

January to March 2014

“Minor Prophets” (Part 1)

by

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“Our Heavenly Father” (a series of prayer to God)

by

Carol Lee



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WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 1

HOSEA 1

1 KINGS 19:15-18

*“Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel,
all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal”*

A PROPHET’S LIFE AS A PICTURE OF ISRAEL

The name Hosea means “salvation” (Joshua and Jesus have the same meaning). Hosea was a prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel when the nation had grown and prospered externally. However internally, moral corruption and spiritual adultery thrived. God instructed Hosea to marry a harlot woman Gomer as an accurate but tragic dramatization of the unfaithfulness of the people of Israel. God abhors the sins of His people and judgment is certain.

Hosea the Prophet: He is introduced as the son of Beerī, but his tribe is not mentioned, and his name is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. He is the writer of the book of Hosea. The time of his prophecy is indicated by the mention of the four kings of Judah: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. It was also in the days of Jeroboam II (Joash’s son) king of Israel. Chroniclers showed that this was a period of about forty years between 739-700 BC. Hosea was a contemporary of Amos, Micah and Isaiah who were prophets in Judah.

Hosea was called to prophesy against the institutionalized idolatry of Israel. His family became a picture of this transgression. The departure of Israel from the Lord began when Jeroboam I (the first king of the divided kingdom) made idols of golden calf in Dan and Bethel. Political interests motivated him to set up those idols and he made the people believe that they were the same as the God that Israel worshipped in Jerusalem. He did not want the people of his nation to go to Judah, so he provided them with what they thought was a convenient alternative. This became a sin in Israel and every king that came after him followed his path. The evil that they did was measured by the sins of Jeroboam. There were some who did worse and others better, but none of them departed from the idolatry of Jeroboam. The Lord sent many prophets to reprove them but they failed to listen. The whole nation was given to that way. However, there were a few individuals who were faithful to the Lord.

THOUGHT: Am I one of the few who are faithful?

PRAYER: Lord, may I worship Thee, and Thee only.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 2

HOSEA 1

EXODUS 20:2-3

“... I (the Lord) will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu ...”

HOSEA’S FAMILY AS A SYMBOL OF ISRAEL’S UNFAITHFULNESS (1)

The Lord determined to punish the nation for their transgression; and Hosea was sent to warn them so that they may turn to the Lord. He was told to convey God’s message in a unique way. This is the message of the Lord to Hosea, “Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the LORD” (Hosea 1:2). This was a surprising command, but it came from the Lord and the prophet had to obey. He took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim. Ordinarily, for a man of God to entangle himself with such a woman would have been a tragedy, but God is sovereign and no man can question Him.

The picture did not stop with the wife but was extended to the children who were born out of that marriage. Thus, the first child was named Jezreel as the Lord commanded. The message was that the Lord would avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu. He would cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel. Jehu became king of Israel by God’s appointment. Elijah was told to go and anoint him to be king (re: 1 Kings 19:16). This was delegated to Elisha and carried out by one of the sons of the prophets commissioned by Elisha. Jehu was used of the Lord to destroy the house of Ahab for introducing Baal worship to Israel, and he assumed the throne (re: 2 Kings 9:1-10). However, like all the kings of the northern kingdom, Jehu did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam (i.e. idol worship). He served the Lord outwardly and was given to occupy the throne of Israel for only four generations. The vengeance of the house of Jehu came as part of the picture in Hosea’s family and that first child was named Jezreel.

THOUGHT: Do not provoke the Lord to anger.

PRAYER: Lord, let me not depart from Thy statutes.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 3

HOSEA 1

2 KINGS 17:1-10

*"I will no more have mercy
upon the house of Israel ..."*

HOSEA'S FAMILY AS A SYMBOL OF ISRAEL'S UNFAITHFULNESS (2)

The second child that was born to Hosea and Gomer was a daughter who was named Lo-ruhamah. The message from this name was, "... And God said unto him, Call her name Loruhamah: for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel; but I will utterly take them away" (Hosea 1:6). This was a prediction of the captivity that was to befall Israel when all the ten tribes under Samaria were taken captive by Assyria. It happened during the lifetime of Hosea. It is not known what happened to the prophet at that time. He might have been taken to Assyria or he might have taken refuge in Judah. However, the meaning of the name of Hosea's daughter came to be fulfilled. The picture depicted by Hosea's family was crystal clear.

The third child that was born to Hosea was a son and the Lord told him to name him Lo-ammi. The meaning of this name was: you are not my people. Israel was disowned by the Lord. This was the fate that befell Samaria. They lost that special relationship with God.

Lastly, Hosea's relationship with Gomer portrays God's faithfulness, justice, love and forgiveness towards His people. As the ministry of the prophet continued, the picture that the Lord wanted to show through his life became clearer. It may appear humiliating for Hosea to be used to portray the transgressions of Israel, but God who commanded this is sovereign and what He does is best for His people.

(Note: Much of the background information and comments here are from "Notes on Hosea" in *The King James Open Bible*.)

THOUGHT: The decrees of God are His ETERNAL PURPOSE, according to the counsel of His will, whereby for His own glory, He hath fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass.

PRAYER: Lord, may I be submissive to Thy will.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 4

PSALM 17:15

1 JOHN 3:1-2

*“...I shall be satisfied,
when I awake, with thy likeness.”*

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER,

The old year has been a year of experiencing Thy goodness. Many times we did not know what to do, and we cried to Thee and waited on Thee, that we may submit to Thee. As our faithful, loving Father, Thou directed, guided and brought us out of our quagmires. Most of all, Thou blessed and brought success. Our gratitude and thanks to Thee for what Thou hast done for us must surely go beyond our lips.

May the past year's experiences of Thy love and care drive our hearts heavenward, to Thy abode, that we may not be satisfied with just Thy blessings on our lives on earth. But may we yearn to be with Thee, the One who loves us, in Beulah Land. May we say with the psalmist “*...I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness*” (Ps 17:15), nothing less. Our hearts' satisfaction must not be found in anything on earth, not earthly health and wealth, not self, not even Thy blessings on our earthly labour and activities, although we are and must be grateful and thankful to Thee for these. The satisfaction we know on this earth is a far cry from the satisfaction that we will experience when we “*awake*” in Thy likeness. “*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, ... we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him...*” (1 John 3:2). Multiply the satisfaction experienced in this world a thousand-fold and we will still be far from the satisfaction, the ultimate satisfaction, Thou mentioned in Psalm 17:15.

As the new year unfolds, may our eyes not linger on the dazzling lights of this world, but re-focus our spiritual lenses and help us to see farther a field, upwards, to the place where our Great Satisfier is, and move our hearts to long for that instead. May the new year be a year when our hearts will no longer be gripped by the things of this world or by our sinful, selfish selves, but may we learn to say: “*I shall be satisfied, (TRULY satisfied) when I awake, with (my Lord's) likeness*” (Ps 17:15). In the name of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

THOUGHT: Where do I look for satisfaction?

PRAYER: Turn my eyes upward to Thee, O Lord, that the things of this earth may grow strangely dim.

THE PROMISE OF A FUTURE RESTORATION

The prophetic symbol of the name of Hosea's third child shows that the nation would not be identified with the God of Israel. However the message in Hosea 1:10 says,

"Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God."

This seems to contradict what had been affirmed, but this is not the case. In the last two verses, the prophet cast his eyes far beyond the history of Israel. He looked at all the sons of the Living God. The main reason why the Lord had chosen the house of Israel was that He might send a Redeemer who would lead the way in bringing reconciliation between this sinful world and God the Father. Jesus Christ is always in the picture of the prophet's messages. Here, Jesus is identified as the Head of both Israel and Judah. The Messiah was born out of this nation. However His redemptive work goes beyond that nation. The people of all nations are adopted into God's family by faith and are called the children of Abraham by faith. Hosea thus saw the salvation of God's elect in the second coming of Christ.

God is faithful and His moral standards never change, He will always punish sin. He also has mercy and is gracious to His wayward children. He will restore those who humble themselves before Him and make a way for them to be reconciled to Him. As Christ is the ultimate hope, let us trust Him for our salvation.

THOUGHT: Christ identifies with our plight and His work of redemption comes to people of all nations.

PRAYER: *"Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee..."*
(Ps 40:16)

MONDAY, JANUARY 6

HOSEA 2

EXODUS 20:4-6

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

THE APPLICATION OF HOSEA’S FAMILY TO ISRAEL (1)

Hosea was called to address the conditions in Israel, and his family became a picture of the events that were taking place. The dramas in his life were visual and audible messages to the nation. The Lord now applies this drama to the people of Israel in their spiritual adultery. There will be judgment and more consequences of that violation. Regardless of all these transgressions, God is faithful and He will show mercy to His people. Thus, He made a promise of restoration and more blessings.

Israel’s spiritual adultery: The character of Gomer disqualified her as a worthy wife of Hosea. She had to put away her whoredom out of her sight. If she persisted, she would face consequences. She would be made a wilderness and set like a dry land and would be slain with thirst. These figures of speech were calamities coming as they continued to reject God and gave allegiance to idols, man-made gods which were not gods at all but were simply carvings of stone or wood. This practice is expressly forbidden in God’s commandments. However, because of the rebellious manner that the nation had adopted, they went against the Law of God with all impunity. This character was thus depicted in the life of Hosea’s wife.

The punishment of Israel came in the lifetime of Hosea. War is always God’s rod of chastisement. The sword of the Assyrian king was used to wage war against Israel. They were led to go and do what they did not wish, their freedom was limited and they lacked basic needs. Whenever they had to move, they were herded around like goats. This robbed them of their dignity, but they were the cause of this chastisement. They were in the dry land and were slain with thirst.

THOUGHT: *“The Lord knoweth how to... reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.”* (2 Pet 2:9)

PRAYER: May I praise Thee according to Thy righteousness.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 7

HOSEA 2

EXODUS 20:4-6

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above...”

THE APPLICATION OF HOSEA’S FAMILY TO ISRAEL (2)

The children of Gomer were also to suffer because of her whoredom. They would receive no mercy because they were children of whoredom. In such circumstances, it is not easy to separate her children from the character of their mother. Keil and Delitzsch had this to say:

“The children are the members of the nation, and are called ‘sons of whoredom,’ not merely on account of their origin as begotten in whoredom, but also because they inherit the nature and conduct of their mother. The fact that the children are specially mentioned after and along with the mother, when in reality mother and children are one, serves to give greater keenness to the threat, and guards against that carnal security, in which individuals imagine that, inasmuch as they are free from the sin and guilt of the nation as a whole, they will also be exempted from the threatened punishment.”

It is important for people caught in such circumstances to look for a means of overcoming by the grace of God. This was one reason why Hosea was sent to Israel.

The judgment of God: Gomer’s way was wedged with thorns so that she was stranded. She was not able to get around. Her companions forsook her and she thought of coming back to her husband. Israel would be put in a difficult path and they would remember that God was a Guide and Shield to their fathers. The Lord had given them good supplies of worldly goods but they gave them to Baal. Since they did not honour God, then He would take away from them those provisions. When the people were made captives, they lost everything they had. God’s rod of chastisement can be very painful.

THOUGHT: *“Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him...”* (Ps 37:7)

PRAYER: *“O continue thy lovingkindness unto them that know thee...”* (Ps 36:10)

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 8

JOHN 6:44

MATTHEW 28:19-20

The Lord must draw them.

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER,

What encouragement Thy Word in John 6:44 is to us who have been witnessing to, and praying for, our unsaved friends and loved ones! As we testified of Thy love to them, and time and again Thy love and Thy gift of salvation were rejected, our hearts sank and we despaired. We were on the verge of giving up praying for these lost souls. Their hearts seemed so hardened, their receiving salvation seemed such an impossibility. Then the balm of Thy Word is applied to our dejected hearts: *“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him...”*

Forgive us, Father, for thinking that it is by our own efforts that we can convert sinners into saints, for leaving Thee out of the equation of our evangelistic work, for being discouraged so easily. Remind us, that we are but instruments in Thy hands, for Thy use. We are to be channels of blessings, and not just for a day, a week, a year but all the days of our lives.

How little our faith is in the Great Lover of our souls! Surely, *“God so loved the world”* (John 3:16) and that must include our unsaved friends and loved ones. We thank Thee, Father, for loving them. We thank Thee that when Thou draweth them unto Thyself, no matter how hardened their hearts are, no matter how much an impossibility it may seem, they cannot but will accept Jesus into their lives to be their Lord and Saviour.

O Father, when will that happen? When wilt Thou draw these lost souls unto Thyself? Wait we must on Thy perfect timing, and trust we must on Thy ability to draw. May we continually look to Thee, Father, that we may not lose heart. May we do the work of evangelism unfaintingly, trusting that Thou art with us always (Matt 28:20). May we unceasingly pray for Thy mercy to draw them unto Thyself, according to Thy perfect timetable. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

THOUGHT: I share the Gospel, but the Spirit convicts the heart.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to persevere in sharing the Gospel.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 9

HOSEA 2

EPHESIANS 2:1-10

“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief...”

THE JUDGMENT AND GRACE OF GOD

The shame of Israel shall be revealed and none shall be able to deliver her. God will cause her mirth and her feast days to cease. Idolaters had appointed offerings similar to those given to the Lord. They had new moons, sabbaths and solemn feasts. When the time of their punishment comes, all these will stop. The land also will experience some environmental catastrophe as her forests are destroyed by wild beasts. Food-crops also will be destroyed so that the land becomes desolate. Famine and other calamities will follow. The benefits that people value will be taken away.

The coming of these sufferings was meant to teach Israel that every good thing they had was from the hand of the Lord. When everything was well with them, they had taken these blessings for granted. Calamities will come. When it gets to a point where nothing can be done, everybody will begin to think of God. Many who are not known to be practising Christians will acknowledge that He is the only one who can help at such times. But once the calamity is over, they will go back to their old ways. Israel did not mind remaining in idolatry as long as all was well with them. However, God will not keep the rod of chastisement away.

The restoration of Israel: Israel will be brought to the wilderness but the Lord will speak to her comfortably. She will be given vineyards and the valley of Achor for a door of hope. This is a change of tone as the Lord warms up towards her seeking restoration. She will sing as in the days of her youth or in the days that the Lord brought her out of Egypt. The Lord shall be to her as a husband. The Lord will take the names of Baalim out of their mouth. Other blessings are also added. This move towards restoration is not because of the good deeds of Israel but by His grace. It is the will of God that none of them should perish but that they should come to salvation.

THOUGHT: God is true and His people are safe.

PRAYER: Lord, let Thy loving-kindness and mercy be upon me.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 10

HOSEA 3

EPHESIANS 2:1-10

*“Neither is there salvation in any other:
for there is none other name...”*

THE REDEEMER IS A GIFT OF GOD’S GRACE

Hosea is represented as a redeemer of his adulterous wife. As noted earlier, the life of Hosea was used as a picture of the relationship between God and Israel. The life of the prophet became an object lesson and this lasted all his lifetime. The purpose of this is known to the Lord alone. Here, Hosea was again buying back his wife.

The Lord instructed Hosea: Hosea was told to go and love an adulterous woman. This was to be a demonstration of unconditional love. The Lord specifically said this was according to the love that He had for the children of Israel though they looked to other gods and loved flagons of wine. This was a clear manifestation of the grace of God. This statement gives also an understanding of the passage and the events that occurred in the life of the prophet. Ordinarily, it would be against the Mosaic Law to do what Hosea was asked to do. The lawful reaction to adultery was the death penalty by stoning. It would have been abominable for the prophet to do what he was being told to do, but in this case it was the Lord who gave the command. Hosea had to submit to God’s sovereign will. The Lord wanted Hosea to show Israel the correct picture of His relationship with Israel.

Having called His prophets, the Lord will also empower them. The case of Hosea was unique and went against normal moral conduct. That negative aspect was meant to keep people talking and in the long run the message got across with clarity. Many questioned Hosea’s conduct. In seeking the answer, they understood what God was communicating to them. Israel had forgotten the Lord and He was showing His regard for Israel in the life of this prophet.

In the New Testament, the Lord called Paul to be an apostle when he was the foremost enemy of Christ. Yet, Paul fulfilled the duties of his calling more than the other apostles.

THOUGHT: God’s ways are His ways. Man must yield to His will.

PRAYER: Lord, open my eyes that I may see wondrous things out of Thy Word.

THE PROPHET BECOMES A REDEEMER

The word “*redeemer*” comes from the verb “to redeem,” meaning to buy back. As the Lord commanded Hosea, so he went and bought that woman of base morals. The price of that purchase was “*fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of barley, and an half homer of barley*” (Hosea 3:2). In those days, that price was a great value and the willingness of the prophet to pay showed his commitment to redeem her. There are stories in Kenya of parents who exchanged their children for a basket of grain in times of great famine. This was not done willingly but out of desperation for survival. A mother would mourn for that child, but the alternative would have been death for the whole family. In the case of Hosea, it was love and his willingness to restore that woman to normalcy.

It is indicated from the beginning of this book that the events that occurred in the life of Hosea were a picture of God’s dealing with Israel. The price that the prophet paid to buy back that woman was a very high price. He did not owe her anything, neither did she deserve redemption. This illustrates well the working of God’s grace. God is faithful, just, loving and forgiving towards His people. God’s love is manifested here towards Israel. And will be more so at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. One direct beneficiary of the redeeming work of Christ was the thief on the cross. While his friend reviled Christ, he was very remorseful and asked Christ to remember him when He comes to His kingdom. The Lord promised that he would be with Him in paradise that very day. The thief was saved at the last minute without any merit of his own. He believed in Christ and he was saved!

