

sea." They will be blessed; they will dwell with their God forever.

This was the prophet's hope; this was Israel's hope. Their hope rested firmly on God's covenant promises made to "our fathers" (Deut 29:12-14).

Our hope rests on New Covenant promises, confirmed to us by our Lord Jesus Christ our Mediator (Luke 22:19-22; 1 Tim 2:5).

"The ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the (New) Covenant of which He is Mediator is superior to the Old (Covenant), and it is founded on better promises" (Heb 8:6).

TALK ABOUT 1. Paul said only a 'remnant' of Israel would be saved ___ True ___ False (Rom 9:27)? 2. God called His people "the remnant of His" (Micah 7:18)? 3. Daniel knew that multitudes would rise tolife to meet their Lord in the air (Dan 12:2). 4. What does your hope of eternal life rest on? 5. Who is Mediator of the New covenant (1 Tim 2:5)?

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Bible studies

Minor Prophets

JOEL

AMOS

OBADIAH

JONAH

NAHUM

MICAH

Written in Easy English

by

Fred Morris

To the Reader: Any study of the Minor Prophets is very worthwhile. This study is brief, but meant to give the reader a quick overview of the prophet's message and, where possible, the historical setting in which it was given. Scripture verses are quoted from the New International version of the Bible. Keep your Bible open beside you as you study.

JOEL, AMOS, OBADIAH – THREE OF A KIND!

Introduction: We know very little about Joel, son of Pethuel or Amos, farmer-shepherd from Tekoa, or of Obadiah, whose name means 'servant of the Lord.' We do know that they were prophets of God. He put His Spirit on them and they spoke His word to the people of their day. The Bible record of their lives and work is small so they are known as "Minor Prophets."

Joel is not known outside the Book which contains his messages to Judah, the southern kingdom. Some date his ministry in the eighth century BC, during the reign of Joash (835 BC – 796 BC) and Jeroboam II of Israel.

Israel's ancient past was little different to its present situation. In the eighth century BC Judah and Israel were surrounded by enemies, many more powerful than itself – Egypt, Edom and Philistia are named - and Assyria.

Edomites had descended from Esau. They were 'brothers' to God's people. Judah's western border touched Edom. War between the two nations continued until David's reign. King David conquered Edom and set up a military outpost there (2 Sam 8:13-14).

Tyre and Sidon, cities on the coast of Phoenicia, were mostly friendly toward God's people and more interested in trade than in war.

After King Solomon died, Israel split into Judah in the south with Jerusalem as its capital city and Israel in the north with Samaria as its capital.

At that time in Judah's history many prophets rose up to rebuke God's people for their sins and to warn them of coming judgment, "the day of the Lord." Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos and Zephaniah lived at that time and shared the same message (Isa 2:10-21; Jer 4:6; Amos 5:18-20; Zeph 1:7-18).

TALK ABOUT 1. What do we know about the prophet Joel? 2. God's people were divided into J.....in the south and I..... in the north? 3. What other great prophet spoke God's words to Judah? 4. What did Joel say God would do (Joel 2:28)? 5. When did this happen (Acts 2:1-4, 16-17)?

JOEL AND THE LOCUSTS

(Read: Joel 1:1-12)

Joel begins with an account of a terrible plague of locusts. They swarmed over the land and ate everything. They were like enemy soldiers.

Even their enemies would see their shame and be caused to ask, "Where is the Lord your God?"

For many years the land lay desolate and the cities in ruin. Then God restored a remnant of people to it and they built the walls again (Neh 12:27-47).

This happened when the Jews returned from Babylon. Other exiles came from far away places where they had been prisoners of Assyria and Egypt (7:12).

MICAH'S PRAYER AND PRAISE

Micah prayed, "Shepherd Your people with your staff, the flock of Your inheritance...Who is a God like You, who pardons sin..." (Mic 7:14,18).

They were now a desolate and sad people in the lands where God had scattered them. The prophet prays that they will be brought back to Bashan and Gilead to find pasture (blessing) there (7:14).

But God promised to bring a remnant back. "I will show them my wonders," He said, "As in the days when you came out of Egypt." Nations will be amazed and "lay their hands on their mouths" because of the things they have said about God's people.

"They will turn in fear to the Lord and they will be afraid of you" (Mic 7:16-17). They had stood against God and His people, but God will be proved just and His enemies will be made to "lick the dust like a snake" (Mic 7:17).

TALK ABOUT 1. Can we change the course of history? How? 2. What did Micah decide to do (Mic 7:7)? 3. Who would God raise up to be the Shepherd of His flock (Mic 7:14; John 10:11)?

WHO IS LIKE YOU, O GOD?

God will shepherd the flock and forgive their sins. God will do this by His Spirit. Micah exclaimed "Who is a God like You, who pardons and forgives the transgression of the remnant of His inheritance" (Micah 7:18). Micah saw only the few who were faithful in Israel at that time. The Scriptures reveal that multitudes have come into the Christian church through the ages and greater numbers have not (Dan 12:2).

Jesus prayed to the Father for us, "Not for them (the disciples and His own people) alone, I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You" (John 17:20-21).

God claimed all the people of Israel as His inheritance (Deut 4:20), but most had not obeyed Him. They had not repented of their sins. God forgave "the remnant" who sought His forgiveness. Those who seek His pardon, will surely find it (Jer 29:13). Their sins will be "hurtled into the depths of the

“You will eat but not be satisfied...”basket
“You will store up but save nothing...”
“You will plant but not harvest...”
“You will crush grapes but not drink the wine...”

All these judgments would come upon them because of their sins. They worshipped idols and turned their back on God’s law. “The statutes of Omri” took the place of the commands of God. “The wicked practices of Ahab’s house took the place of worship in God’s house. They had followed the “traditions of the fathers” and made God’s word to have no effect.

Jesus told the Pharisees, “You nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition” (Matt 15:3). The Israelites would lose all they had enjoyed. The enemy would take their lands and scatter the people. The nations would not want them. They would “bear the scorn of being exiles (Mic 6:16).

A TIME OF TROUBLE (Micah 7:1-13)

Many wicked kings ruled in Israel and Judah – Ahab, Ahaz, Omri and Manasseh were some of the most wicked. It seemed that “the godly had been swept from the land” and only blood-thirsty and wicked men remained (7:2-4).

No man trusted his neighbour or “put his confidence in a friend.” Husbands did not trust their wives and wives did not trust their husbands. Sons and daughters did not honour their parents. God had commanded that children honour their parents. Micah even included daughters-in-law and sons-in-law as “enemies in their own households” (Micah 7:6).

TALK ABOUT 1. Where does true wisdom come from (Micah 6:9)? 2. Did Israel’s kings honour God? 3. When wicked kings ruled, what happened to the people? 4. How could a son or daughter-in-law become an ‘enemy’?

THE PROPHET’S WATCH

Micah felt helpless to change the course of events. He said, prophet “But as for me I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Saviour; my God will hear me.”

When we see the state of our country, we feel sad. But look up, the heavens are glowing with the presence and promises of Almighty God.

Micah took the place of a watchman and waited on God in prayer. God answered with a vision of His glory and power.

“Though I sit in darkness,” the prophet said, “the Lord will be my light” (Mic 7:8). Some from among the people joined Micah. They knew their sins had brought God’s righteous wrath on them.

In the midst of this sad destruction, Joel saw God delivering a remnant of His people and a “Day of the Lord” when God would pour out His Spirit on all people (Joel 2:28). This was the hope of God’s prophets.

The Philistines were pushed back when Joshua entered the land. They fought against the Israelites often. God’s prophets spoke judgment on the cities of Philistia – Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon and Ekron (Amos 1:6-9).

And on Damascus “because she thrashed Gilead with sledges having iron teeth” (Amos 1:3), a picture of cruelty!

THE PROPHET’S MESSAGE (Joel 1:1-12)

A man stood in the city gate and cried out. He spoke God’s words to the merchants and to the elders of the city, “Repent! Repent!”

Who was this rugged man, dressed in a prophet’s cloak?. And what was his quarrel with the leaders of Judah? Was he like all the other prophets who had stalked the land? Would he throw the sins of the nation up in their faces? Surely they had fasted and tithed so that the priest and the orphan did not go hungry!

The man was the prophet Joel, son of Pethuel. “ He was not known in Judah until “the word of the Lord” came to him and the Spirit of God drove him to speak. Would the prophet tell the reason for the famine that held the land in a deadly grip? Would he pray to God to send rain?

The elders could not remember so bad a time in the history of Judah, a time of drought and locust plague. “The vine is dried up and the fig tree is withered...surely the joy of mankind” is gone! (Joel 1:12). Judah had enjoyed a time of peace and plenty, yet her leaders did not walk in God’s ways. Kings and people had left the true worship that God demanded. The Wicked kings led them into idolatry. They wasted their lives in drinking and idleness. Joel warned them and called them to fast and pray to the Lord (Joel 2:12).

God would let their enemies punish them.

TALK ABOUT 1. What natural disasters came on Judah (1:4)? 2. Did the people of Judah honour God? 3. Why did God send Joel to them? 4. What did God tell the people to do (1:13)? 5. Does God speak through national crises?

GOD’S WORDS ARE FOR EVERYONE

“Listen to this, you elders; listen, all who live in the land” (Joel 1:2). It was not enough to tell the elders only, all men and women must hear “the word of the Lord” to their generation. Joel’s generation and his message were not

different to our own. Every generation needs to hear God's word.

"Tell it to your children, and to their children to the next generation..." Children must be told the works of the Lord and His judgments.

What the locust swarms had left, even larger locusts had eaten. And baby locusts kept on hatching and eating, stripping everything in sight! Nothing remained but the bare branches of the trees and the brown, cracked earth (Joel 1:7). Not a drop of rain had fallen from the sky in months!

The people's hearts were as hard as the ground. They had shut their minds to God's command to "act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly" with the Lord and to share His blessings with their neighbours (Micah 6:8).

TALK ABOUT 1. Who suffered most because of the famine? 2. Who was to blame? 3. Who did God point to (Joel 1:13)? 4. What happens when leaders fail to worship God? 5. Does God always punish sin? 6. What does God require of us?

A TIME TO WAKE UP AND PRAY

While Joel preached, the elders drank wine and their wives wept. They must weep, but not for their suffering. They must weep for their sins. God sees our weeping, but He knows our hearts.

The people of Judah were not weeping for their sins. Like their sister to the north, Judah worshipped the pleasures of this world. Their lives were given to drinking, feasting and idleness.

The people showed their wealth in carved beds set with ivory (1 Kings 22:39). They feasted on meat, not a part of Israel's regular diet. They sang and danced to the music of the harp. Amos said, "You...lounged on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves...You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions..." (Amos 6:4-6).

When excavated the royal palace in Samaria yielded elegant clay tablets. Sixty three of these were invoices for wine and oil delivered to the palace. Revelry was uppermost in the people's minds in Judah also.

"Mourn like a virgin in sackcloth," the prophet Joel warned. Sackcloth was a very rough cloth made from hair. The prophet thinks of Israel as a virgin who suffered a great loss of her lover or husband. God had left His people because of their sins and they should mourn.

"Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly... summon the elders to the house of the Lord...and cry out to the Lord" (Joel 1:14). A fast was a time when no food was eaten.

"What have I done to you?" He asked. "How have I burdened you?"

The prophet told of the wonderful works of God, the "righteous acts" of the Lord. He brought these people up out of slavery in Egypt. Sheltered them along the way, protected them from the curses of the witchdoctor Balaam (Num 22-24).

WHAT SHALL I BRING TO THE LORD?

(Micah 6:9-16)

On hearing these charges, the people were sorry for their sins and asked the prophet: "What shall I bring...how shall I bow down before God? Will the Lord be pleased with thousand of rams (burnt offerings), with ten thousand rivers of oil (drink offerings), the fruit of the body (in exchange) for forgiveness" (6:7)?

Their proposals were quite useless! What God required had long been established and settled in His word (Deut 10:12-13). Their offers showed how little they knew about the Lord God. Had they forgotten? The Lord wanted them to obey from hearts full of love!

Micah told them, "God has showed you what He requires: a) To act justly. b) To love mercy. c) To walk humbly with your God (Mic 6:8).

Jews and Gentiles – all who love the Lord God – are commanded to "love the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deut 6:5). Anything less brings His reproach.

No payment we can make will buy forgiveness for our sins. Many try to earn favour with God by the works they do or with the offerings they bring. We must come empty-handed to a loving God and confess our sins. Then He will forgive us and "cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

With the help of His Spirit we will deal justly and offer mercy to the less fortunate. And we must humble ourselves if we are to walk with our Lord.

TALK ABOUT 1. What 'sacrifice' does the Lord want of us (Rom 12:1-2)? 2. Did God show special favour to the people of Israel? 3. Does He still show favour to them? 4. What is God's command to all believers (Deut 6:5)?

DEAL JUSTLY WITH OTHER MEN

Fear the name of the Lord for this is true wisdom (Mic 6:9). The merchants did not think God was watching them. Or that God would pass over their cheating – "the short ephah (a measure), the dishonest scales, the bag of false weights they used. Their unjust practices would be their ruin.

Because they refused to hear God's charges against them, God said, "I will begin to destroy you."

Judah, out of you will come...One who will be ruler over Israel" (Mic 5:2).

More startling were the prophet's words, "whose origins are from of old, from ancient times (or from the days of eternity). Jesus went forth as the Word of God, who was "in the beginning" with God (John 1:1).

The prophecy of the coming Messiah-King continues: "He will stand and shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God. And they will olive securely, for then His greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And He will be their peace" (5:4-5).

This prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus Christ was born in the little town of Bethlehem, not many miles from Jerusalem. At His birth God proclaimed Him to be "a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to Your people Israel" (Luke 2:32).

THE ASSYRIAN CONQUEST

When the Assyrian army invaded the land and scattered its people, God was watching. He kept a remnant safe, "a remnant of Jacob in the midst of many peoples" (Mic 5:7). He promised to pour out His Spirit on them. They would be "like dew from the Lord," cool and refreshing, gentle like their Master who would use them as His witnesses in the world (Rom 9:27).

The remnant will be "like a lion...like a young lion among the flocks" (Mic 5:8). Though gentle in their manner, God's faithful children would be bold in their witness. They would stand against the evils of their day.

The Israel that was not of faith had trusted in chariots and horses. Their leaders gathered more and more of them (Psa 20:7). They had turned to witchcraft and the casting of spells. Their sacred stones and Asherah poles polluted every hill (5:11-13). God said, "I will destroy, I will destroy..." All those who cast spells would be "cut off." They were already cut off from God. He would cut them out of the land. Those who continued in sin would fall under God's wrath (5:15).

(Read: Micah 6:1-8)

TALK ABOUT 1. Who was the 'ruler' the prophet said would be born in Bethlehem (Mic 5:2)? 2. What had Israel trusted in (Psa 20:7)? 3. Who would God "cut off" out of the land (Mic 5:15)? 4. What did God's law say about spirit mediums and witchdoctors (Deut 8:9-13)? 5. Would you trust a false prophet?

GOD HAD GREATLY FAVOURED THEM

God had greatly favoured His people, but they had not been grateful. He called on them to "plead their case before the mountains" (Micah 6:1-3).

(Read: Joel 1:13-20)

Priests, though corrupt themselves, had more power and authority than the people. The people looked up to them. The priest must lead the people in their mourning and in seeking the face of God (Joel 1:9,13).

The priests who ministered before the Lord's alter had greater blame. Because of their sins, grain offerings and drink offerings had been cut off from the house of the Lord (1:9).

The people were hungry; they had no tithes and offerings to bring to God's house. God had commanded, "They (the priests) shall live on offerings made to the Lord...give to them the firstfruits of your gain, new wine and oil..." (Deut 18:1-4). But the people answered, "the grain is destroyed, the new wine is dried up, the oil fails" (Joel 1:10).

Does God 'send' natural disasters? Does He allow them to chasten us? God controls all nature and He allows natural disasters to turn our hearts toward Him. When national disasters strip away the things that take our attention, God has a chance to speak to us. Men and women who have suffered flood or fire or drought and forced to stop and consider what God is saying to them. Sometimes God shouts!

TALK ABOUT 1. God is near whenever we pray to Him ___ True ___ False (Deut 4:7)? 2. What natural disasters happened in Joel's time? 3. Why did God allow flood and fire to destroy the land? 4. What did Joel call on the priests and leaders to do (Joel 1:13-14)? 5. What is a "holy fast" (1:14)? 6. Is fasting and praying enough? What else is needed?

THE JUDGMENTS OF THE LORD

(Joel 1:13-20)

The prophets understood that all the great judgments of God pointed to one last "Day of the Lord." This world's evil is heaped up waiting for the second coming of Jesus Christ, the Judge of all men. "For He (God) has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the Man (Jesus Christ) whom He has appointed..." (Acts 17:31).

"Alas for that day!" the prophet cried, "for the Day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty" (1:15). What was happening in the land of Judah pointed to a greater judgment which would come upon the whole world.

Disaster was much nearer than the people imagined. Their stunted grain would not be good for planting. Their storehouses were in ruins and the cattle died of thirst. "Even the wild animals pant...for the streams had dried up" (Joel 1:20).

AN ARMY OF LOCUSTS OR WARRIORS

(Read: Joel 2:1-11)

For Joel, the army of locusts that invaded the land pointed to much greater judgments still to come. These judgments seemed not so far off (Joel 2:1-2). The 'Day of the Lord' was always at hand; men and women needed to fear the judgments of God and hurry to repent of their sins.

God will destroy everything that lifts itself up against Him. When God looks down on the earth, "will He find faith?" Will His people stand strong against the evils of the day? Or will they be eating, drinking and making merry as they were doing when God sent the flood which swept everything away (Luke 3:36).

The people of Judah were chosen for blessing, if they obeyed the Lord their God. But for cursing if they did not (Deut 28:1-2; 15).

"I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse," Moses told God's people, "the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God...the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord..." (Deut 11:26-27).

GOD ALLOWS NATURAL DISASTERS

Joel used the locust plague to describe the coming "Day of the Lord" (Isa 2:12-22). The trumpet called the people to battle (Jud 6:34). But the trumpet blast at Christ's second coming will wake the dead (1 Thess 4:16-18).

To the prophet, the locusts looked like horsemen. They swept across the land like enemy riders (Joel 2:4-11). The sun on their wings made them shine like gold and like fire.

"They scale the walls like soldiers...Before them the earth shakes ...they run along the wall. They climb into the houses..." (Joel 2:6-10). The onrush of locusts could not be stopped!

The prophet saw the world darkened with sin and evil. The immorality of the people seemed to shut out the sun, just as it was shut out by the swarms of locusts (Joel 2:10). The light of God's truth was put out!

When sin is blackest, the light of Christ in Christian lives shines brightest. God's people are like a mighty army of witnesses, preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ and calling men and women to repent and believe the good news (Joel 2:2; Mark 1:15). "Countless are those who do His bidding, and mighty those who obey His command" (Joel 2:11).

TALK ABOUT 1. Can we run away from God? 2. Why not? 3. What took the place of God in the people's lives? 4. What did Joel call them to do (2:13)? 5. Who must take the lead in calling men and women to repent before God (1:9,13)? 6. What did Moses tell God's people (Deut 11:26-27)?

Christian Church. God gathered more believers from among the Gentile nations. He gathered and grafted in a strong Gentile branch (Rom 11:11-12). Jew and Gentile stand together in the Christian Church "and the gates of hell will not overcome it" (Matt 16:18). Faith in Jesus Christ draws them and binds them into one body of which He is Head and King (Eph 2:14-18).

A WATCHTOWER OVER THE FLOCK

After speaking of a bright future, the prophet turned to a present reality that was very painful. The people suffered like "a woman in labour" (4:9-10). It seemed that there was no king or counselor to lead them. Like the people of Samaria, those living in Jerusalem would leave their beloved city and go into exile in Babylon. It is most likely that Micah saw this grim prospect as did his fellow prophet Isaiah (2 Kings 24:1-14).

"Many nations" under Sennacherib attacked Jerusalem. They gloated over the capture of the city (4:11). But they did not know the Lord's plan. They, in turn, would be destroyed.

The wealth they plundered from Judah and Jerusalem (the temple) would be brought back to the Lord's treasury (Ezra 6:13-22).

A remnant of Israel returned from exile in Babylon (Neh 1:1-2). They brought back the articles Nebuchadnezzar's army had taken from the temple. The men of Judah built up Jerusalem's broken walls and towers. Watchmen stood on the walls. Jerusalem's strength was restored and became a picture of the future Kingdom of God.

Some think the prophet spoke of a tower at the gate of the city called "the sheep gate" (Neh 3:32).

Jesus Christ is watching over His flock (4:8). His people are like sheep and quickly wader away from His care. But the Good Shepherd goes after the sheep and calls to those who are going astray. His Spirit comes to our hearts to convict us of guilt because of sin (John 16:8). As we confess our sin to Him, His shed blood cleanses us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

TALK ABOUT 1. Who did Jesus send the apostles to preach to (Matt 10:6)? 2. Did many Jews come into the Kingdom of God? 3. What did the Jews returning from Babylon bring back to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:9-11)?

A RULER FROM BETHLEHEM

(Micah 5:1-15)

At this time of turmoil and war, God gave Micah a wonderful vision of the coming Messiah of Israel. God would raise up a righteous ruler for His people. This Ruler would be their comfort, hope and salvation (Matt 2:6).

Micah said, "You, Bethlehem...though you are small among the clans of

TALK ABOUT 1. What wrong things did the priests do (3:11)? 2. Do men who preach the gospel need our support? 3. What are “the last days” (4:1)

GOD WOULD MAKE A NEW COVENANT

The New Covenant had better promises. It promised the fullness of God’s Spirit for men and women and the power of God within them (Heb 8:6).

Micah spoke of the Christian Church in the world as “the mountain of the Lord’s temple” (Mic 4:1). God’s Kingdom will be established firmly and men and women will stream to it. They will come from every people and tribe and God will add to it daily those who are being saved (Acts 2:47).

