. It was enough to make the people’s hearts melt and even the knees to smite together and much pain in the loins. Their faces also were said to gather blackness. All these are descriptions of a greatly frightened people. This was the fear that overtook the inhabitants of the city. With an over-running flood, the Lord would make a full end of Nineveh.

The prophet foretold and it happened. Nineveh was a distant city and Judah was the recipient of Nahum’s message. The experience of Nineveh was a lesson for Judah. This repeated trend in nations has a lesson for everyone who reads the scriptures. Nobody can ignore God and remain safe.

The great city, known everywhere for its high walls, towers and palaces and much wealth, was now gone. It became a jungle for wild animals to roam in. No one expected this would happen, but when it is decreed from heaven, it was done. The last verse shows that the fate of the city was from the Lord. It paints a gloomy picture of that sad end.

The providence of God and His punitive will is decreed upon this city. She refused to retain her testimony as a nation that knew God after the preaching of Jonah. The new generation did not bother to keep the faith of their fathers. God’s justice was manifested in her destruction.

THOUGHT: History vindicates the words of the prophet.

PRAYER: Lord, may I believe Thy faithful prophets.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 7

NAHUM 3

REVELATION 21:8

“...and the abominable, and murderers,
and whoremongers...shall have their part
in the lake which burneth...”

THE DEFENCE OF JUDGMENT ON NINEVEH

The third chapter is a detailed pronouncement of a curse upon Nineveh. It was a wicked city as the worst of sins were committed in her. Her kings and citizens prided themselves for their military might, but they did not know that might may not be right. God did not look away from their wickedness, but He decreed and pronounced a specific judgment upon the city, and this included the whole nation of Assyria.

Nineveh was a bloody city full of lies and robbery and her victims could not depart. This is descriptive of the violence and oppression that characterized the citizens of this land. They enslaved their captives and mistreated them in inhuman conditions. They were very rigid, and none could escape. Thus the Lord pronounced a woe against her. The noise of whips and rattling of chariots were an indication of their conquest and capture of slaves. They were treated as beasts of burden. This is what happens when there is no fear of God in the hearts of the people; they are endued with satanic aspirations. They feel at ease and are greatly satisfied in oppressing others. God does not overlook the suffering of the helpless.

Verse 3 indicates that there would also be a mass slaughter. The result of any war is always death of great magnitude, including genocide. This gave Nineveh the name “*the bloody city*” because she exterminated her victims. Shedding of blood is one of the worst transgressions against humanity and the law of God. Vengeance must come upon it. Thus, Nineveh was destined for destruction notwithstanding her military and financial might.

Do you see injustice around you? Do you feel you have been treated unjustly? God knows what is happening and will bring His judgment to pass. Won't you trust Him?

THOUGHT: God is a God of justice, do not offend Him.

PRAYER: Lord, save those who are in the hands of the cruel.

THE REASONS FOR THE DESTRUCTION

The sins which were common among the Ninevites, who walked after the flesh, were roundly condemned. God’s ultimate punishment for them was death. Nineveh could not be allowed to continue in her sins and had to be brought to an end.

God in heaven had decreed the judgment of Nineveh. The reasons for the destruction are indicated in the text. The destruction would be so thorough that the aftermath shall not appeal to anyone. It would cause those who saw it flee as they would be frightened by the ruins of the city. She was compared with the populous city of No (Amon) which was situated among the rivers and had waters round about it. Its location is not known. Suggestions have been made that No referred to Thebes, a city in Egypt as stated in verse 9, *“Ethiopia and Egypt were her strength, and it was infinite; Put and Lubim were thy helpers.”* This city was carried captive after much violence. Her young children were dashed in pieces at the top of all the streets. Honourable men were subjected to lots to decide their fate and all the great men were bound in chains. It was a disaster for that city and Nineveh was destined for similar conquest. It was an event in the past that was foretold and it came to pass exactly as the prophet predicted. The revelation in verse 12 shows that the city would lose the battle.

Her enemies exploited her weaknesses. She was carried captive after much violence, for the Lord had determined the outcome of the siege of Nineveh: it fell like a house of cards. Verse 13 indicates that the enemy shall have the upper hand.

THOUGHT: When judgment is from God, nobody can resist.

PRAYER: Lord, may those who are in danger fear Thee and trust in Thee.

THE MAGNITUDE OF THE JUDGMENT

The king of Assyria and his princes could not imagine that their enemies would overcome them. The disaster that befell the city was a surprise to them. Verse 13 tells of a weak army, all their men would be as women. Also the gates of the land shall be set open for the enemies to come in. It was eventually God who used a flood to open the city. Fire was the next instrument of destruction. (Today, the world recognizes natural disasters as acts of God.) There were no bombs in those days which can be dropped from the air to set fire on the enemy targets, but many factors contributed to the burning of that city. “*The fire shall devour thy bars*” is a declaration in verse 13. The instructions in verse 14 would be the natural thing to do in the midst of such a disaster, i.e. let the city defend itself. However, in view of the preceding pronouncements, all would be in vain. Fire and sword would be instruments of destruction (see verse 15). The result of such an attack was great devastation. The reference to merchants is said to refer to hired soldiers. Nineveh had multiplied these (v 16) to ensure victory over the enemy. The crowned and the captains (v 17) would refer to the military commanders of different ranks. Their comparison with locusts and grasshoppers could refer to their numbers. They were all ready. However, the text added that when the sun arose they fled away and their place was not known.

The conclusion of the judgment: When conquest was accomplished, the shepherds, the nobles and all the people shall be humbled. They shall be scattered in the mountains. The king set himself on fire with his household. The invading armies completed the destruction of the city.

THOUGHT: Kingdoms built on the foundation of force and fraud shall certainly be destroyed.

PRAYER: Lord, be merciful to grant my country a just government.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 10

HABAKKUK 1

DANIEL 9:3-15

“...God, keeping covenant and mercy
to them that love him, and to them
that keep his commandments.”

HABAKKUK AND HIS PRAYER

Habakkuk was one of those prophets with an obscure background. His home city and family were not known. The context of his prophecy shows that he was a prophet in Judah when the nation was at the brink of the Babylonian captivity. Israel by then had already been conquered by Assyria. The contents of his message authenticate his prophetic ministry. His book is primarily a prayer addressed to God. God heard him and answered his prayers. This is the message of the first chapter.

Habakkuk's opening words are: *“O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save! Why dost thou show me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention”* (Hab 1:2-3).

Habakkuk was a prophet possibly from a priestly family. The internal evidence that suggests the time of Habakkuk is the mention of an imminent invasion by the Babylonians (see Habakkuk 1:6; 2:3; 3:16). The mention of Chaldeans points to the supremacy of Babylon by then. This would put him during the reign of Jehoiakim, between 609-597 BC.

At the end of the book, despite his own limited knowledge, the prophet praised God. He saw God's wisdom in the coming invasion of Judah. Even though he was terrified by the prospect of that calamity, he trusted the Lord. He recalled what the Lord had done to the nation in the past and that gave him confidence to persevere. God had a purpose in allowing such a calamity to befall the nation which He had chosen to be His people. Habakkuk had hope at a time when the unfolding events would cause despair. That was Habakkuk, the prophet.

THOUGHT: Prophets were God's messengers.

PRAYER: Lord, hear Thy children when they pray.

HABAKKUK’S FIRST PRAYER PETITION

Habakkuk earnestly sought God’s answer for violence. It was after the death of King Josiah that Jehoiakim came to the throne and he was subject to the king of Egypt since the latter had put him on the throne. The death of Josiah had come with violence as he was killed in battle by the king of Egypt. It was then that the Babylonians began to besiege Jerusalem. Subsequently, the king was overthrown by the Babylonians. It was under those circumstances that Habakkuk prayed.

It is possible that Habakkuk was among the captives who were brought to Babylon. Jeremiah was also a prophet at the same time and if Habakkuk had compared notes with that prominent servant, he would have understood the cause of the violence he was witnessing. It was God’s rod of chastisement for the transgression of Israel. According to his observation, the law was slack and no justice was done to the people. The wicked compassed about the righteous and wrong judgment was the order of the day. The wicked seemed to be getting away while the righteous were condemned. Habakkuk could not understand all these happenings.

God answered Habakkuk (vv 5-11) and revealed to him what was going to happen, and that He would bring these to pass while the prophet was still alive. God specifically mentioned the Chaldeans as the people whom He would raise. They would march through the length and breadth of the land and possess homes that were not theirs. At face value, there was injustice but the Lord here indicated His purpose. The Chaldeans would be terrible and dreadful. They would be ready to judge and maintain their dignity. They would come purposely to extend their dominion over nations. Nebuchadnezzar, who was then the king of Babylon, had that agenda of expansion. He had his own wishes and goals.

THOUGHT: God raises nations and puts down kingdoms.

PRAYER: Lord, forgive me for I have sinned against Thee. Help me to always obey Thee and to live a life that is pleasing to Thee.

HABAKKUK'S SECOND PRAYER PETITION

The military power of the Babylonians was superior, and they were all set to achieve their goal. In the dream of Nebuchadnezzar recorded in Daniel 2, this nation was likened to the head of gold and it was the first among the other kingdoms that were to come. Note the description of their army, *"Their horses also are swifter than the leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves: and their horsemen shall spread themselves, and their horsemen shall come from far; they shall fly as the eagle that hasteth to eat"* (v 8). The presence of such a strong army means that there would be war with much bloodshed. It is evident in the history of Israel that the Lord used external powers to subdue those who went against His precepts.

The prophet in his second petition acknowledged God's power and gave praise to Him. He prayed for God's justice because the unrighteous adversary seemed to have an upper hand and was having great success. Thus, Habakkuk pleaded for vengeance. As he did not have a clear answer thus far, he then put his questions before the Lord. He knew that the Lord would answer him.

Habakkuk understood God's message when He revealed to him the events that would follow. Though many questions were left unanswered, the voice of the Lord was sufficient to put his worries to rest. The victory for the Chaldeans was a foregone conclusion, and it must be faced with courage. God is the only hope in any calamity. He knows the reason for all things, and praying to Him gives understanding to the believer. When we remain in Christ, we will go to God for whatever we need and He will answer. We must always pray. Will you?

THOUGHT: God has good reasons for His longsuffering towards evil people.

PRAYER: Lord, let me not presume on continued prosperity and not keep Thy commandments.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 13

HABAKKUK 2:1-2

EXODUS 34:27

*“And the LORD said unto Moses,
Write thou these words...”*

HABAKKUK AND HIS VISION

God communicated with Habakkuk in a vision, and we read of God’s reply to Habakkuk in chapter two. Much of it cast a negative light. However, during the occasional interlude, God gave hope to those whose hearts were yielded to Him. His message was brief but very powerful. He presented it as a clear picture that was easily understood. God still speaks today through His Word.

Habakkuk set himself upon a high tower in preparation for God’s reply. This was the highest point in the wall of the city. It was meant for a watchman to keep vigil of the enemies who may invade the city.

Biblical history tells of the beginning of the writing of the earliest scriptures. By the time of Moses, the ancient civilization had developed communication through writing in different forms. Writing became a common practice of conveying a message. The prophets applied this to keep permanent records.

Habakkuk lived around 600 BC, making it a total of more than 2,600 years since the book of Habakkuk was written. Since this book is part of the inspired Word of God, it has been preserved. We have it today just as it was given to the prophet in his time. God’s command to the prophet to write carries an inestimable merit. This is God’s seal of approval. *“And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry”* (vv 2-3). Jesus added that heaven and earth would pass away, but His words would not pass away without being fulfilled (Matt 5:18).

THOUGHT: Writing is an aid to memory in transmitting a message.

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for preserving Thy Word for us.

COMMON SINS REPROVED

God, through His prophet, reproved common sins and gave hope. He spoke against vices of everyday life in His nation. He denounced self-exaltation (v 4) saying that it was not upright. Instead, self-exaltation implies a spirit of pride which is natural to the carnal minded. Such a person will have a feeling of self-satisfaction and does not need help from anywhere. He trusts in his earthly possessions and position in society. Such a person is cut off from God and is lost. There is no real satisfaction in sin although people tend to seek satisfaction in earthly pleasures. Human desire was as hell, it could never be filled (v 5). God also spoke against stealing, saying that he who increased that which was not his was cursed (v 6). Stealing comes in many forms. Besides direct stealing, there is fraud, false balance, withholding of wages and many such like practices.

The Shorter Catechism has this to say on the eighth commandment that forbids stealing:

Question 74: “What is required in the eighth commandment?”

Answer: “The eighth commandment requireth the lawful procuring and furthering the wealth and outward estate of ourselves and others.”

Question 75: “What is forbidden in the eighth commandment?”

Answer: “The eighth commandment forbiddeth whatsoever doth, or may, unjustly hinder our own, or our neighbour’s wealth or outward estate.”

The acts of these dishonest people will bring ruin to their victims and God does not have kind words for them.

In the midst of all these, God gave hope for the just: “*the just shall live by his faith*” (v 4b, see also Rom 1:17).

THOUGHT: Habakkuk 2:4b freed Martin Luther from the bondage of Roman Catholicism.

PRAYER: Lord, may my heart always listen to Thy Word.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 15

HABAKKUK 2

1 KINGS 21:1-14

*“The LORD forbid it me,
that I should give the inheritance
of my fathers unto thee.”*

THE ROOT OF ALL SINS REPROVED

The prophet never knew what his written message would accomplish, but one fact is that the Word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword. There is hope for everyone who stands by faith in God.

Covetousness is the root of all sins though it is listed on par with the rest of the sins forbidden in the Ten Commandments. It is a sin of the heart. The outward manifestation of it is seen in the commission of other sins. It is a sin of self-ruin, and also of others. The Law of God is universal and is evident everywhere. All must obey it.

Murder is one sin that greatly hurts the victims and their families. Exodus 12:13 says, *“Thou shalt not kill.”* The Lord Jesus Christ also expounded on this commandment. God denounced those who expanded their earthly possessions by shedding blood or, for that matter, enslaving others. Yet, there was hope in that *“the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea”* (v 14). This is yet another candlestick in the midst of darkness.

Drunkenness is an addiction such that it can become a substitute for one’s religion. Once started it is not easy to get out of it. Thus, those who give their neighbour drink are cursed (v 15). Violence that goes with drunkenness is akin to murder. These habits are the same as idolatry and sin against God. God closed with a sweet refrain that gives direction to His people, *“But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him”* (v 20).

The message that was given to Habakkuk paints a picture of widespread violation of God’s Law but also brings much hope to those who care to be saved. Are you saved?

THOUGHT: Sober and upright living brings blessings, but the way of the flesh leads to sin and death.

PRAYER: Lord, may I live by faith and see Thy grace.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 16

HABAKKUK 3:1-4

PSALM 145:1-12

*“Every day will I bless thee; and
I will praise thy name for ever and ever.”*

HABAKKUK’S PSALM OF PRAISE

Habakkuk’s prayers in chapter one showed that the nation of Judah was facing an inevitable captivity. And he was greatly frightened by the consequences that were coming. However, as a man of God, he knew that there was hope in Him. God is just and would perform all that He had determined to do. Habakkuk depended on the Lord to give him strength and he did not lose hope. Thus, he courageously penned this psalm in chapter three.

Habakkuk praised God by uttering a prayer in song. The opening verse is the title of the song: *“A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet upon Shigionoth”* (v 1). This means that it was a rejoicing song that was to be sung with vigour. In it, Habakkuk acknowledged hearing the voice of the Lord and that he was afraid. He asked the Lord to revive His work in the midst of the years and to make His work known; and also that the Lord should not be angry but be merciful (v 2). Thus, he cried for the salvation of his nation.

Habakkuk also gave glory and praise to God for who He is as *“His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise”* (v 3). He attributed light and power to God (v 4). The first of all creations was light. The prophet said these things to strengthen his case of total dependence on God in making his requests known to Him.

These assertions of Habakkuk have been the inspiration behind some of the finest hymns. Note this example:

O Lord my God when I in awesome wonder,
Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made,
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy pow’r throughout the universe displayed!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!

(Carl Boberg, 1859-1940)

THOUGHT: All things begin with creation as recorded in Genesis.

PRAYER: Lord, may my mouth be filled with praises of Thee each day.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 17

HABAKKUK 3:5-11

LUKE 8:22-25

“...for he commandeth even the winds and water, and they obey him.”

GOD IS ALL POWERFUL

Habakkuk showed that God is all powerful. The reference to “*pestilence, and burning coals*” (v 5) indicates destruction by an epidemic and by fire. These were the means that God had used to visit those who disobeyed Him. In the past, Sodom and Gomorrah stood out as those that suffered such a fate. Pestilences had also been used by God to avenge those who rebelled against Him. His power is also expressed in His ability to control all the earth.