There was a price to pay for forgiveness and salvation. The prophet here had to pay a price to redeem his wife. This picture points to the redeeming work of Christ. Jesus has fully paid for our sins when He lived, died and rose from the dead.

THOUGHT: The redemption of Christ is eternal.

PRAYER: O Lord, “...*redeem us for thy mercies’ sake*” (Ps 44:26).

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER,

We praise Thee, Father, that Thou art OUR God, our God who supplies ALL our needs. Thou demonstrateth Thy love for us in such real, practical ways. Not only declaring Thy provisions, Thou also bringeth it to pass. Thou meaneth what Thou saith. Much indeed Thou hath provided for us! How much? According to Thy riches in glory by Christ Jesus! That much!

Our good health is one testimony of Thy bountiful supply. Thou hast made it possible for us to go about our daily lives here on earth with ease: studying, taking care of the home, making a living, putting food on the table, travelling, serving Thee, giving to Thy work, being able to eat, able to sleep, enjoying the love of family and friends, etc, etc.

And while there are some amongst us who are sick in the body, and whose physical activities are curtailed as a result, yet Thou art still the Great Supplier of our needs. Thy timely supply can be depended upon. Thou canst provide the necessary grace to enable us to go through our time of physical impediment till, according to Thy will and timing, Thou provideth complete healing.

And some of us have other needs. Whatever they may be, no matter how many, still, Thou art able to supply. How we give praise and thanks to Thee, O Father, the Great Supplier of all our needs!

We confess that very often we fail to see Thy Loving Hand of Provision and we take for granted the many blessings Thou alloweth us to experience. We think we are our own provider, we take the credit that is rightly due to Thee. Forgive us, O Father, and remind us that Thou art the One who supplieth all our needs according to Thy riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Open our eyes to Thy Providing Hand behind every blessing, every situation; and open our mouths to give Thee all praise, all thanks and all glory! In Jesus' Name. Amen.

THOUGHT: Can my Lord fail me?

PRAYER: Increase, my faith in Thee, O Lord, as the Great Provider.

MONDAY, JANUARY 13

HOSEA 3

GALATIANS 5:1

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free...”

A REDEEMED CAPTIVE CANNOT GO BACK TO SLAVERY

Hosea’s wife was asked to leave her wayward ways that led to her slavery. Her husband had redeemed her and expressed his desire for her. She was asked to remain with her husband and not to play the harlot any more. He also will be faithful to her. This is restoration and resumption of normal life, disregarding the past. This is expressive of repentance and a forward look to promote good relationship. This is expected from every worthy wife. The Lord used this picture in a very personal way so that the people of Israel may receive the message. The exhortation of Paul to the Galatians is fitting in these circumstances: *“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage”* (Gal 5:1). Repentance and staying free is God’s desire for His children.

The story is applied to Israel: There is an expression of two contrasts of the future of Israel: one is life for them without God, and the other the restoration. The prophet wrote this concerning separation from God: *“For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim”* (Hosea 3:4). This is to say that Israel shall be out of touch with God. This was what happened. They were cast very far from the Lord when they went into captivity. They could not worship the Lord as desired as there was no freedom of worship. Like in the case of Judah in Babylon, they were sometimes compelled to worship idols against their will. Others forsook the Lord for idols at their own will as shown by Ezekiel. All these separated them from the Lord.

A ray of hope came at last: the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord. They will also seek David their king and the Lord Jesus Christ.

THOUGHT: God’s Word is always consistent.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to stand to the end.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 14

HOSEA 4

PSALM 119: 9-16

“...I will not forget thy word.”

GOD’S CONTROVERSY WITH ISRAEL (1)

Hosea here spoke to Israel in plain language. He showed the real situation which they lived under. He said that the Lord had a controversy with them, that is to say He was in disagreement with their ways. The main cause was lack of knowledge because the Word of God was forsaken. Sin reigned and this would bring them damnation as their hearts were set to continue in their evil ways. Judah was also warned not to be part of Israel’s sins. Spiritual adultery was the picture depicted here. The condemnation is also a call for repentance.

A call to Israel: Israel was called to listen to the Word of the Lord because their manner of life was contrary to His will. Truth, mercy and knowledge of God were missing. The prophet was thus sent to warn and to seek restoration. The source of this shortcoming in Israel at that time was idolatry. Their leaders had come up with alternative methods of worship. Their falsehood yielded fruits of rebellion against God. The sins that prevailed in the land then were not different from those that followed every transgression. The text says, “*By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood. Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away*” (Hosea 4:2-3). Sin never brings any joy but pain. Therefore, Israel had to mourn.

These words affirm not only that the inanimate creation suffers in consequence of the sins and crimes of men, but that the moral depravity of men causes the physical destruction of all other creatures, such was the case in the time of Ahab throughout the kingdom of the ten tribes (1 Kings 18:5), and judging from Amos 1:2 and Amos 8:8, may have occurred repeatedly with the continued idolatry of the people. (Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*.)

THOUGHT: Knowledge of God’s Word is chief in fighting sin.

PRAYER: Lord, keep me diligently reading Thy Word.

GOD’S CONTROVERSY WITH ISRAEL (2)

All the people were so corrupted that there was no one to reprove the other. Those who had any hope of reconciliation with God would only look to Him for correction and direction. When sin reigns, the light of the Holy Spirit does not shine. Then the people are led to think that all is well with them when they do evil. When the Word of God is ignored, the result is the same not only in Israel but in every nation and in every generation. Paul’s words of the last days are prophetic, and they came to pass. The catalogue of sins that he gave is exactly the same as those of the days of Hosea. He said, *“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away”* (2 Tim 3:1-5). This was applicable during the time of Paul and it was the same during the time of Hosea and it also fits the present. The call today is the same: forsake sin and follow the Lord!

All people were given to these evil ways: Any mass transgression in a community begins with the leaders. The priests in Israel were entrusted the duty of guiding the people in the proper worship of God and also to teach the people the words of God. In Israel a false religion was adopted. The leaders became blind leaders of the blind. People had no direction because they did not know the Word of God. The Lord stated clearly in a key verse in the text the reason for Israel’s failure. He said, *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children”* (Hosea 4:6).

THOUGHT: The rejection of knowledge leads to rejection of God.

PRAYER: Lord, may I not change Thy glory into shame.

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER,

What excitement to hear our loved one’s voice! What great delight! How we will pay full and careful attention to our loved one’s voice.

And who is our Beloved but Thou, O Father. And yet our love for Thee at times is cold and we take Thee for granted. Help us, Father, “*to love the LORD (my) God*” (Deut 11:13), not with a love that is cold or lukewarm, but “*to love the LORD (my) God ... with all (my) heart and with all (my) soul*” (Deut 11:13).

And what is our Beloved’s voice but Thy Word. May we always have our ears tuned to Thy Voice. Even right at the beginning of each new day, may we seek to hear Thy Voice by having our Quiet Time with Thee. And may each day not end without us coming to Thee to thank Thee for Thy daily blessings and provisions and even to seek Thy blessing for a good night’s rest, for it is Thee who “*giveth his beloved sleep*” (Ps 127:2b).

Let not our hearts be attracted, distracted, by the seductive serenades of the many tasks on hand. Make us to desire to hear Thy Voice the way the psalmist desired: “*As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?*” (Ps 42:1-2). Give us, O Father, that longing to “*appear before God.*” Especially when we worship Thee on the Lord’s Day, may we come with expectant hearts to listen to “*the voice of my beloved!*”

And finally, what are we to do when we listen to Thy Voice but that we may do Thy bidding. May our desire to hear Thy Voice be matched by our desire to respond to Thy Voice in obedience. “*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path*” (Ps 119:105). May we rely on the light from Thy Word to guide us in the way that we ought to live. Help us, Father! In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

THOUGHT: Who do I desire to meet with the first thing every day?

PRAYER: Forgive my lack of love for Thee, O Lord.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF REBELLION

In times when Israel obeyed the Lord, they served Him faithfully. When they came out of Egypt with all the victories that the Lord granted them, the Canaanites acknowledged that the God of Israel was a great God. Now when they turned their backs against the Lord, the calamities that would befall them was great shame. God would forget them. This is not how anyone would like to relate to God.

The Lord asserted that the people and the priests were alike in pursuit of evil ways and He would punish them. The priests were leaders in spiritual matters and teachers of the Law, but they appointed unqualified priests. The fruit of this move is rebellion against God and the punishment that follows. Their efforts to satisfy carnal lusts yield no fruit but only work to their own ruin. Their manner of life in whoredom and drunkenness took away their heart. This is usually the outward manifestation of rejection of God in pursuit of false religion.

The people had grown up in that sinful manner of life; and they felt no shame. They treated everything as normal because everyone was at it. They sought false counsel to increase their whoredom and erred against God. Idol worship is spiritual adultery and goes hand in hand with physical adultery as the text states in verse 13. Regardless of the time span between the time of Hosea and today, the trend is the same: people reject God and worship idols and yield to the works of the flesh. These always work to their ruin. The acceptance of Darwinism today and rejection of God's creation has led to tolerance of homosexuality and other perversions. And they reject the Law of God.

Israel was compared to a backsliding heifer. She was wholly given to idols. Their rulers took the lead but in the long run they shall be ashamed.

THOUGHT: God was gracious in sending the prophets to Israel.

PRAYER: Lord, may Thy people come out of evil and be saved.

WARNING TO BOTH ISRAEL AND JUDAH

The Lord’s prophets were always faithful in delivering God’s messages to Israel. The current message was addressed to both Israel and Judah. Though Hosea was a prophet to the northern kingdom, he ministered to all Israel. The nation lived under rebellion, and the Lord had to remind them of that serious offence. Punishment is pronounced. But the Lord always opens the door of repentance for those who are willing to return to Him.

A specific address of the prophet: The prophet addressed the priests, the people and the king’s household. He first mentioned the priests because they were an authority in spiritual matters. They had neglected their duty of teaching God’s words and the right worship. In 1 Kings 13, Jeroboam as king was also in charge of burning incense at the altar that he had set up. The man of God who was sent from Judah spoke and condemned the false worship. When the king wanted to apprehend him, the Lord struck the king so that he had to submit.

The priests were those appointed by the king and they were not from the tribe of Levi as God had commanded in the Law. These were false priests and it is no wonder they misled the people. When they went against the Lord, there was none to guide them back to true worship. Hosea had to tell them that they were the main cause of spiritual transgression in Israel and became a snare to everyone.

The people also as a whole had to be told that they were also responsible for rejecting God and following their leaders in false worship. They added to the idolatry of the nation by making their own idols in high places and offering sacrifices to them. As it was revealed to Elijah, there were a few who feared the Lord and did not worship Baal. They were caught in snares and nets. The king’s household was the originator of that idolatry. Every king that reigned in the northern kingdom followed the ways of Jeroboam.

THOUGHT: Do not allow personal interests to overtake your spiritual priorities.

PRAYER: May my chief end be always to glorify Thee, Lord.

IDOLATRY OPENS A FLOODGATE OF OTHER SINS

The whole land was defiled by sin. The rebels were profound and ready to kill even though the Lord had rebuked them. Idolatry is rejection of God and it opens a floodgate of other transgressions. It breaks down every moral right and everyone will do that which is right in his own eyes. The sin of Israel was always prominent and they did not turn to the Lord. They had not known Him. The spirit of whoredom was in their midst.

If God's people are to follow the Lord today, they will learn to shun modern, self-proclaimed preachers. They will exercise self-examination by the Word of God and shun politicians who have self-interests. They seek personal gain and deception wins the people. As the Lord proclaimed judgment, it is for all transgressors to this day.

The attitude of the people is a source of retribution: Both Israel and Judah will fall because of their pride. This is a sin that is condemned severely. It gives credit to self, not God. In the book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar was exiled to be with the beasts of the field for seven years because of pride. This spirit leads to self-destruction because it locks the door to any counsel. Humility is the way to live. The consequence of the pride of Israel is evident in the text. Albert Barnes saw the fulfilment of these words later in the reign of Josiah. He observed,

Josiah himself "*turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses*" (2 Kings 23:25). He put away idolatry thoroughly; and the people followed his example. He held such a Passover, as had not been held since the time of the judges.

Since they dealt treacherously against the Lord, they will be devoured. Both Israel and Judah were delivered into the hands of foreign nations. They did not recover as a nation again but always lived under foreign dominion. (Barnes, *Notes on the Bible*)

THOUGHT: Flee idolatry.

PRAYER: Revive Thy work, O Lord!

MONDAY, JANUARY 20

PSALM 90:10

2 TIMOTHY 4:7-8

“...I have finished my course,
I have kept the faith ...”

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER,

We thank Thee for giving us life, both physical and spiritual, and for the many accompanying graces necessary for our sojourn on earth. Make us to remember that this gift of earthly life is nothing more than a brief journey, and that we are but frail people.

The newspapers tell us of the sudden termination of the life of an eight-year-old boy as a result of an accident. And also the snuffing out of the life of a mother by a falling tree as she was going about her normal life. Then we are told that a sister is suddenly found with fourth stage cancer of the stomach, lung and liver.

Who could have anticipated any of these? None can guarantee that we will live to a ripe old age, not even to the biblical estimate of “*threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years*” (Ps 90:10). What is guaranteed is that our life “*is soon cut off, and we fly away*” (Ps 90:10).

Help us, Father, to consciously register this truth and realise that our lives indeed can be cut off at any time! May Thou thoroughly reform our lives (our aspirations, loves, attitudes, priorities, focus) by this truth. Help us not to carelessly think that we will always have tomorrow. May we live each day, each hour, each minute with the conscious thought that we may have to drop what we are doing on this earth, leave behind all that we have, and take that inevitable step that will land us in our final Home, into Thy presence, never more to sojourn on this earth again. And Father, when that step has to be taken, may it be taken readily. May we be able to say, “*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day...*” (2 Tim 4:7-8). Make me to examine the way I live my life before it is too late and my life is no more. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

THOUGHT: I must live my life as if today is the last day of my life.

PRAYER: May I make today count for Thee, Lord.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 21

HOSEA 5

PSALM 119: 9-16

"...the wages of sin is death ..."

AN EMERGENCY IS DECLARED

Cornet, trumpet and wailing are cries of alarm, each has a distinct meaning. This alarm was given to Benjamin one of the tribes that made up the southern kingdom of Judah. At its sound, the people must act or they may be overcome by the danger. When the prophet gave warning, Benjamin was to listen and put their house in order.

The desolation of Israel in the day of rebuke was sure. When the prophet spoke, the immediate recipients did not think it too alarming. But history tells of the accuracy of the prophecy to the letter. The whole nation of Israel was uprooted and exiled. They could not resist and were made captives and enslaved in a foreign land. Their city was destroyed and all her past glory in ruins. Ephraim, the main tribe in the northern kingdom, was declared to be oppressed and broken. All that Hosea said of her came to pass.

Judah was also not spared because of her sins. The wrath of the Lord was poured upon her like water (Hosea 5:10). Whenever this term is used in Scripture it refers to painful punishment. Jerusalem suffered nearly the same fate in subsequent years. There was a promise of restoration to them. They did return to the land after seventy years.

The punishment for both Israel and Judah shall be persistent: Even though the nation was divided politically, it was still one nation. The Lord sent prophets to deliver messages to them as one nation. Hosea said that when Ephraim was wounded, she went to the Assyrians but was not healed. He predicted that both nations will be torn as a lion tore his prey. God will turn away from them. They will have hope only if they repent and seek the Lord. In Israel those who were saved were possibly individuals who did as the prophet instructed. As for Judah, the Lord had promised to restore them. When the time came, Daniel was led to pray on behalf of the captives of Judah. Others may have also prayed and the Lord honoured His promise.

THOUGHT: The prophets were a gift of God's grace.

PRAYER: Lord, may I take heed of the prophet's call, and repent.

GOD’S DISPLEASURE WITH ISRAEL

Hosea did not cease to speak God’s words of warning to both Israel and Judah. Both were one nation and were God’s chosen people. They would learn to fear God if they listened to His prophets. Those who desire to know God would know the way of salvation. This is Hosea’s expression of God’s displeasure.

The Prophet’s call to Israel: God’s diagnosis of Israel’s problem was rebellion. This came with sins of which a remedy must be found. God expressed His displeasure. The prophet spoke to the people in these words, *“Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up”* (Hosea 6:1). It was His desire that none of them should be lost but that they would come to repentance. This call is quite similar to the one the Lord Jesus Christ gave in Matthew 11:28 when He said, *“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”* The nation was injured and needed healing, and the offer of the Lord was at hand. Hosea told them that they would be revived after two days and would be raised up on the third day. They would then live in the sight of the Lord.

The grace of God also extends to the blessings that they would receive because they would know Him if they follow Him. Even though the general mood of the people of Israel was rebellion, the words of the prophet were not in vain. God never leaves Himself without a witness. The testimony of His Word would not return to Him void. The coming of the Lord as the latter and the former rain (Hosea 6:3) is an expression of blessings that the Lord would shower upon those who obey Him. In the introduction to this book, the time of Hosea is given as the time of four kings of Judah and Jeroboam II, king of Israel. One of those kings was Hezekiah. He is known as a revivalist who loved the Lord with all his heart. He strove to restore true worship of the Lord, and the Lord blessed his efforts.

THOUGHT: There is no limit to what the grace of God can do.

PRAYER: Lord, forgive all my sins and accept me as Thy child.