At first the Church would be small, like a mustard seed (Matt 13:31-32). But it would grow and become large in the world and “raised up above the hills.” So the prophet could say, “The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house” (Haggai 2:9).

There will be a wonderful fellowship among the believers. Men and women will say to each other, “Come, let us go up to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us His ways, so that we may walk in His paths” (4:2).

The Church will have a new love for the law of the Lord (the gospel). All believers are under a new law of hope and love.

The gospel message will go forth as Jesus commanded (Matt 28:19-20). Where the gospel takes root, there is peace in the hearts of men and safety (Titus 3:2-3). Hatred and death are replaced by love and life in those who embrace Christ’s gospel. This was ever God’s plan for the nations – to beat swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks (Mic 4:3).

Such peace among men would result in “Every man sitting under his own vine or fig tree,” not fearing his neighbour, but exalting in the goodness of God. This is a picture of abundance and safety in God’s Kingdom..

TALK ABOUT 1. Read the parable of the mustard seed (Matt 13:31-32). What was Jesus talking about? 2. Who adds people to the Christian Church (Acts 2:47)? 3. What makes the Kingdom of God continue to grow? 4. Do you fear evil? 5. Will evil overcome the gospel light (John 1:5)?

PEACE, PLENTY AND STRENGTH

(Micah 46-13)

God planned peace of mind and plenty of blessings for the Church. Despite its sins of self-satisfaction and worldliness, it is being formed and established on the Rock, Christ Jesus (Micah 4:6-7; Matt 18:16-18).

Christ sent His apostles to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 10:6). They gathered a remnant of faithful followers who became the early

WAR AND RUMOURS OF WAR

(Joel 2:12-17)

Mesha, king of Moab, led an alliance of kings against Judah. They were defeated. The Lord caused them to turn on one another. Judah and king Jehoshaphat won without a battle (2 Chron 20). Israel forced Mesha to pay tribute. He rebelled (2 Kings 3:4). But even worse trouble gathered in the north “and Pul, the king of Assyria came against the land” (2 Kings 15:19-20).

If Judah had been spared the northern kingdom of Israel was under threat of war. After the wicked King Ahab, Jehoram his son reigned in Samaria. The Arameans attacked Samaria and laid siege to the city. Israel lost a large part of its territory east of the Jordan river. More land was lost under Jehu’s reign. He tried to pacify the Assyrians but “In those days the Lord began to cut Israel short...”

RETURN TO ME

(Joel 2:12-17)

Even as the prophet Joel spoke of the terrible things that were coming upon the land, he made a last appeal to the people. God was calling them to “return... with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning” (2:12).

All who are far from God as included in the prophets cry: “Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love...” (Joel 2:13). These are the words God spoke when He revealed His glory to His servant Moses (Ex 34:6-7).

But God told Moses, “He (God) does not leave the guilty unpunished.” In the midst of Israel’s punishment, God would receive them again.

“Who knows?” the prophet asked, “He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing – ” (2:14). Sinners must seek God’s mercy!

With this thought in mind, the prophet sought to rally elders, priests and people to fast and pray (Joel 2:15-17). They would come before the Lord with the plea: “Spare Your people, O Lord. Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations.” A ‘byword’ may mean a people and their God who are ridiculed by the nations (Deut 28:36-46).

The intense longing of the prophet’s heart can be felt in every word. They were still God’s inheritance. If they changed their ways and returned to the Lord “with all their heart,” He may relent. The covenant promise God made with Israel at Mt Sinai could be renewed even at the last minute.

THE LORD ANSWERED HIS PEOPLE

(Joel 2:18-27)

God promised to 'restore' His blessings to those who repented. Many take His blessings as general and universal, and they are. Also, the blessings – expressed as grain, new oil and wine – may not be material, but spiritual. We conclude this because the promises of restoration lead directly to the promise of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-32).

(Read: Joel 2:18-27)

The enemy was cleared from the land – “driven into a parched and barren land” – and punished for their own cruelty (Ezek 38:18).

God offered His suffering people pardon and grace, but these promises looked to the New Testament time when God would pour out the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:2-4). He said, “And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. I will show wonders in the heavens...And everyone who calls on the name of the lord will be saved...” (2:28-32).

On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon the gathered disciples. After this Peter and the disciples spoke to the crowd. Peter told the crowd in the street, “This – which you see and hear – is what was spoken by Joel the prophet” (Acts 2:16-23). Men from every nation heard “the wonders of God” in their own tongue and they wondered.

TALK ABOUT 1. Why did Joel cry out, “Rend your hearts” (2:13)? 2. What did God want the people to do? 3. Do you weep and pray for your unsaved friends? Did Joel? 4. What happened on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4)?

TWO GREAT PROMISES OF GOD

(Joel 2:28-32)

Before the great Day of the Lord came:

1. God would pour out His Spirit as He had promised (Joel 2:28).
2. All those who called on the name of the Lord in true repentance would be saved from God's wrath.

In Joel's day, the Spirit of God came upon special people for special tasks (Ex 31:3; Jud 3:10; 1 Sam 10:6). At Pentecost, God answered Moses' wish that all the Lord's people have His Spirit and prophesy (Num 11:29).

Joel said that God would fulfill His promise (Jer 31:33) and fill every born-again believer with His Spirit (John 3:5,8; Eph 1:13). God's Spirit would be in old, young, men, women, rich and poor. God invites all men and women of all races to “call on the name of the Lord” and be saved before that great and terrible Day of the Lord comes.

Paul wrote to the believers in Rome, “For there is no difference between

ashamed and the diviners disgraced. They will cover their faces because there is no answer from God” (Micah 3:6-7).

False prophets and diviners told kings and people that God would not carry out His judgments. They said, “Peace!” but there was no peace.

TALK ABOUT 1. A remnant of people would be spared __ True __ False (Mic 2:12)? 2. When did God gather a remnant of the people (Ezra 1:1-6)? 3. What were the leaders accused of doing (Micah 3:3)? 4. God will call leaders to give account to Him __ True __ false (Rom 12:14)?

MICAH FELT GOD'S POWER

Micah was not popular or well-liked, but he had God on his side. He knew the power of God in his life. He said, “I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord...” God put His Spirit on Micah for one purpose: “to declare to Jacob (Judah) his transgression, and to Israel his sin” (Micah 3:8-12).

Israel's leaders were building Zion, their nation, with wickedness and bloodshed. They said, “No disaster will come upon us.” How deceived men can be! God saw them for what they were. God saw through their pretence.

God, and His prophet, watched as the leaders asked for bribes. They watched as the priests demanded a fee for teaching God's Law. God had told them to live off the tithes and freewill offerings of the people. They even “told fortunes for money.” They were no better than the pagan priests and diviners.

When Micah rebuked them they answered, “Is not the Lord among us? No disaster will come to us” (Mic 3:11).

THE MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD

(Micah 4:1-5)

These leaders were making a bad mistake. Zion would become rubble, Jerusalem a heap of stone burned by fire (Mic 3:12). But God's mountain would stand majestic. His Kingdom will never be moved. It is “the mountain of the Lord's temple,” the dwelling place of the living God.

Micah spoke of the Kingdom of God which includes the Christian Church as we know it today.

Many have pointed out that these verses were first spoken by the prophet Isaiah (Isa 2:1-4). Isaiah and Micah lived and ministered at the same time in history. “In the last days” (Micah 4:1) points to the time from Jesus' birth to His coming again. Jesus Christ would bring in a New Covenant. There would be a Christian Church in the world. The gospel Church would worship God in Spirit rather than in a physical temple (John 4:24).

TALK ABOUT 1. The idolatry of Samaria had come to the..... of Jerusalem (1:9)? 2. What took place at the city gate? 3. What was Lachish noted for? 4. Did the false prophets believe Micah's words (Mic 2:11)?

A REMNANT OF PEOPLE (Micah 2:12-13)

God promised that a remnant of people would survive and return to their own land. He said, "I will surely bring together the remnant of Israel" (Micah 2:12; Neh 1:1-2).

The prophet looked forward to two great events in the history of Israel. He extended God's promise beyond the nation of Israel to all the people of God.

1. Micah's first thought may have been of a remnant of Israel that would survive the captivity in Babylon and return to the land of Palestine. God promised this through many and various prophesies made at different times (Isa 4:2-3; 10:20-23).

2. Far off in the future Israel's Messiah, Jesus Christ, would come again and gather the believers of all ages. Hope and faith in God's promise lived on through the ages in the hearts of God's people. They did not fully understand the nature of God's promises, but they searched the Scriptures and waited for a Messiah to come.

"One who breaks open the way will go before them; they will break through the gate and go out." Great leaders gathered the people who returned to Palestine, but the Lord God went before them. He challenged them to "leave Babylon and come out" (Isa 48:20), and He promised to shepherd them "like a flock in its pasture" (Micah 2:12-13).

ISRAEL'S CORRUPT LEADERS (Micah 3:1-12)

Micah rebuked the leaders for their wicked ways. God gave them authority and position to lead the people in righteous ways. They should know justice. In stead they hated good and loved evil (Micah 3:2-3).

God accused them of "eating the people's flesh and breaking their bones," so that they were like "flesh for the pot" (3:3).

When the Assyrians attacked, these leaders would "cry out to the Lord, but He would not answer them. At that time He would hide His face from them..." (Micah 3:4; Matt 7:22-23).

"As for the (false) prophets who lead My people astray," this is what the Lord said, "Night will come over you, without visions...The seers will be

Jew and Gentile – the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call upon Him, for, Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom 10:12-13). And the Holy Spirit would give spiritual gifts to the saved ones "according to His will" (1 Cor 12:4-11) – they would prophesy, have dreams and see visions. Prophecy may mean a teaching ministry.

SIGNS AND WONDERS

In the days of the Gospel Church – to which Joel was pointing – God would do great signs and wonders. New Testament writers said God adds signs and wonders when the gospel is preached (Heb 2:4).

God speaks through us when men and women see our devotion to the Lord. He speaks to them through our testimony.

God will warn the nations – by wonders in the heavens and on the earth – that the end of the world is near (Joel 2:30-32). Wars will ravage the earth – blood and fire and destruction – telling that "the great and dreadful Day of the Lord" is at hand.

TALK ABOUT 1. What did the prophets mean by "The day of the Lord (2:28)?" 2. When did God send His Spirit on the Christian Church (Acts 2:2-4)? 3. Do you have the Holy Spirit? 4. What did Jesus tell us to do (Matt 24:42)?

DELIVERANCE ON MOUNT ZION

"On Mt Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance..." (2:32). Many prophets spoke of the blessings of Mt Zion, or of God delivering His people on Mt Zion. The thought is of men and women coming to God and receiving mercy. They will be "the survivors whom the Lord calls."

His "holy mountain" is the place of His throne.

Jesus Christ offers to save all who repent of their sins and turn away from them. He came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). He saves and keeps and will come again to take those who love Him to the New Jerusalem which is in heaven (John 14:2-3; Rev 21:1-6).