The text says in verse 6, “*He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting.*” Besides His power over the earth’s physical features, God also has absolute power over nations. He controls those who rule the nations as well as their subjects. Two nations, Cushan and Midian (v 7), trembled. These were nations that were known to have great influence and wealth in the ancient days. They were able to subdue other nations, but now they were humbled before the mighty hand of God.

The sovereign power of God was further displayed by the ability of His word. It was manifested in creation and it remained ever powerful over the rivers and seas. Floods, sea waves and earthquakes were most dangerous. Man has limited ability over the disasters that they triggered, but God has all power. When the Lord Jesus stilled the storm, His disciples wondered, saying that He rebuked the sea and the waves and they obeyed Him (Matt 8:24-27). All nature submits to His power. The prophet further asserted this in verses 10 and 11. When the sovereignty of God is considered, man is reduced to nothing and has to submit to the Almighty in all humility. These are the praises of the power of God.

How are you responding to the power of God?

THOUGHT: All earthly creatures are under God’s sovereign hand.

PRAYER: Lord, help me always to submit to Thy powerful hand.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 18

HABAKKUK 3:12-19

EXODUS 15:1-11

“Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?”

GOD IS JUST AND ALSO GRACIOUS

God punished the heathen and was indignant because of their evil ways. He inflicted wounds upon their houses. Habakkuk remarked this to show that God was displeased with their rebellious ways. Israel was to amend her ways to conform to God's righteousness.

God goes forth for the salvation of His anointed people. This is their hope and the demonstration of God's care on those who obey Him. God was known in Israel by the historic manifestation of His power when He brought Israel out of Egypt. It was an event that could not be wished away. It was a display of His power that remains for generations. They came out of that land and Pharaoh followed with full military might, but the Lord fought the battle for them and on the other side of the sea they were able to sing a song of victory. Thus, any reference to the Lord of hosts is traced back to this victory. All the prophets of Israel knew this part of their country's history and it served as an encouragement to them to speak God's Word with confidence.

Although Habakkuk reacted with fear, he had that blessed hope. He said that his belly trembled and his lips quivered at the voice. He felt as if his bones were falling apart and his whole body trembled (v 16). He foresaw the time when the farm produce will cease. Figs, fruit of the vine, and olives would not be produced in the fields as there would not be anyone to till the land, and there would not be any security. Flocks and herds also would be no more in the fields. It would be desolate and miserable. In the midst of this, the prophet had hope in God to save and to strengthen them. He would run like an antelope. Thus, Habakkuk ended his psalm.

The revelation in this psalm is common knowledge of what God does and is. It is gratifying to note that in all extreme circumstances, God is still on the throne. He is the only hope of all His children. He has opened a door for us in Jesus Christ. Shall we not enter and live with Him in eternal joy?

THOUGHT: Those who hope in God do not despair.

PRAYER: Lord, may I always hope in Thy justice and grace.

THE PROPHECY OF ZEPHANIAH

The prophet Zephaniah was a contemporary of both Jeremiah and Habakkuk. The brief information about Zephaniah given in the first verse puts him in the royal line. His name means "God hides." His royal ancestry made it easier for him to discharge his prophetic duties. The reign of King Josiah was between 640- 609 BC. Zephaniah was a prophet within that period. Since Amon (Josiah's father) reigned only for two years, it is possible that the prophet grew up in the days of Manasseh who was on the throne for fifty-five years. He was one of those kings who were reputed to have done evil. Manasseh's idolatry put the nation to the lowest spiritual ebb. Zephaniah was called to be a prophet under such circumstances.

In view of the determined judgment, he spoke of both the punishment of his nation and the universal judgment that would come in the future. It was an appeal to everyone to be ready for that time. This is the message of Zephaniah.

Zephaniah was bold in speaking against spiritual wickedness. The time of King Josiah was a time of spiritual revival of the nation. As a prophet then, Zephaniah was one of the supporters of this transformation initiated by the king. It is noted that the king ascended the throne as a child of eight years. When Josiah was sixteen years old, he was able to make decisions and was in the position to issue orders as a king. His officials obeyed him. Zephaniah may have been part of the king's advisory council which helped the king to initiate that revival. The king came out with full force against idolatry that had become the way of life in Judah under the past kings. The Law of God (which was mandatory for every king to have a copy) had been laid aside. Foreign deities were substituted for the true God. The people also were inclined to follow the direction taken by the king.

THOUGHT: The king agreed with the prophets of the need to turn the nation back to God.

PRAYER: Lord, revive me!

MONDAY, OCTOBER 20

ZEPHANIAH 1

2 PETER 3:10

*“But the day of the Lord will come
as a thief in the night...”*

THE JUDGMENT TO COME

The name of Zephaniah is not mentioned in the historical books, but Jeremiah played a role in that awakening. Zephaniah is an unsung hero behind the scenes. He spoke the words recorded in his book.

Zephaniah announced a judgment to come. The Lord said that He would consume both man and beasts and fowls of heaven and fishes of the sea. He would also consume the stumbling blocks with the wicked and cut off man from the land. This was total destruction of every creature. This describes the outcome of the last judgment (i.e. universal destruction) which is yet to come. This prophecy looks far and near as it shows the end when Christ shall come the second time. This prophecy agrees with other scriptures. This is the ultimate end and it is linked to man’s transgression of God’s precepts.

The Lord then turned to Judah and addressed the immediate vengeance He was to bring upon the land. In Judah and Jerusalem, He would cut off the remnants of Baal. Other idol-gods were also mentioned and all these were a cause of vengeance upon Judah. The nation turning to idolatry was a direct contravention of God’s Law. Despite the reforms of Josiah, the hearts of the people were still very far from the Lord. Only a few were sincere in their commitment to serve the Lord. The Lord would not withdraw His determined judgment on the nation.

The hypocrisy of the people is like that of the multitudes that flock to churches today. They are driven by selfish motives and the spirit of “quick fixes” that the modern preachers preach. When these shall appear before the judgment seat of Christ, the intents of their hearts will be revealed and they will be ashamed at that hour. Their punishment stands.

THOUGHT: Hypocrisy is a deadly sin.

PRAYER: Lord, let me always be sincere in my faith.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 21

ZEPHANIAH 1

REVELATION 18:1-11

*“...Come out of her, my people,
that ye be not partakers of her sins...”*

EXHORTATION AND DETAILS OF JUDGMENT

Zephaniah called upon the people to hold their peace before the Lord. He declared that the day of the Lord was at hand. This referred to the immediate judgment and the final judgment.

Those of the king's house and all who disobeyed the Lord would be punished. The kings who succeeded Josiah did wickedly before the Lord. They were delivered into the hands of the Babylonians as their punishment. The last king was Zedekiah whose son was killed before his eyes by the king of Babylon. He was also tortured and taken prisoner to Babylon where he died. Others were also punished. It was a time of panic and confusion. Commercial activities ceased because of the lack of security. The value of their merchandise was reduced to nothing. The situation in Judah then could be reversed and normality restored, but when the final day of the Lord came, it would be a point of no return.

The judgment of Judah was at hand and it was about to witness uncertainty. The Lord would search their city, all goods would be seized by their enemy, and their houses shall be desolate. Even the mighty shall cry bitterly. It would be a day of wrath, trouble, distress and gloom. It would be a day of death of the worst kind. Earthly possessions could not save as they would be burned. The wise would heed the words of the Lord Jesus Christ and lay for themselves treasures in heaven where they would remain forever.

The message of Zephaniah is yet another reminder that the present earth will one day come to an end. Eternal hope is in the land that the Lord has reserved for the faithful.

THOUGHT: All the material goods in the world cannot save anyone.

PRAYER: Lord, may I heed Thy message of warning.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 22

ZEPHANIAH 2

2 KINGS 25:5-7

“So they took the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they gave judgment upon him.”

THE JUDGMENT OF THE NATIONS

The book of Esther said that the Persian Empire had one hundred and twenty-seven provinces stretching from India to Ethiopia. This was a little more than one hundred years after the time of Zephaniah. The prophecies that he told here concerning the nations of the Middle East were fulfilled prior to the Persian Empire. The Babylonians conquered the nations mentioned in the book and in turn the Persians inherited them in her vast empire. The prophet Zephaniah spoke of the imminent overthrow of these nations by the Babylonians. These prophecies reaffirmed God’s truthfulness and accuracy in revealing the future as well as His righteousness in judging nations.

The Judgment on Judah: The people of Judah were the immediate recipients of this message. There was a spiritual revival at the time of King Josiah. Zephaniah was a first-hand witness as a member of the royal family. In his message to Judah, he called upon the nation to come together. This was because the nation had forsaken the Lord and adopted foreign religions. The day of the Lord’s anger was near and the chastisement would be very painful to them. When the book of the Law was read to King Josiah, he reacted with great fear for he knew that his fathers had transgressed the Law of God and they would not escape punishment. The prophet told them to seek the Lord as a remedy for the determined punishment. It was a plea to those who were inclined to obey the Lord and an opportunity for anyone who wished to escape the judgment. God is always gracious and He will hear the cry of the repentant. This window of God’s mercy was also opened to those in Judah who feared the Lord.

The last king of Judah before the fall of the nation was Zedekiah. He did not fear the Lord and was subjected to the greatest pain. Many others became slaves and suffered in the most degrading manner.

THOUGHT: God is able to save His own children in any calamity.

PRAYER: Lord, may I take heed of Thy Word and escape the judgment.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 23

ZEPHANIAH 2

PSALM 46

*“God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.”*

THE JUDGMENT OF THE PHILISTINES

The Philistines were perennial enemies of Israel and were Israel’s nearest neighbours. They fought many wars with Israel and featured prominently in the history of Israel.

Each of the cities of the Philistines mentioned was to be destroyed. Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod and Ekron were the chief cities to be rooted up. Woe and destruction were pronounced against them. Their land was referred to as *“the sea coast, the nation of the Cherethites... Canaan, the land of the Philistines”* (v 5). This was the western coast of Palestine. The city of Gaza retained the same name to this day and so did some of the other cities. However, through the years these places have gone through many changes and occupations. The prophecy of Zephaniah had to do with the inhabitants of these cities in his days.

When the Babylonian invaders came, they took all the cities of Palestine. Subsequent empires that inherited them also colonized these places for many years. The desolation of those cities is described in Zephaniah 2:4. They were going to be dwellings and cottages for shepherds, and folds for flocks. Also those who remained of the house of Judah were to occupy those places and God would visit them to turn away their captivity. Even though this was a Gentile land, the Lord did not entirely determine to destroy this place but retained it for those who feared Him.

The faithful can always find some refuge, even in unlikely places, in the midst of calamities. The comfort of the remnant is described in verse 7, *“... in the houses of Ashkelon shall they lie down in the evening: for the LORD their God shall visit them, and turn away their captivity.”* The prophet had to assure Judah that her hope was not all lost regardless of the Lord’s anger against the majority who sinned against Him.

THOUGHT: God is righteous and a refuge to those who follow Him.

PRAYER: Lord, may I find refuge under Thy wings.

THE JUDGMENT OF OTHER NATIONS

The judgment on Moab and Ammon: Moab and Ammon are the nations to the east of Judah. Moab was Israel’s last stop before entering Canaan as they came out of Egypt. It was here that Moses died. It was also the home country of Ruth. Ammon was also another land that was often at war with Israel. Attention was given to “*the reproach of Moab, and the revilings of the children of Ammon...*” (v 8). Like other nations, they were pre-occupied with magnifying themselves in extending their borders. Both nations were condemned and were likened to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah that had been destroyed by fire. They shall be a perpetual desolation: whatever will be left in them would be given to the remnant of Judah who shall possess them. The reason for their destruction was their pride (v 8). Thus they were to face the full force of God’s wrath. The Lord would destroy all the gods of the earth and they shall turn and worship the Lord. In the fulfilment of the prophet’s words, these were destroyed by the tide of Babylonian occupation.

The Judgment on Ethiopia: In ancient times, this would refer to parts of modern Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan. Ethiopia was to be destroyed by the sword and would become a wild jungle. Assyria and her main city Nineveh were also mentioned together with Ethiopia. Nineveh would be made “*a desolation, and dry like a wilderness*” (v 13). The story of Nineveh and its fate is told in the book of Nahum. Ethiopia was not spared in the invasion that came. God’s Word is always true.

The prophecies given here and subsequent fulfilment speak of God’s foreknowledge of all things. He is righteous and those who defy Him cannot escape. People can do as they please, but the time will come when they will have to answer before a righteous Judge. Let us seek the Lord while He may be found. Will you?

THOUGHT: “*...the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men...*” (Dan 4:17)

PRAYER: Lord, let me live in obedience to Thy Word.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 25

ZEPHANIAH 3

2 KINGS 25:8-10

*“And he burnt the house of the LORD,
and the king’s house...
and every great man’s house...”*

GOD JUDGES WICKED NATIONS

In the Old Testament, the book of Zephaniah is the last of the pre-exilic prophecies. The next book, the book of Haggai, is a post-exilic prophecy. As one of the last prophets before the exile of Judah, Zephaniah (in chapter 3) gave a message of hope to the nation despite the imminent calamity that was coming upon them. He wrote of the judgment of nations that oppressed Israel and the restoration that would follow. This was his final message to Judah.

The prophet said that the wicked city was cursed, to let the nation of Judah know what would befall them if they persisted in their sinful ways. They needed to repent and obey the Lord. Judah needed to trust the Lord and to draw near to Him. However, this was not the case then in Judah. Their leaders had misled the nation, and the prophet Zephaniah revealed their character in verse 3.

Besides the civil rulers, their prophets and priests also had failed. These religious leaders had the duty to guide the nation morally, but they did not do it. The priests violated the Law. Thus their ministry did not point the nation in the right direction and they failed in their duties.

The message of Zephaniah was intended to show them that God is just and knows all that they do. He will not tolerate their sinful ways but will bring His righteous judgment to light. However, these leaders were not ashamed of what they were doing. Thus the destruction came to Judah as prophesied in verse 6. Jerusalem was the capital city and her fall was symbolic of the fall of the whole nation. The invading armies made sure they destroyed all the cities that could be used to launch resistance. It was not only Judah that was destroyed, but (as was prophesied in chapter 2) all the nations around Israel were destroyed.

THOUGHT: Every city of wickedness is cursed.

PRAYER: Lord, let me flee all wickedness.

THE HOPE OF RESTORATION

Zephaniah and all the prophets that spoke at that time showed Judah that the Lord was bringing calamity upon them because of their sins. It was intended that the nation would repent and turn to the Lord.

However, despite the Lord's gracious offer to Judah there was no positive response. Instead, they corrupted their ways further and practised every abomination. This is the worst state of man. Thus Judah was destined to suffer divine retribution because of her unrighteous ways. The grace offered to this nation is the same grace that God offers to all sinners. When one accepts His offer by faith, he will be saved and have eternal life.

The Lord has judged and destroyed wicked nations. The description in verse 6 says that their towers were desolate and He made their streets a waste and impassable. Thus, no one would dwell in these cities. This speaks of the nature of the foreign powers' conquest. The people would be deported and their cities destroyed. Since there was no repentance in their hearts, the Lord issued a very strong message to them in verse 8. When they had tasted the pain of God's wrath, they would then turn to the Lord.

It is true that in any calamity, nobody needs to be taught to seek the Lord or how to pray. They will just know. God is able to make the people turn to Him. The children of Judah would be scattered to many lands, even beyond the rivers of Ethiopia. In desperation, the children of Israel would turn to the Lord and give offerings to Him. They would realize that they had sinned, and be ashamed of their deeds in disobeying the Lord. They would remove the proud in their midst and there would be hope for restoration and revival of their nation. The Lord was going to live among them in the time of their humiliation.

THOUGHT: The Lord gives a window of hope to those who trust in Him.

PRAYER: Lord, may I humble myself before Thee. And may Thou be with me in my time of humiliation.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 27

ZEPHANIAH 3

EZEKIEL 1:1-3

*“The word of the LORD came expressly
unto Ezekiel the priest...
the hand of the LORD was there upon him.”*

GOD IS WITH THE EXILES

Subsequent history confirms what the Lord was telling Judah. The captivity came and all Judah was deported to a foreign land. Those who were left behind did not have any security and some of them had to flee to Egypt and other nations. Those in exile were not left destitute because God sent them prophets to instruct them on the ways of the Lord and gave new revelations.

Ezekiel was a notable prophet. Daniel also played a great role for the interests of the Jews since he served as an officer in the highest office in both Babylon and Persia. When the time came for their return to Jerusalem, the Lord raised leaders for them and touched the heart of the Persian king to show kindness to them. When they were resettled in the land, the Lord sent other prophets to guide them in their service for the Lord.