GOD’S REACTION TO THE TRANSGRESSIONS OF ISRAEL

God did not see any goodness among His people. He likened their goodness to the morning clouds and dew (Hosea 6:4) that came and went away. God sent prophets to cut them down by the word of His mouth. God is gracious, but is also a consuming fire.

God will not let any sin go without punishment. Many in Israel were used to mechanical solutions to their spiritual problems. They thought sacrifices and burnt offerings would do. However, the Lord desired mercy and knowledge of God more than these externals. Even though these were commanded in the Law, a correct disposition of the heart is necessary for worship to be meaningful. In the days of Jesus, a similar spirit of external display prevailed among the scribes and Pharisees. The Lord reproved them in very strong terms. Israel did not understand this and they all followed the sins of Jeroboam in offering worship to idols. Since they transgressed God’s commandment, their life was a life of hypocrisy. God told them that they, like Adam, had transgressed God’s covenant. They dealt treacherously against God. They were dishonest and served two masters.

The psalmist says that God spoke once and he heard Him twice (Ps 62:11). This means that God’s words must reach the ear as well as the heart and remain there. Israel, however, did not take the Lord seriously. They did as they pleased, but the invitation and temptation to transgress the Law of God was everywhere. The prophets were a voice of God sent to make the nation aware of their sins and to return to the Lord. There was hardly a prophet in the Old Testament that spoke positively about Israel. As the Lord Jesus affirmed, all the prophets were persecuted or killed (cf. Luke 11:49-51). Their testimony was necessary for the preservation of Israel as a nation under God. The Church is also preserved the same way. The Lord Jesus, the Apostles and the prophets are the messengers of God speaking to us today through His written Word, the Bible.

THOUGHT: God is displeased with the sins of our generation.

PRAYER: May I heed the prophet’s call and return to the Lord.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 24

REVELATION 3:17

PSALM 14:3; 34:10

“...He that glorieth,
let him glory in the Lord.”

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER,

Daily Thou hast provided for us, even more than what we have asked for. Some of us can even say like the wealthy Laodiceans that *“I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing.”* How grateful and thankful we are to Thee because all that we have cometh from Thee. As we count our blessings and name them one by one, may we at the same time thank Thee for each blessing big or small.

While we enjoy Thy blessings, make us to know that we *“have need of nothing”* not because we are self-sufficient but because Thou art Jehovahjireh, the Lord God who provides for His people. *“...they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing”* (Ps 34:10). *“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”* (Rom 8:32).

Unlike the wealthy Laodiceans, may we always remember that without Thee we are but *“wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked”* (Rev 3:17). Daily remind us afresh, Father, of our total depravity. How we *“are all gone aside, ...are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one”* (Ps 14:3). *“As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”* (Rom 3:10-12). May we say like Paul that *“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief”* (1 Tim 1:15). But, while we see our absolutely depraved nature, keep our eyes open also to Thy bountiful mercy and grace. Turn, O Heavenly Father, our self-sufficient, ungrateful hearts into hearts that truly see Thy loving, gracious, providing hand. Then will we know that we can never thank Thee enough. Then will we give all glory to Thy Name. *“... I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing...”* (Rev 3:17), all because of Thee, O Father! May all glory and praise be unto Thee. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

THOUGHT: Read 1 Corinthians 1:31.

PRAYER: Forgive me, Lord, for my self-sufficient attitude.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 25

HOSEA 6

GALATIANS 5:19-26

*“If we live in the Spirit, let us
also walk in the Spirit.*

Let us not be desirous of vain glory...”

SPECIFIC SINS OF ISRAEL REVEALED

The prophets now turned to rebuke the external sins of Israel. The city of Gilead (possibly referring to Ramoth-gilead, one of the cities of refuge) was identified as the place of iniquity and polluted with blood. Robbers thrived in the place and the priests committed murder. The word translated “*lewdness*” (Hosea 6:9) means “heinous crime.” The description here shows that the people lived in lawlessness.

God did not turn a blind eye to these crimes but told the prophet to denounce them. It is noted that the priests were also included in these crimes. When Jeroboam had instituted false religion in Israel, he appointed priests who were not from the house of Levi. Since they offered sacrifices to false gods, they also were destitute of moral values. They used their offices for personal gain. They could not restrain themselves from indulging in those vices and thus the land was polluted. Hosea says in verse 10, “*I have seen an horrible thing in the house of Israel: there is the whoredom of Ephraim, Israel is defiled.*” God’s displeasure over this lawlessness is obvious and in the end He will avenge those crimes. This ended in the captivity of the nation, never to return again to the land.

The call of the prophet as seen earlier was an expression of God’s grace; the last verse also gives the extension of that grace. Though Judah was involved in the sins of Israel, there was hope for her and she was promised restoration. The Lord told of the return of their captivity. God had to honour the covenant that He had made with their fathers. Thus the house of David was destined to carry on the royal line up to the birth of the Messiah. Jesus fulfilled that promise.

God spoke repeatedly to Israel through the prophets and Israel was expected to listen. The old transgressions of Israel were not different from those seen today. We all need this message, and we all need to return to the Lord.

THOUGHT: Know the consequences of sin and heed the Lord’s call.

PRAYER: Lord, may I put my hope in Thee.

ISRAEL REMAINED REBELLIOUS AGAINST GOD

The spiritual condition in Israel at this time was very low. The prophet's message contained nothing positive about Israel, only a report of rebellion. God also stated the consequences that will follow. The presence of God's prophet among them was a manifestation of His longsuffering. As the servants laboured among the people, there was hope. The report here is a manifestation of rebellion.

God seeks Israel in her sins: While the Lord was at the point of healing the nation, her iniquity was discovered. She was characterized by falsehood, theft and robbery. The northern kingdom was called Ephraim and Samaria. Her evil practices began with their rejection of God and giving themselves to idolatry, and this transgression yielded the fruit of the flesh. The sins committed here were serious and were recognized even in secular law as crimes that went with the highest penalties that the courts could offer. However, the genesis of these evils was the rejection of God and it was manifested in idol worship. In the laws of many nations there is no prescribed punishment for anyone who worships idols. There is an indirect recognition of idolatry in the law of freedom of worship. The world does not see any relationship between what one worships and the manifestation of criminal offences.

The law of God on the other hand offers one the moral code enshrined in the Ten Commandments. The transgression of any of these commandments has a bearing on the others and cannot be separated. Israel knew this from the warnings of the prophets but their rebellious spirit blinded their minds. They acted after their own counsel and continued to ignore God. The Lord Himself declared this truth in verse 2: *“And they consider not in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness: now their own doings have beset them about; they are before my face.”*

THOUGHT: God is always watching the works of men.

PRAYER: Have mercy, O Lord, on sinners like me.

MONDAY, JANUARY 27

HOSEA 7

2 PETER 2:9-10

*“The Lord knoweth how to deliver
the godly... and to reserve the unjust
unto the day of judgment ...”*

GOD’S INTENTION TO HEAL THE NATION

The opening words in Hosea 7 express God’s intention to heal the nation. When there was no positive response to His gracious gesture, condemnation of their conduct followed. They were bent towards wickedness and they were said to flatter the king and the princes with lies. The false prophets were seeking to please men.

The episode of king Ahab and King Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 18) is a case in point here. Ahab persuaded Jehoshaphat to go to war in Ramoth-gilead. Jehoshaphat suggested that they should inquire from the Lord before venturing to war. Many false prophets were called and they spoke according to the wishes of Ahab. Jehoshaphat perceived that they were not truthful and asked for another prophet. A true prophet of the Lord, Micaiah, was called and in jest he spoke after the words of the false prophets. Then he told the truth to Ahab who ignored the prophet’s words and even put him in prison. He did not come back alive. This was the spirit that prevailed in Israel. Today’s politicians are no different. They also like the praise of men and give heed to flatteries and hijack the course of justice.

The sin of adultery is not far from the hotbed of other sins. In this regard, Israel was compared with an oven heated by the baker. Both spiritual and physical adultery were part of the nation’s transgression. The extent of their sin was thus described, *“For they have made ready their heart like an oven, whiles they lie in wait: their baker sleepeth all the night; in the morning it burneth as a flaming fire. They are all hot as an oven, and have devoured their judges; all their kings are fallen: there is none among them that calleth unto me”* (Hosea 7:6-7). The king instituted idol worship and the people used it as an easy way to continue with their evil deeds. They just ignored God and let their king lead them in idol worship. The Lord God, however, had extended a gracious hand to restore the nation.

THOUGHT: There was none among them that called upon God.

PRAYER: Lord, save Thy children from the acts of false prophets today.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 28

2 PETER 1:3

PHILIPPIANS 4:7; JOHN 14:27

“...let him ask of God,
that giveth to all men liberally...”

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER,

What a comfort to know of Thy promised provision of “*all things that pertain unto life and godliness*”! What do we lack? Let us come by faith to receive what Thou “*hath given unto us*” already. Let us receive as from the hand of a kind and thoughtful Father.

Is it peace of heart and peace of mind that we need amidst the many uncertainties that trouble us in this terror-filled world? Thou hast given us the “*peace of God, which passeth all understanding*” (Phil 4:7). Thou hast promised: “*My peace I give unto you*” (John 14:27). Are we exhausted by the many demands of this earthly life and feel weak, unable to meet life’s daily challenges? Thou hast said, “*I will give you rest*” (Matt 11:28). Thou giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might Thou increaseth strength (Isa 40:29). Are we in a fix and do not know what to do concerning some matters whether big or small in our homes or in our places of work? Thou saith, “*If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him*” (James 1:5). Thou hast promised wisdom to those who fear Thee (Prov 9:10). Yet, how we so often short-change ourselves when we fail to look to Thee to see the “*green pastures*” and the “*still waters*” that Thou hast prepared for us. How we turn every which way, all the wrong ways, bypassing Thy paths of righteousness, to struggle in our own strength. How we thirst for that which does not quench and hunger for that which does not satisfy.

Make us realize that we need lack nothing because Thou hast “*given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness*” (2 Pet 1:3). “*All*” things that are necessary for the sustenance of our physical lives on earth, and “*all*” things necessary for the sanctification of our spiritual lives. How wonderful that we are a people who are provided for by our caring, loving heavenly Father. Truly we can say with the psalmist, “*I shall not want*” (Ps 23:1). In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

THOUGHT: (Read Psalm 23.)

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for Thy daily provision.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29

HOSEA 7

PROVERBS 31:1-9

*"It is not for kings, O Lemuel,
it is not for kings to drink wine..."*

THE PROPHET PICTURED ISRAEL AS A REBELLIOUS NATION

Drunkenness is another evil practice that is not far from a rebellious people. Israel was no exception in this regard. The people made the king sick with the bottles of wine so that he became part of the scorners. In Proverbs 31, Lemuel's mother gave the right counsel to his son who was aspiring to be king that he should keep away from that intoxicating drink. She said, *"It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted. Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more"* (Prov 31:4-7). The kings of Israel neglected their duties because of drunkenness. This counsel was given not only to princes but to everybody, for each has a place of authority and drunkenness will take away one's sound judgment.

Israel lived among the people of other nations. Hosea compared Israel with a cake that was not turned: burnt on one side and uncooked on the other. It was not fit for consumption, and was good for nothing. Strangers devoured their strength and they would not know. Their ignorance was compared to an aging person who did not know that his hairs had turned gray.

Pride is yet another deadly sin. This was obvious in Israel but they did not return to the Lord nor seek Him. When such a spirit reigns in a person's heart, he is self-satisfied and does only what is right in his own eyes. As Israel ignored God, they did not have the right counsel and therefore were persuaded in their own eyes that they were right. The nation was also compared to a silly dove without a heart. Though there are some good qualities in this bird, there are also characteristics that make her vulnerable to predators or other kinds of dangers. Israel was also that silly dove in that she looked to Egypt and Assyria and not to God.

THOUGHT: Where there is no vision, the people perish.

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to flee youthful lusts.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 30

HOSEA 7

JEREMIAH 17:9-11

*“The heart is deceitful above all things,
and desperately wicked: who can know it?”*

GOD’S CHASTISEMENT OF THE REBELLIOUS

God’s chastisement will be brought upon the nation because of their persistent rebellion. Who can endure the pain of God’s correction!

God will spread a net upon them and will bring them down as the fowls of heaven and chastise them. This had been told to them. Chastisement from heaven will not be comfortable, but will hurt greatly. Anyone listening would do well to repent and be saved from that pain. God pronounced a curse and destruction to the nation for they did not seek God and spoke lies. They lived at ease and did not cry to God but rebelled against Him. However, they will not escape His punishment. All these explain the agony that befell Israel later as they went into captivity.

The rebellion of Israel persisted: God had strengthened their arms but they imagined mischief against Him. As it had been repeated, they did not return to the Most High. Israel was compared to a deceitful bow which shall fall by the sword. Their tongue shall make them to suffer in Egypt. The situation did not seem to improve regardless of the many words that the prophet had told them. However, the wise would know that God had not forsaken them but had extended His gracious hand through the prophets. There were other means which gave them a window of hope, but sadly they chose to ignore all of it.

The depravity of the human heart manifested itself prominently among them. What was seen in Israel is happening all over the world in all generations, even in our midst today. The Word of God has been preached everywhere but rebellion abounds. The witness of His servants is a manifestation of God’s grace, but rejection persists.

THOUGHT: Look up to God’s mercy and repent. He will save.

PRAYER: Lord, let me know my heart and repent of my sins.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 31

HOSEA 8

1 SAMUEL 12:17-20

*“Pray for thy servants unto
the LORD thy God, that we die not:
for we have added unto all our sins ...”*

GOD REPRIMANDED IDOLATROUS ISRAEL

Since Israel did not cease her idolatry, the Lord was not silent, and continued to warn the nation. He told them of the harmful consequences of their continued rejection of God as they remained in idolatry. He told them of an eminent captivity and the vanity of their worship. Restoration could come only by the mercy of God.

God sounded a warning to the nation: The blowing of the trumpet was an alarm signal in those days. Everyone would make ready for an emergency when it was sounded. The Lord told Hosea to set a trumpet upon his mouth, in this He was alerting him of the urgency of the message to Israel. He said that the enemy would come as an eagle to the house of Israel. This is descriptive of swift attack as the king of birds attacks its prey. The attack is almost always successful, so the Lord was telling Israel that they would not overcome their enemy when the enemy swiftly set upon them.

The Lord brought this upon Israel because they had transgressed His covenant and trespassed against His Law. At that time of great calamity, Israel shall cry to the Lord saying that they knew Him. However, this will be a point of no return because they had cast off that which is good. The enemy will become an instrument of the punishment of Israel. The alarm was necessary because of the grave consequences that were coming upon the nation. It was the duty of the prophet to give that warning, and he was faithful to his calling.

THOUGHT: Ignoring the alarm is courting disaster.

PRAYER: Lord, let me hear when Thou speaketh.

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER,

We thank Thee for Thy precious word in 1 Timothy 1:15; for sending Thy Son Jesus to come into this world to save us sinners. How we remember the day of our salvation. Thou hast opened the eyes of so many of us. Thou gavest us new and abundant life in Christ, a life to be lived on this earth for Thee, guided by Thy Spirit and Thy Word, with the hope of life beyond, eternal blessed life in the heavenly home that Thou hast so graciously and mercifully reserved for us.

But we have so often neglected the last few words of 1 Timothy 1:15: *“of whom I am chief.”* The great Apostle Paul gave his life to serve Thee and in the process suffered much. He was the great missionary, going about Thy business wherever Thou leadeth. He was a great Bible writer, inspired by Thy Spirit to write a large portion of the New Testament. Yet, he called himself the *“chief”* of sinners, he considered himself *“less than the least of all saints”* (Eph 3:8)! How can that be except that he looked inward and saw the total depravity of his own heart and at the same time looked up to see the complete holiness of the Almighty God!

Jeremiah 17:9-10: *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins....”* Leviticus 19:2: *“...Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy.”* Help us, O Father, to look within our own heart and open our eyes to see, by the Light of Thy Word, the deceit and wickedness there, and how our words and actions are driven by them. Increase our sensitivity to our many daily sins. May we confess our sins instead of covering them up. May we look up to see Thy holiness and realize how far we have fallen short of Thy standard. Then, perhaps, will we be led a step nearer to confessing that of all sinners *“I am chief,”* and to considering ourselves *“less than the least of all saints.”* Help us, O Father. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

THOUGHT: How is my heart in the sight of my God?

PRAYER: Forgive me, Lord, for deceiving myself into thinking that I am holier than I really am.

ISRAEL IGNORED GOD IN THEIR PRACTICES

Israel appointed their own kings and made idols. Their kings did not belong to the same one dynasty, as was the case in Judah. The Lord gave Jeroboam the kingdom, but he failed to obey the Lord and his house was removed from the royalty. This went on successively in other families.

Most of these kings were appointed without the blessings of the Lord. Such self-appointed kings were also pursuing their own interests and did not look to the Lord to guide them. Their priests also were appointed without regard to the house of Levi. Their religion also was false. Since their hearts were turned from the Lord, they did not take heed to any positive counsel.

Israel used their gold and silver to make idols. They were thus cut off from the Lord. God spoke thus against their idolatry, *"Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off; mine anger is kindled against them: how long will it be ere they attain to innocency? For from Israel was it also: the workman made it; therefore it is not God: but the calf of Samaria shall be broken in pieces"* (Hosea 8:5-6).

The calf image was the symbol of the false religion of Samaria. There was no way in which such idolatry could be justified as it was a direct violation of the commandment of the Lord. It was the same sin that Israel had committed in the wilderness as they came out of Egypt. Moses had gone to meet with the Lord on Mount Sinai when the people began to depart from the Lord. That sin was rebuked and punished. It was to become a lesson to generations in Israel, but they refused to listen.