This 'calling on God' requires that we know the gospel and put our trust in

THE DAY OF THE LORD - God's prophets saw that world events would climax in a great "Day of the Lord" when there would be 1. Universal judgment (Amos 8:8-9) 2. An end to this present earth (2 Peter 3:10-12). 3. The second coming of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of the dead (Dan 12:2; 1 Thess 4:16-18). 4. God's people gather from the four corners of the earth (Joel 3:1-2; Matt 13:41). 5. God's people would receive their inheritance in the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:1-6). New Testament writers called it "the day of Christ" (1 Cor 1:8), or "the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Thess 5:2).

Christ. Paul asked, "How can they believe in One they have not heard of? And how can they hear without someone preaching (the gospel) to them?" (Rom 10:14).

There will be no deliverance for those who reject the Lord Jesus Christ (John 3:36). Concerning Israel God said, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people" (Isa 65:2). Because of their own rejection they were "ever hearing, but never understanding" (Isa 6:9). They had closed their eyes to the truth and shut their ears to God's word!

TWO VIEWS OF THE SAME EVENT

(Joel 3:1-16)

The prophet pointed to two aspects of the Day of the Lord:

1. The blessings that will come to those who have trusted in Christ, the Son of God (Joel 2:32; Matt 25:23).
2. God's judgment that will come on all who have rejected Jesus Christ and the gospel message.

These two aspects of God separating the just from the unjust are set out plainly. God said, "I will restore the fortunes of Judah...I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will enter into judgment against them" (Joel 3:1-2).

God is sorting the good from the bad and marking those who are His own all the time (Ex 8:23; Eph 1:13). The unbeliever is judged in that he or she does not believe in the Jesus Christ (John 3:36). In this sense judgment is continuous. But the last and final judgment of this world and all evil is committed to Jesus Christ (Acts 17:31).

These two great events – Christ's second coming and universal judgment – may well come at one and the same time. No one knows when that will be. Jesus said, "Keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come" (Matt 24:42; Acts 1:7).

God does not know time (Psa 90:4). So we should not be concerned with when or how God will bring these great events to pass. Foolish people try to set God's calendar on man's time line, but they have always been wrong. God tells us not to do that. It is most important that we be ready.

TALK ABOUT 1. What does 'Mt Zion' mean in the prophets' writings? 2. How would God deliver Israel? 3. What two great spiritual events does the prophet point to? 4. Are you watching for Jesus Christ to come again (1 Thess 4:16-18)?

had infected Jerusalem (Mic 1:9). All business was transacted at the city gate. Samaria's sin of robbing the common man had taken root in Jerusalem. Traders in the city did the very same things done in Samaria (Amos 8:4-6).

God was sending judgment. Micah saw in his vision Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem (701 BC) as though it was already happening. He named places and the pain, fear and shame of the peoples as they waited for the invading Assyrian armies. Assyrian soldiers were noted for their cruelty. No words could describe their cruel acts.

"Tell it not in Gath," the prophet cried. Gath was a Philistine city near to his home town. Micah did not want the pagan peoples of Gath to boast of the Assyrian victory.

As the enemy advanced on Jerusalem, they came first to the fortified town of Lachish. The men of Lachish should "harness the team to the chariot" and be ready to fight the enemy (1:13).

The men of Lachish fought to the last man. They showered the attackers with arrows, threw large stones and burning torches down upon them. A record of the battle is preserved in the British Museum. Also a prism recording the events was found at Nineveh, the Assyrian capital. It reads in part: "Hezekiah of Judah who had not submitted to my yoke...I shut up in Jerusalem...like a caged bird..."

MAN'S PLANS – GOD'S PLANS

(Micah 2:1-13)

God gave man the ability to plan and create, but the men of Israel planned only evil. They coveted fields and took them, so that the land was divided up among evil-doers and the fields given to traitors (Micah 2:4).

Those merchants who robbed their fellow men would have no one to speak for them in the assembly, no one to cast a lot when decisions were to be made (2:5).

FALSE PROPHETS SPOKE LIES

God's words of judgment were not spoken against the upright. They were for those who had "risen up like an enemy." They were accused of many wicked schemes: a) They robbed people of their robes (2:8). b) They drove women from their homes. c) They robbed children of their inheritance by taking their land.

Israel's false prophets did not believe Micah's prophecies. "Is the Spirit of the Lord angry?" they asked. If a false prophet came to them and said, "I will prophesy for you plenty of wine and beer" they would receive him with open arms. He would be "just the prophet for this people" (Mic 2:11).

Again the prophet answered his own question: "Is it not Jerusalem" (Mic 1:5)?

The Lord brought two charges against the people:

1. The people worshipped the idol Baal in Samaria.
2. The merchants cheated the common man in Jerusalem and in the land generally (Mic 3:5-7).

King Ahaz of Judah set up idols in the temple courts and closed the temple doors so that no one could worship there. The temple doors were not opened again until Hezekiah began to reign (2 Kings 18:1-8).

SAMARIA WOULD BE DESTROYED

God said, "I will make Samaria (the capital city of Israel), a heap of rubble...I will pour her stones into the valley...her idols will be broken to pieces; and her temple gifts will be burned...since she gathered her gifts from the wages of prostitutes..." (Micah 1:6-7). These were prostitutes in the temple of Baal who charged for their services.

The law God gave to His people was very clear: "No Israelite man or woman is to become a shrine prostitute. You must not bring the earnings of a female prostitute or a male prostitute into the house of the Lord your God... because the Lord your God detests them both" (Deut 23:17-18).

This prophecy of Samaria's destruction was fulfilled during Micah's lifetime. The Assyrian armies destroyed Samaria in 722 – 721 BC (2 Kings 17:6). They led the people of Israel away and scattered them in many lands.

Israel's officials and helpless people wept as they were dragged away. They shaved their heads in mourning (Mic 1:16).

Micah wept and moaned as he thought of the sure judgments of God upon Samaria (Micah 1:8-9). He knew that the disaster that came upon Samaria would one day strike the people of Judah.

At that time Hezekiah was King of Judah. He "did what was right in the sight of the Lord" (2 Kings 18:3). His father had submitted to Tiglath-Pileser and Judah paid tribute to the Assyrians. All this changed when Hezekiah rebelled against the King of Assyria (2 Kings 18:7).

TALK ABOUT 1. What sin did God charge Samaria with? 2. What great event overtook Israel? 3. Was the Assyrian invasion a judgment from God? Why? 4. What did Micah do when he thought of God's judgments (1:8-9)?

SAMARIA'S SINS CAME TO JERUSALEM

(Micah 1:8-16)

Because of Israel's sins, disaster has come from the Lord, even to the gate of Jerusalem (Mic 1:12). Samaria's sins spread to Judah, "to the gate." They

THE VALLEY OF JUDGMENT

Joel tells of a 'Valley of Judgment' where God will judge the nations. 'Jehoshaphat' means 'the Lord judges.' God said, "Let the nations be roused; let them advance into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the nations...Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe..." (Joel 3:12-13).

Jesus used the same words to tell of the last judgment. He said, "The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will weed out of His Kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil" (Matt 123:41; Rev 14:14).

WHAT DO YOU HAVE AGAINST ME?

God often asked His wandering people, "What complaint have you got against Me?" But now He will ask the nations: Tyre and Sidon (regions of Philistia), "What have you got against Me" (Joel 3:4)?

God brought these charges against the nations:

- "You have taken My silver and My gold..."
- "You sold the people of Judah...(Joel 3:5-6).
- Joel tells how God will punish the nations:
- "I will return on your own heads what you have done."
- They must stop warring against God's people,
- because God is preparing a host to fight against them.
-

COMFORT AND HOPE

(Joel 3:17-21)

The world that rejects Christ faces the fearful judgments of God. But there is comfort and hope for all who trust in Jesus Christ.

Multitudes have not made a decision. They falter between belief and unbelief; they waver and are not sure. One day it will be too late! Call on the name of Jesus now and ask God to save you from your sins.

All heaven's resources belong to the Israel of God: a) He is their dwelling place, their Mt Zion (Joel 3:17). b) He will keep them safe. c) All their needs will be met – new, wine, milk and honey are pictures of God's blessing (Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13). d) A fountain flowing from the Lord's house is the "River of Life." The apostle John saw the same 'River' flowing from the throne of God (Rev 21:1). e) God's city, the New Jerusalem, will be inhabited forever (Joel 3:20). God is there with His people, His special treasure (Mal 3:17).

TALK ABOUT 1. Why did God ask the people, "What do you have against Me?" 2. What charges did God bring against the nations (Joel 3:5-6)?

THE WORDS OF THE PROPHET AMOS

Introduction: The words of Amos are the words of God. God spoke some prophecies to the leaders of Israel, the northern kingdom, and to Samaria its capital city. Amos gave most of God's messages as short 'oracles.' He spoke at different times and in different places.

Amos was a shepherd from the little town of Tekoa, six miles from Bethlehem (1 Chron 2:24, 45). He tended a grove of sycamore trees, perhaps as a tenant farmer.

The prophet Amos lived and prophesied in the reigns of Uzziah king of Judah and Jeroboam king of Israel. This was a time of peace and luxury. The people living in Israel enjoyed the good things of life. And they forgot God.

Amos began to minister "two years before the earthquake." Some historians date this about 760 BC.

GOD'S CHARGE AGAINST ISRAEL

(Read: Amos 1:1-15)

The prophet said "they trample on the heads of the poor...and deny justice to the oppressed..." (Amos 2:7). People thought only of themselves!

God would punish the people of Israel for their selfishness. The prophet said, "The Lord roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem..." This time of peace and social injustice would end in calamity. The words 'roar' and 'thunder' tell of God's wrath against the nation's sins. And Jerusalem was considered the place of God's dwelling.

TALK ABOUT 1. What do we know about the prophet Amos? 2. Amos gave God's words to the people of Israel __ True __ False? 3. Did people live well in those days? 4. When life is easy, we often forget G.....?

GOD WILL JUDGE THE NATIONS

(Amos 1:3 – 2:16)

Amos spoke of "the three sins" of neighbour nations. On them God would send fire or judgment (Amos 1:4,7,10,12,14).

The prophet named nations that had long been enemies of Israel: Damascus (1:2-5), Philistia (1:6-8), Tyre as the chief city of Phoenicia (1:9-10), Edom (1:11-12), Ammon (1:13-15) and Moab (2:1-3).

A large amount has been written about the wars waged against God's people. All the nations near to Israel fought against them at some time. Some of their neighbours signed treaties with Israel and then broke them (1:9).

Samaria was the capital city of Israel. It had long been the seat of Baal worship. Baal was the chief god of the Canaanites. God had told His people not to worship the gods of Canaan, but they refused to listen.

God always warns men. Prophets like Micah warned the people that their sins would bring God's judgment upon them. At the same time, God called all men to repent. To all who repented God offered pardon and peace of heart. This was Micah's message and it holds true for us today.

DIVISIONS IN MICAH

(Micah 1:1-2)

Some people divide the Book of Micah into three sections. Each section begins with a call to "Hear, O peoples, all of you...O earth and all who are in it..." (Micah 1:2; 3:1; 6:1).