The remnant would act righteously and would be protected. The Lord would take away their judgment and they would see evil no more because the Lord the King of Israel was with them. There would be no cause for fear, for no evil would come upon them. Their hands cannot be slack. The burden of sorrow of Judah would be taken away and they would have no reproach. The Lord would restore the nation and bring salvation to them. He would set them for praise and fame in every land where they had been put to shame. The success of the Jews over their enemy in the book of Esther was known throughout the vast Persian Empire and that, in part, fulfilled this prophecy. The Lord would also gather them and their testimony shall be known to all nations of the earth. The Lord confirmed that He would turn back their captivity. Thus, the prophet Zephaniah ended his message on this optimistic note.

THOUGHT: Those entrusted with leadership are responsible for their deeds. The people too are also responsible.

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for Thy righteous and gracious judgment. May I always repent of my sins and turn to Thee.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 28

HAGGAI 1

EZRA 5:1-2

“...with them were the prophets
of God helping them.”

THE PRIORITY OF GOD’S PEOPLE (1)

Haggai was a post-exilic prophet. His book is best understood in the background of the book of Ezra (Ezra 5:1, 6:14). Haggai was called to be a prophet in the second year of Darius I, king of Persia (i.e. 520 BC). Darius reigned between 521 and 486 BC. It was more than one hundred years since Zephaniah’s time and sixteen years after the return of the first batch of exiles. The books of Ezekiel, Daniel and Esther tell more of the events of that time. God did not cease guiding His people through His prophets. As recorded by Ezra, the people returned to Jerusalem as the Lord had promised, and that was in 536 BC. Haggai and Zechariah were sent this time to guide the people. Haggai was sent to Zerubbabel and Joshua who were leaders of the returnees. They were the governor and the high priest respectively (v 1).

The work of rebuilding the temple started but stopped. They did not act according to their mandate in rebuilding the temple to its completion. They were in a position to get the work going, but sixteen years had passed since they returned to Jerusalem and there was no effort to revive the work of rebuilding God’s house. The Lord then said, “*Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?*” (v 4). They had been concerned about their own comfort and were building good houses for themselves, and the house of the Lord was neglected. They were called to re-consider their ways. The Lord told them that what had befallen them was the result of their inaction. All their labour did not bring any satisfactory returns for them (v 6). Regardless of all that they had done, their living conditions did not improve.

It is the Lord who brings blessings to every work of man, but when man does contrary to the revealed will of the Lord, He withdraws His blessings. He called the children of Israel to re-consider their ways. This message was relevant at that time, and it is still relevant today. Will you re-consider your ways and do as instructed by your Lord?

THOUGHT: Give priority to the needs of God’s house.

PRAYER: Lord, let me not neglect the physical needs of Thy House.

THE PRIORITY OF GOD'S PEOPLE (2)

Haggai showed Judah her priority. The message was very clear and he called upon them to move into action. Apart from giving money, they were also to provide the manpower. They were expressly commanded to go up to the mountain, bring wood and build the house. The Lord said that He would take pleasure in such work and He would be glorified.

The Lord repeated that He had withdrawn His blessings from them because His house was left to waste. They had been concerned about their own houses and did not care for the house of the Lord. He withheld rain and their fields yielded no fruits. All their food-crops ceased to grow in the land because of the drought. Their livestock also lacked pastures. As a result, famine came upon them. All these meant death.

Whenever small nations are faced with famine, international organizations and charitable groups make effort to supply the needed food to the starving people. This in itself is a commendable work. However, the spiritual aspect in solving the problem is least considered and hardly mentioned. For Israel, it was the main reason. The people of Israel had forsaken the Lord. They had not considered their ways, and the Lord withheld His blessings from them.

This message is not limited to those in farming communities. The main principle is that when the people forsake the Lord, He will withhold His blessings of any kind from them. When this happened to Judah, it was clearly revealed to them that it was from the Lord and they had to amend their ways and seek to please the Lord. The text easily fits the way many people approach God's work today. God's people must set their priorities right. Do you?

THOUGHT: Only a born-again Christian knows God's priorities.

PRAYER: Lord, may I always be swift to do Thy work.

THE PEOPLE OBEYED THE VOICE OF THE LORD

It is gratifying to note that even though the leaders had neglected their duty, they still had the fear of the Lord in their hearts. They responded positively to the prophet Haggai’s message.

Zerubbabel (governor of Judah) and Joshua (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 (v 12). These were the same leaders who led the people back to Jerusalem after the decree of King Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. The Lord assured them through Haggai that He was going to be with them. They were encouraged to carry on with the building of the Lord’s house. It was not an easy task as it needed much wood and stone. We recall that the idea of the first building of the temple was raised by King David, and he also prepared the building materials. His son Solomon built it. He had unlimited resources to build a magnificent temple. Zerubbabel and Joshua were poor returnees and the people who had returned with them were few. These and other factors limited their ability to carry out the work smoothly. But one important fact was that the Lord was with them. So, as long as they were committed in their hearts, the work would be completed.

“They heard the voice of the Lord...and determined to act according to it: ...perceiving that he was displeased with them for the neglect of his house; and that this drought upon them was a chastisement and correction for this sin; and fearing lest his wrath should continue, and they should be more severely dealt with, on account of their transgressions” (Gill).

They were moved to do the work. Within twenty-four days of the Lord’s first message to Haggai, the work of rebuilding God’s house resumed (v 1, 15).

THOUGHT: Only fools turn a deaf ear to the words of the Lord.

PRAYER: Lord, let me always have a listening ear for Thy Word.

GOD GUIDED THE REBUILDING OF THE TEMPLE

The prophecy of Haggai was brief but it made the people get on with the work of rebuilding God’s house. The presence of the Lord among His people was clearly manifested. The unfaithfulness of the people was constantly reproved. The messages were directed mainly at the two leaders and they were greatly encouraged. The people also were cooperative in fulfilling the task. The Lord thus guided them. The greatest glory of this second house was that God would be with them in person (“Emmanuel”).

God’s second message to Haggai came a month after work on the temple resumed (v 1). Since the leaders and the people had responded to the first message, the prophet continued to counsel them in continuing the work of rebuilding God’s house. Even though it was an uphill task for the people, what they were able to do was still meagre compared to the work that David and Solomon did in building the first temple. Among the returnees were some who had seen the glory of the first temple. Haggai told them that what they were doing then was nothing compared to that first house. The prophet brought this up to show them that there was much that needed to be done.

The house must have some semblance of the earlier one. The Lord, through the prophet, had some words of encouragement for them: *“Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the LORD; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD, and work: for I am with you, saith the LORD of hosts”* (v 4). Thus the Lord encouraged them in their efforts. Haggai was not underestimating their efforts, but he strengthened their heart to carry out their work for the Lord.

Are you encouraged by Haggai 2:4 in your work for your Lord?

THOUGHT: *“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God...”* (1 Cor 3:16)

PRAYER: Lord, help me to keep *“the temple of God”* holy.

GOD IS WITH HIS PEOPLE

The Lord repeated His assurance by reminding the people of Israel of the covenant He had made with the nation of Israel when they came out of Egypt. He told them that His Spirit would remain with them and there was no cause for them to be afraid. This was the time when the nation had left Egypt and was set apart as a distinct people. The whole story of the Exodus was the greatest manifestation of God’s presence among His people. The Lord is always the same and His promises to them would surely come to pass.

“Emmanuel” is the word used to express this relationship. The Lord said He would shake the earth and the sea and the dry land. He also said He would shake the nations and fill the new house with His glory. The tabernacle which served Israel as a place of worship was a simple movable tent. Later, Solomon built a magnificent structure with excellent materials. It was in use for a long time until it was burnt down by Nebuchadnezzar after the fall of Jerusalem. God allowed that destruction because the nation had forsaken Him.

The house of God which Zerubbabel and Joshua helped to rebuild was not as magnificent as Solomon’s. In its history, it went through some renovations to improve its quality. However, the main quality of God’s house did not lie in the materials that were used to construct it. It was the presence of God among Israel that mattered. God told Haggai that He would fill His house with His glory.

The Lord said that all the money (silver and gold) belonged to Him. Thus, the people were not to hold back the money, but to contribute to the building of God’s house. Even though the house as a building had limited value compared to its spiritual value, it was still an important feature as it testified of the faith of all those who worship God in it. The Lord said that the glory of the new house will be greater than the first.

THOUGHT: What is my attitude when I enter the church sanctuary?

PRAYER: Lord, may I always cherish Thy glory.

GOD BLESSES HIS PEOPLE

The third message of Haggai came on the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month; that is, three months after the commencement of the work. In verses 11 to 13, God asked the priests a question concerning the Law. He used that question to put across the message that their conduct was displeasing to Him and thus their offerings were declared unclean. They were told to consider their works. They were to look back and make amends where necessary. Their slothfulness resulted in a reduction of the measure of their supplies. The Lord smote them with blasting and mildew and hail in the labours of their hands. Yet, they did not turn to the Lord.

This message was meant to help the people see their failures and to return to the Lord. They were to join hands in bearing a testimony for the Lord in building His house. When God's people are slack in doing His work, He will do something to move them to action.

God appealed to them yet again to consider their ways. He promised to bless their fields to yield the desired fruits. They were told to look back to the time since the foundation of the Lord's house was laid. The Lord would bless them from that day.

God then sent the final message to the leaders that He would shake the heavens and the earth. He would overthrow the thrones of kingdoms and destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen. The Lord had to say this because His people were subjects of the Persian Empire and did not have a final say on any major decisions. God assured them that they could stand on their own feet as the Lord was with them. He also promised to give Zerubbabel an honourable promotion. In these promises, God encouraged Judah to persist in rebuilding His house. The presence of God among the people was the greatest assurance for them to continue in His work. Do you have this assurance too in your work for God?

THOUGHT: God is always my "*Emmanuel*."

PRAYER: Lord, may Thy people feel Thy presence in Thy church.

INTRODUCTION TO ZECHARIAH

Zechariah was one of the last prophets of the Old Testament. He was called after Judah returned from Babylon. He and Haggai encouraged the people to continue rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem. The mention of the name of a foreign king showed that the nation was not free from external domination. The prophet's name also characterized his message. His violent death confirmed the depravity of the hearts of the people. Thus the Lord required His people to return to Him. A brief survey of the book gives us an idea of the message of Zechariah.

The book of Zechariah: The rebuilding of the temple was half completed. Zechariah was commissioned by God to encourage the people in their unfinished responsibility. God did not use strong words. Instead, He sought to move their hearts to work by reminding them of the importance of the temple. Zechariah's contemporary, Haggai, used stronger language. One of the reasons for rebuilding the temple was that one day the Messiah would inhabit it. This thought was very precious to the hearts of the Jews. It was more so after the experience of the exile. At that time, they did not understand the manner of the coming of the Messiah. That ignorance continued until Christ came, and many of the Jews still did not recognize Him because of their wrong understanding of His coming.

Zechariah's message was that the future blessing was contingent upon their present obedience. They were not simply putting up a building. They were building a future. When they adopted this as their motivation, they would enter into that building project with a wholehearted zeal. Their Messiah was coming and they needed to prepare for Him. The name Zechariah means “God remembers.” This is the theme that dominates the book. Israel would be blessed because God remembers the covenant which He had made with their fathers.

THOUGHT: God always raises His messengers for a purpose.

PRAYER: Lord, remember me.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 4

ZECHARIAH 1:1

NEHEMIAH 12:1-4, 16

*“Now these are the priests and the Levites
that went up with Zerubbabel...”*

THE AUTHOR OF ZECHARIAH

The name Zechariah was a popular name shared by twenty-nine characters in the Bible. Another well-known New Testament character with the same name is the father of John the Baptist. He was also a priest. It was a name given to a child to show the parents' gratitude to God for His gift of a baby boy. Other prophets who were also priests were Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Zechariah was the son of Berechiah and grandson of Iddo. This is mentioned in Zechariah 1:1, 7; Ezra 5:1, 6:14. He was born in Babylon and was brought up by his grandfather. It is possible that he was called to prophesy at an early age in 520 BC.

According to Jewish tradition, Zechariah was a member of the Great Synagogue that collected and preserved the canon of revealed books. This tradition is most likely due to the fact that he was a priest and thus was educated in the Holy Scriptures, making him one of the most qualified people to undertake that task. At the time of Jesus, the Old Testament Canon was already completed. Jesus did not have any disputes with the Jews as to which book should be included and which excluded. They were in total agreement. It was recorded a number of times in the New Testament that when Jesus went to the synagogue and the book was delivered to Him, He simply read without any argument about it. It was a blessing to Zechariah that such a responsibility was placed upon his shoulders. He did not disappoint but delivered what was required of him.

As it often happened that faithful servants of the Lord died violent deaths, it was so with Zechariah. The Lord Jesus told of Zechariah's death as a martyr (Matt 23:35). This was often the case with God's faithful prophets. Thus it was not surprising that this happened to Zechariah.

THOUGHT: Am I willing to pay the price of being a faithful disciple?

PRAYER: Lord, may I courageously use my talents for Thee.

CHRIST IN ZECHARIAH

The book of Zechariah is rich in messianic prophecies. There are altogether eleven. Jesus was mentioned via different figures of speech. Some were direct prophecies that were fulfilled in the New Testament, some just mentions of Him and others were prophecies related to the second coming of Jesus. The eleven messianic prophecies are as follows:

1. The Angel of the LORD (3:1-2). This is a common reference to Jesus in the Old Testament, commonly called a theophany, i.e. God appearing in human form.
2. The Righteous BRANCH (3:8; 6:12-13). This refers to Jesus as from the House of David.
3. The Stone with seven eyes (3:9). This possibly refers to the divinity of Christ, i.e. Christ is God.
4. The Priest (6:13). Christ is the Great High Priest.
5. The lowly King (9:9-10). This is a reference to His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matt 21:5ff, John 12:15).
6. The Cornerstone, Nail and Battle Bow (10:4). This is descriptive of Jesus as a Leader and Victor.
7. The Good Shepherd who was sold for thirty shekels of silver and was rejected (11:4-13). This was fulfilled when Judas sold Jesus for thirty pieces of silver.
8. The Pierced One (12:10). One of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear.
9. The Cleansing Fountain (13:1). Jesus cleanses sinners of their sins.
10. The Shepherd smitten and abandoned (13:7). Jesus was arrested and His disciples left Him.
11. The coming righteous King (14:9, 16). This will be fulfilled at Jesus' second coming.

THOUGHT: The book of Zechariah is part of the inspired Word of God.

PRAYER: Lord, may I believe in the inspiration and preservation of Thy Word.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 6

ZECHARIAH 1:1-6

ISAIAH 55:6-9

*“Seek ye the LORD while he may be found,
call ye upon him while he is near.”*

THE MESSAGE OF RESTORATION OF JERUSALEM

At the time of Zechariah, the Jews had returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple after the decree of Cyrus. There were still obstacles in that work because the Jews were not fully in control. The most important task was the completion of that work. The Lord gave Zechariah messages in oral speeches and in visions to show that God was overseeing their efforts and rendering full assistance. They had to fulfil His purpose.

In the first phase of restoration, a prophet was called from a priestly family. He was identified as Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo. Priests and prophets were spiritual leaders of the nation. Prophets always had a direct message from the Lord and they were usually rejected by the people and were persecuted even to death. Priests were rarely mentioned to have suffered such negative reaction. It was so because the priests conformed to the written Law and the people trusted them more. Other priests would compromise and conform to the wishes of the people and thus did not attract confrontation. Zechariah was a priest by birth and a prophet by calling. The text said that the word of the Lord came to him in the second year of Darius.

Through his messages, Zechariah confronted the people with their transgressions and sought to correct them. These were the opening words of Zechariah’s message: *“The LORD hath been sore displeased with your fathers. Therefore say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye unto me, saith the LORD of hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto me, saith the LORD”* (vv 2-4). The message required them to change, but they were hard-hearted. It was not easy to change their hearts.

THOUGHT: God’s grace restores the repentant.

PRAYER: Lord, may I not be hard-hearted, but submit to Thee.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 7

ZECHARIAH 1:7-11

DANIEL 9:1-4

“In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years...”

INSTRUCTIONS WERE GIVEN TO THE PEOPLE

There were prerequisites to the restoration of Jerusalem. The people were told not to be like their fathers who rebelled against God. They were reminded that they could not live forever, just as their fathers and the prophets of old were all gone by then. Other prophets had spoken to them, but they failed to listen.

The Lord was now calling them through Zechariah not to follow the path of their fathers but to listen and to change. They did not take heed and were punished. This was a common trend. The context of this text should have made the people see the hand of God and render to Him gratitude by obeying His commands. When Judah was taken captive to Babylon, the Lord had promised to restore them to their land after seventy years. The Lord was faithful to His word. When the time came, the Lord restored them to their land. He moved the heart of a heathen king to issue a decree that allowed them to return to Jerusalem. It included full security during their travel and the offer of funds to help in the rebuilding of the temple. This came to pass and they had been in Jerusalem now for more than a decade, and they had quickly forgotten the hand of the Lord upon them. God sent the prophet Zechariah to remind them of their responsibility to Him.