Physical idolatry may not be a common sin today, but many sins are being justified openly. These include the denial of God's creation, the acceptance of same-sex marriages, etc.

THOUGHT: God's Word alone is the Truth.

PRAYER: Save me, O Lord, from my self.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 3

HOSEA 8

MATTHEW 25:31-41

*“Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire,
prepared for the devil and his angels.”*

GOD IS PROVOKED TO ANGER BY SIN

Hosea prophesied in Israel for a long time. His testimony (and family life that the Lord commanded him to adopt) was a strong message that the Lord sent to Israel. The prophet did not receive any recognition, and God used strong words against Israel.

God’s anger was kindled against Samaria and they were not innocent. The window of hope for them was that they were given prior warning. This would have given them the opportunity to repent, but they failed to take this opening. The pain that comes with God’s reaction can be very devastating to those who disobey His commands. Their idolatry had separated them from the Lord. They worshipped images made with hands and their hearts were blinded that they could not perceive the magnitude of their own sinful doings.

Thus, the prophet rightly observed that they had sown the wind but they were going to reap the whirlwind. The wind can be mild and also necessary to create a comforting breeze. On the other hand, the whirlwind can be very destructive. When it becomes a hurricane or typhoon, it will leave a trail of destruction and death; and there will be a need for emergency assistance. This was what Israel was courting when they made idols. It naturally led to pain and death. The comparison of stalk and bud that yields no meal shows the vanity of idolatry. The strangers would swallow up that which they thought they had achieved; and in the end they would be left with nothing.

It is always gratifying to talk of God as merciful and longsuffering. This is true for this is His character. But such knowledge cannot be a license to ignore Him and to sin with all impunity. God is also just and He protects His name and that of His faithful children. The character of God in its fullness is clearly manifested in His dealing with Israel.

THOUGHT: God knows those who love Him with all their hearts.

PRAYER: Lord, let my profession of faith be true.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 4

HOSEA 8

2 KINGS 17:5-23

"Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight ..."

THE CAPTIVITY OF ISRAEL AND NO HOPE OF RESTORATION

The eternal punishment in hell is for unbelievers, earthly punishment is a prelude to that eternal one. In the Mosaic Law, there are statutes that are meant to provide justice to offended parties. In line with this principle, God had to punish Israel into captivity. In that foreign land, they were stateless and deprived of all rights.

The prophet predicted that Israel would be swallowed up and they shall be among the Gentiles and would be like a vessel without pleasure. Israel would be assimilated into the captive nation and would lose their identity. Assyria is specifically mentioned as the nation that would carry Israel captive. Israel is likened to a lonely wild ass. A wild life documentary today will show that such a creature is vulnerable to attack by its predators and has a small chance of survival. The hiring of lovers (Hosea 8:9) points to an adulterous relationship. Israel here is depicted as an unfaithful nation and it is true that idolatry is spiritual adultery.

The Lord gave Israel away; He used the Gentile nations to punish Israel. The Lord would gather the nations against Israel and they shall sorrow a little for the burden of the king of princes. Israel had made many altars of sin. The prophet kept repeating Israel's wayward deeds. He was specific. The multiple witnesses were an affirmation that the Lord would not fail. At the same time, the witness of the prophet was a constant reminder of God's concern for them. The message was directed at Ephraim, the northern kingdom. The Assyrian captivity was to swallow up the nation completely. This is what subsequent history tells us.

God gave prior warning to the nation, but they failed to take heed. The wickedness of all those kings and their princes had to have a day of God's visitation.

THOUGHT: Earthly punishment is a prelude to the eternal one.

PRAYER: Lord, let me not be a habitual transgressor of Thy Law.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5

PSALM 104:1

EXODUS 19:16-18

*“Why art thou cast down,
O my soul?”*

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER,

May we look up and see Thy greatness, for *“Thou art very great”!* *“Who can utter the mighty acts of the LORD?”* (Ps 106:2). One word from Thy mouth *“Let there be light”* and it was done: there was light! At will, Thou parted the Red Sea to save Thy children and at will Thou letteth the waters come crashing down to drown Pharaoh and his army. In Thy presence, *“there were thunders and lightnings”* (Exod 19:16) and *“the whole mount quaked greatly”* (Exod 19:18). There is nothing too difficult for Thee. We praise Thee, for Thou art indeed the all-great, all-powerful and all-mighty God!

“Be still, and know that I am God.” In our modern life, how we need so much to learn to be still and see that we are not in control of our destiny. May we be still and see our own frailty, our nothingness, and acknowledge that Thou art the Master of our lives. When we lose sight of Thee, we are easily drawn away by the world and our sinful self because every which way we turn, the world and self call out to us and we are tempted to “sell our soul” in order to gain the “gold” that sin dangles before our eyes.

May we also be still and know that Thou art the very great God when we face all the difficulties, troubles, and problems of this earthy life. *“Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? ... Are we weak and heavy laden? Cumbered with a load of care?”* *“Nothing seems hopeful, nothing seems glad. All is despairing, often times sad.”* *“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me?...”* (Ps 42:11).

“... O LORD my God, thou art very great...”! Help us daily to be still and bring our trials, troubles, heavy loads, despairs, and sadness to Thee, knowing that Thou art the very great God and nothing is too difficult for Thee! In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

THOUGHT: Am I trusting in my great God?

PRAYER: Lord, I praise Thee for Thou art *“the health of my countenance, and my God.”*

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 6

HOSEA 8

JAMES 1:8-17

*“Every good gift and every perfect
gift is from above, and cometh down
from the Father of lights ...”*

ISRAEL'S FALSE WORSHIP AND PUNISHMENT

Israel made many altars not to worship the true God but to sin against Him. False religion is described in the Scriptures as an imitation of the true.

The worship that God had commanded Israel included altars and sacrifices. Israel forsook the true worship and invented their own. The Lord described their sinful deed in these words, *“I have written to him the great things of my law, but they were counted as a strange thing”* (Hosea 8:12). They sacrificed flesh for their offering and ate them. However, the Lord did not accept their offering because it was not offered to Him. The devotees may appear sincere and fervent in their worship. However since it was based on a false doctrine, it was not acceptable before God. Today, there are idols too. The health and wealth gospel, propagated everywhere, stands on the same footing.

Hosea asserted that God will remember their iniquity and visit their sins. They will return to the bondage of sin as they desired to return to Egypt during the Exodus. Judah was also part of the transgressors and the Lord also made known their punishment. They forgot God and built temples in fenced cities. Since they depended on their physical capacity and not on God, the Lord pronounced that these will be destroyed by fire. This came to pass at the captivity of Judah.

Sin and punishment became part of the history of Israel. The transgressions of the people show the vulnerability of man without God. History repeats itself. We need to examine our position before God today. His warning is there for us to come out of the apostate church. We have to depend on Him only. There is hope of victory by God's grace. Let us obey His Law and offer Him true worship.

THOUGHT: Dependence on external or physical prosperity is vain.

PRAYER: Lord, may I heed Thy warning.

THE DAYS OF JUDGMENT OF ISRAEL

The prophet continued to paint a sad picture of Israel. God warned them that they were persisting in their sinful condition. He spoke to them to let them see the dangers ahead. If they were to listen, they would repent. But they failed to, and the nation had to be judged.

Israel was not to rejoice because she had gone a whoring: The designation given to the ways of the nation, as has been noted earlier, was spiritual adultery. Their idolatry was committed in every place. If every home had a corn-floor, it meant that every household was given to this false worship. They had great anticipation of harvest of corn and grapes, but the Lord told them that these would not feed them. Either the crops were going to fail or their enemies would invade them. This calamity was directly linked to their idolatry. Famine is one painful consequence that results in death.

God chose this as one punishment for Israel. Israel may also try to buy food from other nations as the sons of Jacob did, but the conditions may not be safe for them to search for food elsewhere. Since famine was a punishment from the Lord, all avenues of hope will fail.

Israel was not going to dwell in the Lord's land but will be in captivity and eat the unclean things in Assyria. Egypt in this context does not refer to the literal Egypt. It refers to their captivity that will be like the time their fathers were in bondage in Egypt. It was Assyria that subsequently took Israel captive. When they were in bondage, they had no freedom even to choose what to eat. They will eat whatever was available, including the meat of unclean animals. They will have to partake of it to satisfy their hunger. The Lord told them to anticipate this kind of life.

This message was conveyed to them with the intent that some will listen and repent and escape the disaster.

THOUGHT: Any calamity is directly linked to sin.

PRAYER: Lord, save the righteous in the midst of apostasy.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 8

HOSEA 9

JUDGES 19:29-30

*“There was no such deed done
nor seen ... consider of it, take advice,
and speak your minds.”*

THE FATE OF ISRAEL IN EXILE

In captivity Israel will not have an opportunity to worship the Lord as prescribed in the Law of Moses. They will offer wine or sacrifices but all these will not be pleasing to the Lord. Their bread will be as the bread of mourners and polluted bread, thus it will not be fit for the house of the Lord.

The Law also assigned solemn days and days of feasts, but in captivity the observation of these occasions will be impossible. The nation had gone to destruction and their land shall be in ruins. All their good things were turned into sources of suffering. Nettles and thorns best describe the kind of ruin that the land will become.

The days of visitation and recompense were to come: These were the days when the vengeance of the Lord would be accomplished. The prophet of God was seen as a fool and the spiritual man a mad man. (Jesus Himself was called mad by the Jews and so was Paul by Festus the governor.) When those who were able to give positive assistance ignored God, there would be no more direction but only destruction. This was the situation Israel was in at that time. Hosea said that they were greatly corrupt, even as in the days of Gibeah. This was a city of the tribe of Benjamin that had done corruptly in the days of Judges. Barnes added the following to this comparison, he said, “As in, the days of Gibeah — When Benjamin espoused the cause of ‘the children of Belial’ who had worked such horrible brutishness in Gibeah toward the concubine of the Levite. This they maintained with such obstinacy, that, through God’s judgment, the whole tribe perished, except six hundred men.” (Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Bible*)

THOUGHT: God will remember their iniquity.

PRAYER: Lord, may the fate of Israel serve as a warning to me.

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER,

What "*tribulation*" we go through in this sinful world. Daily we may have to face troubles, painful circumstances, difficult people, heart-breaking disappointments, and maybe even life-threatening sicknesses. Many of these are beyond our control. Even our own sinful self can unleash its destructive power to our own surprise! How we wish if only Thou wilt remove all these far from us and make our lives peaceful and serene. If only Thou...

Yet, we need not and ought not to plead "If only Thou...." For Thy Word has already assured us of the availability and reality of Thy comfort "*in ALL our tribulation.*" Let us come to our Lord Jesus to confess and to repent of our sins. "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*" (1 John 1:9). And then, let us come to Thee, "*the Father of our Lord Jesus...the God of all comfort.*"

Jesus has said: "*Let not your heart be troubled...*" (John 14:1) and "*These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer...*" (John 16:33). The untroubled heart, the "*peace*" and the "*good cheer*" come not because Thou removeth all troubles, tears and sorrows. They come because Thou hast promised to comfort us IN our tribulation. So if Thou alloweth tribulation to come our way, may we not ask that the tribulation be removed but that in the midst of it all we may learn to walk closer to "*the God of all comfort,*" and to experience that untroubled heart, that "*peace,*" that "*good cheer,*" that heavenly comfort which are there for us.

O how foolish we have been in constantly forfeiting ourselves all these wonderful blessings by our own stubbornness and reliance on our own efforts and wisdom, constantly refusing to look to Thee, "*the God of all comfort.*" Forgive us, Father. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

THOUGHT: What do I do when I am troubled?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Father, for being the God of all comfort.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 10

HOSEA 9

JEREMIAH 16:1-9

*"...I have taken away my peace ...
even lovingkindness and mercies."*

GOD WILL DEPART FROM THE NATION

The story of Gibeah was not a happy incident and Israel was familiar with it. It was used to show them the magnitude of what would befall them. Their glory shall fly away as a bird from birth. In its place there will be disgrace. The visitation with chastisement will bring Israel down and Ephraim shall disappear.

The assertion here that Israel will be bereaved of her children suggests that mass death will be a result of war. The young will all die. This was one reason that the Lord told prophet Jeremiah not to marry. The Lord did not want him to go through that grief. Much evil will befall Israel when the Lord departed from them. A woe is a curse. Israel was planted in a pleasant place but their children shall be murdered. They will have a miscarrying womb and dry breasts. This is a picture of the grief that Israel will have to face.

The Lord's intention was to save them from that pain. However, Israel was so engrossed with idolatry that they did not listen. God had departed from them and they had no light to seek to do good. They were indwelt by an evil spirit and were blind to any admonition that could have saved them. They needed to repent and to forsake their sins.

Israel did not repent and those calamities befell her. All the wickedness of Israel in Gilgal will have them driven out of the house of the Lord. She will be smitten and its root dried up. They shall bear no fruit. Whatever they had will be taken away from them, even their infants will be slain. God will cast them away because they did not hear Him. They shall be wanderers among the nations. They will live a life of slavery.

THOUGHT: No one continues in sin and remains free.

PRAYER: Lord, may I be willing to hear when Thou speaketh.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 11

HOSEA 10

ROMANS 13:1-7

*“Whosoever therefore resisteth the power,
resisteth the ordinance of God ...”*

THE PUNISHMENT OF ISRAEL

The messages that Hosea conveyed to Israel are nearly identical. The only difference is that he spoke at different times and to different groups of people. Nevertheless the problems that faced Israel were the same. The message was the same since Israel was engrossed with the same sins. God did not cease to warn them of eminent punishment. The nation was destined for destruction.

The sin of Israel is described: Israel was compared to an empty vine that brought forth fruits. According to the multitude of their fruits, they also increased the number of altars. And according to the fertility of their land, they made “*godly images*” (Hosea 10:1). This is a reference to their vain worship where they offered sacrifices in many altars and made idols that were only good for the eyes to behold. In these efforts, they thought they were offering true worship. In actual fact, they had forsaken the Lord and their hearts were divided. God will break down their altars and spoil their images.

Idols are useless objects and have no place in the worship of God. It is a sin expressly forbidden in God’s commandment.

Israel also rejected their king because they did not fear the Lord. This mindset was manifested in the way in which different kings of the divided kingdom were removed and others were installed in their place. Those who came forcefully to power did not have full exercise of authority because they did not command any respect among their subjects.

Rejection of authority is also a sin against God and man. The need to obey authority is enshrined in the commandment to honour father and mother. This is understood to include all superiors, equals and inferiors. There has to be mutual respect in all these relations so that all may co-exist harmoniously. Sadly this was not the case in Israel.

THOUGHT: Lawlessness brings harm to innocent people.

PRAYER: Lord, teach me to submit to those in authority.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 12

HOSEA 10

TITUS 1:9-16

“... that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.”

THE MANIFESTATION OF THEIR SIN

The people of Israel were characterized as telling lies not only in ordinary conversation but more in serious matters, and they swore falsely. They were to answer for their sin. One does not swear falsely or make a covenant without serious consequences.

Israel was facing such repercussions because of their sinful ways. Falsehood is transgression of God’s commandment. Israel had forsaken the Lord and the priests who were to teach the Law of God were themselves destitute of knowledge. Their ignorance led to their transgression and their sin was openly manifested.

The people of Samaria valued their idols. The calves of Bethaven were imitations of the ones that their king had put up in Dan and Bethel. The people mourned over the loss of their idols, idols which the priests had before rejoiced over. They mourned because their glory was departed. They were false worshippers and false priests. They were imitators of true worship and they valued the religion of their own creation. Their sin was manifest at all times and it remained for a long time. Hosea had to give this picture of the transgression of Israel repeatedly because God was not pleased with it and they had to be warned. At the same time, it gave those who wished to obey God a window of hope, i.e. forgiveness of their sins if they repented of their sin.

History goes in circles and the saying goes that if one does not learn from it he will repeat its mistakes. The biblical commands against idolatry and falsehood stand to this day and will be forever. The Church of Rome, for example, is the largest religion with Christian roots. Every building of this church has a number of images and they bow before them. It is, nonetheless, idolatry. There are many other practices and doctrines of this church that have no biblical basis. The Church has been warned. And God will judge. Will you learn from history?

THOUGHT: The end of transgression is punishment.

PRAYER: Lord, open my eyes to the sin of idolatry.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 13

REVELATION 3:16

1 CORINTHIANS 10:31

“I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot...”

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER,

May we heed Thy warning to us in Revelation 3:16 that Thou wilt “*spue*” us out of Thy mouth if we are “*neither cold nor hot.*”

Have we been so lukewarm, so distasteful, to Thee that Thou wilt vomit us out of Thy mouth, O Father? Guide us to honestly review how we have been living our lives, that we may see how we have been “*neither cold nor hot.*”

Lukewarmness may be seen in the way we serve Thee. We may have served half-heartedly, perhaps even grudgingly, out of obligation to our brethren, to be seen and to be praised by man, for our own exaltation or glory.

We may have been “*neither cold nor hot*” as evident in the way we walk with Thee: We may have chosen to obey Thee only when convenient. But when the going gets rough, we rationalize away Thy instructions, we block out Thy Word from our heart and we take the easy way out, we do what our own heart dictates, thereby smoothening our own paths (or so we thought). We worship Thee or attend Prayer Meeting when we have “nothing better to do.” We serve Thee when convenient. In our service we put self before Thee, doing what is right in our own eyes, glorifying ourselves under the guise of serving Thee. We are “*lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot*” and our lives are distasteful to Thee.