The Sovereign Lord would bring a charge against the leaders and all those who did not obey Him. God charged the leaders of Jacob, an ancestor and symbol of Israel, with the sins of that time. The leaders of Israel were charged with "Hating good and loving evil" (Mic 3:2).

God judged them from "His holy Temple." They had ignored His Law and profaned His temple with their unholy living. He wanted to live among them, but they had rejected Him (John 1:11).

The Temple in Jerusalem represented "God's dwelling place," for it was there that the High Priest of Israel presented the blood of sacrifice which atoned for the sins of the people.

TALK ABOUT 1. When did Micah prophesy? 2. He warned men of coming? 3. What words divide the Book of Micah (1:2; 3:1; 6:1)?

THE FURY OF GOD'S WRATH

(Micah 1:3-7)

"The mountains melt beneath Him and the valleys split apart..." Why would God come crashing down on Israel and Judah with such fury? The prophet pictures God leaving His dwelling place to come and punish Israel for their sins (Mic 1:3-5).

"All this is because of the sins of the house of Israel," Micah said.

And what is Jacob's transgression?

Micah answered, "Is it not Samaria?"

And what is Judah's high place? (High places were used by the Canaanites for idol worship. God's people also used the same high places for various rituals and sacrifices).

Thebes was the capital city in Upper Egypt. The people of Thebes also trusted in the water around them (Nah 3:8), just as Nineveh trusted in the Tigris river. Both cities had canals and great walls to protect them.

In a mocking voice, the prophet called on the people of Nineveh to "Work the clay, tread the mortar, repair the brickwork" of the walls (Nah 3:14).

History tells us that they did do this. "To the south of the gate, the moat is still filled with fragments of stone and mud bricks from the walls where they were broken into..." (A.T. Olmstead)

The rubble of Nineveh's past has been covered over and her ditches filled by the sands of time. It has been that way for more than 2,000 years. God's word, through Nahum the prophet, came to pass just as God said it would (Nahum 3:7).

TALK ABOUT 1. What was God's message to the people of Nineveh (Jonah 3:4-5)? 2. Nineveh was spared once because the people.....? 3. God calls on all men to..... (Acts 2:38)? 4. When we repent, we must turn from our sins __ True __ False? 5. Why did God allow Nineveh to be destroyed? 6. Did God's word, spoken by His prophets, always come to pass?

THE PROPHET MICAH

Introduction: Micah's visions and oracles were spoken to the people of Samaria in Israel (the northern kingdom) and also to Judah. The prophet gave God's message of judgment to people who had turned their backs on their Creator. Now they worshipped worthless idols of wood and stone. These prophecies may seem difficult to understand. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you read Micah's words. They are "the word of the Lord" (1:1). God's words, whenever spoken, are the authority and foundation of our faith.

This study follows the lead of commentator Matthew Henry (1662-1714). Bible verses are quoted from the New International Version of the Bible.

JUSTICE AND LOVE

Micah grew up in Moresheth, near Gath, about twenty miles from Jerusalem in southwest Palestine. He lived about the same time as Isaiah, the great prophet of the Old Testament. He was God's prophet in the last half of the eighth century BC – after the prophets Amos and Hosea and before the fall of Assyria in 722-721 BC - a time of turmoil. He spoke the word of the Lord to both Israel (the northern kingdom) and Judah (the southern kingdom). He wrote God's words in the Book of Micah to warn the people of coming judgment. It was "the vision he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem" (1:1).

Nations that lifted their hand against God's chosen people would not escape His judgments. "The Lord will cause men to hear His majestic voice and will make them see His arm coming down with raging anger and consuming fire..." (Isa 30:30; Amos 1:7,10; Heb 12:29).

SINS OF JUDAH AND ISRAEL (Amos 3:1-15)

The Lord would not pass over the sins of Judah and Israel. Amos spoke God's word against "the whole family I (God) brought out of Egypt" (Amos 3:1).

The family of Jacob was one people, Israel. But they had divided into Judah to the south and Israel to the north. Both nations were guilty.

God spoke of "the three sins of Judah, even four..." (Amos 2:4). He would send 'fire' on Judah because they worshipped false gods. Fire speaks of God's wrath.

Israel was thought to be even more wicked. Their sins are named (Amos 2:6-8).

God called to their sense of justice. He said, "I brought you up out of Egypt, I led you forty years in the desert to give you the land of the Amorites..." Here "the Amorites" could mean all the people living in Canaan at the time Israel entered the land.

The Lord's rebuke continued, "I also raised up prophets among your sons and Nazirites (men who made a special covenant to serve God. Nazirites made a vow not to drink wine or cut their hair).

The rebellious people made the Nazirites drink wine and told God's prophets not to speak to them (Amos 7:10-17). For this God said, "I will crush you...the swift will not escape...the archer will not stand his ground... and the horseman will not save his life" (2:13-16).

TALK ABOUT 1. Were the people in Israel more wicked than the people in Judah? 2. Nazirites took special.....? They did not drink.....? (Num 6:2). 3. Why would God 'roar' from Jerusalem? What did the prophet mean? 4. Was God's prophet in danger when he rebuked kings (7:10-15)?

THE WORD OF THE LORD AGAINST ISRAEL

"Hear the word of the Lord..." Of all the 'families' living on the earth, God chose (to care for or watch over) Israel. He desired to 'walk' with them in a close fellowship. They refused to walk with God and walked in their own way. "Woe," Amos said, "to you who feel secure on Mt Samaria" (6:1).

Amos asked, "Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?" The prophet asks the people questions, to which they can only agree (3:3-6). Their sins deserve God's judgment. God has shown Amos that judgment is

near. God has revealed His plans (3:7), and Amos must tell the people. ivory (6:4)

The Sovereign Lords says, "An enemy will overrun the land; he will pull down your strongholds and plunder your fortresses" (Amos 3:11).

God's judgment will be complete. As a shepherd might grab a piece of an ear or a leg bone from the mouth of a lion, so nothing worth saving would be left of Israel after the Assyrian assault (Amos 3:12).

On that day the Lord would destroy the heathen altars of Bethel. At Bethel, Israel built temples to the Canaanite god Baal and offered sacrifices on the altars of Baal. God said he would destroy the palaces and mansions of Samaria which were "adorned with ivory" (Amos 3:13-15).

TALK ABOUT 1. God asked, "Can two walk together.....?" 2. Who did God want to 'walk' with? 3. Does He want to walk with you? Are you willing to walk with Him? 4. What must we do to 'walk' through life with a husband or wife? 5. Why did the word of the Lord come against Israel (Amos 3:11-12)?

THE WOMEN OF SAMARIA (Amos 4:1-13)

The Lord spoke harsh words to the "women who oppress the poor" in Samaria. Amos thought of them as a herd of prize cattle feasting in a rich pasture (Amos 4:1-3). They enjoyed this luxury by 'crushing' the poor of the land, like cattle crush the grass under their feet. And they told their husbands to do this, to supply them with food and drink for their parties.

"Go to Bethel and sin," the prophet urges. Go to Gilgal and sin yet more... brag about your freewill offerings, boast about (your worship) you Israelites....." You won't serve the true God, so go to the heathen shrines!

Amos said they practiced a religion full of pomp and ceremony and show, but in their hearts they worshipped the idols of greed and injustice. There was no place in their lives of righteousness and justice and mercy.

God had done everything He could to change them. He had sent famine and "empty stomachs" until people went from town to town looking for water (Amos 4:8-13). In the face of all God's warnings and judgments, they did not return to the Lord. They must prepare to meet an angry God, not to renew covenant with Him, but to receive justice at His hand (4:12-13).

"Many times," Amos said, God "struck the gardens and vineyards with mildew and blight." Locusts ate fig and olive trees and plague killed the young men. "Yet you have not returned to Me," declares the Lord (4:9-10).

God's anger against sin and evil is balanced by His mercy and justice. King David said, "Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other" (Psa 85:10). This happened at the cross. Christ's death

judgment. Nahum said, "The Lord will restore the splendour of Jacob..." (Nah 2:2-13). Nahum's prophecy was good news for the people of Judah.

Judah would fall, but God would restore her again. Men of Judah may have looked for the glory days of Solomon. They thought this is what Nahum's prophecy meant. They did not believe God's anger would fall on them, as it did on Israel, their sister people to the north.

Even Jesus' disciples asked if He would "restore the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6). When Jesus answered their question, He turned their eyes away from this world to the Kingdom He was building by His Spirit.

Nahum tells of the attackers (Nah 2:3-10). People who do not know the living God are cruel, urged on by Satan to kill and 'devour' their victims. The shields of the soldiers are red (with blood)... "the chariots storm through the streets..." (Nah 3:2-3). The attackers were like angry lions. Nineveh had carvings of lions on its temples (Nah 2:11; Hosea 5:14; Micah 5:8).

"The river gates are thrown open and the palace collapses" (Nah 2:6). Flood waters rush in upon the city and the prize of the city – the palace of the king – falls in ruins. All becomes "like a pool" as the waters subside. That part of Nineveh not washed away by the flood was destroyed by foreign armies.

The great city of Nineveh was "pillaged, plundered, stripped! Hearts melt, knees give way, bodies tremble, every face grows pale" (Nah 2:10), as Nineveh's people faced the same cruel exile they had forced on so many other nations.

In its past glory, Nineveh was like a lion. Now it would suffer the fate of a lion's prey (Nah 2:11-12). "I am against you," the Lord declared. "I will leave you no prey on the earth" (2:13).

WOE TO NINEVEH (Nahum 3:1-19)

Nineveh, like Babylon, was pictured as a wicked woman. In the Bible, these wicked cities are referred to as 'harlot' and 'prostitute' (Nah 3:4; Rev 17:5). God said Nineveh "enslaved the nations by her prostitution and witchcraft." For this sin, God would make the Ninevites "a spectacle," a lesson to all those who oppose God. Their city would be left in ruins, and the Ninevites would be killed (Nahum 3:3). Assyrian records tell how the city was taken. And the cruel invaders did not spare anyone (Isa 13:16-18).

Egypt, Babylon and Assyria were the great powers at the time. Babylon destroyed Nineveh in 612 BC. And the Babylonian armies defeated Egypt at Carchemish in 605 BC.

Nahum said Nineveh would suffer the same fate as Thebes (Nah 3:8).

GOD'S ANGER AGAINST NINEVEH

God is good to those who trust in Him. But to His enemies, He is an overwhelming flood that sweeps them away.

Why was God angry? The Bible tells us that God will punish sin. He cannot be holy and just and not judge sinners (Nah 1:2).

Nahum spoke of God as "a refuge in time of trouble" to all who repent and turn to Him. "He cares for those who trust in Him" (Nah 1:7).

The "good news" on the mountains of Judah is the news that God will deliver His people from all their sins and from Satan's power over them. Satan our greatest enemy and he had set his throne in Nineveh.

Paul said that God delivers men and women from Satan's power by Christ's gospel (Rom 10:15). In each case, the victory is God's.