The first message came in the eighth month and the second one came in the eleventh month. Zechariah saw a man riding a red horse and he stood among the myrtle trees. He was followed by *“red horses, speckled, and white”* (v 8). And God revealed to Zechariah the meaning of this vision (vv 9-11).

A horse in ancient days was a symbol of war or protection from aggression. The vision of Zechariah was a sign that God was fighting for the nation of Judah. God was on their side and had pledged to give them victory. When He is in the midst of His people, there is victory.

THOUGHT: “With Christ in the vessel, we can smile at the storm.”

PRAYER: Lord, let me always be courageous for Thee.

THE MESSAGE GAVE HOPE TO JUDAH

The angel asked the Lord of hosts how long He would have mercy on “*Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah*” (v 12), and the Lord answered with words of comfort. This showed that He had a concern for Israel. And He gave the assurance that all would be well.

The prophet Zechariah was commanded to declare that God was jealous for Jerusalem and Zion. The Lord had chosen that land since the call of Abraham and He had designed to fulfil His plan of redemption through the descendants of the patriarch. His name had been imprinted on that land and He would not desire to have any other to substitute Him. God was displeased with the heathens who ignored Him as they added afflictions. He promised mercy to Jerusalem and the building of His house. The borders of the city were to be demarcated as He promised to prosper Zion and Jerusalem.

The prophet saw a second vision of four horns (v 18) and four carpenters (v 20). The horn also symbolized a fighting weapon. The Lord said that the horns had been used to scatter Judah, Israel and Jerusalem (v 19). These horns then would represent the nations that had taken them captive. The carpenters were there to stand against the horns.

The visions of Zechariah as a whole were an affirmation of the Lord’s protection and restoration of His city. The message that the Lord gave to the prophet Zechariah was an assurance to the returnees that God had not forsaken them. He would see them through all their afflictions and efforts to restore Jerusalem.

God is always faithful to His promises. Trust in Him and He will fulfil His promises to you.

THOUGHT: God always keeps His promises.

PRAYER: Lord, may I stand on Thy promises, and not be moved.

THE VISION OF JERUSALEM

Zechariah attested to God's covenant faithfulness towards Israel through the work of the Messiah. God has a definite programme for His people during the times of the Gentiles until the Messiah comes to deliver them and to reign upon the earth. Zechariah 2:1-5 outlines one of Zechariah's visions that the Lord focused on Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

Zechariah saw a man with a measuring line. When he was asked of his mission, he said he was measuring Jerusalem. A measuring line is what is used today by the surveyors to determine the dimensions of a given place. The purpose of measuring Jerusalem was to signify the restoration of Jerusalem in Zechariah's time and also in the future.

Two angels went to meet the man with the measuring line. The man was to tell Zechariah that Jerusalem would be inhabited "*without walls*" (v 4). And that God said He would "*be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her*" (v 5).

In Revelation 21, the dimensions of the new city of Jerusalem are given. Such were given for the understanding of our human minds. While Jerusalem is a real city on earth and many biblical events have taken place there, it is also a symbol of the eternal city of heaven where the saints will dwell eternally. Will you be there?

THOUGHT: Jerusalem is a picture of heaven.

PRAYER: Lord, may I look forward to the New Jerusalem.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 10

ZECHARIAH 2:6-9

PSALM 32:7-10

*"I will instruct thee and teach thee
in the way which thou shalt go:
I will guide thee with mine eye."*

GOD'S EYE IS ON ZION

There was a call from God to flee from "*the land of the north*" for Israel was spread "*abroad as the four winds of the heaven*" (v 6).

Zion was told to deliver herself for she "*dwellest with the daughter of Babylon*" (v 7). In biblical language, "*daughter*" usually refers to a nation. Jerusalem or Israel is also referred to as the "*daughter of Zion*" (v 10). "*The daughter of Babylon*" would then mean the nation that colonized Israel.

Here Israel was called the apple of God's eye (v 8). It implies that God kept a constant eye on Israel. Can the heathen nations be expected to listen to God or His prophets? Whatever it is, God always has a way of conveying His message to such people. Daniel testified before kings. Jesus testified before Pilate, the Roman ruler. And Paul also testified before Roman governors. Their testimonies were prophetic messages; and Paul even spoke of converts in the household of Caesar (Phil 4:22). The witness of the Old Testament prophets for God was equally effective.

Now the Lord would shake His hand upon them and "*they shall be a spoil to their servants*" (v 9). Despite this assurance from the Lord, the prophet Zechariah did not have an easy time. Judah was not entirely free at the time of Zechariah; she was regarded as one of the provinces of Persia. They only had some extended autonomy. The prophet had to deal with two authorities plus the internal problems of the Jews. He needed encouragement from the Lord; and the people needed his message.

THOUGHT: God sees all things.

PRAYER: Lord, may I always trust in Thy protection.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 11

ZECHARIAH 2:10-13

GENESIS 12:1-9

*“Unto thy seed will
I give this land: and there
builded he an altar unto the LORD...”*

THE BLESSINGS OF THE HOLY LAND

Jerusalem and the entire land of Canaan that was originally promised to Abraham is the Holy Land. The Lord told the nation of Israel, referred to as “*daughter of Zion*” (v 10), to sing and rejoice because He would come and dwell in her midst.

Many nations shall be joined to the Lord and His people. The original promise to Abraham was that in his seed all nations of the earth would be blessed. This was a reference to the Messiah who would come and save His people from their sins. The declaration in verses 10 to 13 is in line with this promise. It was noted at the introduction that prophet Zechariah made references to Christ eleven times. Each prophecy was thus fulfilled either at the first coming of Christ, still to be fulfilled, or will be fulfilled at the second coming of Christ.

“And the LORD shall inherit Judah... and shall choose Jerusalem again” (v 12). The Lord fulfils this in the literal sense. However, that earthly land, even with milk and honey, is nothing compared to the heavenly Jerusalem which is the eternal heritage of all believers. The restoration and the sustenance of the children of Israel prove God’s faithfulness.

The Lord concluded with this refrain, *“Be silent, O all flesh, before the LORD: for he is raised up out of his holy habitation”* (v 13). The subjects of earthly kings give great reverence to their kings. How much more should we give reverence to the King of kings and Lord of Lords?

THOUGHT: The blessing of eternal heritage is for all who have Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for sending me Thy Son Jesus.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 12

ZECHARIAH 3:1-2

2 PETER 2:9-12

*“The Lord knoweth how to deliver
the godly out of temptations...”*

THE MESSAGE TO JOSHUA THE HIGH PRIEST

Joshua and Zerubbabel were leaders of the Jews that returned from Babylon. One was the high priest and the other a ruler. Zechariah was raised by God among them to be a prophet to encourage them to face the task ahead of them. The current message is directed to Joshua because he was the spiritual leader. The prophet was a priest too and they would understand each other. The Lord’s message forecasts the present and the future. The main charge is obedience and the promise of a Saviour.

The prophet saw the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord. The Lord worked in the hearts of foreign kings to ensure that the nation remained secure until He fulfils His purpose in the first advent of Christ. The restoration of Judah and the rebuilding of the temple was not an accidental event; it was ordained of God. The high priest was an important officer in Old Testament worship. Joshua was raised to guide the nation in spiritual matters. Christ was there for him, and Zechariah conveyed God’s message to the priest.

Satan is always active in opposing and seeking to destroy God’s people. Peter said that Satan was like a lion *“seeking whom he may devour”* (1 Pet 5:8). Zechariah saw Satan standing on the right hand of the angel of the Lord to resist Him. Satan is never happy when he sees the Lord’s work prospering. The Lord will not allow him to prevail over His own. The Lord protected Joshua from the wiles of Satan. The Lord rebuked Satan because He had chosen Jerusalem. He called that city *“a brand plucked out of the fire”* (v 2). The city was on the brink of extinction and the Lord came to her rescue. The Lord restored her and raised spiritual leaders to guide them in the revival and put in place proper worship of God. The nation was thus rescued from the hand of the adversary.

THOUGHT: In the Lord there is always victory.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to always resist Satan, and not to fall into his trap.

JOSHUA IS DEDICATED A NEW MAN

“Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel” (v 3). This was an outward manifestation of an inward condition.

The long absence from Jerusalem had led many of the Jews in foreign land to adopt some ungodly practices. One thing that Ezra had to correct was intermarriage with the foreigners. This was forbidden in the Law of Moses.

It is possible that those of the priestly family were among those who had married foreign women. Joshua and his kin stood to be corrected in this regard. He was an important minister in the revival of the right worship and had to be made to possess the necessary qualifications. The angel spoke to the people that stood by him to take the filthy garments from the priest. The meaning of this is revealed in the second part of verse 4: *“...Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.”* In the Mosaic Law, there were prescribed clothes for priests; thus Zechariah said, *“Let them set a fair mitre upon his head...”* (v 5). That completed the priestly attire. This was to identify Joshua as a priest of the Lord and also to symbolize the holiness expected of him.

That act of God qualified Joshua to serve effectively as a worthy priest of the Lord. The Lord had brought these people out of physical slavery. Now He had to release them from unrighteous spiritual practices.

THOUGHT: “Christ loathed the filthiness of Joshua’s garments, yet did not put him away, but put them away.” (Matthew Henry)

PRAYER: Lord, put away my filthy garments from me.

A CHARGE AND PROMISE OF A SAVIOUR

The charge in Zechariah 3:6-10 came from “*the angel of the LORD*” (v 6), i.e. Jesus Christ. The word “*protested*” in verse 6 means solemnly declared. Joshua and the people were prone to go against the will of the Lord. God’s words therefore were solemnly declared to Joshua to ensure that he and the Jews followed His ways.

The priest was to obey the Lord and he would have his place among the righteous. The Lord told him of the His servant “*the BRANCH*” (v 8). This is a figure of speech earlier identified as one of the titles of Christ. He is so called because He comes from the house of David and Abraham. The Lord had told Abraham that in him all nations of the earth will be blessed. The prophet Zechariah was prophesying the fulfilment of that promise. Since he was one of the last prophets, the fulfilment was very near. Joshua understood the meaning of that message.

A stone (with seven eyes) was laid before Joshua (v 9). This refers to Christ. The seven eyes signify one of the attributes of God: that He sees all things. This communication shows the assurance and the long lasting endurance of the promise. The Lord added that He would engrave an engraving and remove the iniquity of the land in one day. This is salvation that comes with forgiveness of sins. There would also be peace and prosperity in the land. This is the peace that would come in the millennial reign of Christ. Through this, Joshua knew what the Lord had for them even to eternity.

These encouraging words in such a time were desirable and fulfilled God’s pattern in shepherding His flock. Leaders are raised and guided by the Lord and His flock will follow. He will rescue them from the wiles of the evil one and make them new. He promised to save them through Jesus Christ. He also promised security of their salvation.

THOUGHT: The present salvation has eternal values.

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, that I believe in Jesus Christ and am ever saved for eternity.

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT TO ZERUBBABEL

Zerubbabel became the governor of the Jews that returned from Babylon (Hag 1:1). His name means “seed of Babel.” He could be so named because he was born in Babylon. He was the great-grandson of Jeconiah (1 Chron 3:17), one of the last kings of Judah before the captivity. He is listed in Matthew 1:12 and Luke 3:27 as one of the ancestors of Christ. If the nation had been restored to full authority, he would have been a king. He was a leader and had authority over the returning Jews. His main tasks were restoration of worship and rebuilding of the temple.

Prophet Zechariah saw a vision when he was awakened by the angel that had earlier spoken to him (Zech 4:1). He saw a candlestick all of gold holding seven lamps. The golden candlestick with seven lamps (also featured in the book of Revelation), representing the seven churches, was one of the temple furniture. It is known in Hebrew as the menorah. It has a base, the stem and six branches. It was used to provide light in the temple. In prophecy, it was also symbolic.

The immediate purpose of the candlestick was to give light in the holy place. The lamps were lit in the evening and burned till the morning (Exod 30:7-8, Lev 24:3, 1Sam 3:3, 2 Chron 13:11). (In the day, light was admitted into the temple via the upper windows.) In Zechariah’s vision (Zech 4:2), the seven lamps were fed by two olive trees which the Lord revealed to be “*the two anointed ones*” (Zech 4:14). And these have been interpreted to refer to Zerubbabel and Joshua, the civil and spiritual representatives of theocracy (ISBE).

Zechariah, as a priest who ministered often in the temple, was familiar with the candlestick and its meaning. However, he was not sure of the meaning of the vision. So he asked, “*What are these, my lord?*” (Zech 4:4)

THOUGHT: God is the key player in all scriptures.

PRAYER: Lord, grant that I may always understand Thy Word.

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE VISION

The prophet sought the interpretation of the vision because he did not understand it. He confessed this ignorance to the angel that spoke to him. He did not pretend to know everything. In humility, he asked for the meaning of what he saw. The angel told him that it was meant to be a message from the Lord to Zerubbabel the governor.

The Lord was the Shepherd of those Jews that had returned from Babylon. He led them through leaders raised by Him. Thus the angel made this declaration, *"Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts"* (v 6c). These words were a sweet refrain in the ears of the prophet. This is where the whole ability of their leadership emanates from.

As a civil leader, Zerubbabel had the great task of dealing with law-breakers and also presiding over the general welfare of the people entrusted to his care. Some people would not obey until they were forced to, or simply obeyed because they feared punishment. The governor may have had the mind of other kings, but the Lord told him that He was their leader. He could not do anything on his own without the Spirit of the Lord. In a world where people are used to commands from the authorities and the might of the army, dependence on the Lord is a strange thing. This was also a spiritual lesson to those Jews who came back from Babylon. They had to adapt to the new environment where God is their leader. The words in verse 6 became the guiding principle for the leadership of Zerubbabel. The Jews cherished these words because they had faced much suffering in the Diaspora. Those who know the Lord would put their hope in the promise of these words. It is a universal promise. The Spirit of the Lord is the same Spirit that the Lord Jesus Christ promised His disciples that He would send to them. In Him, they would be able to learn the truth.

THOUGHT: God is always *Adonai Shebaot* (the Lord of hosts).

PRAYER: Lord, keep the carnal spirit away from me.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 17

ZECHARIAH 4:1-7

JOHN 7:14-19

*“He that speaketh of himself
seeketh his own glory....”*

THE MESSAGE TO ZECHARIAH

The Lord continued to guide the governor of Judah. He said that a great mountain shall become plain before Zerubbabel (v 7). This was to assure him that what seemed like a big task will become easy. The main task that was before him was the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem. God assured him that since his hands laid the foundations of that house, the same hands will also finish it.

The main worry at that time was the opposition that they faced, and they were afraid that they may not be able to complete the task. God did not forsake them but gave them assurances that He would see them through to completion. This confirmed that the hand of the Lord was upon Zechariah and that He had sent him.

The presence of the prophet in Judah during this time was a great relief to the leaders because Zechariah could tell them what the Lord said. They had confidence in attending to their responsibilities because they knew the Lord was with them. The shouting of grace (v 7) shows that Zerubbabel realized that he and the people did not deserve the treatment they were receiving from the Lord, but He had favoured them unconditionally.

However, the persecutors of the prophets did not have the Holy Spirit and could not recognize God’s hand. They reacted negatively to the prophet’s messages. Zechariah, like all other prophets, remained steadfast to the end.

God chose Israel and those who are to be saved from the foundation of the world. It was therefore not a hard task for Him to care for the Jews who returned from Babylon.

THOUGHT: Zechariah was taught a lesson on courage.

PRAYER: Lord, let me fulfil the task Thou hast assigned to me.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 18

ZECHARIAH 4:8-14

2 KINGS 5:1-14

“Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy.”

THE DAY OF SMALL THINGS

The Lord posed a rhetorical question in verse 10, *“For who hath despised the day of small things? for they shall rejoice, and shall see the plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel with those seven; they are the eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth.”*

Jesus similarly taught the biblical principle that he who is faithful in little shall also be faithful in much.

Small or little things can become a key to great things. This can be illustrated by what the maiden from Israel told Naaman’s wife (2 Kings 5:2-3). The story of the healing of Naaman involved two kings, the prophet Elisha and many high ranking government officials. But it all started with a word from the maid.

The *“plummet in the hand of Zerubbabel”* (Zech 4:10) is just a small and simple instrument, but there is more in the vision: the seven *“eyes of the LORD, which run to and fro through the whole earth”* (v 10). This means that God was with them, and He could see everything at all times.

Zechariah then asked about the two olive trees (v 11). And the Lord revealed that they were *“the two anointed ones, that stand by the Lord of the whole earth”* (v 14). And so, Zechariah understood the vision.

This being a message of encouragement to Zerubbabel, verses 6 and 9 must have made a great impact on him. It was the Lord who was with him by the Holy Spirit. Secondly, the task entrusted to him had to be, and could be, fulfilled. When David said that the Lord was his shepherd, the same is attested to in the present encouragement to Zerubbabel. God has placed upon us the duty of keeping the faith to the end; His promises are there to encourage us too.