O, Heavenly Father, how we deserve to be vomited out of Thy mouth! Yet we plead for Thy mercy. Forgive us for our lukewarmness. Make us hot for Thee instead. Help us to re-learn the lesson of what it means to “*do all to the glory of God*” (1 Cor 10:31) so that our lives may not be distasteful to Thee but be a sweet savour. Help us, O Father! In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

THOUGHT: Why am I not on fire for my Lord?

PRAYER: Forgive my lukewarmness, O Lord.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 14

HOSEA 10

2 KINGS 17:5-8

“For so it was, that the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God ...”

THE PUNISHMENT THAT SHALL COME UPON THE NATION

The prophet specifically predicted that Israel shall be carried to Assyria. With its capital in Nineveh, Assyria was a world super power at that time and had the ability to subdue a small nation like Israel.

In the ancient days, a nation that was conquered by another power had all its fortified cities destroyed. Everything of value was taken away from them. The people were also taken captive to be slaves of the conqueror. This was the punishment Israel was facing. It was not by accident but it was God’s rod of chastisement as the prophet told them that it would come to pass. This humiliation was a shame to the nation, but they could not escape because of the hardness of their hearts.

The king of Samaria will be cut off like foam upon the water. This is to say that the king will be cut off and will disappear. The last king of Israel before the captivity was Hoshea. His fate and that of the nation was revealed in 2 Kings 17:5-8: *“Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. For so it was, that the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods, And walked in the statutes of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they had made.”* God’s words came true.

THOUGHT: Sin brings slavery.

PRAYER: Lord, use my testimony to save some from sin.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 15

HOSEA 10

ACTS 4:24-30

“For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.”

THE DESTINY OF THE NATION

The high place of Aven (which symbolized the sin of Israel) will be destroyed and will be overgrown with thorns. This is expressive of desolation that the land will experience for the people will be carried away and no one will be left to take care of the land.

God had to chastise them because of their sin. When God speaks of His retribution, it is not a small matter. It comes with great pain because He is a just God. This was the experience of Israel and it was never pleasant. It was a life-changing matter that could not be reversed.

At this point, Israel was set for captivity. She was likened to a heifer that was being trained. In those days, the cows were also used as oxen in various farming and transport needs. Each animal had to be trained to fulfil certain tasks. Here, it was used to tread the corn. Judah was given the duty of pulling the plough. A commentator suggests that Israel was taught in the law of God but did not regard it and chose to live at ease and grew fat. The metaphor shows that the assigned task was too little for them. Since they were ten tribes, they easily overwhelmed Judah which had only two tribes (source: John Gill's Exposition of the entire Bible). When they sowed righteousness, they reaped more blessings. When they sowed in the wilderness, they reaped iniquity because they trusted in the flesh. Israel shall thus be defeated and her children killed mercilessly. The king shall be cut off because of idolatry.

Every sin goes with punishment. God is never pleased with habitual sin. The consequences are painful in this life and more so in eternity. Seek obedience to God and live to see His blessings.

THOUGHT: Pleasing God is a believer's priority.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to choose to live righteously before Thee.

GOD SHOWS MERCY TO ISRAEL

Regardless of the waywardness of Israel, the Lord did not turn His heart away from them. He was longsuffering just as when He brought them out of Egypt. And He was to receive all the glory. In Hosea 11, the prophet showed that God was still compassionate towards them. Moreover, he reminded them of His justice. He gave hope to them because God loved Israel.

The picture of God's mercy is manifest as history is told: God called Israel out of Egypt as a child. The name Israel was a name that God gave to Jacob. It means a prince of God. Jacob as a family went down to Egypt with seventy-five persons, on the invitation of his son Joseph. They had to leave Canaan because of the famine. Since they were well treated in Egypt and given the best of the land, they decided to remain there permanently. After more than four hundred years in Egypt, they reached a population of two million. The story of Exodus saw them returning to the land of Canaan, the place that God had promised to give to their fathers.

Hosea 11:1 is referred to in Matthew 2:15 in connection with the birth of Christ and the family's flight to Egypt to escape from Herod:

“When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son” (Matt 2:14-15).

This shows that Hosea 11:1 meant more than what the people knew in the time of Hosea. The election of Israel as a nation under God has the ultimate goal of fulfilling God's plan of redemption.

THOUGHT: God saves all by grace alone.

PRAYER: Lord, may I always remember and be thankful for Thy redemptive plan of salvation.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 17

ACTS 9:6

PSALM 119:72

*“Thy word is a lamp
unto my feet...”*

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER,

We come to Thee confessing our many shortcomings: our self-centredness, wilfulness and waywardness. Forgive us, O Father.

Our lives do not belong to us but to our Redeemer. May our hearts echo Paul’s question: *“Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”* Indeed, as Thy blood-bought children, may we be constantly grateful to Thee and come to Thee in complete submission, willing to be moulded by the nail-pierced Hands of our Saviour, and to do Thy every bidding. Not a few, not some, but Thy every bidding.

Help us, Father, that as we read Thy Word, our hearts, our souls and our minds will totally be tuned in to Thee. That we will always want to take Thy instructions to heart and to apply Thy Word with understanding. That we will say: *“The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver”* (Ps 119:72).

“Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”

“...be thankful unto him...” (Ps 100:4). *“...by love serve one another”* (Gal 5:13). *“Humble yourselves ...”* (James 4:10). *“...be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another ...”* (Eph 4:32). *“...Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you...”* (Matt 5:44). *“Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men”* (Rom 12:17). *“And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men”* (Col 3:23). These are what Thou wilt that we do. Indeed, much more than these hast Thou revealed in Thy Word. *“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet ...”* O, Heavenly Father, may we resolve by Thy grace to put off our wilful self and to obey Thy every Word and walk submissively in that well-lit, Word-lit, path of righteousness so long as Thou giveth us breath. Help us, Father. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

THOUGHT: Do I really allow God to dictate how I live my life?

PRAYER: O Lord, may I be quick to obey Thy instructions.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 18

HOSEA 11

ROMANS 5:1-11

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

GOD SAVES THE IGNORANT

Coming back to Israel, the Lord pointed again at one of their foremost sins. They were sacrificing to Baalim and burning incense to graven images. The silent admission of idol worship is denial of the existence of God. The psalmist condemned atheism saying that those who hold to this teaching are fools. When Israel practised a syncretistic religion, they had no idea that they were denying God and acting the fool. The words of Hosea were meant to show them their sin but they simply ignored him.

God taught Ephraim (Israel) to go as part of His plan of salvation, but they did not know that God had healed them (Hosea 11:3). Israel was like a baby learning to walk and God made them to take those first steps. Their lack of knowledge also made them thankless.

It is such a tragedy that God's people were ignorant of what God had done for them and as such did not appreciate His grace. The Lord said that He drew them with cords of a man and bands of love. This is an expression of that grace, but Israel was oblivious to that goodness. The Lord also eased their burden and gave them food.

In revealing this to Israel through the prophet Hosea, the Lord was telling Israel to turn away from their sinful ways and to follow the Lord. God was indeed gracious to them. He showed this by doing to Israel what they did not deserve. The voice of the prophet was an extension of that grace. It was to help them turn to the Lord and live.

The character and responses of Israel in the days of Hosea, unfortunately, are repeated in our world today. Sadly, it is a case of history repeating itself. Have you still not learnt? Will you let history be repeated in your life?

THOUGHT: Idol worship is atheism and acting the fool.

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to be thankful for Thy saving grace.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 19

HOSEA 11

1 PETER 3:12-14

*“...the face of the Lord is
against them that do evil.”*

GOD’S PUNISHMENT IS FOR REPENTANCE

Israel shall not return to Egypt but shall be under the king of Assyria. The sword in their cities means mass death by the hand of the enemy. When that punishment came, it was fulfilled to the letter. Many fell by the sword in the battles to capture their cities and those who survived were taken captive.

They did not have any kind of freedom including that of worship. Israel was bent on backsliding and they called not to God. They did not exalt Him. What befell the nation was the natural outcome of such a disposition. They did not simply reject God, they sinned against Him more. The fulfilment of the prophecy of Hosea painted a sad picture of Israel.

God did not give up on Israel regardless of their rebellion. The Lord recalled the cities of Admah and Zeboim of Genesis 14 that were spared after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Though the events were far apart, the Lord saw all these as the work of His grace. He used past experiences to show this work. They needed to return to the Lord in order to prosper.

God restrained His anger on them as He was merciful and did not execute the fierceness of His anger immediately. This delay gave them time to repent and to escape punishment. The Lord will forgive them and give them privileges that they never thought of or deserve. They will be exalted as they walked after the LORD and had decent houses in Assyria. Thus, as much as He had chosen Israel, He will also manifest His power and glory through them regardless of their rejection of Him.

THOUGHT: God will not give His glory to another.

PRAYER: Lord, restrain Thy anger from our sins.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20

HOSEA 11

1 PETER 3:15-20

“... sanctify the Lord God
in your hearts ...”

ISRAEL REMAINS AS GOD’S NATION

In addition to the exalted position given to Israel, the Lord also restored to them their houses. Since Hosea’s message to all Israel, the Lord looked at the restoration of Judah after the seventy-year captivity.

When that time came, the Lord moved Cyrus the king of Persia to order the return of the Jews to Jerusalem as they wished. The Lord was giving hope to Israel to show that He was not punishing them for the sake of it, but to punish their sins.

God saw both Israel and Judah as one nation and gave them victory over their enemies. However, the tainted picture of their sin could not be erased from them. Ephraim was said to have compassed the Lord with lies and the house of Israel with deceit.

Like the sin of idolatry, telling lies is also a deadly sin and brings great damage to those who choose to live by it. In contrast to Ephraim, Judah will rule with God and remain faithful to the Lord. The preservation of Judah was the work of God.

It was through this nation that the Redeemer would be born. He is not only a Redeemer of Israel, but of the whole world. The royal family of Judah from David up to captivity forms the unbroken genealogy of Christ. This seed was preserved and Christ was born. The Messiah is thus the focus when God chooses Israel as His people. It is a promise that He gave first through Abraham, that in him all nations of the earth will be blessed.

The waywardness of Israel is a reflection of the depravity in the human heart. They continued in sin in the time of their abode in Canaan right through to the captivity. Let us learn to follow the right path. Look to Jesus in whom all the promises of Israel are fulfilled.

THOUGHT: Christ paid the price of man’s redemption.

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee that I am one of the redeemed.

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER,

We come to Thee as Thy weak and needy children, acknowledging our many infirmities, for there are many times we are at a loss as to what to do. Many dire straits in our lives seem impassible, barriers insurmountable. We do not have the answer or solution to the many difficulties that pepper our earthly lives; and no answer or solution seems to be in the offing.

Yet learn we must to “*most gladly*” glory in our infirmities. Help us, Father, to look infirmities in the face and acknowledge that Thou hast allowed them to come into our lives so that “*the power of Christ may rest upon*” us; so that we may come to Thee and experience first-hand the power of Christ and to see what Thou canst do in our lives.

We thank Thee, Father, for our dark circumstances, for through them Thou art working a mighty work in us, moulding us, strengthening us and growing us.

May we keep trusting in Thee even when all is bleak and dismal. Keep us looking up to Thee for “*thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice*” (Ps 63:7). We can rejoice, not because we are strong and able to solve our problems, but because Thou art our Helper and we are in the shadow of Thy wings. Surely there is no safer or better or happier place in the world.

Keep us rejoicing, Father, while we seek shelter in the shadow of Thy wings. For only when we are weak, then the strength and power of Christ can be seen in us. May we let our lives, although fraught with weaknesses and difficulties, be living testimonies of the power of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, bringing glory to Thee, the Almighty and Loving God. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

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

PRAYER: I thank Thee, Lord, for the trials in my life, for through them I learn to look up to Thee and to trust in Thee.

THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD

Israel did not improve their relationship with God in the days of Hosea. The picture depicted in the life of Hosea remained the same despite the cry of the prophet. The only hope was that God was still speaking to them and those who obeyed were saved.

They had history to learn from yet they did not take heed. God is sovereign and will intervene. The way of repentance was not in sight yet. Their faithlessness was ever manifested. The prophet had to put these things in a clear light. He began with the declaration that Ephraim fed in the wind and followed after the east wind. He added that the nation daily increased in lies and desolation. This is an expression of their very low moral condition. Hosea could not say anything good about Israel, only evil. The people had forgotten the Lord and were ready to be yoked with peoples of other nations.

Assyria and Egypt here are mentioned as having some form of relationship with them. Egypt was a reminder of their turning away from the Lord since they were earlier rescued from that nation. Assyria was going to be their future slave-master that was used as an instrument of God's vengeance.

The prophet addressed both Israel and Judah and he revealed the Lord's mind towards them also at that time. He said that the Lord had *“also a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways”* (Hosea 12:2). The Lord was especially interested in Israel because He had revealed Himself to them and much was expected of the people. The assertion that He will recompense the house of Jacob according to his doings was an assertion of His justice. Israel knew about all these but they did not bring themselves into obedience to the Lord. They continued in their sinful ways and thus the prophet told of the looming punishment.

THOUGHT: They had the opportunity to repent, but did they?

PRAYER: Lord, teach me to appreciate Thy longsuffering.

HISTORY HAS A LESSON FOR THE NATION

The prophet made reference to the account in Genesis 25:26 at the birth of Jacob and Esau. The account became an allegory and attributed strength to Jacob over his brother. Centuries after, Jacob became a nation and not an individual and had power with God.

The episode of Genesis 32:24-32 where Jacob wrestled with the angel is also referred to here. A reference was also made to the event in Genesis 28:12 which took place in Bethel. This was where the Lord repeated His covenant with Abraham and Isaac. In mentioning these landmark events, the Lord was reminding Israel that they were a special people in the heart of the Lord. He had to deal with them by His sovereign will in order to bring to pass His promises to their fathers.

The title of God as LORD of hosts is used here in verse 5 to show that God was fighting battles for Israel. If they were to remain on the side of the Lord, all would have been well for them. However, they committed abomination by indulging in idolatry. In this they denied God who led and sustained them. The prophet made a call to them exhorting them to turn to God, to keep mercy and judgment and to wait continually on God. This was a duty that Israel knew from the Mosaic Law, but they had forsaken and went after Baal and other idols. Interestingly, there were religious leaders who were supposed to teach and interpret the Law of God to the people, but all of them had forsaken their responsibility and had sought to please men. Those who spoke the truth were oppressed by the authorities. The word of the true prophets came to pass. In Hosea 12, Israel should recognize the prophet of God and listen to him and return to God. Today, there are messengers of God who speak for Him. Are you listening?

THOUGHT: Few stand on the Lord's side.

PRAYER: Lord, may I stand for Thee, and with Thee, all the time.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 24

HOSEA 12

HEBREWS 1:1-5

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets.”

ISRAEL CONTINUES IN SIN AND GOD INTERVENES

Israel was compared to a merchant having balances of deceit in his hands. He loved to oppress with these. This is to say there was no honesty in the business of exchange of goods. Israel allowed stealing from the helpless to thrive. They became rich by this dishonesty.

The people boasted about that particular sin. They were never conscious that the whole situation was against God and man. Even though they seemed to be ignorant of their sin, God did not look away from it. This is His message to them: *“And I that am the LORD thy God from the land of Egypt will yet make thee to dwell in tabernacles, as in the days of the solemn feast. I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets”* (Hosea 12:9-10). This shows the superiority of God over the works of men. Tabernacles were humble dwellings compared to permanent houses. The Lord was saying that He was able to humble Israel despite their boasting over the things that they possessed. God had shown them great things by the prophets and these were His communication to them that they were to listen.

The opening words of the book of Hebrews say that God in the past spoke by the prophets and in these last days He has spoken through His Son. When the Son of God came He preached the gospel of salvation. He also commissioned the disciples to go into all the world and preach that gospel. This is the gospel that has been preached in the New Testament church. Those who listen to it came to salvation offered freely through the Son of God. He is pleading with the present generation, as He pleaded with Israel through Hosea, to return to Him. Have you come back to the Lord?

THOUGHT: God speaks at all times.

PRAYER: Lord, give me a listening ear.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 25

1 SAMUEL 7:3

JOSHUA 24:15-24

“...choose you this day
whom ye will serve ...”

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER,

We thank Thee for 1 Samuel 7:3. Help us to take heed of Samuel’s message to Israel, that our own spiritual lives too may be revived.

May we come to Thee with all our hearts, putting away any and all our “*strange gods*.” Even if no one knows, Thou, O Father, knoweth what “*strange gods*” we harbour in the dark, deep corners of our hearts: position, power, popularity, praises of man, wealth, our careers, our loved ones, our pride, our “face,” even our own selfish self! How we treasure these “*gods*” and worship them. How we bow ourselves to them, and serve and obey them. We allow our lives to be ruled by them, letting them take precedence over Thee. May Thou forgive our idolatry and help us to put away our “*strange gods*” and come to Thee truly, sincerely, with all our hearts, undivided, worshipping no “*strange gods*” but Thee only.

And then may we prepare our hearts to serve Thee. Help us to check our own hearts: Are our hearts pure? Or do we still entertain selfish, sinful, evil thoughts or desires? Are our hearts truly ready to serve Thee? May Thy Spirit search our hearts and prepare us.

With our hearts prepared, then finally may we serve Thee. What is the purpose of Thy reviving us if it is not to serve Thee with our hearts and our lives? Grant us, Father, that desire to serve Thee.