EVERY GENERATION MUST HEAR THE GOSPEL

One hundred and fifty years before Nahum spoke this oracle of woe, God sent the prophet Jonah to Nineveh with a one-line message, "Repent!". God called on the people of Nineveh to repent and turn from their evil ways. That generation of Ninevites believed God's message and repented of their sins (Jonah 3:4-5). Because they repented, God spared their city.

Generations passed and the people of Nineveh lost the knowledge of the true God, so Nahum told them who the living God is: a) God is jealous for His own name (Nah 1:2). b) He is great in His power. c) His way is in the whirlwind and the storm (1:3). d) He is slow to judge evil, yet He will not let sin go unpunished forever. e) "The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble (Nah 1:7). f) No one can defy Almighty God. g) He is perfectly just. Assyria would be judged because of their pride (1:11), and idolatry (1:14).

God was looking out over these proud cities. Samaria had been brought low. Jerusalem would be humbled and should not proud. Like Nineveh she would be judged?

TALK ABOUT 1. What message did Jonah preach in Nineveh (Jonah 3:4-5)? 2. What message did Nahum give to Nineveh (Nah 1:8)? 3. Because the people did not repent, God said He would prepare their..... (1:14)? 4. Nahum means..... His message brought comfort to Judah at a time when God's people feared the nations around them ___ True ___ False?

NINEVEH WILL FALL

(Nahum 2:1-13)

Nineveh would be destroyed, never to rise again. The mighty nation of Assyria that destroyed Israel (the northern kingdom) would be brought to

satisfied both God's righteous anger against sin and His mercy.

TALK ABOUT 1. What did the women of Samaria do that God hated (4:1)? 2. How do merchants oppress the poor? 3. What sins did Amos list (5:7-12)? 4. Are the same sins common today? 5. Why was God so patient with Israel? Why is He so patient with us (2 Peter 3:9,15)?

AMOS MOURNED FOR ISRAEL

(Amos 5:1-17)

Amos grieved for Israel and said, "Fallen is virgin Israel...deserted in her own land, with no one to lift her up" (5:2).

God called, "Seek Me and live!"

"Seek good, not evil, that you may live....Hate evil, love good." It was no use tuning to the idols at Bethel, or making a journey to Beersheba, for all would be destroyed by the Assyrian armies.

Israel is accused of "turning justice into bitterness... oppressing the righteous, taking bribes and of depriving the poor of justice in the courts" (Amos 5:7-12).

GOD HATED THEIR SHOW OF PIETY

(Amos 5:18-27)

"I hate your...religious feasts," God said. "I cannot stand your assemblies. I will not accept your burnt offering and grain offerings...I will not listen to the music of your harps" (Amos 5:21-23).

For forty years, when Israel wandered in the desert, they did not obey God's commands. God demands right conduct and not outward piety (Micah 6:6-8; Jer 6:20).

Some among them, "longed for the day of the Lord." They hoped and prayed for a day of blessing. God warned "that day will be darkness, not light" (5:18). He told them plainly, "I will send you into exile beyond Damascus..." (5:27).

Centuries before this Moses prophesied: "The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar...like an eagle swooping down...a fierce-looking nation without respect for the old or pity for the young" (Deut 28:49-50). That nation was Assyria.

After the death of Jeroboam II, Menaham made himself king in Samaria. In that same year (747 BC), King Uzziah died in Jerusalem.

THE ASSYRIAN CONQUEST

At last the fateful day came. Two historical records tell of the Assyrian hordes that plundered Israel and carried its people away to other lands. The Bible record and the tablets of clay told of the victories. For thousands of years these tablets lay buried in the ruins of the palaces of Sargon II.

The Bible recorded, "In the days of Pekah, king of Israel, came Tiglathapileser, king of Assyria and took... Hazor and Gilead and Galilee, all the land of Naphthali and carried them captive to Assyria" (2 Kings 15:19,30).

Pekah, an officer in Israel's army, killed the king's son and took the throne. He hated the Assyrians and took a strategic step when Rezin, King of Damascus, turned against the superpower. Pekah joined an alliance with Rezin against Assyria. Only King Ahaz remained aloof, thinking to get help from Egypt (Isa 7:3-5; 2 Kings 16:5).

The Frenchman, Botta, excavated the great palace of Sargon II at Khorsabad. He found tables that he could not read, written in cuneiform.

In October 1844 the tablets, statues and pieces of pillars were shipped to Paris. They were later found to contain much valuable information on Sargon's campaigns in Syria and Palestine. They provided a historical commentary agreeing with and supporting the Bible record.

All Israel went into exile, scattered across the lands under the rule of Assyria. The destruction was great and the suffering of the people terrible. And the northern kingdom of Israel ceased to exist.

Sargon's scribes wrote, "People of the lands, prisoners my hand had captured, I settled there (in Israel). I imposed tribute and tax upon them, as upon the Assyrians" (see 2 Kings 17:24). The Jews in Judah did not speak to the Samaritans because they were a mixed race of man people groups taken from among the countries Sargon II had conquered (John 4:9).

TALK ABOUT 1. Every nation was at war ___ True ___ False? 2. War was God's judgment on Israel ___ True ___ False? 3. Because of their sin, God let A.....invade Israel? 4. God's people were..... in other lands?

A FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY

(Amos 6:1-14)

Amos spoke God's word to both kingdoms, Israel in the north (Samaria), and Judah (Jerusalem) in the south (Amos 6:2). He told them to look at their heathen neighbours – Calneh and Hamath (city states in the north of Israel) – and asked, "Are they better off than your two kingdoms?"

He pointed to the luxury of Israel's lifestyle (Amos 3:3-6). The high class people in Jerusalem (Zion) were no better. They all thought, 'because we are

GOD SENT NAHUM TO NINEVEH

(Nahum 1:1-13)

God raised up His prophet to speak against Nineveh and its wickedness. Nahum (his name means comfort) spoke doom on the great city. Nahum received a vision from the Lord or an oracle to be spoken for Him (Nah 1:1).

Assyria was the most wicked and cruel of all the nations on the earth. Nimrod built the first city called Nineveh (Gen 10:11-12). Later, the city was made larger by Assyrian kings who had their palaces there. These kings attacked Israel and received tribute (taxes) from Israel's kings. Assyria finally defeated the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC.

The date of Nahum's vision is fixed by his mention of the fall of Thebes, the capital city of Upper Egypt (Nahum 3:8-10). So Nahum had this vision some time after 663 BC. This left approx 50 years before the city was destroyed. We suppose the message was relayed to Nineveh by messengers.

It is very likely that Nahum never went to Nineveh. The city represented the kingdom of Assyria and that was enough to bring it under God's judgment. Assyria had a name for being ruthless and cruel. They were a proud nation and boasted, "By the strength of my hand I have done this...I removed the boundaries of nations, I plundered their treasures...I subdued their kings" (Isa 10:112-13).

God used Assyria in His plan, but now God said, "I will punish the king of Assyria for the willful pride of his heart and the haughty look of his eyes..." The Lord had used the Assyrians to subdue Israel.

The Assyrian soldiers drove the people out of their towns and villages and into the countries around Assyria. They resettled Israel with foreigners.

THE DESTRUCTION OF ASSYRIA

The cruelty of Nineveh toward God's people grew worse and reached its climax in the reign of the Assyrian King Ashurbanipal (669 627 BC). From that time, Assyria's power grew less and less. Nineveh was destroyed by the Babylonians and Medes in 612 BC.

The prophecy of Nahum teaches us that God is Sovereign. He will punish sin wherever it is found. God would destroy Nineveh with its carved images and heathen temples because it had rejected His grace (1:14).

Other prophets also spoke of the fall of Nineveh (Isa 10:12-19; Ezek 32:22-23; Zeph 2:13-15).

TALK ABOUT 1. Why was God angry with Nineveh? 2. Which other prophet did God send to Nineveh? 3. Who invaded Israel and carried its people to other lands? 4. Why did God allow Assyria to invade Israel? 5. How do you suppose God's word reached Nineveh? Did Nahum actually go there?

ever gracious and chooses to use the weak things to confound the mighty (1 Cor 1:27). You miserable little worm, Jonah!

Jonah waited under a shelter of branches to see what God would do. In anger he prayed, "Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live" (Jonah 4:4).

God caused a vine to grow up and shade his hut from the hot sun. God would use the vine to teach His prophet another lesson about His sovereign power over all the earth. Jonah did not thank God for the shade of the vine. As Jonah looked out over the city, a worm came up and ate the vine and it died. God had given the shade and God had taken it away.

Jonah fainted in the heat of the sun (4:8). He felt upset and angry.

God wanted Jonah to learn more of His love, so He asked the prophet: "You are concerned about the vine...should I not be concerned about the 120,000 people in that great city (Nineveh)" (Jonah 4:10-11).

Jonah did not understand that his God, the God of Israel, was God of the whole earth. God gives His grace to us to share with others. Oh, how selfish we can be. We want God to forgive us, but we forget about those who die in their sins.

God chose Israel to be a blessing to the rest of the world, to tell the nations of His love. Like Jonah, they failed to understand His ways and the mercy of the Lord for those outside their own nation (Ex 34:6; Joel 2:13).

TALK ABOUT 1. Does God care about those who have not heard the gospel (2 Peter 3:9)? 2. How will the world hear the good news? 3. Does God want you to go and tell them (Matt 28:18-19)? 4. What is the chief lesson in Jonah?

THE PROPHET NAHUM

Introduction: Nahum spoke God's words against Nineveh the capital city of Assyria. It had a wall 50 feet high and huge gates that no army could break down. Nahum said the city would be destroyed. God would make an end of Nineveh (Nah 1:8).

When Jonah preached in Nineveh, the people repented. God saw their faith and spared everyone in the city. Now, 150 years after Jonah went to Nineveh, the Assyrian city had rejected the light God gave them. Satan's spirits, represented by the idol-god Ishtar, had captured the hearts of the new generation of Ninevites. They were lost in the darkness idolatry.

Nahum probably lived at the time of Hezekiah and gave his prophecy after Israel was taken captive by Assyria. Assyria had already destroyed Samaria (722 -721 BC) and scattered its people. This happened in the ninth year of King Hezekiah and before Sennacherib invaded Judah (2 Kings 17:18-34).

the people of God, no harm will come to us.' Judah was not better than Samaria; they were 'one people' in their sin against God.

Amos said, "The Sovereign Lord has sworn by Himself: 'I abhor the pride of Jacob...I will deliver up (to the enemy) the city and everything it'" (Amos 6:8-14).

A fearful judgment is pictured in these verses. God said He would stir up a nation against the house of Israel. This was probably Assyria which attacked the northern kingdom (721-720 BC) and, some 150 years later, Nebuchadnezzar who attacked Judah and Jerusalem.

LOCUSTS, FIRE AND A PLUMBLINE (Amos 7:1-9)

Amos had visions of doom. He saw 'locusts' ready to eat the young sprouts of a new crop was coming up. The king had taken his share (tax) of the early harvest and now the people would have no new crop to harvest. (Perhaps the king claimed the first cutting of hay to feed his chariot horses, 1 Sam 8:15,17). Fire may have burned what grass there was because drought had even dried up "the great deep."