THOUGHT: Do I have confidence in the Lord as I follow Him?

PRAYER: Lord, let me not despise the day of small things.

THE BOOK OF THE LAW GUIDES THE PRIEST

The work of the prophet was to bring God’s messages to the people and prescribe corrective measures where necessary. Like the church today, the work of those men of God was to be a light to the world of sin around them. The two visions in Zechariah 5 show God’s way of dealing with individual sins and national sins.

A *“flying roll”* (v 1) represents the written Law of God. There were times in Israel when the Book of the Law was disregarded and the people did not know what God had intended for them as revealed to Moses. The kings that came before Josiah were negligent and the Book was lost, but the king restored it. The *“flying roll”* that the prophet saw no doubt represented the Book that the people were familiar with. The Lord wanted Judah to be guided by the Book.

Joshua the high priest used this Book. The Levites were teachers of the Law. On many occasions, when the Book of the Law was read publicly, they were at hand to cause the people to understand the readings of the book. This happened in the days of Jehoshaphat. When he ascended the throne, he sent princes and Levites to the cities of Judah to teach the words of the Law. Also about the time of Zechariah, Nehemiah came to Judah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. When he had finished, he invited the people to come to the open street and asked Ezra, who was also a priest, to bring the Book of the Law to read to the people. They made preparations for the big day. Ezra read the book all morning and the Levites caused the people to understand the words that were read to them (Neh 8:1-12).

THOUGHT: The biblical Law is the Word of God.

PRAYER: Lord, may I always trust Thy perfect Word.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 20

ZECHARIAH 5:1-4

2 CHRONICLES 7:14

*“For he is good;
for his mercy endureth for ever.”*

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ROLL

The angel told Zechariah that the “*flying roll*” represented punishment for those who transgressed the law. Specifically mentioned were those who stole and those who swore falsely. These may usually be regarded as the worst because of their frequent occurrence.

The message was that they must not be habitual transgressors. As most of them were born in Babylon, they were not familiar with the Law of God. They were also not familiar with a central place of worship. In the days before the captivity, the people were offering sacrifices in high places near their homes. This was contrary to the Law. This practice may have continued among the returnees.

Their main task was to rebuild God’s house in Jerusalem. This house was not meant to be a monument, but a place where the people of God would come and worship according to the instructions given in the Law.

In the dedication of the first temple, Solomon demonstrated the worth of that house in his prayers. God’s answer to the king’s prayer shows the meaning of true worship. This is summed up in 2 Chronicles 7:14 where the Lord said, “*If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.*” The Book of the Law was a guide to proper worship, and thus the vision of the “*flying roll.*”

The houses of transgressors of the Law would be consumed (Zech 5:4). The roll was called a “*curse*” (Zech 5:3) because it spelt out the punishment of transgressors. The Law of God is a perfect law, and it will reward and punish with justice.

THOUGHT: Every law of God is just.

PRAYER: Lord, let me be submissive to Thy perfect Law.

A WOMAN IN THE EPHAH

The prophet saw a second vision, that of “*a woman that sitteth in the midst of the ephah*” (Zech 5:7). The ephah is the standard measuring basket for dry grains. Its liquid equivalent is called a bath. It is classed with balances and weights (Lev 19:36, Amos 8:5) in the injunctions regarding just dealing in trade (ISBE). Besides the ephah, another measuring unit mentioned here is the “*talent*” (Zech 5:7).

Then the prophet saw two women, with wings like a stork. And “*the wind was in their wings*” (Zech 5:9). He saw them lift the ephah between the earth and heaven. Zechariah asked where they were taking it, and the angel said that they were going to build “*an house in the land of Shinar* (i.e. Babylon)” (Zech 5:11).

The meaning and the interpretation of this vision is brief. The woman in the ephah represents “*wickedness*” (Zech 5:8). The measuring basket implies that this wickedness was measured out. The angel threw “*the weight of lead upon the mouth*” (Zech 5:8). Lead is a heavy metal. This was done to confine the woman in the ephah, so that she could not escape punishment. The two women with wings represent divine intervention, their flying power was strong enough to carry the ephah away. The angel told Zechariah of the mission of the two women in that distant land.

While the full meaning of the vision cannot be speculated, it does show that the wickedness in Judah was carried away to a far country. This is the same place that the Jews had been taken captive. Thus, the land of Judah was being purged from wickedness.

The prophet and his immediate audience may have understood the vision better, but the face value of the message is brief and to the point. “*For the wages of sin is death*” (Rom 6:23). The primary duty of the Church is to preach the gospel and deal with sin. Christ called upon His disciples to be the salt and light of the world.

THOUGHT: Every church must become a prophet’s voice.

PRAYER: Lord, forgive my wickedness.

THE VISION OF CHARIOTS

In Zechariah 6, the Lord gave Zechariah two messages: one as a vision of four chariots, and the other in plain speech. An angel had been assigned to show him the vision and he could also ask questions on the things he did not understand. The meaning of the vision is obscure, but the prophet understood it well. The second message has to do with the conquering Messiah. The instructions to the prophet were visible lessons on the coming King of the universe. These are the heavenly messages.

The four chariots in the vision were war machines of the ancient days: carriages pulled by horses. They offered speed and protection to the soldiers. It was the cavalry unit of the ancient army. The legendary Trojan Horse of Greek mythology illustrates the effectiveness of their military strategy. The chariots that Zechariah saw came from between two mountains of brass. The horses that pulled the chariots were of different colours, but their significance is not indicated in God's Word. The horses were red, black, white, and a mixture of grisled and bay (Zech 6:2-3).

A similar vision of horses is in Revelation 6 where there are pointers in John's vision as to the meaning of those horses. The meaning of the current vision is given, and the meaning is the same as that in Revelation. “The chariots were messengers of God to execute divine justice upon those who oppress God's people” (Yoilah Yitpet).

The messages that the Lord conveyed to Zechariah was to affirm God's presence with Judah. The eternal kingdom of God stands as the Messiah is coming for their salvation. This blessing comes to those who diligently obey the voice of the Lord.

THOUGHT: “Rejoice the Lord is King!”

PRAYER: Lord, may I always trust in Thy great salvation.

MORE LIGHT ON THE VISION OF CHARIOTS

The prophet specifically asked the angel that talked with him for the meaning of the four chariots. This is the answer that he received, "*These are the four spirits of the heavens, which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth*" (Zech 6:5). He added that the black horses and the white ones went forth to the North Country while the grided went forth to the South Country. The bay horses went to and fro through the earth. In Judah, the north would be from Syria all the way to Russia, and the south would be Arabia and Egypt. These foreign nations were perceived to be enemies of Judah. There was no reference to the east because the nation was dominated by Persia then which was in the east.

Chariots were war machines meant for protection. The four chariots signified God's judgment upon the nations surrounding Israel. The chariots were attached to horses, and were ready to dispense judgment. These were the "*four spirits of the heavens, which go forth from standing before the LORD of all the earth*" (Zech 6:5). They were the angels of God that do His work. The result is peace and rest.

THOUGHT: God's protection for His people is guaranteed.

PRAYER: Lord, grant me Thy assured protection.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 24

ZECHARIAH 6:9-15

1 SAMUEL 15:22

*“Hath the LORD as great delight
in burnt offerings and sacrifices,
as in obeying the voice of the LORD?”*

THE LORD INSTRUCTED ZECHARIAH

The Lord told the prophet to take three men whom He named that had come from Babylon. These were to go on the same day into the house of Josiah the son of Zephaniah. Then he was to take silver and gold and make crowns and set them upon the head of Joshua, the son of Josedech the high priest.

Among the returnees were three public officers; one was Zechariah himself as a prophet, Zerubbabel the governor, and lastly Joshua the high priest. Among the three, Joshua occupied a greater position in the everyday life of the people. He was God’s representative as a teacher of the Law and also an administrator of ordinances that were commanded in the Law. Zechariah was instructed to crown Joshua with crowns.

God was the *de facto* King of Israel and this royal position was best represented by the office of the high priest. The crowning of Joshua was symbolic of God’s priestly kingship over Judah.

Jesus occupied all the three offices of prophet, priest and king. The crowning of Joshua depicted Jesus as the King. This was conveyed to Joshua through Zechariah that a man whose name is “*The BRANCH*” (Zech 6:12) shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord. This refers to Christ. The term “*BRANCH*” is used for Him in Zechariah 3 because He is from the house of David. This has been repeatedly foretold by the prophets.

The crowns were also given to four people that were named for a memorial in the temple of the Lord (Zech 6:14). The people who were far off would come and build the temple of the Lord. The temple was an important place of worship. When they diligently obeyed the voice of the Lord, they would see His blessings and they would know that the Lord had sent the prophet to them.

THOUGHT: Diligent obedience is God’s desire for His people.

PRAYER: Lord, may I see Thy blessings as I obey Thee.

GOD EXPLAINED THE REASONS FOR THE CAPTIVITY

In the history of Israel it was not unusual for the people to reject God’s prophets. The Lord often reproved the people through these prophets because of their waywardness. The ministry of Zechariah was no different. The message in Zechariah 7 denounces the people’s hypocritical devotion.

The Lord gave them the example of their fathers who hardened their hearts and were consequently scattered among the nations. History was repeating itself. God spoke through Zechariah and the exact date specified here when the word of the Lord came to him serves to authenticate this message. All the words of the prophets are genuine and it was regarded as blasphemy if anyone should speak in the name of the Lord when the Lord had not spoken to him. Zechariah was very particular in conveying his message. The confidence he had showed that the Lord had spoken to him.

While these words are read today, they speak as genuine words and not a myth as some liberals depict them. The people had sent Sherezer, Regemmelech and their men to pray before the Lord. They were also to speak to the priests who were in the house of the Lord and the prophets. He asked them if he should weep as he had done for many years. Here is a demonstration of concern among God’s people. The prophet called to their attention the agony that he had gone through. At least at this point there was harmony and not confrontation as it was often the case in his relationship with the people. Zechariah spoke in that tone of voice because generally the people of Israel were sceptical and did not regard the words of the prophets. This negative spirit led to the persecution of prophets and even to the violent death of Zechariah.

THOUGHT: An obedient soul delights in pleasing God.

PRAYER: Lord, let me not develop a negative spirit towards Thy Word.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 26

ZECHARIAH 7:1-7

LUKE 10:25-37

*“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God...
and thy neighbour as thyself.”*

GOD’S ANSWER TO ZECHARIAH

The Lord told Zechariah to speak to the people concerning devotion in fasting in the seventy years that they were in Babylon. He also reminded them of their eating and drinking. The physical food was for their bodies, but the worship was for the Lord. He wanted them to show a difference in this regard and to remember the words that the prophets had spoken to them before the captivity.

The prophets always represented the voice of the Lord and their word was the only way the people could know the will of God. They were now ignoring Zechariah as their fathers had done. Their words were still relevant and these people ought to listen to them.

The prophets dealt with moral issues among the people. The people were exhorted to execute true judgment and show mercy and compassion to their brothers. They were not to oppress the less fortunate; the widow, the fatherless, the stranger and the poor. These were people who were needy and required a helping hand from those who were able. Looking down on them would add to their misery. As a general rule they were not to imagine evil in their hearts against their brother. The Law of the love of God and love for one’s neighbour is expressed here with clarity. They were to obey the law of God in their relationship one with another. This law is clearly expressed also in the New Testament and it is a requirement for all believers in Christ to keep this law.

Today’s generation needs to be reminded of their duty to God in the same vein that Zechariah reminded the people of his generation. There are needy ones today as there were in those days. When this message is told, some may nod their heads in agreement, but that is not enough. There is a need for concerted effort to assist those who are needy within the means available as God has prospered us.

THOUGHT: Man’s duty to man is also his duty to God.

PRAYER: Lord, let me always keep Thy commandments.

THE RESPONSE OF THE PEOPLE

The people refused to hear the counsel of the prophet. They *“pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear”* (Zech 7:11). The prophet added that *“they made their hearts as an adamant stone”* (Zech 7:12). Thus they refused to obey the Law, and the word which the Lord had sent in His Spirit by the past prophets. As it is expected of any rebellion, the retributive hand of the Lord would catch up with them. They were not willing to do to their brethren as instructed by God, and were self-satisfied. They were also proud and, in a way, attributed their comfort to their own effort. The Lord was displeased with their attitude. The prophet pointed out their error. They were carnal and did not receive spiritual things. The expectation of the Lord for them was that they were to be spiritual and do good that comes out of their experience with Him.

Zechariah reminded the people of what had happened to their fathers: They were exiled because of their disobedience. The consequences of their rebellion would follow that of their fathers' who did not listen and were banished to a foreign land. The Lord had warned them, but they would not listen. The illustration of the whirlwind represents a violent end. Those who survived had to take refuge wherever they can.

Because the people persisted in their father's ways, they later suffered the then-future scattering after the ascension of Christ. At that time, under the Romans, the Jews had some autonomy. However, the expectation of the Jews did not conform to God's. Their desire was to gain full authority, but this was not realised. So they rebelled against the Romans and suffered a sad end. The prophecy of Zechariah was fulfilled when they were scattered to many lands. They had no home until the establishment of modern-day Israel in 1948. Let us learn a lesson for ourselves. Going against God's instruction leads to a downward slide to death. God's children need to be awake.

THOUGHT: Evil acts easily influence the hearts of depraved people.

PRAYER: Lord, let me follow Thee and be safe.

THE RESTORATION OF JERUSALEM

In Bible history, Jerusalem is the key city of Bible events. Zechariah’s prophetic eye saw far and near. (My teacher, Rev Timothy Tow, called this foresight “prophescope.”) In Zechariah 8:1-15, Zechariah saw the distant future of Jerusalem when there will be peace and prosperity. The message was relevant to the Jews of his day because of the eternal importance of the city. They were also to strive to fulfil the duty that was before them to fortify the greatness of Jerusalem.

Zion is a particular location within the city of Jerusalem, where the temple was built. This is near the place where Abraham offered Isaac. David later purchased this place and lived on it. He was also buried there. It became the most sacred site for the Jews. When the Muslims conquered the city, they adopted it as their holy place because they also regard Abraham as their father. It was in this city that the Son of God later walked. He taught in the temple and did many of His great works within its borders. It became a symbol of God’s dwelling place. The eternal city is called the New Jerusalem.

Zechariah was sent to encourage the Jews who had returned to rebuild the temple. This second temple was subsequently destroyed. In John 4, Jesus told the Samaritan woman that true worshippers must worship the Father in spirit and in truth. This thus abolished dead worship in physical, sacred places. However, Jerusalem remained the symbol of God’s holy abode.

In Zechariah 8:3, it is called *“a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD...”* Its restoration is of high value. This will be a glorious city that will be revealed after the passing of the present world. It will be a city that no human power will be able to destroy.

THOUGHT: The New Jerusalem will be a reality.

PRAYER: Lord, prepare for me a habitation in the New Jerusalem.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 29

ZECHARIAH 8:4-10

ISAIAH 65:20

*“There shall be no more thence
an infant of days, nor an old man
that hath not filled his days...”*

THE PEACE OF JERUSALEM

Zechariah now focused on the events of Jerusalem as an earthly city. The peace that shall prevail in it is shown in the expressions that followed. Old men and old women shall dwell in the city and each with a staff in his hand and also boys and girls will play in the streets (Zech 8:4-5). Such life does not occur in times of war. Old people and children are always vulnerable victims of war. However, their presence here implies that there would be peace in the city.

The prospect of peace will come to its fullness when the Lord Jesus Christ establishes His millennial kingdom. Jerusalem will be the capital city. Isaiah referred to the same blessedness of long life and peace. Both prophets saw the time when this peace will exist. The prevailing calm then shall be marvelous in the eyes of the Lord and in the eyes of the people. This expectation (following the second coming of Christ) shall be a blessing to all who are children of God. God will save His people from every corner of the earth, and will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem (Zech 8:7-8). They will be God’s people and He will be their God in truth and in righteousness. There is every promise of blessedness. This message came at a time when the few returnee Jews were struggling to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. It was a slow process as they were under a foreign power. The kingdom was never restored to them. This created uncertainty in their hearts. The prophet’s words were for their comfort as they looked forward with an optimistic spirit. They were encouraged to strengthen their hands and to hear the words of the prophet when the foundation of the Lord’s house was laid (Zech 8:9).

In the early stages of their settlement, there was no employment or harmony among them. They were put through such misery that they saw their helplessness and therefore sought assistance in the right way. The Lord also gave the prophet foresight over these things so that he may point them to the truth.

THOUGHT: In any calamity, listen to what the Lord is saying.

PRAYER: Lord, speak to me every day through Thy Word.