And when we serve Thee, may we serve only Thee. Could we possibly be serving anyone else? O wretched, sinful people that we are, we confess, Father, how self-serving we can be. Forgive us, and make us truly God-serving, that our service may be God-honouring and God-glorifying.

Revive us, O Father, that our revived lives may be of use to Thee, for Thy glory, and Thine only! In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

THOUGHT: Am I really serving my God with my life?

PRAYER: Lord, help me to put away the “*strange gods*” in my life.

THE WAY OF REPENTANCE IS NOT IN SIGHT

Their rejection of God through idolatry magnified the iniquity in Israel because they offered false sacrifices. The prophet called this vanity. They had a form of worship but their worship was not according to God’s Law. They were satisfied and had some expectation of blessings, but all their effort was vain.

Jacob is mentioned as having served in Syria for a wife. This is a reference to the Genesis narrative of the patriarch serving Laban for a wife. He kept livestock as a dowry payment. This reference may seem out of place in what the prophet was addressing, but the reminder of God’s dealing with the house of Israel centred on Jacob. He is referred to as an individual and also as a nation. He said this also of the nation in verse 13, *“And by a prophet the LORD brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved.”* In saying this, Hosea was pointing at the ministry of the prophets as God’s means of saving and preserving the nation. They should not thus look at the old prophet only, but they should listen to the present prophet. However, the contrary was true. They were not listening to the prophet, but they provoked the Lord greatly. Reproach shall return to them.

The Lord had responded to the apostasy of King Solomon and divided the kingdom into two. However, the nation that took the largest number of people began with rejection of God and adoption of false worship. God was gracious still and wanted them to return to Him.

Faithlessness is spiritual slavery and keeps the offender in sadness. Joy comes when one repents and trusts the Lord. There is hope for such a person. Bring all your burdens to Jesus and you will have rest.

THOUGHT: Idolatry is vanity.

PRAYER: Lord, allow me to offer Thee a worthy service.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 27

HOSEA 13

ROMANS 6:1-6

*"...the body of sin might be destroyed,
that henceforth we should not serve sin."*

GOD'S CONTROVERSY WITH ISRAEL CONTINUES

The faithlessness of Israel continued to keep them in the negative light. Idolatry thrived and the people were too proud to turn to God. The Lord kept a watch of their rejection of Him. He declared that He was their only King who could save. The sin of Israel and their punishment loomed. Their end was desolation and tribulation. However, God did not forget them.

Ephraim spoke exalting himself in Israel and he died for following Baal. Such description of the chief tribe of Israel reveals the pride that was demonstrated in idol worship. However, the wages of sin caught up with them and they perished for it. They sinned more and went deep into idolatry. They made images of silver according to their understanding. All of them were the work of craftsmen and were no gods at all. God abhors the sin of idolatry because it is a direct rejection of Him.

Secondly, the prohibition of this sin is enshrined in the first and the second commandments of the Law. Other nations who did not know God had idols to fill the void shown in God's general revelation. They also compared themselves with other nations. The vanity of idolatry is thus described, *"Therefore they shall be as the morning cloud, and as the early dew that passeth away, as the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the floor, and as the smoke out of the chimney"* (Hosea 13:3). The metaphors of cloud, dew, chaff and smoke best represent false hope: visible to the eyes, but disappear without notice and cannot be restored.

THOUGHT: *"... Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?"*
(Rom 6:1)

PRAYER: Lord, magnify Thy Name among the nations.

THE LORD IS ALWAYS THE TRUE GOD

Regardless of Israel’s rejection of God, the Lord remains the same for there is no God but Him. He is the living God and the Maker of heaven and earth. He upholds everything that He has created. He also controls the destiny of all His creatures and all submit to His will.

Israel may imagine what seemed best for them, but God never changes. He is unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. The prophets sought to bring home these messages to Israel, but they were bent on sinning and were not willing to listen to the voice of God. In one incident, the Lord led the prophet Elijah to dramatize the truth of the being of God over against Baal. The answer from heaven vindicated the words of Elijah beyond any doubt. King Ahab did nothing to Elijah even though he had earlier sought to punish him. In the message of Hosea, God stressed that He was the LORD known to Israel since the days of Exodus. He said they will know no other god but Him. There is no Saviour beside Him. “Yesterday, today, for ever, Jesus is the same.”

God knew of Israel from the time they were in the wilderness. He said this because that was when He began to have a direct relationship with Israel. The generation of Hosea, through the Scriptures, knew of that connection. The Lord disclosed this to show that He was superior in knowledge compared to those who did not want to accept Him. Israel was filled and exalted with pride and had forgotten the Lord. When all things went well with them and they did not experience any famine, they forgot the Lord. The Lord said that He would be to them as a lion or as a leopard in the way He watched over them. He said He would meet them as a bear bereaved of her little ones. He would devour them.

THOUGHT: God cannot overlook man’s irrational attitude.

PRAYER: Lord, may I learn to fear Thee.

SATURDAY, MARCH 1

DANIEL 3:17

1 CHRONICLES 29:12

“...in thine hand is
power and might...”

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER,

How comforting it is to know that Thou ART ABLE to deliver us from the “*burning fiery furnace*” in our lives. What are the “*burning fiery furnace*” that we are in right now? Sickness, loss of a loved one, unemployment, trouble at work, disharmony in the home, relationship problems? No matter how impossible the situation may seem, Thou HAST the ability to deliver us.

Yet, we confess that ever so often we are fearful of the “*furnace*,” we despair when we see the “*fire*,” and we lose all hope when we are in the “*fire*.” We are such because we look to ourselves or man to help us. How we have to learn to look up to Thee and to hope in Thee, for THOU ART ABLE.

Thou hast the power to protect Daniel’s three friends when they were in the “*burning fiery furnace*” which was “*exceeding hot*” (Dan 3:22) so that they were not burnt at all even when engulfed by fire of extremely high temperature. King Nebuchadnezzar himself testified that he saw a fourth man who “*is like the Son of God*” (Dan 3:25) in the furnace with Daniel’s three friends. Thou art indeed the all-mighty, all-powerful God! How we praise Thee!

“...in thine hand is power and might...” (1 Chron 29:12). “...*Is my hand shortened at all...have I no power to deliver? behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness: their fish stinketh, because there is no water, and dieth for thirst*” (Isa 50:2).

Whatever “*burning fiery furnace*” we may be in now, Thou art the additional Person there in it with us. We sing the hymn, “Wherever He leads I’ll go.” What if Thou leadeth us into a “*burning fiery furnace*”? Will we still say “I’ll go”? Remind Thy children that THOU ART ABLE to deliver and may we see Thee present with us in the “*burning fiery furnace*.” In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

THOUGHT: “I know my God is able to carry me through.”

PRAYER: Increase my faith and trust in Thee, O Lord.

GOD IS THE KING OF ISRAEL

The expressions here are so clear that Israel should pay attention to the warnings. The Lord put these words in the mouth of Hosea so that they might listen and come to repentance. Since their hearts were not guided by the Holy Spirit, there was rebellion. The Lord had to paint for them a clear picture of their disobedience and the retribution they had to face.

Israel in their transgressions destroyed themselves. Their only help can come from God. The history of Israel reveals that God was always their King. The Lord had called Jacob to Egypt as a family. After four hundred years it became a great nation, but they were strangers in that foreign land. God had called them out of Egypt through Moses and settled them in the land of Canaan under Joshua. The nation was a government under God for many years until they asked for a king. Though God gave them kings, He kept an eye on them and became their perpetual King. He took that office because no other king could save. He told them that He gave them a king in His anger and took him away in His wrath. Their request for a king was part of their rebellion and God was displeased with it. The story of the anointing of Saul as their king is well known. The Lord told them that they had destroyed themselves but their help was only from God. He declared that He will be their King, for there is none other who can save them in their cities. There is a great difference between the strength of man and that of God. God is all powerful and does all things after the counsel of His will.

When Jesus came, He preached the kingdom of God. He is King of kings and Lord of lords. Israel, as a type of that eternal kingdom, had to retain God as their King. However, the situation in the days of Hosea did not represent that expectation. The prophets were messengers of restoration and they were striving to fulfil this in their ministry.

THOUGHT: Rejoice! The LORD is king.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be Thy loyal subject.

MONDAY, MARCH 3

HOSEA 13

JAMES 1:19-23

"...let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath."

THE WRATH OF GOD BRINGS PAIN TO ISRAEL

There is a common expression that there is no gain without pain. While not true all the time, we know that God does use pain for our gain. God had to inflict pain on Israel to ensure that they obey Him. Yet, the iniquity of Ephraim remained.

The sorrows of Israel were compared to those of a woman in travail. Jesus also used this example in John 16:21. It means that there is hope for the woman while she undergoes that pain. In the end, a child is born into the world. Jesus said that she will forget the pain because of the joy of bringing forth life. God said He will rescue His children from the power of death if they repent. The Lord said that though Israel was fruitful among his brethren, he shall be destroyed by natural calamities. The prophecy concerning Samaria was gloomy and many prophets foretold it. The city was to be desolate and was to go through tribulation. Subsequent history confirmed all the words of the Lord for God made good His threats.

Hosea did not cease to speak to the wayward nation since God had called him into that mission. The circle of transgression continued and God was not done with Israel yet. His grace was manifest in His efforts to convict them and to sustain the work of His prophets. Do not reject God, come to Him in repentance.

THOUGHT: God can use pain for my gain.

PRAYER: Lord, take the world but give me Jesus.

TUESDAY, MARCH 4
HOSEA 14
ISAIAH 55:1-7

*“...and let him return unto the LORD,
and he will have mercy upon him;
and ... he will abundantly pardon.”*

MESSAGE OF HOPE FOR ISRAEL

In Hosea 14 is the last message of Hosea to Israel. In it he gave an optimistic note of the days to come. Israel had the opportunity to amend their ways and return to God. The Lord was also gracious enough to accept them upon their repentance. When that happens, the prophet will have fulfilled his duty with success. Those who gave heed lived to see good days.

The exhortation to repentance: Israel was urged to return to the Lord for they had fallen into iniquity. In the past messages, the prophet had enumerated all the sins of the nation and had told them God’s desire about the situation. It was their only means to salvation in the entanglement of sin. They were asked to pray that the Lord would take away their iniquity and receive them graciously. This would make them give praise to the Lord for what He had done for them. Their enemy Assyria (Asshur) could not save and they could not ride on horses. It is possible that there was some diplomatic contact with this nation like Hezekiah had with Babylon. This “friendly” nation was powerful by then and Israel may have trusted them for their security. However, unknown to them, this mighty nation had been appointed of the Lord as a rod to chastise Israel.

The main problem of the nation that was often repeated was their rejection of God and their idolatrous worship. These were dismissed as the work of their own hands that will not lead to mercy. The Lord however is the true God and is able to show His mercy and provide blessings to the needy.

THOUGHT: My God is a God of mercy.

PRAYER: Lord, revive me again.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 5

2 CORINTHIANS 8:21

PROVERBS 21:6

“Lie not one to another...”

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER,

Honesty in a dishonest world, honesty from a sinful heart, seems so dissonant. The opposite of *“providing for honest things”* (2 Cor 8:21) is so much easier and natural for us sinners. A little distortion of the truth here, an outright lie there, an half-truth once a while, enables us to look good (or others look bad!) in the sight of men, helps us get what we want, helps us get ourselves off the hook, hastens the closing of a business deal, or gives us a little more financial gain. Or maybe it is not for self but for others, maybe it is to help a friend in need.

Yet, whatever our motives (even altruistic ones), our dishonesty is still sin in Thy sight. And we need to confess and repent of our sin of dishonesty. For the same Word of God that gives us the message of salvation and assurance of eternal life also condemns dishonesty. *“Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour”* (Exod 20:16). *“Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds”* (Col 3:9). *“Thou shalt not have in thy bag divers weights.... For all that do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the LORD thy God”* (Deut 25:13, 16). *“A false balance is abomination to the LORD...”* (Prov 11:1). *“The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death”* (Prov 21:6).

“O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day” (Ps 119:97). May we not only study and defend Thy Word, but also love Thy Word and meditate on Thy words that condemn dishonesty. May Thy Spirit lead us to hate our dishonest words and see our dishonest ways the way Thou seeth them: all an abomination! May we never cover them up or excuse ourselves. Forgive us, O Father, for our many lies and dishonest dealings with men, even our own brethren. Cleanse us of our filthiness and grant us that desire to *“ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men”* (1 Thess 5:15). In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

THOUGHT: There is no such thing as a white lie. A lie is a lie.

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, not to excuse my sin of dishonesty.

A MANIFESTATION OF GOD’S GRACE

The prophet Hosea did not cease to denounce the sins of Israel. At the same time, he pointed out to them the way of reconciliation with God. He always reminded them of the greatness of God and what He was able to do for them. God did not condemn them at once, but as much as He was longsuffering, He gave them time to repent. However, they did not listen and did not return to the Lord. They knew that God was true and the words of the prophet were right, but they were blinded from acknowledging the truth. This rebellion characterized Israel from the days of Exodus and was a revelation of the depravity of the human heart.

The Lord promised to heal their backsliding and to love them freely. His anger will be turned away from them. There was no better way than this offer from their heavenly Father. He also promised prosperous blessing to the nation. He said, *“I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon”* (Hosea 14:5-6). God will provide nourishment to Israel so that their beauty will be demonstrated. The comparison with Lebanon could refer to that trademark of the land, the cedar tree. Lilies, olive trees and cedar are at their best when they put forth flowers and green leaves. They offer a pleasant beauty. This showed how the Lord desired to make this nation to shine. He added that those dwelling under Israel’s shadow shall return and be revived as corn.

“Israel seeks God’s face, and they shall not seek it in vain. His anger is turned from them. Whom God loves, he loves freely; not because they deserve it, but of his own good pleasure. God will be to them all they need. The graces of the Spirit are the hidden manna, hidden in the dew; the grace thus freely bestowed on them shall not be in vain.” (Matthew Henry)

THOUGHT: All who dwell under God’s shadow fare the better.

PRAYER: Lord, may I always acknowledge Thy grace in my life.

FRIDAY, MARCH 7

HOSEA 14

PROVERBS 1:1-7

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom...”

THE BLESSINGS THAT COME WITH REPENTANCE

If God was to demonstrate His justice, then He would have condemned Israel and removed them from the earth completely. However, this is not the only character of God. When there is hope, He offers time for consideration. This He did to Israel.

The shadow of the Lord is ever protective and satisfactory. The understanding of the value of a shadow comes with the imagination of a very hot sun in a desert place where there are no trees. When a shadow is found, it provides great relief and one does not wish to leave. God is that protective shadow when there is no other hope.

Repentance also frees the people from idolatry. God hears and observes them. The steps they take free them from the guilt of sin and make their relationship with God acceptable. Their understanding also becomes clear and they appreciate God and His commandments. The enmity that sin brings is removed, and fellowship with God becomes meaningful.

The application of wisdom is true faith: Wisdom leads to the understanding of these things. It is true that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. God is truth and is the source of wisdom. Prudence is knowing His Word. The ways of the Lord are right and just. Transgressors shall fall and get what they deserve.

This message is an expression of God’s desire for His people. It is a positive note that brings life. There is no hope in disobedience. To repent is always God’s call to sinners. Today, we too have fallen into the same trap as Israel and we too need to repent. *“...repent ye, and believe the gospel”* (Mark 1:15).

THOUGHT: The penitent shall return and dwell under His shadow.

PRAYER: Lord, save Thy people who come in repentance.

JOEL INTERPRETS JUDAH'S CALAMITY

Joel was a prophet in Judah as the context suggests. A combination of factors put him in the eighth century BC. Some similarities with Amos suggest that he prophesied about the same time. He may have prophesied from about 835 BC when Athaliah was removed and Joash ascended the throne. The boy king ruled under the regency of Jehoiadah the priest. Thus the prophet's reference to priests and not kings adds to the determining of his time. Joel prophesied when there was a great calamity in the nation. His book is authenticated in the book of Acts when Peter quoted from it in his sermon in the day of Pentecost. This is the first part of Joel's message in which he told of the past day of the locust and the past day of the drought.

Joel introduced himself as the son of Pethuel. His frequent reference to Zion and the house of the Lord suggests that he lived not far from Jerusalem. He may have been a priest. He was a clear and uncompromising preacher of repentance. In his opening words, he told the people to listen and asked if they had seen such a disaster. He prophesied of a great calamity in the nation. The combination of locusts and a drought caused great devastation in the land and the people were left to die. This calamity came from God. It was thus a lesson for many generations to come and the prophet told them to tell their children, and they in turn to tell their own children, and so on. They needed God in order to live. Besides the locusts, there were also cankerworms and caterpillars. These creatures are known to bring great destruction to the vegetation. They devour to the last blade.

One of the consequences that the destruction brought was that drunkards would miss their drink because the raw materials for making their wine had also been destroyed by the locusts, and their drink was cut from their mouth.

THOUGHT: Sin causes unimaginable devastation.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to follow Thy path of righteousness.

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER,

The world says "Do not do to others what you do not want others to do to you." This is good advice which if obeyed would have spared the world of many ills. And yet, Father, this is not Thy teaching. For Thou knoweth that it would not add any good to the world.

Thou expecteth much more from us. In Thy infinite knowledge and wisdom, and consistent with Thy loving nature, Thou wanteth us not just to refrain from doing bad. Thou wanteth us to actively show the love of our Saviour by doing good to others. Luke 6:31 teaches us to take the initiative to do the good that we would like others to do to us.