The vision was so striking and real that Amos cried out, "Sovereign Lord, I beg You, stop! How can Jacob survive? He is so small!" (7:4).

So the Lord relented. God's actions were right and just, but disaster was halted for a time.

In another vision Amos saw the Lord (Yahweh) "sanding by a wall...with a plumbline in His hand" (Amos 7:7-9).

A plumbline was a cord with a weight tied to the end. It was used to build a straight wall, one that did not lean. God set a plumbline on His people, Israel, and they did not live straight and honest lives. Israel had not obeyed God's covenant or kept their promises. God hated their idol worship and told the prophet Amos, "The high places of Isaac will be destroyed ...with My sword I will rise against the house of Jeroboam," the reigning king. Amos left Judah with this message and went north to Israel to tell it there.

TALK ABOUT 1. Locusts are like grasshoppers ___ True ___ False? What harm do they do? 2. Did God send the locusts? 3. What gave the people a false sense of hope? 4. What prayer did Amos make for Israel (Amos 7:4)? 5. What is a plumbline? What is it used for? 6. Does God test us today?

AMAZIAH TOLD THE KING

(Amos 7:10-17)

Amaziah, a priest of Baal at Bethel, heard Amos preaching God's message. He sent a message to King Jeroboam: "Amos is raising a conspiracy against you in the very heart of Israel..." And Amaziah repeated the prophet's words just as Amos gave them (Amos 7:10-11).

The priest shouted at Amos, "Get out, you seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there and do your prophesying there." This was probably the King's order.

Amos answered Amaziah's harsh words: "The Lord took me from tending the flock and said to me, 'Go, prophesy to My people Israel.' Now hear the word of the Lord..." (Amos 7:15-16).

No prophet of God took the honour of being a prophet on himself. Amos was appointed by the Lord and spoke only "the word of the Lord." He told the pagan Amaziah just how God would deal with him – "Your wife will become a prostitute in the city, your sons and daughters will fall by the sword...and Israel will certainly go into exile..." (Amos 7:17; Jer 25:8-14).

God puts His hand on scholar and farmer. He chooses whom He will to serve His people. Our status does not depend on what we are, but on the God we serve and His anointing.

A BASKET OF RIPE FRUIT

(Amos 8:1-14)

The vision of a basket of ripe figs was a picture of the sins of Israel. The fruit should have brought joy as a sign of a bountiful harvest. But, alas, the Lord told Amos: "The time is ripe for My people Israel; I will spare them no longer" (Amos 8:1-6).

The Lord swore "by the Pride of Jacob, I will never forget anything they have done" (Amos 8:7). How different is the Lord's grace toward those who repent. To them His promise, "I will restore David's fallen tent," a picture of the Christian Church.

Amos gave God's complaint against Israel many times (Amos 8:4-6). He must have grown tired of speaking the same words. Like Jeremiah, he had only 'bad news' to give to the people.

THE LAST WORDS OF AMOS

(Amos 9:5-10)

All the remaining "words of the Lord" in Amos 8:8 to 9:10 tell of coming judgments – a) A day of gloom and darkness (8:9-10). b) A time of famine

Jonah entered the city and shouted God's message in the city streets, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned...this is the word of the Lord" (Jonah 3:4-5). Jonah probably spoke Aramaic, the official language of business and commerce.

Forty more days showed the extent of God's mercy. When the people heard God's message, the Spirit of God moved in their hearts. They repented and believed God's word (Jonah 3:5). And no one was more surprised than the prophet.

The King heard God's message and he, too, repented. He told all the people to fast. And he made this decree: "Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways..." (Jonah 3:7-9).

We do not know how many people repented, but God "saw what they did." He saw their hearts and He spared their city and that generation of Ninevites to receive His mercy (Jonah 3:10).

God's word is for everyone. He grants His grace and mercy as He wishes. His love and forgiveness are greater than all our sin (Lam 3:22-23).

TALK ABOUT 1. Would Jonah's message be welcomed in Nineveh? 2. Did these heathen Gentiles matter to God? 3. Do you believe that the heathen are perishing? 4. Did all the people of Nineveh repent (Jonah 3:10)? 5. When Jesus Christ brought the good news of the gospel to men and women, did they repent (John 1:11; Matt 21:41)?

JONAH WAS ANGRY AT GOD

(Jonah 4:1-11)

"But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry" (4:1). In his anger, Jonah complained to God, "O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home. I knew You were a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity" (4:2).

When Jonah saw God had mercy on Nineveh, he did not like it. He did not understand how God could forgive such wicked people. God had cancelled His plan to destroy that wicked city.

Jonah was telling God that he knew what the end result of his preaching to the Ninevites would be, even before he left home. (Jonah took his words from Ex 34:6-7).

He had tried to go to Tarshish because he thought God might forgive these Gentile people. Jonah had wanted to destroy them! When God spared the city, Jonah looked foolish. Even worse, he felt like a false prophet (Deut 18:20-22). Yet God had used Jonah as an instrument of His mercy.

God could have spared Nineveh without any help from Jonah, but He is

for a dark and silent place, the realm or the dead (Psa 6:5; Job 17:16).

Jonah prayed a prayer of thanksgiving. Even in that dreadful darkness, Jonah knew one thing: "Salvation comes from the Lord" (Jon 2:9).

"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven...by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

The Lord "commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah on to dry land" (Jonah 1:17). The power of God caused the wind to obey, the storm obeyed and the fish obeyed.

The Lord gave His prophet a second chance. But let us not presume on God and think He will always deliver us. Paul wrote, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows..." (Gal 6:7).

God is always there, right beside you. If you call to Him in faith, He will answer your prayer. For those passing through hard times because of sin, Jonah's prayer gives hope. When we take the wrong path, or are caught in open rebellion against God, we must ask Him to forgive us. Jonah's prayer tells us that God will hear our cry.

How foolish to wait until we are in trouble or near death before we cry out to God! Or to let the years of our lives slip into old age before we seek the Lord (Isa 55:6). It is better to seek Him while we have good health and to offer Him our best years (Deut 6:5; Rom 12:1-2)

A SIGN OF RESURRECTION

Jonah became a sign to all generations of God's mighty power. When the Jews asked Jesus for a sign, He said to them, "No sign will be given... except the sign of Jonah the prophet. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt 12:38-40).

Christ's death, and His rising again from the dead after three days, was the sign of God's mighty power to that generation (Eph 1:19-20). Just as God's power raised Jesus Christ from the tomb, so He will raise up all those who trust in Jesus Christ as their Saviour (1 Cor 6:14; 2 Cor 4:14).

JONAH WENT TO NINEVEH

(Jonah 3:1-10)

On dry land, the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: "Jonah, go to the great city of Nineveh and preach the message I give you" (Jonah 3:1).

To get to Nineveh, Jonah had to travel 550 miles and enter the city by one of its great gates. Nineveh is called "a great city" (1:2;3:2;4:11). We do not know how Jonah got into the city. Foreigners would certainly be asked questions by Assyrian officials.

(8:11-14). c) A cruel invader (9:4).

Out of all the people of Israel, God would save a remnant. He would shake Israel "as grain is shaken in a sieve," a preserve the good grain for Himself, a remnant of the house of Jacob (9:8-9).

TALK ABOUT 1. Who was Amaziah (7:10-15)? 2. What did he say to Amos? Why did he tell the king what Amos was saying? 3. What was God's word to Israel (7:17)? 4. What did the basket of figs mean in Amos' vision (8:1-6)?

GOD'S PROMISE TO RESTORE

(Amos 9:11-21)

In the darkest times God has faithful people. God knows them. They are His witnesses. God said to Amos and the faithful in Israel, "In that day I will restore David's fallen tent..." (Amos 9:11).

The monarchy under King David was a picture or symbol of the Kingdom of God. David's tent or monarchy fell into the hands of invaders. The land of Israel was never restored to its former glory. But God had a greater purpose, to build a spiritual kingdom. It would be made up of "all the nations" or peoples that bear the Lord's name (Amos 9:12; 1 Tim 2:20). Its citizens would come out of every tribe and tongue and people (Rev 5:9). They are His Kingdom and He rules over them by His Spirit.

God did bring back a remnant of Jews to live in their own land. They did "rebuild the ruined cities" and live in them (Amos 9:14). But the promise of God to restore Israel is largely fulfilled in the Kingdom of the Messiah, the Christian Church (Acts 15:15-17).

In a vision, Daniel saw this happening. He said, "the God of heaven will set up a Kingdom that will never be destroyed...It will crush all those kingdoms (of men) and bring them to an end, but it (God's Kingdom) will itself endure forever..." (Dan 2:44). It will be enlarged so that the 'house of David' may possess "the remnant of Edom and all the nations" who honour the Lord by taking His name on their lips (Psa 2:8).

There is a multitude of Christ's people. They lack nothing (Luke 22:35). The last verses of Amos tell of God's rich supply – wine and vineyards and gardens with fruit trees (Amos 9:13-15). This reminds us that the Kingdom of Heaven will be like the garden in Eden in beauty and abundance. This is the inheritance reserved for the Israel of God (1 Pet 1:4-5).

TALK ABOUT 1. David's monarchy was powerful and glorious. It was a picture of GKingdom? 2. Now David's kingdom was like a 'fallen tent' (9:11). How would God restore it (Acts 15:15-17)? 3. What did Daniel

say about God's Kingdom (Dan 2:44)? 4. Are you a citizen of God's Kingdom? 5. If you are, He has given you a passport to H.....?

THE VISION OF OBADIAH THE PROPHET

Introduction: Who was Obadiah? He is a mystery, but God gave him a vision of "the day of the Lord" that would come upon the nations. Some think he was the servant of King Ahab of Israel (1 Kings 18:3). His was a common name. Nothing is known of his parents or his life. He may have lived about the time Nebuchadnezzar came against Jerusalem and destroyed the city and the temple. The people of Edom, always an enemy of God's people, rejoiced at Judah's calamity (Ezek 25:12).

A VISION FROM THE LORD (Obadiah 1-14)

"The Sovereign Lord" gave Obadiah this vision and preserved it here for us to read and understand. It is against Edom, the descendants of Esau (V 6). Obadiah words are like Jeremiah's, so we think Jeremiah lived at the time and prophesied against Judah and Jerusalem. Obadiah's words to Edom (V 1-6) are like Jeremiah's (49:14-16). The Edomites were God's enemies.

The prophecy is against Edom, but the people of Judah needed to hear it also. They were living careless lives, very much like their 'brothers' in Edom. The prophet may have been living in a community or 'school' of prophets. He said, "We have heard a message from the Lord..."

JACOB TRICKED HIS BROTHER ESAU

Many generations before this, Isaac's sons Esau and Jacob lived in Canaan. Jacob tricked his brother and his father (Gen 27). Isaac gave Jacob the eldest son's blessing. From that day Esau vowed to kill his brother, Jacob.

Jacob ran away to his uncle Laban and worked for him for 20 years. Esau forgave him, but Esau's descendants kept up the old enmity. At every opportunity they fought against God's people, Israel (1 Sam 14:47).