JERUSALEM IS RE-ESTABLISHED

The re-establishment of a nation requires that there be law and order. God's promise to Judah in Zechariah 8:11 marks the turning point in God's dealing with them then: *“But now I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days, saith the LORD of hosts.”* The Lord will bring their punishment to an end and relate to them in a gracious way. The land will be fruitful and the people will prosper. God will provide sufficient rain and everyone can lay claim on his property. Their lives will then be meaningful. God will remove the curse of Judah and Israel, and save them and make them a blessing. Keil and Delitzsch's comments are as follows:

“The formula, to be a curse among the nations, is to be interpreted according to Jer 24:9; Jer 25:9; Jer 42:18; 2 Kings 22:19, as equivalent to being the object of a curse, i.e., so smitten by God as to serve as the object of curses. In harmony with this, the phrase to “become a blessing” is equivalent to being so blessed as to be used as a benedictory formula (cf. Gen 48:22; Jer 29:22). This promise is made to the remnant of Judah and Israel, and therefore of all the twelve tribes, who are to become partakers of the future salvation in undivided unity (cf. Zech 9:10, 9:13, 10:6, 11:14). Israel is therefore to look forward to the future without alarm.”

They were encouraged to fear not and to make their hands strong. God has thought to do well to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. The coming of Christ has led to the integration of believers of all nations as the people of God, being the children of Abraham by faith. Those who believe in Christ enter the covenant. On the other hand, Jerusalem and Judah remain distinct as a symbol of the eternal city. Believe in Christ and you will be a citizen of the city of truth, Jerusalem.

THOUGHT: The blessing of Jerusalem is the blessing of all nations.

PRAYER: Lord, may the peace of Jerusalem prevail.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 1

ZECHARIAH 8:16-17

MATTHEW 22:36-40

*“And the second is like unto it,
Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”*

LOVE FOR ONE’S NEIGHBOUR

The Lord commanded Zechariah to remind Judah of the moral standards of their faith. They were to be truthful and exercise the greatest commandments in the Law. There were occasions set aside for fasting and also for feasts. These were to bring cheer, peace and truth. These words are also for the people of all nations and they will recognize the God of Israel and worship Him.

Love for one’s neighbour is what the Lord Jesus Christ called the second greatest commandment in the Law (Matt 22:37-39). It is the sum of the second table of the Ten Commandments. The keeping of these commands fulfils that Law.

The spirit of discontent was prevalent during Zechariah’s time and a reminder to the people of their moral responsibility was needful to build harmony and godly living (Zech 8:16-17).

The people were familiar with these words but they could not resist the temptation to do the opposite. It was the prophet’s duty to point out their disobedience. The Lord kept reminding them that He hates those things. Love for one’s neighbour must prevail even when a person is provoked and his patience is tested to a breaking point. In every neighbourhood, there will be antagonists. But obedience to God’s law and application of wisdom brings easy solution.

Paul also gave wise counsel in such situations when he said, *“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head”* (Rom 12:19-20). This, he said, will encourage peaceful living with all people. When there is a lack of peace, it is a disadvantage to both the offended and the offending party.

THOUGHT: The law of God is the path to peace.

PRAYER: Lord, let me be at peace with all.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2

ZECHARIAH 8:18-23

NEHEMIAH 8:13-18

“...the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month.”

THE VALUE OF DAYS OF FASTING AND FEASTING

Zechariah indicated that there were four occasions of fasting, in the fourth, fifth, seventh and tenth months (Zech 8:19). Fasting is an intense seeking of the Lord in prayer. Abstaining from food is meant to stress the serious desire to seek God without distractions or interruptions. And these shall be joy and gladness to the house of Judah.

And there shall also be “*cheerful feasts*” (Zech 8:19). These occasions included travelling to Jerusalem and offering of sacrifices. In the Levitical law, there were seven main feasts, three of which required all males of Israel to travel to the temple in Jerusalem (Exod 23:14-19; Lev 23:34). Subsequently, other feasts were added. The Feast of Purim was added under Mordecai after his victory in Persia (Esther 9:18-32). The Feast of Lights or Hanukkah (John 10:22) was added following the Maccabean revolt in the inter-testamental period. (Details of which are given in the books of the Apocrypha.) These were times of celebration to commemorate what the Lord had done for Israel. While they were “*cheerful feasts*,” there must be love for truth and peace. The commitment to keep these occasions of worship must bring change to the hearts of those who observe them.

The majority of the Jews who returned from Babylon may have been ignorant of the teachings of the Law of God and had been detached from regular Jewish worship for a long time. This also led to other consequences and the prophet Zechariah strove to address these problems. The Lord had to put in place shepherds to cater to the wayward members of His flock. At that time, Zechariah already had his hands full trying to address issues that came up every now and then.

THOUGHT: Sinful hearts always go astray and everyone seeks his own way.

PRAYER: Lord, may I always love Thy truth and peace.

PEOPLE OF ALL NATIONS TO ACCEPT THE LORD

The Lord declared that “*people, and the inhabitants of many cities*” (Zech 8:20) shall come, encouraging one another to go and pray before the Lord. They would want to go continually and offer their worship. These people from many cities will be of all nations, not just of the house of Israel. When the Lord Jesus Christ was on earth, He commissioned the disciples to go to all nations of the world and preach the gospel. Those who believe will be saved.

The significance of Jerusalem, the city of truth, has not ceased. Today, however, it is a city of conflict. Regardless of the state of war hanging over her, many pilgrims from all corners of the globe flock there. Her spiritual significance to Christians is irresistible.

As Jesus was ascending to heaven, the angels appeared to the disciples and announced that the same Jesus who was taken from them “...*shall so come in like manner...*” (Acts 1:11). Then the disciples returned “...*unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day’s journey*” (Acts 1:12).

Note that Jesus had earlier (in John 4) overruled homage to a physical place of worship. He made this known in His conversation with the woman of Samaria. Those who worship God must worship Him in spirit and in truth. In the Christian church, there is a limit to the homage paid to Jerusalem.

In Zechariah 8:23, God concluded, “*In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.*” Through Zechariah, God revealed that salvation shall be extended to the people of all nations, and that they too can be saved.

THOUGHT: The gospel is clear and is proclaimed to all people.

PRAYER: Lord, rescue the perishing. Use me to share the gospel message.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4

ZECHARIAH 9:1-7

MATTHEW 11:20-22

“...Tyre and Sidon,...would have repented
long ago in sackcloth and ashes.”

THE FUTURE OF ZION IS BRIGHT

The prophetic eye of Zechariah saw a great future for Zion. In the previous chapters, he dealt with the immediate issues, now he turned to the future events. This is a general characteristic of all prophets.

The prophecy in Zechariah 9:9 stands out in that it was literally fulfilled when Christ walked on the earth. It was an explicit fulfilment. The prophet Zechariah had other things to say about the future of Zion and painted a bright picture. He looked at the time beyond the Persian period. It is history written in advance.

The eyes of all the tribes of Israel shall be towards the Lord. They shall overcome the lands of Hadrach and Damascus (Zech 9:1). Hamath, Tyre and Sidon were cities within the borders of Israel. These lands were to bear the burdens that would befall them. Tyre is described here as having made herself wealthy with silver and gold in innumerable abundance, but she shall be destroyed (Zech 9:3-4). The cities of the Philistines, i.e. Ashkelon, Ekron, Gaza and Ashdod, would be given to strangers (Zech 9:5-6). These, the prophet said, shall not be inhabited.

The prophet here was looking at the days following the return of the Jews. The neighbouring nations would not be spared the chain of the new coming power. According to the prophecies of Daniel, the new power coming after Persia was Greece. Alexander the Great was the Greek general who conquered all these lands. Cities in ancient days were strongholds for the security of the nation. Their strategic locations were important. The conquerors brought people from different places to live together so as to suppress their unity and possible resistance. The term “*bastard*” (Zech 9:6) refers to these people.

THOUGHT: Jerusalem is protected because she looks to the Lord.

PRAYER: Lord, protect Thy Church today.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5

ZECHARIAH 9:8-17

DANIEL 8:5-12, 21-25

“Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision.”

THE LORD SHALL KEEP AN EYE ON HIS HOLY CITY

According to Josephus, Alexander’s first approach in his conquests was diplomacy. The Jews of Jerusalem were willing to support him against the Persians. Part of the terms of their treaty was that the Jews would be given some form of autonomy in the exercise of their religion. Zechariah prophesied that the Lord would encamp His house in Jerusalem and no enemy can touch her.

The prophet’s foresight then stretched ahead and saw the time of Christ’s ministry on earth. He spoke of a future King of Zion riding humbly on an ass. The literal fulfilment of this prophecy is well known. It is the message of Palm Sunday. Then the prophet saw far beyond the first advent of Christ to His second coming. That is when Christ will exercise His power as King. He will remove all violence and bring peace. His Kingdom shall be a universal one. He will free His prisoners on the basis of the covenant of blood. The ultimate salvation for sinners is on the basis of the shedding of the blood of Christ. This included those Jews who were still in exile then. The Lord had an eye on all of them and the prophets gave them hope in their misery.

In the first mention of Greece (Zech 9:13), the prophet indicated that the Lord would subdue Judah and Ephraim, and Greece was made a sword of mighty men. This was the military prowess of Alexander the Great. Subsequent rulers built on his achievements. The entrance of Alexander the Great into the scene of world super-power was something that no man could predict, but God knows every detail of the future. The Greeks did not only capture Jerusalem peacefully, they also subjected the Jews to their power for many years. The Maccabean revolt highlighted the conflict. God gave them great victory over their oppressors and put a landmark in their history. The Lord Jesus attended the Feast of Lights (John 10:22) that came out of that victory.

THOUGHT: The hand of the Lord is in all things.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to trust Thy prophets.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6

ZECHARIAH 10:1-4

JEREMIAH 14:22

*“Are there any among the vanities of the
Gentiles that can cause rain?”*

NATURAL BLESSINGS COME FROM THE LORD

The prophet continued to foretell what the expectation of Israel shall be in the days to come. He spoke of their common issues in their relationship with God and also prophesied specific events. The main fact is that the nation of Israel, after the scattering to far countries, shall be re-gathered to their own land. These events will precede the second coming of the Messiah.

In Zechariah 10:1, rain was requested from the Lord to water the plants of the fields. The waters coming from heaven is one of the miracles of nature. The nearest that man can do to substitute rain is irrigation. The superiority of waters from heaven makes man recognize that it is only the Creator who can provide such immeasurable amount of water.

The people were used to the seasonal rains and the changing weather patterns. In some seasons, there may not be enough rain, thus the need to call upon the Lord. In the past, those who did not believe in the Lord had their own man-made beliefs regarding the provision of rain. They used idols or teraphim and divining. But the prophet declared them vanity and lies (Zech 10:2). Unfortunately, the children of Israel resorted to some of these methods in defiance of God’s Law. They went their own ways as a flock. It was a national apostasy as they denied God and sought their own ways.

The Lord said that they did not have a shepherd, i.e. a priest or a prophet. Kings also carried a great responsibility as they were the country’s overall leaders. When there were good kings, the spiritual health of the nation went up, and vice versa. Since Zechariah was speaking of their failure, the kings were poor shepherds of the flock.

THOUGHT: Jesus is the Good Shepherd that Israel needs.

PRAYER: Lord, let me always look only to Jesus as my Shepherd.

GOD RESPONDS TO THE WAYWARD ACTS OF MEN

God's anger was kindled against the shepherds and He punished the goats. These were leaders who failed in their duties and led the flock to follow false shepherds. This was the trend that was characteristic of many spiritual leaders in Israel from the time that the Lord instituted it as a nation. Aaron, consecrated the first priest of Israel, was overcome by fear of man and led Israel to worship the golden calf. The depravity of the human heart also led the shepherds to yield to the wiles of the devil. They transgressed the Law of the Lord and did not appreciate the grace shown to them.

The "*corner*," the "*nail*" and the "*battle bow*" (Zech 10:4) refer to the Messiah who is ever present to render a helping hand. He is the gift of God's grace. His power will enable them to defeat every oppressor. Peter cited Isaiah in 1 Peter 2:6, "*Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.*" This stresses the superiority of the Messiah in the rescue of His people. The prophet Zechariah thus declared that Judah shall be mighty to defeat their enemies in battle. As the Lord shall be with them, "*...the riders on horses shall be confounded*" (Zech 10:5).

God will gather again the redeemed and increase them. When the prophet spoke, Israel had returned to their land from Babylon. The context, however, indicates that there was another scattering and the Lord would restore them again. The prophecy applies to both Judah and Israel, represented by Ephraim or Joseph. The Lord's dealing with Israel goes on until the second coming of Christ. These are the words of the Lord concerning that future return, "*And I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph, and I will bring them again to place them; for I have mercy upon them: and they shall be as though I had not cast them off: for I am the LORD their God, and will hear them*" (Zech 10:6).

THOUGHT: "*The heart is deceitful above all things...*" (Jer 17:9).

PRAYER: Lord, keep me from the deceit of the evil one.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 8

ZECHARIAH 10:8-12

MATTHEW 24:23-28

“Behold, I have told you before.”

THE FATE OF ISRAEL BEFORE RE-GATHERING

The prophet continued to speak of what would befall them before they are gathered again. They will be scattered among the people of far countries. At the time of Zechariah, Israel was under foreign domination, but had some extended autonomy with wider freedom.

They remained a distinct people under three powers. When they subsequently rebelled against the third power, the Romans, their city was destroyed. They were all scattered to far countries as the prophet prophesied. This was not their end as a nation. The Lord would gather them from these lands and redeem them. They would also increase. They were familiar with Assyria and Egypt as some of the lands that they had gone to as captives or refugees. These are representative of all far countries. The history of Israel cannot be complete when they were out of the land that God had promised their fathers. They will then return to Gilead and Lebanon. These are neighbouring territories of Israel and going there, to them, is next to home.

The re-gathering of Israel shall not come easily. A place shall not be found for them. History testifies that many have claimed Jerusalem. Even the establishment of the modern state of Israel did not come in peace. The anticipation of resistance and violence had given rise to alternative consideration. However, at last, confrontation could not be avoided. The prophet said that Israel would be strengthened in the Lord and walk up and down in the Lord’s name.

The prophecy was not clear then, but it is more manifest today as history and current events testify. It is God who is able to reveal the future and brings those events to pass. This affirms the truthfulness of His promises.

THOUGHT: Messiah is coming again.

PRAYER: Lord, may I have a place in Thy kingdom.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9

ZECHARIAH 11:1-3

JUDGES 3:1-3

“Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to prove Israel by them...”

FOCUS ON LEBANON

Lebanon is Israel's next door neighbour. Tyre and Sidon are her well-known cities. They played an important role in the commerce of the Mediterranean for centuries. Cedar trees do well in this land and the tree is its national emblem. The history of the country is closely related to that of Israel. Zechariah's prophetic eye now focused on this land. He also saw the future of Israel and her foolish shepherds.

After the re-gathering of Israel, Lebanon shall be opened and fire shall devour her cedars. The importance of these trees was not just their beauty. They are useful for buildings and making furniture. The king of Tyre had supplied the cedars in abundance to King Solomon to build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem. The understanding of the prophecy comes with knowing the approximate time of its fulfilment. This would definitely be in the future days of Zechariah. The history of the land will also give an indication as to when this may have been fulfilled or if it is yet to be fulfilled. It is possible to see the events of this prophecy in the recent events in this land. The burning of cedars is of course a figure of speech, but it points to the use of weapons of modern warfare, bombs and other explosives. Nebuchadnezzar burned the temple and other structures in Jerusalem when he had taken Judah to captivity. However the description in the prophecy fits the devastation brought by modern war machines.

Recent history has seen Lebanon rise and fall because of war. First there was the civil war that lasted for fifteen years and the land that had been the most prosperous in the Middle East was reduced to a shell. Her cedars were burnt by fire of war. Second, as a result of the Arab-Israeli wars, many Palestinians took refuge in Lebanon. They established training camps to fight back. The Israelis retaliated in an all-out war to contain the danger they faced. The Middle East crisis is not over. Lebanon will continue to be in the picture. The shepherds' glory *“is spoiled...the pride of Jordan is spoiled”* (Zech 11:3).

THOUGHT: Biblical prophecies are always accurate.

PRAYER: Lord, may I not doubt Thee, but take Thee at Thy word.

GOD COMMANDS THE FLOCK TO BE FED

Sheep are possessions of the owner; he can sell them for money whenever he wants. The sheep will then be slain for meat and sold. The owner can say, *“Blessed be the LORD”* because he is rich. He will continue to feed more sheep for the same purpose without guilt. The shepherds have no pity for the sheep. In this analogy, the Lord said that He *“will no more pity the inhabitants of the land”* (Zech 11:6), but will deliver them to be killed. He added that He will deliver the men everyone to his neighbour’s hand and to the hand of his king and He will not deliver them. He will feed the flock for the slaughter. There is an indication here that the fate of this nation and that of Judah are indeed divine punishment. The wise would seek to know the purpose of such chastisement and repent, seeking forgiveness from the Lord.