What are the good that we want others to do to us? We want others to love us, be kind to us, show their care and concern for us, understand us, be polite to us, help us, respect us, encourage us, give us of their time, pray for us, forgive us, etc.

O Father, as we look at our long list of "wants," remind us that we are to take the initiative to do all these to those around us, regardless of what they do to us. Help us to turn our list of "Want others to do to me" to a list of "Do to others."

The next time we are self-centred and do not want to care for others, or are vengeful and refuse to do good to others, prick our conscience, O Father, with Thy Word in Luke 6:31. Remind us that we are not unbelievers but children of the most high God and as such we are to behave accordingly. Luke 6:32-33 says: "*For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same.*" Let none of us be considered as no better than unbelievers. Let all of us "*...as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.*" May our deeds give glory to Thee, Father. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

THOUGHT: (Read James 4:17.)

PRAYER: Help me, O Lord, to be a doer of good deeds.

MONDAY, MARCH 10

JOEL 1

ACTS 7:11-17

“...there came a dearth over all the land...
and our fathers found no sustenance.”

JOEL DESCRIBES THE CALAMITY IN MENTAL PICTURES

The prophet Joel told the virgin to be girded with sackcloth and to lament for the husband of her youth. His mention of different classes of people showed that nobody was spared and all had to bear the consequences of the heavenly chastisement.

The meat offerings and drink offerings were no more in the house of the Lord. The main source of the country's economy was completely destroyed and life was no more normal for everyone in the land. The priests, the Lord's ministers, were also mourning for their ministry was not possible in such a situation. The fields were wasted and the whole land mourned because it could not produce anything. The essential ingredients in everyday people's diet were also no more. The labourers in the fields were ashamed because there was no harvest. All the trees were dried up and there was no joy for the sons of men. Generally, the land of Canaan was arid land but the rivers (eg: River Jordan) coming from the northern mountains watered the land.

It was possible for the vegetation to turn green again after the passing of the locusts, but that was not to be in Judah in the days of Joel because the destruction was followed by a drought. Nothing could live without water. The land was deprived of her favourite food crops. The prophet mentioned them in verse 12 saying, *“The vine is dried up, and the fig tree languisheth; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, even all the trees of the field, are withered: because joy is withered away from the sons of men.”*

The appetite was there, but there was nothing to enjoy and they were sad. In the days of Jacob, the Lord had caused a drought in the land for seven years. In this instance, He had a different purpose. God used a bad intention for a good purpose.

THOUGHT: God always has a purpose in sending afflictions.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to know Thy works.

TUESDAY, MARCH 11

JOEL 1

LUKE 11:1-13

“Give us this day our daily bread.”

THE PEOPLE TOLD TO MEASURE THEIR MISERY

Addressing the priests, the prophet Joel told them to lament because there were no sacrifices in the house of the Lord. He added, “*Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD*” (Joel 1:14).

Here, Joel proved himself to be of greater authority than the priests because his message came directly from the Lord. He was able to interpret correctly the calamity that the nation was going through. The priests who feared the Lord would do well to listen to him. Crying to the Lord was the best thing to do in such a situation. The priests were not ignorant of the reasons behind the calamities. Some had compromised with wicked kings to go against the Lord’s commandments.

“*The day of the LORD*” (Joel 1:15) was at hand and destruction from the Lord had come. This day (with the definite article “*the*”) usually refers to the very last day when Christ shall judge the world in righteousness. However, the day of judgment of Israel or at least the day when the Lord will punish the nation because of her sins is a type of that last day. Joel also repeated that food will be cut off from the land. Joy and gladness too will be removed from the house of God. The seeds and the corn will be destroyed and the barns burned down.

Domestic animals also will suffer for lack of pasture. In times of such calamities, the only hope was to cry to the Lord. Joel did so because the land was destroyed. The pain that even the wild animals experienced was a cry to the Lord to save them. Today, we need to heed this wise counsel and learn to cry to our Lord.

Judah’s punishment cannot be separated from their response to the Lord. Crying to the Lord must include repentance. This is also a picture of “*the day of the LORD*” when all will have a part.

THOUGHT: What is my response to the Lord’s message today?

PRAYER: Lord, may I obey Christ and be saved.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 12

JOEL 2:1-17

2 CHRONICLES 36:1-21

“...until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy.”

JUDAH AT THE BRINK OF WAR

There was an imminent invasion of Judah and the prophet Joel saw it coming. The enemy was ready to conquer the nation. The historical portions of Scripture complement the prophets in showing the fulfillment of their words. In the case of Judah, it was the Babylonian captivity under Nebuchadnezzar. Jerusalem and the temple were set on fire. The prophet Joel here told of the sequence of those events.

War alarm was sounded: Joel told of war alarm (“*the trumpet*”) and called on the people to fear “*the day of the LORD.*” It was war and the people trembled. The day is called “*the day of the LORD.*” This may refer to the immediate judgment that the Lord will bring against the land of Judah, and also that last day at the second coming of Christ. The prophet was given to see the future events in one view. The day of the Lord will be a day of darkness and gloominess. It will be a time of hopelessness. The picture depicted was that of a sad atmosphere. People will mourn, great and strong, and there was none like it. In the events that followed this prophecy there was the invasion of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. They destroyed the walls of the city and burned the Temple. The people were then taken captive. The struggle that ensued is best described by the words of the prophet here. These events must come to pass because it was God who allowed it as He revealed through His prophets.

When Judah returned from captivity, the Temple was rebuilt and the city walls were restored under Nehemiah. However, the nation was not re-established as it was before; they remained under the dominion of foreign powers for some centuries. The message of the alarm came to pass.

THOUGHT: God determines the destiny of nations.

PRAYER: Lord, save me from the pain of war.

THURSDAY, MARCH 13

DEUTERONOMY 4:30-31

NUMBERS 14:18-19

“...the LORD thy God
is a merciful God...”

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER,

The God of Moses and of Israel was a merciful and faithful God. How thankful we are that today Thou art the same God to us.

Thy great mercy assures us of Thy forgiveness (Num 14:18-19). Even as we seek to live a sanctified life here on earth, we are far from perfect and will never be completely sinless in our corrupt bodies. And yet we need not despair. We need only to come to Thee to confess and to repent of our sins, in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and Thou wilt be merciful to “*purge (our) conscience*” (Heb 9:14), to wash us “*white as snow*” (Isa 1:18), to forgive us. Not because we deserve it, and God forbid that we should demand it as our right, but because Thou art merciful to forgive.

Thy faithfulness assures us that Thou wilt remember us. Thou wilt not forsake us or destroy us. And Thou wilt not forget to bring to pass all Thy promises. “*When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee*” (Isa 43:2). What blessed assurance, what timely comfort we can have, because Thou art our faithful Father.

How we need to always turn to Thee and obey Thee (Deut 4:30) that we may taste, experience and enjoy Thy mercy and faithfulness to us. What happens when we fail to come to Thee or when we disobey Thee? We live with a guilty conscience because it has not been brought to Thee to be purged by the blood of Jesus. Our sins lead us to cover them up and we sin further and further. We live by our own strength which brings neither assurance nor comfort. Turmoil resides in our hearts and we have much to fear because of the many trials, problems and injustice that this life brings. O Heavenly Father, how torturous a life without Thee! Turn Thy children to Thee and help us to obey Thee, O Father! In Jesus' Name. Amen.

THOUGHT: Why do I find it so difficult to obey God?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, O Lord, for Thy mercy on me.

FRIDAY, MARCH 14

JOEL 2:1-17

2 SAMUEL 21:1-7

“...and David enquired of the LORD.

And the LORD answered ...”

JUDAH IN PERPETUAL WAR

When Jesus was born, the Roman Empire was the colonial power over the Jewish state. This dominion put the Jews constantly in a state of war as they sought to shake off the hand of their foreign masters.

Horses and horsemen and noise of chariots describe the military equipment of that time. There had to be such power to keep the nation under control. The descriptions of the prophet showed that much force was used to subdue Judah and to keep them under the control of the invaders. He said, *“Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains shall they leap, like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble, as a strong people set in battle array”* (Joel 2:5).

There are instances in the history of Israel that the Lord had acted against their enemies and gave them victory. The Lord did this not because Israel was superior in their strength, but because the Lord intended to protect them. Similarly, when the Lord wanted to punish them for their transgressions, He let their enemies triumph over them. Prophets were always sent to sound the alarm of the impending calamities. These threats were meant to awaken the nation to return to God and to seek forgiveness for their sins as they repent.

God had chosen Israel and settled them in the land of Canaan when He brought them out of Egypt. He gave them superior laws under Moses and required of them obedience. Everything that He told them was His perfect will. Every transgression comes with retribution. Every prophet almost had the same message for Israel that they must return to the Lord. The Lord did not leave Himself without a witness. In every generation, God raised a prophet to guide His people. It was time for Joel to bear that witness.

THOUGHT: God always has His witnesses.

PRAYER: Lord, let me heed Thy messengers.

SATURDAY, MARCH 15

JOEL 2:1-17

2 PETER 3:10

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

THE CONSEQUENCE OF PAIN, DEATH AND DESPAIR

The prophet tells of much pain that shall come upon the people and the expression in their faces will be like blackness. He described the performance of military formations showing their readiness to fight in war. These descriptions paint a picture of great events that always accompany wars. Judah was in for a violent end.

The soldiers were orderly so that they will not injure one another with their weapons. Such a demonstration of might will put the people in great panic as they sought to escape. The siege of Jerusalem took several years and the people were in great fear. The tragedy that befell their last king was very inhuman and their fear was justified. The prophet thus described their panic, *“They shall run to and fro in the city; they shall run upon the wall, they shall climb up upon the houses; they shall enter in at the windows like a thief”* (Joel 2:9). In any war situation, such a reaction is manifested as all seek to hold on to their dear lives.

The prophet saw beyond the immediate events to the final end. He told of the quaking of the earth and trembling of heaven. Sun and moon shall be darkened and the stars shall cease shining. This is an event that is yet in future even now. However, the Lord revealed this as part of His eternal plan. The prophetic writings of the New Testament confirmed that what Joel was saying is a future event. In the chronology of the last things, these events will take place before the millennial reign of Christ. He will then usher in a glorious millennium for those who remain faithful to Him to the end. This is called the day of the Lord and He will command His army. He is said to have a very great camp. The Lord is strong and executes His Word. The prophet concluded with the exclamation: *“...the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?”*

THOUGHT: Every reference to the day of the Lord comes with both fear and joyful expectation.

PRAYER: Lord, may I expect Thy day with joyful expectation.

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER,

We thank Thee for giving us Matthew 6:33 which many of us can recite word perfect from memory. But Thou knoweth too well, how we have failed to actually seek Thee first in our lives. The way we use our time shows that we are far from putting Thee first. Forgive us, Father, for our lip-service. Convict us of our waywardness for we do our Quiet Time ONLY WHEN we have spare time and spare energy; we come for church prayer meeting or fellowship meeting or Bible study ONLY WHEN we have nothing else to attend to; we come for worship ONLY WHEN we do not have any other appointment; and we serve Thee ONLY WHEN it does not take up too much of our time.

Just like Aaron and the children of Israel in the Sinai wilderness, we too are guilty of making idols and bowing to them. We have made idols of our selves: idols of I, me and my family; and we give of our time, even our lives, to these idols, instead of to our Almighty God. O, how idolatrous a people we are! Cleanse us and forgive us, Father.

"Flee from idolatry" (1 Cor 10:14) is what we must do. Flee from seeking our own kingdom which are but at best the soon-to-be-burnt-up kingdom of puny man. Help us to truly seek Thee first, and ascribe to Thee top priority in our lives by setting aside time for all our appointments with the Lord of lords and King of kings: our daily Quiet Time, our Bible study time, weekly church prayer meeting, weekly fellowship meetings, Lord's Day worship, our times of service, etc. May our planners or digital diaries be marked by these activities first, and all else may be rendered second place. This may seem so difficult to do and maybe to some of us it may even seem impossible. But, Father, Thou hast assured us in Philippians 4:13: *"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."* O, gracious Father, grant us that serious resolve to *"seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness."* In Jesus' Name. Amen.

THOUGHT: What is it that I seek most in my life?

PRAYER: Forgive me, Lord, for my pursuits of worldly things.

MONDAY, MARCH 17

JOEL 2:1-17

LUKE 13:1-5

“...except ye repent, ye shall all
likewise perish.”

THE LORD CALLS HIS PEOPLE TO REPENT

Turning to the Lord is the only hope of a besieged people. The desire of the prophets when they proclaimed the Lord’s message is that the people will listen and repent.

Fasting, weeping and mourning are a demonstration of humility and surrender to the will of the Lord. Thus, the Lord commanded the people, “*And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil*” (Joel 2:13). The outward show is of the least importance. God wants the hearts of the people. Joel told them about the attributes of God to assure them that He will not fail to answer them and He will do good to them. He told them of the prospect that God did not want to execute what He had determined concerning the nation and that He wanted to leave a blessing for them.

God does not change His mind as a result of man’s action. That God would “*repent*” means that God’s punishment upon the people were conditioned upon their repentance. Hence, if they repented, God would hold back judgment. God will grant blessing to the humble and they will offer sacrifices and offerings. Joel told them to blow the trumpet in Zion and to sanctify a fast and solemn assembly. This was a serious worship and was what God desired from His people. All classes of people, from the oldest to the youngest, were called upon to come and humble themselves before the Lord. Negligence of worship is nothing but courting disaster. Those who draw closer to the Lord shall always be happy.

God’s people ought to search their hearts whenever a calamity befalls them. God’s Word is full of instructions on obeying the Lord. It also shows the consequences of rebellion. Repentance is God’s way to pardon.

THOUGHT: Repent, and the way to heavenly glory is ready for me.

PRAYER: Lord, may I surrender all to Thee.

TUESDAY, MARCH 18

JOEL 2:18-32

MATTHEW 6:25-34

“...your heavenly Father feedeth them.
Are ye not much better than they?”

THE BLESSINGS THAT COME WITH REPENTANCE

The first part of Joel chapter two saw Judah at the brink of war and the prophet's call to repentance. This was the only step to overcoming punishment due for sin. When they returned to the Lord, He will defend them. The Lord also will restore to them that which was destroyed and the people will have a heavenly experience. The end will come with great deliverance for them. The Lord blesses a repentant people. These blessings come in four stages as shown by the prophet.

The Lord will defend His people: The Lord will be jealous for the land and will pity His people. One of the calamities that befell the people was hunger, but provision of sufficient food will come as part of the blessings of repentance. The nation will be no more a reproach as the Lord will supply corn wine and oil. The Lord also promised that He will remove the northern army so that they will no more be a threat to Judah. They will be driven to a barren and desolate land. They will be far removed from Judah and the Lord will ensure that they stay there. The Lord told them not to fear for He will do great things. This was an assurance the nation needed. The punishment was too hard and the mention of it was too frightening.

When calamity befalls man, even the beasts within their habitations suffer, both domestic and wild animals. As much as these are also God's creations, He also cares for them. Even though they cannot hear or understand, there is a promise for them in the words of the prophet. He said, “*Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field: for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig tree and the vine do yield their strength*” (Joel 2:22). The Lord Jesus Christ confirmed this fact when He said that the birds of the air do not sow or reap, but the heavenly Father feeds them. He shows here that He does not forget them. The plants that form part of their diet will be available in abundance.

THOUGHT: God sustains all His creations.

PRAYER: Praise God from whom all blessings flow.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 19

ISAIAH 66:1-2

PSALM 8:3-9

“...to this man will I look, even to him
that is poor and of a contrite spirit...”

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER,

The immense heaven truly is Thy throne, and the whole earth Thy footstool. The grandeur of Thy house must be far above what we can imagine. Only when a glorious body we receive one day soon, will we be able to fully comprehend. But now, O gracious Father, through Thy revealed Word, open our eyes to catch a glimpse of Thy greatness, Thy power and Thy might! What house can we build for Thee? What can we do for Thee that Thou cannot do Thyself? Indeed, nothing. Yet, “*to this man*” Thou decide to “*look*,” granting him Thy attention. What condescending mercy! How thankful must “*this man*” be that out of the billions who inhabit Thy footstool, Thou chose to take note of him.

Who is “*this man*”? Can we be him? Can I be him? “*This man*” is he that is “*poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at (Thy) word.*” O Father, make us “*poor.*” In humility, in lowliness, recognizing our unending need of Thee, admitting that without Thee we can do nothing, may we come to Thee thus. Grant us a “*contrite spirit,*” to acknowledge and to grieve for our sins, for we have sinned, not just against man, but against the great God of the heavens and the earth. With remorseful hearts confessing our transgression of Thy Word as well as our wilfulness in not doing that which Thou want us to do, may we come to Thee thus. Make us to tremble at Thy Word. The Word of the Heavenly Ruler is not to be taken lightly nor be brushed aside according to our whim and fancy. May we give full attention to Thy Word and hasten with great earnestness, desire and care to do all that is written therein. Let us never read, no, not even study, Thy Word and then go right back to living a self-centred, self-willed life.

O great God whose throne is the heaven and whose footstool is the earth, may Thou be so merciful as to look “*to this man,*” Thy children, here who are “*poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at (Thy) word.*” In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

THOUGHT: Am I too insignificant for God to notice me?

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for Thy love and care for me.

THURSDAY, MARCH 20

JOEL 2:18-32

PSALM 23:3

“He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.”

THE LORD WILL RESTORE THAT WHICH WAS DESTROYED

There is gladness for the Lord will supply sufficient rain so that the land can be productive. God gave His promise in these words, *“Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month”* (Joel 2:23). Wheat, wine and oil will once again flow from the land, this was unthinkable during the drought. This will also compensate for the time that was lost to locusts and other destructive worms. A good yield comes.

While this promise was given to Judah in a particular context, it is also a principle of God’s dealings with His people in every generation and in every place. Every Christian has a past history that may be unpleasant. But when he repents, the Lord saves to the uttermost. He compensates the days that are lost. This promise of God is always there for every child of God to stand on.

The people will eat and be satisfied and praise the name of the Lord and they shall not be ashamed. The Lord will deal wondrously with them. This was a positive message to them at that time and it could come to Judah because the nation was much better spiritually than northern Israel. In the last days, before the captivity, there were two illustrious kings whose works pleased the Lord. Hezekiah and Josiah had a testimony as having followed the Lord. The priests also were obedient to the Law and the Lord used Jehoiadah to restore the house of David after Athaliah tried to destroy it. The captivity of Judah also was not going to last forever. The Lord promised to free them after seventy years.

THOUGHT: God is faithful always to His promises.

PRAYER: Lord, restore me to Thy way.

FRIDAY, MARCH 21

JOEL 2:18-32

ACTS 2:14-21

“...this is that which was spoken
by the prophet Joel.”

THE PEOPLE’S HEAVENLY EXPERIENCE

The prophet saw far and near. Earlier he had spoken of the day of the Lord, i.e. the events to the very end of the world.

In the current prophecy, he saw the not-so-far future and uttered these famed words from the mouth of the Lord: *“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit”* (Joel 2:28-29). This was a prominent prophecy which Peter testified of its fulfilment in the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2.

In the Acts record, it was ten days after Jesus had gone to heaven and the disciples were in a room. Suddenly, there was a sound as that of a mighty wind, and tongues as of fire were seen above the heads of the disciples. Then they began to speak in different foreign languages. And those who knew those foreign languages were able to understand. More than a dozen foreign languages were listed as those that were spoken. Some of the people, thinking that the disciples were drunk, began to mock them. It was then that Peter stood up and explained to them about that manifestation. He quoted Joel 2:28-29 and explained that God was fulfilling that prophecy. A few centuries had passed since Joel uttered that prophecy of God, and then the words of God came true.

The book of Joel is a short book but it provides a panorama of God’s prophecy from his generation all the way to the second coming of Christ. The Word of God is always profitable for doctrine. It is perfect and preserved of God in written form through all generations.

That Pentecost experience in Acts 2 was an outpouring of the Holy Spirit and great things were manifested in the disciples’ lives. Because of this event the gospel was spread to all the ends of the earth.

THOUGHT: Pentecost was a heavenly experience.

PRAYER: Lord, pour Thy Spirit on this generation.

SATURDAY, MARCH 22

DANIEL 1:1-2

DANIEL 4:35

“...the Lord gave Jehoiakim
king of Judah into his hand...”

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER,

Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, and he was successful. Why? Because Thou art the Great Sovereign God of heaven and earth and Thou “gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand.” What a wonderful lesson for us! Unless Thou allow it or enable it, even the great, wicked, king Nebuchadnezzar cannot have victory (even temporarily) over Judah. Thy Sovereign Hand is seen not only in the history of Israel, but also in all histories. Not only in the lives of nations, but also in the lives of individuals, especially Thy children’s.

Is there a death in our family? “...the Lord gave...” A birth? “...the Lord gave...” Are there pain and sorrows? Are there rejoicings? Unimaginable injustice experienced or insurmountable hurdles in our lives? May we see beyond all these and realize that Thy unseen Sovereign and loving Hand is at work.

King David said, “*For I have heard the slander of many: fear was on every side: while they took counsel together against me, they devised to take away my life. But I trusted in thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my God*” (Ps 31:13-14). O, how we need to be able to say like David, “*In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me*” (Ps 56:11). “*I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved*” (Ps 16:8).

Towards the end of his life, even Nebuchadnezzar testified in Daniel 4:35 of Thy Sovereignty.

Our Great, Sovereign God, teach us not to question Thee, but in all that Thou sendest to our lives (whether it be joy or tears, peace or war), may we continually acknowledge that “*the Lord gave*” and without end declare by Thy grace that “*I trusted in thee...Thou art my God.*” Help Thy children, heavenly Father, who bow and submit to Thy sovereign will. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

THOUGHT: Who is the real Controller of my life?

PRAYER: Forgive me, Lord, for not looking to Thee.

LORD'S DAY, MARCH 23

JOEL 2:18-32

ACTS 17:24-32

“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.”

THE END WILL COME WITH GREAT DELIVERANCE

There will be wonders in heaven and earth. Blood, fire and smoke will be part of God's wonders. This is a means by which God manifests Himself. The sun and the moon will cease shining and turn into blood. This is a back-and-forth foresight of the prophet focusing on that last day.

The Apostles in their preaching did not forget also to mention this day. When Paul spoke to the unbelievers at Mars' Hill in Athens, he mentioned that God had appointed a day when He will judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31). The signs that the prophet Joel saw will accompany the events of that day. Whosoever then shall call upon the Name of the Lord will be saved. Zion and Jerusalem shall be a deliverance of the remnant that the Lord shall call. This holy city is a picture of the eternal heavenly city. The Lord Jesus will come to that city again even as He had ascended thence to heaven.

When a threat of punishment is looming, the only way is to turn to the Lord and confess and repent of all our sins. The day of the Lord will come with judgment and righteousness. Let us repent and we will see the blessings of salvation.

THOUGHT: God has appointed a day in which He will judge the world.

PRAYER: Lord, may that day find me ready.

MONDAY, MARCH 24

JOEL 3

GENESIS 12:1-5

*“...I will make of thee a great nation,
and I will bless thee ...”*

THE JUDGMENT OF NATIONS AND RESTORATION OF JUDAH (1)

The Lord had called Judah to repent and had promised blessings of restoration. God will then deal with the nations that have enslaved them and bring them back to their land. War was also part of their effort for restoration in that they were told to convert farm implements into weapons of war. The final warfare will be fought in the valley of Jehoshaphat. The Lord will be with them and Judah will dwell in Jerusalem forever.

All nations will be brought to the valley of Jehoshaphat. The Lord promised that He will bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem. This promise was not made to Samaria, the seat of the northern kingdom. Their captivity came earlier and they never returned. There were sufficient reasons that made the return of Judah necessary. The Lord will plead for His heritage. This came from the promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In the covenant that the Lord made with Abraham, He had promised him that all nations of the earth will be blessed through him. This was a promise of the Redeemer who will come and save the world.

When Jacob blessed his twelve sons, he indicated that the ruler of his brethren will come from the house of Judah. David and Jesus fulfilled the promise and will sit on the throne of Israel forever.

THOUGHT: Jesus is the reason for the return of Judah.

PRAYER: Lord, I thank Thee for Thy promises.

TUESDAY, MARCH 25

1 JOHN 1:7

1 JOHN 1:8-10

“...we walk in the light...”

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER,

As we recall that happy day when the Holy Spirit worked in our heart and by Thy grace we confessed our sins and received Thy Son Jesus to be our Redeemer, we know that not a day goes by after that without us still sinning in one way or other. How we need to thank Thee, Heavenly Father, that the blood of Jesus can effectively and continually cleanse us of our sins (1 John 1:7).

Open our eyes to our every daily waywardness and faithlessness. How we may have been proud, wilful, disobedient. How we may have lived for self instead of for Thee. Daily must we come to Thy cleansing fountain to have the filth of our life washed away by the blood of our sacrificial Saviour.

Although we are still sinners, help us not to live in sin or to excuse the sins in our life. May we be entirely convinced that no sin will escape Thy eye and that truly our sin will find us out (Num 32:23). Help us, O Father, to be mindful of Thy instructions: “...*they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them...*” (2 Cor 5:15) and “*that (we) henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of (our) mind*” (Eph 4:17).

Like the psalmist in Psalm 63:1, may we daily say to Thee: “*O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee...*” And in coming to Thee in the freshness of the day, in confession and repentance of our sins, thanking Thee for Thy faithfulness and ability to forgive, grant us also that daily portion of Thy faith, strength and wisdom which we will need for the new day ahead. May our walk on this earth day by day be a walk that honours and glorifies Thee.

We thank Thee, Father, for that wonderful assurance that “*the blood of Jesus Christ (Thy) Son cleanseth us from all sin*” (1 John 1:7). In Jesus’ Name we pray. Amen.

THOUGHT: Am I walking in the light?

PRAYER: Help me to walk in Thy Light, O Lord.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 26

JOEL 3

ISAIAH 2:1-4

*“And he shall judge among the nations,
and shall rebuke many people ...”*

THE JUDGMENT OF NATIONS AND RESTORATION OF JUDAH (2)

While in captivity, the nations that took them cast lots and made them slaves with great humiliation. The cities of Tyre, Sidon and the coasts of Palestine were mentioned as those seeking vengeance but God said He will avenge them first.

They had also taken the silver and gold from the house of the Lord. These were vessels for the Lord’s service. They sold the children of Judah to the Grecians. This was mentioned in a time when the Greek empire was not known, but it eventually became a world super power as told in the prophecies of Daniel. Joel also saw this coming in the distance.

He also told of the restoration and dominion over their opponents. He said, *“Behold, I will raise them out of the place whither ye have sold them, and will return your recompence upon your own head: And I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the children of Judah, ... for the LORD hath spoken it”* (Joel 3:7-8). The signature of the Lord on this pronouncement is that it will definitely be fulfilled.

War will be part of the efforts of restoration. There was a call to prepare for war. In that preparation, they were told to beat their plowshares into swords and their pruning hooks into spears. This is a contrast to the peace that was told by Isaiah and Micah. Their call was to change the weapons of war into farm implements (Isa 2:4; Mic 4:3).

THOUGHT: *“To every thing there is a season...”* (Eccles 3:1)

PRAYER: Lord, may I always seek Thy approval in all my actions.

THURSDAY, MARCH 27

JOEL 3

2 CHRONICLES 20:15-24

*“...stand ye still, and see the salvation of
the LORD with you, O Judah...”*

THE JUDGMENT OF NATIONS AND RESTORATION OF JUDAH (3)

This will be the time when the Lord will reign over them and they will have that peace. However, the present call was to take up weapons of war and to fight for their freedom. Such is not a happy occasion for there will be casualties even when there is victory in the long run. That preparation was accompanied by a call to God for help. God promised that He will judge all the heathen in the Valley of Jehoshaphat. This was an assurance of victory for Judah.

The battle will be reminiscent of the victory of Jehoshaphat when three kings came against him. It was through the proclamation of a fast and supplication to the Lord that he defeated the enemies without shooting an arrow. As much as this battle will be fought in the same place, the Lord was telling them to remember how He saved them.

The directions that the Lord gave them were part of His providential care for the nation of Israel. It was God’s will that Judah should be restored to their land, His instructions to them were a way of fulfilling His purpose. War has casualties, and each side will suffer. Strategies are made to minimize the loss of life, but one side will lose. This was the worry of Judah when they were asked to prepare for war. However, when God was on their side, they did not need to worry. The Lord said He will judge the heathen.

THOUGHT: Trusting God is victory.

PRAYER: Lord, give me a sure victory.

FRIDAY, MARCH 28

PHILIPPIANS 1:21

MATTHEW 6:9-13

*“For to me to live is Christ,
and to die is gain.”*

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER,

We thank Thee for giving us that most precious hope and firmest of assurances that *“to die is gain.”* While we witnessed the burial of Thy servant, the Rev Timothy Tow, on 23 April 2009, truly Thy Word came alive to comfort our hearts. While dust returns to dust, the soul has already soared to that place of greatest gain, where Thou *“shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain”* (Rev 21:4); that place where the gates are of pearl and the street of pure gold; that ultimate place which is the Home that Thou hast prepared for Thy children. Help us all, who call Thee Father, to see that our death is but an entrance into our most blessed Home where Thou, our Heavenly Father, art.

We thank Thee for giving us that most needful instruction and best of advice that *“to live is Christ.”* While we reflect on the life of the Rev Timothy Tow, we see not a sinless or perfect man (for none is) but a man who exemplified what living for his Saviour and Lord meant and we thank Thee for blessing us with Rev Tow not only to touch our lives but also as a model for us. May we not live for self but turn, Father, our hearts away from our earthly dreams and goals of selfish attainment, from looking for the praises and accolades of man, from all the desires of our proud, sinful heart.

As Thy servant has lived and served his Master till Thou called him home, may it be the desire of every child of Thine to live for Thee and to serve Thee, striving to obey Thy every word so long as Thou lendest breath. *“The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away”* (Ps 90:10). May the limited time that Thou giveth us on earth be lived with Thy Word firmly etched in our heart, soul and mind: *“to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”* In Jesus' Name. Amen.

THOUGHT: What am I living for on this earth?

PRAYER: Make my life count for Thee, Father.

THE JUDGMENT OF NATIONS AND RESTORATION OF JUDAH (4)

The prophet spoke of the victory using a figure of speech: *“Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great”* (Joel 3:13). Like Egypt in the time of Exodus, the enemies of Israel also had to be punished for their wickedness and at the same time, Judah has the opportunity to return to their land.

Judah had to return chiefly because the Messiah had to come from that nation. God had to fulfil His promise to Abraham and the patriarchs in this regard. Jehoshaphat was one of the good kings that had done the will of the Lord. Thus Judah was told to remember how He had given that king victory. When they followed that pattern of the good king, they will be safe in their land.

The fate of the enemies will be to the contrary. *“Their gathering against God shall be a token of His coming to judge them. They come to fulfill their own ends; but His shall be fulfilled on them. They are left to bring about their own doom; and being abandoned by Him, rush on the more blindly because it is at hand. When their last sin is committed, their last defiance of God spoken or acted against Him, it is come.”* (Albert Barnes)

The day of the Lord will come. This expression primarily refers to the final day when Christ shall come to judge the world at the end of the age. Joel also saw that end in his prophecy that is yet to be fulfilled. However, in the present context it also refers to the day when the Lord will avenge the enemies of Judah.

THOUGHT: The Lord decides the outcome of the battle.

PRAYER: Lord, grant me confidence in fighting for Thee.

THE END IS SURE

The sun, the moon and the stars will cease shining. This does not refer to a time in human history but to the future, that last day when Christ shall have come and judge the world. This event of the destruction of the universe is also foretold in the New Testament prophecies. The Lord also revealed that end to Joel. He said that the Lord shall roar in Zion and the earth shall shake. The Lord will be the only hope for all nations that have received the promises of Christ. That is the day of the Lord.

Israel shall know the Lord and no “*strangers*” (Joel 3:17) shall set foot on Jerusalem. These refer to the unbelievers or enemies of Israel. The Lord gave this assurance in these words, “*So shall ye know that I am the LORD your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more*” (Joel 3:17). The potential enemies were to be punished for their violence against Judah. These included Egypt and Edom. They were the immediate neighbours who had shed innocent blood. Judah was promised that they will dwell in Jerusalem forever. There was also a promised blessing of milk, wine and water. This was a promise that they will not lack the basic necessities of life. Lastly the Lord promised that He will cleanse their blood that He had not cleansed because the Lord Himself dwells in Zion.

The prophet Joel, speaking in the Old Testament context, focused on Judah and the blessing that will follow. The coming of the Messiah changes all situations and the disciples are included in the household of the Lord. The promises to Israel will thus include all who follow Christ. The New Jerusalem will be heaven for all. This, however, was not so clear to the prophet Joel then.

THOUGHT: Obey Christ and I will have an eternal heritage.

PRAYER: Lord, let me not miss out in the New Jerusalem.

MONDAY, MARCH 31

PSALM 47:2

1 CHRONICLES 16:29

“...the battle is not yours,
but God’s.”

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER,

How we give praises to Thee and magnify Thy Name, the “*great King over all the earth*”! All nations (first-world to third-world), peoples (of whatever colour or faith), and events (of global influence or otherwise, of years gone by, today or in the days ahead) are all under Thy great rule. Nothing passes and nothing will pass without Thou knowing and without Thee granting permission. None on earth or in heaven can claim this but the great King over all the earth!

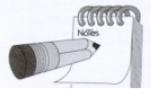
O great King, we bow down to Thee, submitting ourselves to Thy rule over us. And look up we must to Thee and Thy revealed Word for guidance and wisdom as to how we are to order our lives on earth, in anticipation with unabated hope of that prophesied day of Thy coming to earth to take us home to Beulah Land.

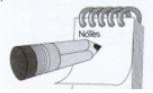
Is there any who refuses to bend his knee to the great King? Let him quickly confess and repent, for “*it is hard ...to kick against the pricks*” (Acts 9:5) and there is no way of escaping the great King of all the earth. May 1 Chronicles 16:29 be our wholehearted response to the great King: “*Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.*” Is there any who is downcast, disheartened, dismayed, downtrodden? Let him quickly turn his eyes upon the majestic, great King and rest in His grandeur and trust in His power for He comforts: “*Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God’s*” (2 Chron 20:15). Is there any who is fearful and anxious of the unknown? Let him realize that his great King has promised: “*Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand*” (Isa 14:24). How unnecessary for us to be wrecked with fear and anxiety.

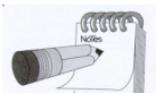
O, Heavenly Father, how we give praises to Thee and magnify Thy Name, the “*great King over all the earth*”! In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

THOUGHT: Is the “*great King over all the earth*” my God?

PRAYER: O Lord, Thou art the “*great King over all the earth.*”







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