Since there is no sign of mending the relationship with God, the rod is used. The nature of their transgression is not specified; it could be a general rejection of God, and thus the punishment. The Lord spoke of *“two staves”* (Zech 11:7), one He called Beauty and the other He called Bands. “The prophet then saw himself carrying out the duties of the Messiah in feeding the poor flock. He took two staves and named them ...Beauty stands for Graciousness and Bands for bonds. The first shows God’s restraint on the nations from destroying Israel. The second refers to the brotherly ties within Israel itself. With the coming of the Messiah, Israel will be preserved from destroying nations while the brotherly love in Israel itself will be strengthened” (Timothy Tow).

Three shepherds are cut off in one month. They are loathed and abhorred; many agree that these are princes, priests and prophets. These are the ones who have neglected their duties and served their own interests. They will not be fed and they will die as they eat one another’s flesh.

THOUGHT: Who is a faithful servant?

PRAYER: Lord, raise up faithful shepherds from among us.

GOD DEALS WITH ISRAEL

The prophet, according to the Lord’s instruction, took the staff called Beauty and cut it asunder. The interpretation given by the Lord Himself is that it signifies the breaking of the covenant He had made with His people (Zech 11:10). The flock that waited “*knew that it was the word of the LORD*” (Zech 11:11). And they gave him his price: “*thirty pieces of silver*” (Zech 11:12). Note: Thirty pieces of silver was the price of compensation for a slave gored by an ox (Exod 21:32).

Then Zechariah cut asunder the other staff, Bands; signifying the breaking of “*the brotherhood between Judah and Israel*” (Zech 11:14). This may refer to the divisions that arose among the Jews in the Roman period as there were different schools of theology. The Sadducees and the Pharisees were the main sects. There were also Zealots and non-religious sects. These divisions were exploited by the Romans and were easily defeated, and Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed in AD 70.

God then commanded the prophet to take “*the instruments of a foolish shepherd*” (Zech 11:15). He said that a shepherd shall be raised in the land and “*shall not visit those that be cut off, neither shall seek the young one, nor heal that that is broken, nor feed that that standeth still: but he shall eat the flesh of the fat, and tear their claws in pieces*” (Zech 11:16).

Then, woe is pronounced against the “*idol shepherd that leaveth the flock*” (Zech 11:17), who shall have to face the sword! The extent of the grievous punishment that the “*idol shepherd*” deserved is described in the same verse: “*...the sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened.*”

THOUGHT: In these prophecies, God reveals to us His faithfulness and His all-knowing power.

PRAYER: Lord, may I trust in Thy promises to the end of my life.

JUDAH’S ULTIMATE VICTORY

The prophet now looked at the events leading up to the second coming of Christ. Jerusalem was called “*a cup of trembling*” and “*a burdensome stone*” (Zech 12:2-3). Her governors shall be active in directing warfare. The Lord shall save and defend the city. The Holy Spirit shall be poured upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem. There shall be great mourning as the houses of Israel are led to repentance.

The prophecy focuses on the nation of Israel in the period between the first coming of Christ and the second coming. In the previous chapter that focused on Lebanon, it was seen that the events taking place was a fulfilment of what the prophet had foretold. The current prophecy sees Israel residing in the Promised Land again. There was to be another dispersion and subsequent return to the holy land.

The message comes from the Creator of all things. Jerusalem is made “*a cup of trembling*” to all people round about. The cup in metaphoric language means those who attack Jerusalem will stagger and fall. Jerusalem is also described as “*a burdensome stone*” for all people. All that shall burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, even if it be all the people of the earth that are gathered against the city. The events described will take place after the return of the Jews to Jerusalem, and fit the time of the second coming of Christ.

The horse and the rider (Zech 12:4) refer to warfare equipment and it is the Lord who promises to smite these forces. Those who fight against Israel will do so in vain because the hand of the Almighty will be against them. The existence of Israel today has been clouded with much controversy. And has led to many wars. As the situation stands, it will come to a climax as the parties in conflict are not relenting.

THOUGHT: God is true and His prophecies will come to pass.

PRAYER: Lord, I give Thee the glory worthy of Thy Name.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13

ZECHARIAH 12:5-6

PSALM 125

*“As the mountains are round about Jerusalem,
so the LORD is round about his people...”*

THE BOLDNESS OF THE GOVERNORS OF JUDAH

The approach of the governors of Judah makes the city stand out. They will be bold. They shall say that the inhabitants are their strength and the Lord is their God. They will mobilise the people to put up a defence and trust God to give them victory.

The description of the nature of the attack that will be witnessed is told by Zechariah in verse 6: *“In that day will I make the governors of Judah like an hearth of fire among the wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf; and they shall devour all the people round about, on the right hand and on the left: and Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place, even in Jerusalem.”* Zechariah added that the Lord shall save the tents of Judah first and more. Reading this prophecy is like reading the latest history of modern Israel. The nation has remained in a state of war all this time. She has fought many wars and won. It is not by coincidence that these events are so. The Lord is bringing His word to pass.

On the other hand, having established the state of Israel does not mean the people acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Messiah. There may be a handful of Jewish Christians, but the majority and the official stand reject the gospel of Christ. The Lord has allowed this to be so because of reasons known only to Him. The restoration of Israel, nevertheless, is always guaranteed. The city of Jerusalem has religious significance to the Jews, Christians and Muslims. As such, pilgrims from all over the world stream to this city in large numbers at all seasons. This has contributed much to the commerce of the land and also its peace. Jerusalem is not just a city like all the others around the world. It is a historic city kept in the eye of God for the sake of His promises.

THOUGHT: God always sees the end from the beginning.

PRAYER: Lord, may Thy peace come to Jerusalem, soon.

THE LORD SHALL ALWAYS BE THEIR STRENGTH

Regardless of the rejection of the Messiah, there is full assurance in the text that the Lord will defend Jerusalem and the house of Judah. The feeble among them shall be as David and the house of David shall be as God and as the angel of the Lord before them (Zech 12:8). The Lord will also destroy the nations that come against Jerusalem.

This prophecy was written many years after the Lord saved Judah from the hand of the Assyrians. When Assyria was at the zenith of her power, she captured and enslaved many nations with all impunity. The Assyrians came close to the gates of Jerusalem. On the eve of the intended invasion, scripture says that the angel of the Lord came and smote the host of Assyria. Only the king survived and he returned to his city only to be killed by his own sons. The Lord promised to destroy any nation that would rise against Judah and the episode of Assyria was a fitting precedent.

Spiritual salvation shall also come to Judah. There is hope for many in Judah, for in the end they will believe the Lord. The spirit of grace shall be poured upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The same grace that saved Paul on the Damascus road will also save them. The offer of God is unconditional. The Lord, adding more to His assurance, said that *"they shall look upon me whom they have pierced"* (Zech 12:10b). This prophecy refers to the crucifixion of Christ when a soldier pierced His side. Their turning to Him is yet to come. When that spiritual revival comes, it will be seen. The families of Israel will mourn in repentance. Each will confess his sins.

God brings all things to pass not because the house of Judah is better than others, but only because God's grace is bestowed upon her. He makes them stand as victors in the battlefield. The Lord protects them and leads them to repentance.

THOUGHT: Have I already received the offer of God's grace?

PRAYER: Lord, may Thy grace be manifested in the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 15

ZECHARIAH 13:1-2

MARK 13:14-20

“... but for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days.”

ISRAEL'S REPENTANCE IN THE LAST DAYS

Zechariah saw, ahead of his time, the first advent of Christ and also His second coming and accomplishments. The chronology of these events is not clear to a casual reader. However, a careful study will show the direction of the prophet's message. There is a huge gap between the events seen by the prophet here, but in God's time it is like today and tomorrow.

The repentance and acceptance of Israel were events that will take place *“in that day”* (Zech 13:1). A future tense was used to show that it is a future event. In the same verse, he said *“there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.”* The water of a fountain is used for cleansing. The Messianic prophecies and the gospel will show that the only effective power to remove sin is the blood of Christ. The beneficiaries in this context are the Jews. This prophecy points to a future salvation of Israel.

Regardless of their rejection of Christ, God's time will come. This prophecy agrees with other assertions in scripture that God's chosen people will acknowledge Him. The LORD said in Jeremiah 2:13, *“For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.”* As *“the fountain of living waters,”* He gives life. In John 1:29, John the Baptist referred to Jesus as the Lamb of God which takes away the sins of the world. Zechariah's prophecy ascribed to Him the same role. Paul said that in Him we have our redemption through His blood, and forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace (Eph 1:7). The work of Christ is well defined and Zechariah gave hope to Israel that He is the only one who can solve their sin problem.

THOUGHT: *“...this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.”* (Acts 1:11)

PRAYER: Come, Lord Jesus!

FALSE PROPHETS SHALL BE CUT OFF

God will cut off the names of idols, false prophets and unclean spirits. These were the tools of the enemies of God that made Israel go against the Lord. The nation (save for a few who raised the banner of the Lord on high) was almost in perpetual idolatry.

Parents shall curse their offspring who become false prophets and shall thrust them out (Zech 13:3). They shall be ashamed and shall not wear *“a rough garment to deceive”* (Zech 13:4). This is false religion. For the father and mother to deal with such false prophets is taking a courageous step. The false prophet would have wounds in his hands caused by his friends (Zech 13:6).

The departure of Israel from the Lord was a result of the work of these false prophets. Jesus attributed lies to Satan and called him the father of lies for he was a deceiver from the beginning (John 8:44). Many false prophets rose to oppose true prophets. The followers of the false prophets also persecuted the prophets of God. It was mentioned that Zechariah had a violent end. He died for his prophetic work. This is not mentioned in this book but Jesus confirmed Zechariah’s martyrdom (Matt 23:35). There was a strong general rejection of these servants of God. However, the Lord used them to give hope to those who were faithful. They did not have an easy time. John the Baptist, recognized as a prophet, died one of the most degrading deaths. The prophets of God faced many obstacles, but the Lord gave them victory. When faced with difficulties, the false prophets, on the other hand, would deny their calling: *“But he shall say, I am no prophet, I am an husbandman; for man taught me to keep cattle from my youth”* (Zech 13:5). True prophets would not deny their calling as prophets, but would speak out to substantiate their call and would speak for the Lord. They would be faithful to God unto death.

THOUGHT: True prophets will always speak for the Lord.

PRAYER: Lord, change stumbling blocks in our way into stepping stones.

THE TRIBULATION OF THE SHEPHERD

A sword shall be brought upon God’s shepherd and the man that is the Lord’s fellow (Zech 13:7). The “*shepherd*” here is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. In John 10:33, the Jews accused Jesus of making Himself equal with God although He was a man. “... *Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh...*” (1 Pet 4:1), yet He was the Son of God. Isaiah testified of Jesus in Isaiah 40:11, “*He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.*” In Hebrews 13:20, Jesus is called “*that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant.*”

This “*shepherd*” shall be subjected to the “*sword*” (Zech 13:7), i.e. to human violence. It shall “*smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.*” The Lord Jesus quoted this very verse when He was about to be arrested (Mark 14:27). It was in reference to His disciples who would flee each to his own way. Who knew that this would happen literally four hundred plus years after Zechariah prophesied it? This not only authenticated the claims of Christ, but also the divine origin of God’s written word. Jesus quoted freely and all was accurate. He is the Giver of the scriptures and none of His words can ever be lost. The preservation of scripture is a doctrine of the Bible and it will remain for ever.

Zechariah then moved his prophecy to an event further into the future: the second coming of Christ. He said that two thirds of the population shall die and there shall be a remnant according to the election of grace (Zech 13:8). These shall go through fire and be refined as silver or gold (Zech 13:9). This speaks of their purity and the nature of that attainment. They shall call upon the name of the Lord and He shall hear them. They shall be His people, and He shall be their God. God is always true in all that He reveals. Trust the Lord and you will be among the number of those who will be saved.

THOUGHT: The gospel of salvation must be preached to Israel.

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for the gift of Christ.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18

ZECHARIAH 14:1-5

PSALM 65:1-8

“Which by his strength setteth fast the mountains; being girded with power.”

THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM

Zechariah here again spoke of “*the day of the LORD*” (Zech 14:1), the great day of the second coming of Christ. He spoke of the events that will come to pass around Jerusalem. It will begin with the siege of the city, followed by supernatural events.

The Day of the Lord comes and spoils will be divided, implying conquest. The Lord said that He will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle and these invaders will take the city (Zech 14:2). It will be a time of pain and all the scenes of devastation of war will be witnessed. Half of the city shall be captured and a number of people shall survive. This is an event at the end of the age. When this happens, God will then fight against all the nations that come against Jerusalem (Zech 14:3).

Nations predict the outcome of war by their military might. However, when the Lord is involved, no earthly army can match His power.

The timing of these events is implied in Zechariah 14:4. At that time, there will be some cosmic upheavals. Mount Olives “*shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south.*” The valley shall reach Azal (somewhere south or east of Jerusalem). People shall flee because of the upheaval. Zechariah compared their flight to that when there was an earthquake in the days of King Uzziah (Zech 14:5).

The Great Rift Valley, which stretches from Israel to the east coast of southern Africa, is one physical feature which was formed in a recent upheaval. Such real examples in history show that the prophecy of Zechariah is not farfetched. The reason why it will come is not told but there must be some significance in connection with the events during the time of Zechariah.

THOUGHT: God is the Lord of hosts.

PRAYER: Lord, may I always be confident of Thy power.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19

ZECHARIAH 14:6-11

ISAIAH 65:17-25

*“...for, behold, I create Jerusalem
a rejoicing, and her people a joy.
And I will rejoice in Jerusalem...”*

JERUSALEM SHALL BE EXALTED

The city shall become the centre of activity and the prophet added that that day shall not be clear or dark, but in the evening it shall be light (Zech 14:6-7). The prophet also added that the living waters will flow out of Jerusalem (Zech 14:8). This could be a figure of speech referring to Christ as the Living Water. The city will be a place full of life and source of blessing.

In the calendar of the last days, this second coming of Christ will be after the seven-year tribulation period. Christ will come and fight to rescue Jerusalem and establish His millennial kingdom. He will be King of the whole earth as stated in verse 9. He shall reign for a thousand years as told in Revelation 20:6. The details of life during the millennium show that there will be a restoration of the Eden experience for there will be complete peace among the people. There will be sufficient supply of food and other physical necessities. The animal kingdom also will be at peace, for none will hunt another. Isaiah said that “...*the lion shall eat straw like the bullock...*” (Isa 65:25). It will be a perfect reign as Satan will be bound in the bottomless pit during that one thousand years (Rev 20:3). The piecing together of references on the last days shows a wonderful world never seen before.

The city shall be favourable for habitation. The vision of the prophet added that the land from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem shall be turned to plain (Zech 14:10). The other places around it will also be dwelling places and there will be no more destruction. Jerusalem itself will be safely inhabited (Zech 14:11). The chief element in all these things is God Himself.

THOUGHT: “...*They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD*” (Isa 65:25).

PRAYER: Lord, may all know Thy greatness, even today.

THE NATURE OF THE PLAGUE UPON NATIONS

In the aftermath of war against Jerusalem and the cosmic upheavals witnessed, the Lord shall take charge and set up His kingdom on earth.

The nations that fought against Jerusalem shall be punished with a plague (Zech 14:12). The plague will be deadly such that the enemies' flesh shall consume away while they stand. Their eyes and tongues will also be consumed likewise. Such is the supernatural power of God. Zechariah also added that there shall be a great tumult among them so that they shall fight against each other (Zech 14:13). In this battle, Judah shall fight at Jerusalem and gather the wealth of its enemies (Zech 14:14). This move is part of war strategy. The enemy is weakened when their resources that could be used for war are taken away. Hence, the enemy cannot use money to purchase war equipment or sustain its soldiers, or finance other activities that may contribute to its success in war.

The promise to Judah is that it will be given the upper hand over its enemies. Zechariah prophesied the victory of Judah over its enemies. It is the Lord who will give Judah victory. This is the battle that will be fought at the second coming of Christ. It will be the climatic battle in an attempt by nations to dominate Jerusalem. According to Revelation 13:1-8, it will be the Antichrist who will try to dominate the earth. As much as he is an imitator of Christ, he will try to take over Jerusalem and dominate the Jews and all nations of the earth. He will use many nations under his dominion to wage this war but Zechariah shows here that the Antichrist will have no chance of winning. The Lord is going to fight against them and give victory to Judah.

THOUGHT: Faith is the victory that overcomes the world.

PRAYER: Lord, grant me victory in my spiritual battles.

THE EXTENT OF THE PLAGUE UPON NATIONS

The plague will also extend to domestic animals. The horse, the mule, the camel, the ass and all the beasts that they keep shall be affected (Zech 14:15). These are part of the enemies' resources that can be used (both for food and transportation) in war. When these are weakened or destroyed, the power of these enemy nations will be greatly weakened.

Ordinarily, there are times when epidemics come upon both men and beasts. In modern days, the health service providers are able to contain such epidemics. However, when it is an act of God, all such services will be rendered helpless. It is gratifying to know that even the insurance providers recognize that there are acts of God. These acts of God are listed together with wars as losses which the insurance providers will not compensate. The plague that God shall bring upon those nations shall be devastating.

Zechariah 14:17 says that those who will not worship the King, the LORD of hosts, in Jerusalem and to keep the feast of tabernacles will have no rain. One nation (a perennial enemy of Israel) that is mentioned is Egypt (Zech 14:18). It will also be smitten with the plague. The Lord will also smite all the heathen nations that will not come to keep that feast (Zech 14:19).

Zechariah's prophecy is of a time when all nations will have received the Word of God. If it was the time when the Lord dealt with Israel only, these nations would not have the obligation to keep that feast. They are now required to believe and do what God commands. Every continent of the world would have the good news. Evangelism would have been very intense and reached every place. Death is the condemnation that they will face if they do not take heed (Zech 14:18-19).

THOUGHT: Rejection of the Lord is sin and death.

PRAYER: Lord, keep me faithful at all times.

THE THEME: CHRIST’S RULE

The bells of the horses shall bear the identification of the priest: *“HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD”* (Zech 14:20). In Exodus 28:36-37, this was the inscription that was written on a golden plate on Aaron’s mitre. This and other priestly garments set him aside for the service of God’s house.

Jesus Christ is the great High Priest and the writing of this inscription will be the theme of His rule. Zechariah used this familiar expression because his audience fully understood what it meant. The pots of Jerusalem shall be like the bowls of the altar and every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holiness to the Lord (Zech 14:21). There will be no difference between the sanctified vessels used in the temple and those for common use.

The focus here is not so much on these vessels but on the people that use them. Thus, every heart will be consecrated to the Lord and everything the people use is holy. This is qualified by the statement that *“...there shall be no more the Canaanite...”* (Zech 14:21). This is not referring to Canaanites in the flesh, but to those who are not born again. All who dwell in Jerusalem then will be those who have been washed by the blood of the Lamb. This will be regardless of the race they belong to in the flesh. It will be a glorious fellowship and an echo of heaven itself. The Messiah has come and He saves people of all nations and sanctifies them to Himself. Those who have heard the gospel must take heed to His call and be part of His heritage.

Zechariah spoke in plain speech. The plagues, the feast of the tabernacles, the identification of the priest, and the reference to Canaanites, all appeal to historical landmarks that were familiar with his audience. The focus of this prophecy is far beyond what his audience knew. Let us wait with great expectation for the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

THOUGHT: Christ will reign on earth for a thousand years.

PRAYER: *“...Even so, come, Lord Jesus”* (Rev 22:20).

MALACHI AND HIS OPENING MESSAGE

Malachi (meaning “my messenger”) was a prophet in the days of Nehemiah. Malachi addressed the same problems that Nehemiah encountered. He was a prophet in about 430 BC, a century after Haggai and Zechariah. He was the last of the Old Testament prophets. After the time of Malachi, the Lord was silent for four hundred years.

Malachi directed his message to the post-exilic community, a people plagued with corrupt priests and wicked practices, and who were hard-hearted. He used the question-and-answer method to probe into the practices that were prevalent in the nation.

The *“burden of the word of the LORD to Israel”* (Mal 1:1) is an expression of what the Lord had against Israel. God’s love for the nation of Israel is expressed in the love that He had for Jacob. This is love by election, not condition. Jacob and Esau were twins and the Lord chose Jacob, the younger of the two. In the same way, the Lord also gave privilege to the house of Judah. This is an expression of the sovereignty of God. He has the right to do as He wills.

The house of Esau grew to become the people of Edom. They also faced the same fate as Judah under the Babylonians. They were looking forward to return and rebuild their desolate places but God overruled their effort. He would overthrow because they were a people against whom the Lord had indignation. When this comes, they will magnify the name of the Lord in Israel. The Lord made mention of Edom and her fate so as to teach Judah a lesson. He wanted them to see His hand working in their midst. The privilege that Judah had was by the sovereign will of God and never based on any merit on their part. The preservation of Judah at this time also had a higher purpose; the prophecies of the Messiah will be fulfilled through her.

THOUGHT: God loved Judah and extended His favour to her freely.

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for extending the assurance of Thy saving grace to me.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24

MALACHI 1:6-10

LEVITICUS 22:17-25

“And whosoever offereth a sacrifice of peace offerings unto the LORD... it shall be perfect to be accepted...”

THE POLLUTION BY THE PRIESTS

In Malachi 1:6, the priests were asked to honour the Lord as sons honoured their parents and servants honoured their masters. The Lord asked them that if He were their Father, then where was their honour for Him? Or if He were their master, where was their fear? The priests had developed a negative attitude and despised the name of the Lord.

The Mosaic Law had given specific guidelines on the offering of sacrifices at the temple. The priests did not obeyed the Law, but went their own way. They offered polluted bread upon the altar (Mal 1:7). This was a sacrilege that the Lord could not tolerate. He rebuked them by the mouth of Malachi. It was not an act that could be ignored or allowed to continue. The quality of the offerings of these priests spoke much of the disposition of their hearts before the Lord.

The Lord took great notice of what they did and expressed His displeasure over their lack of respect for Him. They offered the blind and the lame for sacrifices, the base animals that they would not offer to their governor (Mal 1:8). They showed more honour to their earthly ruler than to the Lord. Malachi made this comparison to show them the Lord's displeasure with their actions. He put the question of the Lord to them: *“...will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person?”* They were serving the Lord out of formality. Their serious religious offence went together with other practices touching on their moral, social and material attitude.

The people asked for God's favour but were not doing their part. Malachi again told them that the Lord will not accept them. They only pretended to serve Him. They would not shut the doors for nothing or kindle a fire on the altar for nothing (Mal 1:10). This means that they would not do God's work for nothing in return.

THOUGHT: God is holy. Due honour must be given to Him.

PRAYER: Lord, *“Hallowed be Thy name.”*

GOD’S RESPONSE TO THE SACRILEGE

The Lord affirmed that He had no pleasure in them and would not accept their empty sacrifices (Mal 1:10). God is great and worthy of the best. He said, *“For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts”* (Mal 1:11). The Lord said this to highlight the transgression of Judah.

Believers in Christ must not give lip service to the Lord. They must give their all to Him. Israel had polluted the table of the Lord (Mal 1:12). Every priest was aware of what the prophet meant. Jesus used the story of David eating the showbread which was not lawful for anyone to eat except the priests, but the Lord allowed this noting that it was a case of a higher law overriding a lower law. It was an act of desperation in an emergency and such necessity is understood. In the case of King Uzziah, it was an intentional violation of the law. The priests said no to his burning of incense (2 Chron 26:16-19). When he persisted, the Lord struck him with leprosy. The priests in the days of Malachi did not check their actions as they profaned the worship of the Lord. The Lord will not accept their sacrifices (Mal 1:13).

In Malachi 1:14, we see that the Lord had blessed these people with flocks and they could have chosen the best to offer to the Lord. But they did not. Such deceivers were thus cursed.

History was repeating itself. It was then more than a century since they returned from exile. The new generation quickly returned to the sins of their fathers. The Lord did not cease to admonish Judah to return to Him. Do we observe this even today? God’s people must always give Him due honour. Do not let familiarity breed contempt.

THOUGHT: God is always worthy of true worship.

PRAYER: Lord, may I remain faithful to Thee to the end.

MALACHI REBUKES THE PRIESTS OF JUDAH

The conduct of the priests in Judah was treacherous, abominable and outright rebellion against the Law of God. The Lord directed a message of rebuke to them through Malachi. The Lord reminded them of their duty and His covenant, but repentance was not in sight. His illustration of the marriage covenant (Mal 2:11, 14) brought home the message and His judgment stands.

In Malachi 2:2, the priests were asked to hear and lay it to their hearts and give glory to His name. This exhortation was gentle and firm. It was supposed to awaken them to seek and serve the Lord in His way. But they had to be threatened with a curse because they did not lay the words of the Lord to their hearts. They would be reprovved and shamed for their deeds and their seed would be brought to ruin (Mal 2:3). The humiliation prepared for them was meant to bring them back to their senses and back to the Lord.

All the priests in Israel were from the house of Levi. The covenant of God with Levi was a solemn agreement (Mal 2:5). Any breach of it would lead to serious consequences. Danger came with the priests acting in a treacherous manner. They were turned into false priests and their deception extended to those whom they were supposed to serve. It became a mockery to God’s name to profess to represent Him and yet the heart was loyal to another god (Mal 2:11).

The covenant in its original purpose was for life, peace and the fear of the Lord (Mal 2:5). The Lord used strong language to address the priests because they were repeating the sins of their fathers (Mal 2:8-9).

THOUGHT: Failure to learn leads to rebellion against God.

PRAYER: Lord, may I learn quickly from Thy Word.

GOD’S EXPECTATION OF THE PRIESTS

The build-up of the priests’ rebellion subsequently led to other consequences. They rejected the Messiah when He came. Their response fell below God’s expectation.

The tribe of Levi was separated to stand before the Lord to minister to Him and bless His name. The confirmation of this covenant is recorded in Numbers 17, when the Lord told Moses to ask each tribe of Israel to bring a rod with the name of their leader. Aaron represented the tribe of Levi and his name was written on the rod. Moses laid the rods in the tabernacle of witness. Aaron’s rod miraculously budded and brought forth buds, blossomed, and yielded almonds. That rod was kept in the holy place for a testimony. This was part of the covenant that confirmed the house of Levi for the holy service.

In Malachi 2:6, the Lord said of Levi, *“The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity.”*

The priests at Malachi’s time were expected to follow the path of Levi in keeping knowledge and seeking the law. The sad fact here is that the descendants of Levi were not loyal to that covenant. They departed from the way and caused many to stumble (Mal 2:8). They were made contemptible and base for not keeping the Law (Mal 2:9).

The office of a priest was a privilege and honour. However, these priests made it the opposite of what it should be. Malachi’s words were meant to show them their guilt, but they did not listen. He appealed to them to see the reality of the situation and to come to their senses: *“Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?”* (Mal 2:10).

THOUGHT: Rebellion is a sin that brings death.

PRAYER: Lord, may I always pursue obedience to Thee.

THE PEOPLE FOLLOWED THE PRIESTS

Nehemiah, the "governor" (Mal 1:8) during Malachi's time, had the authority to implement corrective measures. And these carried some weight. The prophet Malachi, on the other hand, could only speak. And those who chose to listen to him and obey would be saved.

Since the rebellious priests were the leaders of the people, nothing good could be expected of the general population. The people also profaned the covenant of the Lord and committed abomination. Their sin stood out and the Lord said that those who commit abominations will be "cut off" (Mal 2:12), i.e. they will die. The wages of sin is always death; this is God's justice. His grace stands out clearer as He did not execute His judgment quickly. The direction that Judah chose was the way of sorrow. The Lord would not receive their offering (Mal 2:13).

The situation in Judah is a lesson for the church today. Pastors must know the responsibilities of their calling and remain faithful. It is sad that this is not always the case. It is always easy to follow the broad way. Today, interests have shifted from salvation of souls to self-glory and the love of money. The flock remains neglected as they are fed with the diluted gospel and man's philosophy, and they remain spiritually weak.

Malachi gave a warning on the importance of faithfulness in marriage and to the Lord (Mal 2:14) to stress his point. While marriage is used here as an illustration, it still asserts the importance of this institution of society. It needs to be sustained by faithfulness with the knowledge that it was established by a covenant. Although Judah wearied the Lord with their words (Mal 2:17) and in their actions by misrepresenting Him, His judgment still stands. The priests' negligence led to the spiritual death of Judah. Today's pastors and church leaders must be diligent in their ministry.

THOUGHT: The flock must be watchful not to follow abominable leaders. Follow Christ.

PRAYER: Lord, constantly remind me to be faithful.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 29

MALACHI 3:1-12

NEHEMIAH 13:10-14

*“Then brought all Judah
the tithe of the corn and the new wine
and the oil unto the treasuries.”*

GOD’S MESSENGER AND THE NEED OF GIVING TITHES

God promised a special messenger who would come to prepare the way before Him. He would be the next prophet after Malachi. He would deal with Israel in a significant way and would judge the sins of the nation. They were to cease robbing God and give their tithes and offerings, and they would see the salvation of the Lord.

John the Baptist, recognized as a prophet, belonged to the New Testament era. He was the one who introduced Christ to the world, as prophesied here. John’s father, filled with the Holy Spirit, said, *“And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways”* (Luke 1:76).

This was the special prophet who was to come. The Jewish religious leaders who rejected him could not confirm who he was. However, John spoke to them boldly and called them *“generation of vipers”* (Luke 3:7). He urged them to repent and bear fruits worthy of salvation. When Jesus came, He also submitted to John’s baptism. Jesus was not a sinner but, in His own words, He had *“to fulfil all righteousness”* (Matt 3:15). John the Baptist took the opportunity to introduce Jesus to his disciples. He spoke highly of Jesus. As a result, many who heard John the Baptist became the disciples of Jesus.

God does not change and therefore the sons of Jacob would not be consumed (Mal 3:6). They needed to adhere to God’s ordinances by maintaining the house of the Lord and supporting the priests who served there. This was the purpose of giving tithes and offerings, but Judah had ignored this requirement. God instructed them to fulfil their duty of giving tithes, and He promised abundant blessings (Mal 3:10). It is not only Judah that had to give but all believers have that obligation in every generation. God promised that He would preserve the crops in the land so that there would be good yield. All nations shall then recognise the blessings of the Lord (Mal 3:12).

THOUGHT: The instruction to give shows God’s care.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to give my tithes and offerings faithfully.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 30

MALACHI 3:13-18

2 PETER 2:3-10

“The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.”

GOD ADMONISHES JUDAH

The Lord gave an account of the spiritual condition of Judah. He spoke of the wickedness that was manifested in their words against the Lord (Mal 3:13). They were tired of keeping His ordinances. Those that feared the Lord, however, had their place before Him and He promised to reward them by making them His special treasure.

The Lord declared that the words of Judah were against Him. They had taken His favour on them for granted and they saw no obligation to obey Him. They were even ignorant of what they had said. This was no reason for them to act the way they did. It demonstrated their neglect of the order that the Lord had given to their nation. Their leaders were to blame. None of them was entirely without any knowledge of God. Judah despised the service of the Lord, considering it as vain and that it was unprofitable to keep God’s ordinances. They took it as a burden, not a blessing. This made them lose their moral direction as they sought their own ways to satisfy their ego. Worldliness breeds this kind of attitude in the hearts of many who do not fear the Lord. Their punishment will be worse than that of Sodom and Gomorrah.

They that feared the Lord came together in fellowship and spoke to one another in promoting righteousness (Mal 3:16). Malachi said that the Lord hearkened and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before Him. The Lord recognised them and listened to them.

Bible history is a testimony of a just God. These were encouragements that Malachi used to show the few in Judah who loved the Lord that they must press on. The Lord said that He would spare them in the day when He makes up His special treasure. They that feared God also would make a difference. They would serve God while those who did not fear God would not serve Him. There will always be people who work contrary to God’s directive, and violate His revealed will.

THOUGHT: The Lord’s will is clear. Where do I stand?

PRAYER: Lord, may I stand with those who fear Thee.

THE DAY OF THE LORD

The Old Testament comes to an end and the prophet spoke of the day of the Lord. This is the day of the last judgment. This is still in the future. The destinies of those who fear the Lord and those who do not fear are stated in Malachi 4. There is a call to Israel to remember the Law of Moses which was delivered in Horeb.

Another prophet in the spirit of Elijah would come before the day of the Lord. He will cause the children and the fathers to turn to the Lord, or the Lord will come and smite the earth with a curse. That day shall be a day of great torment as expressed in verse 1. Pride and all wickedness are incompatible with godly character. They are sins. The comparison with stubble means they will be reduced to nothing.

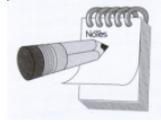
On the contrary, those who feared the Lord shall have a deserved blessing. The Sun of righteousness that shall shine with healing in his wings could be descriptive of the saving work of Christ. They are also compared with the calves that shall grow in the stall. They shall have power over the wicked.

Israel is called upon to remember the Law of Moses. The relationship between Israel and the Lord could not be complete without His Law. The context shows that there was a general neglect of the Word of God among His chosen people.

The focus now turns to what the Lord has for Israel at the end of the age. God will render assistance in preparation for that day. He will send Elijah before the coming of that dreadful day. The forerunner of Christ in His first advent had the same characteristics as Elijah. The Lord will show great wonders in his ministry. Malachi 4 says that he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers. The preparation for that day is necessary for everyone.

THOUGHT: It is always safe to be on the Lord's side.

PRAYER: Lord, let me always be on Thy side.



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