Now the Edomites live south of the Dead sea; their territory bordered Judah to the southeast. It is said that they made their living by the sword.

Edom was a proud nation. They lived in the rugged mountains and felt secure "in the clefts of the rocks" (V 3). Obadiah said, The pride of your heart has deceived you..." And God said to Edom, "I will make you small among the nations..." We need to remember that God rules over the nations!

Edom's chief city, Petra, was built into the cliffs, so that no invader could

Living God: "Lord," the men prayed, "do not let us die for taking this man's life..." and they threw Jonah into the sea (Jonah 1:15).

At once, God made the sea calm. The men were amazed. They made vows and offered gifts to the Lord the God of heaven. It was not Dagon or Baal who controlled the waves, but the Lord God of Israel!

TALK ABOUT 1. What message did God tell the prophet Jonah to preach (1:2)? 2. Is it possible to run away from God? Why not? 3. Why were the Assyrians so feared by other peoples? 4. What race of people did Jonah belong to (1:9)? 5. What did the sailors do with Jonah? Why did they do this?

GOD GAVE JONAH ANOTHER CHANCE (Jonah 2:1-10)

God is not pleased with us when we disobey Him, but He did not give up on Jonah. He gave Jonah another chance to obey His command and go to Nineveh. God wanted Jonah to preach against the city.

When the men threw Jonah into the sea, "the Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah..." (Jonah 1:17). The Hebrew word used here really means God 'prepared,' or created the great fish especially for this purpose. Jonah was inside the great fish for three days and three nights.

Inside the belly of the fish, Jonah prayed. Jonah said, "I called on the Lord and He answered...I called for help and You listened to my cry (2:1-9). Jonah's prayer is like a psalm.

Even when we try to run away from God, He always works for our good. God is always there for us! (Rom 8:28). God did not forget His prophet. He worked a miracle for Jonah!

TALK ABOUT 1. What did God do that no heathen idol can do? 2. Did Jonah tell the sailors the truth (1:9)? 3. What did the frightened sailors do? 4. How did God 'save' His prophet from drowning? 5. Was the "great fish" a special creation of God?

JONAH'S PRAYER

When Jonah faced death, he prayed. Jonah's prayer is a poem. Study it carefully. In his prayer, Jonah tells us his story: "You brought my life up from the pit, O Lord my God" (Jonah 2:2,5-6). God saved Jonah and the seamen from certain death. God does not want anyone to perish. It is Satan who wants men killed (John 8:44).

"When my life was ebbing away, I remembered You, Lord..." (2:2,7). "You brought my life up from the pit..." or Sheol. The Bible uses the word 'Sheol'

history of the city? 4. How was Nineveh protected? 5. Do you think it would be easy for Jonah to get into Nineveh? Why? 6. Why did God send Jonah?

THE PROPHET'S PLAN

It was an honour for God to choose Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach there, but Jonah did not want to go. He knew the Ninevites were a cruel and ruthless people.

If the city repented, Jonah would lose face. And why would God want to show mercy to these ruthless people?

GOD SENT A GREAT WIND (Jonah 1:1-17)

"The Lord sent a great wind on the sea" (Jon 1:4). The sailors feared their ship would break up, but Jonah was asleep in the bottom of the ship.

The sailors did not know what to do, so they threw all the cargo into the sea. "Each (sailor) cried out to his own god" - perhaps the Philistines' god, Dagon, god of the seas. Or maybe they cried out to Baal, the Canaanite god of nature.

The captain shouted to Jonah, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your God. Maybe He will take notice of us, and we will not perish" (1:6).

The sailors cast lots to try and find out who was troubling the gods and causing the sea to be so angry. The lot fell on Jonah. The sailors jumped on him and shouted, "Who are you? Where did you come from? What are you doing here" (Jonah 1:8)?

God put Jonah in a situation where he had to see the peril of those around him. These heathen men were about to perish in the angry waves. He felt concern for them but what could he do?

Jonah told the ship's crew about the living God. He said, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land." Jonah told them he was running away from God (Jonah 1:10). The Creator, who made the heavens and the earth, had sent this storm because of Jonah!

The men were even more afraid and shouted back, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down...?"

Jonah replied, "Throw me into the sea, and it will become calm. I know it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you" (1:12). No one wanted to throw Jonah into the sea. They tried everything, but the sea grew more furious.

Then they believed what Jonah told them and they cried to Yahweh, the

enter its gates. The Edomites might have thought of themselves as "soaring like an eagle" and "making their nest among the stars," but even from such a lofty place, God would bring them down to the dust.

EDOM WOULD BE DESTROYED

Obadiah used common words to tell of the Lord's judgments: a) Thieves that come at night and take all they want (V 5). b) Grape pickers who might leave behind a few grapes here and there, but take the whole crop.

Esau's allies would turn against them. God said, "Those who eat your bread will set a trap for you..." Even the "wise men" would not be able to detect the trickery of Edom's allies.

God would bring this judgment on Edom "Because of the violence (you did) against your brother Jacob (Israel and Judah)."

On the day Judah needed help, Edom "stood aloof...while foreigners entered the gates of Jerusalem and carried off its wealth..." (V 11).

Edom is accused of joining the enemy and "marching through the gates (of Jerusalem) in the day of their disaster." And Edom's fighting men "waited at the crossroads to cut down the fugitives and capture the survivors" as they ran from the city (V 14).

It is wrong to "look down on a brother" in the day of his misfortune ...nor boast in the day of their trouble" (V 12). Rather, we are to "bear one another's burden" for the sake of Christ (Gal 6:2).

TALK ABOUT 1. Why is the prophet Obadiah important? 2. Who was Esau? 3. What did God say about Edom (V 10-14)? 4. Were the Edomites always enemies of Israel? 5. How should we go after a wandering brother (Jas 5:20)?

ON MOUNT ZION (Obadiah 15-21)

The prophet turns from the disaster that will come on the Edomites to the joys of Mt Zion. God is always near to His faithful people. He dwells on Mt Zion (V17), a symbol of heaven. In Him the remnant of faithful people found hope and comfort and deliverance.

The house of Jacob – the faithful remnant – will possess the land, from the Negev as far as Zarephath (V 19-20). This prophesy was partly fulfilled in the return of the Jews from Babylon to their won land. It is finally and completely fulfilled in the Kingdom of God.

The "house of Jacob" will not be complete until Christ returns and gathers His own from every nation and tribe and tongue (Matt 24:30-31).

God's prophet saw that the gospel-church would enlarge its borders more and more until the Kingdom of God is completed.

God's people and His rule in their hearts will be like a flame and a fire. Esau will be as stubble before the Lord in the day of Israel's deliverance. Esau stands for the world that rejects Messiah Christ. The world of men and women will be destroyed by the fire of God's judgment (Heb 12:29).

"And the Kingdom (that endures) will be the Lord's (Kingdom)." Obadiah saw far into the future when "the kingdoms of this world will pass away." Only the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ will remain forever.

God gathers His children into His Kingdom "one by one." Not one is overlooked or forgotten – "those who were perishing in Assyria and those who were exiled in Egypt" will be gathered in to worship and give praise forever on the Lord's holy mountain (Isa 27:12-13).

TALK ABOUT 1. Where did the Edomites live? 2. What made them feel secure? 3. Who did the prophet call 'a remnant'? 4. Who dwells on Mt Zion? 5. When will the 'house of Jacob' be complete (Matt 24:30-31)? 6. How will Jesus Christ gather His people (Matt 24:30-31)?

JONAH, THE PROPHET WHO RAN AWAY

Introduction: Jonah was a prophet, a man with a message from God. He lived in the northern kingdom of Israel. God said to Jonah, "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it..." The Ninevites did not know God!

The Bible tells how Jonah did not want to go to Nineveh. He took a ship going the other way, but God stopped him with a great storm. Jonah found himself drowning in the raging waves. God caused a big fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah was in the stomach of the fish for three days and three nights. He repented and cried out to God. God gave Jonah a second chance. The big fish vomited Jonah out onto a beach. This was a miracle. Only God can do miracles! Jonah got up and went to Nineveh to preach God's message to the people of that great city.

What happened to Jonah is God's message to the Christian Church (Matt 12:39-41). But many who study the Bible think Jonah was not a real person. They think Jonah's story is just another folk tale, or perhaps a parable. Jesus said Jonah's story was true. This actually happened to Jonah.

God gave us a record of Jonah's life so that we can learn from it. Jonah and his family lived in history (2 Kings 14:25). He was a sign to the people of his day, just as the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a sign to us today (Matt 12:39-41). Jonah was three days in the belly of a great fish. Jesus Christ was in the tomb three days.

In recent years we have learned a lot about the great city of Nineveh, the

This was a place rich in minerals. Tin, iron and lead were mined there and shipped to Phoenician ports like Joppa.

Everything seemed to go well for Jonah, he had the money for his fare, he found the right ship, almost at once. And God did not stand in the prophet's way as He did when Balaam set out to curse the Israelites (Num 22:21-41).

Sometimes God has to do more than put obstacles in our way. He has to send a major crisis before we are willing to trust in His might and power and obey His commands (Zech 4:6).

TALK ABOUT 1. Where was the city of Nineveh? 2. Why would God send Jonah to preach against it? 3. What did God tell Jonah preach in Nineveh? 4. What did Jonah do? 5. Did God stand in Jonah's way?

THE CITY OF NINEVEH

Nineveh was one of four cities founded by Nimrod (Gen 10:8-10). Many centuries later, it became the capital of the Assyrian Empire and one of the great cities of the ancient world.

Many people doubted the Bible record of Nineveh. Then Layard discovered the ruins of the city and excavated them (1845-54). Levels of previous occupations, dated by the broken pottery found in them, went back to 3,100 BC, to the time of Nimrod and the Sumerians.

Among the great buildings in Nineveh was the palace of King Sargon with its bas-reliefs (stone carvings) of winged lions and library of clay tablets (22,000 were collected and analysed). The tablets provided much information that helped scholars understand the Book of Genesis.

Jonah came from a small town in northern Israel. He called Nineveh "a great city" (Jonah 1:2;3:2;4:11). The city had a high inner wall and great outer wall eight miles long. It took most visitors three days to go through the city and the towns around it (3:3). It is thought that the population of Nineveh in Jonah's day was about 120,000 (Jonah 3:2; 4:11).

Several centuries after Jonah came to Nineveh, the city became the throne city of Sennacherib (705 – 681 BC), who built more temples and forts in the city. The wall was made larger, perhaps 40 to 50 feet high, with fifteen main gates leading into the city.

From this city, Sennacherib marched against Jerusalem and Judah . He exacted tribute from King Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:15) Sennacherib was killed by his sons in the temple of his god Nishroch (Isa 37:38).

In 612 BC Nineveh was destroyed as God prophesied through His prophet Nahum.

TALK ABOUT 1. Who founded the city of Nineveh (Gen 10:8-10)? 2. Which great river flowed by Nineveh? 3. How did men learn the ancient

JONAH RAN AWAY FROM GOD

(Jonah 1:1-3)

"The word of the Lord came to Jonah, son of Amittai..." (Jonah 1:1). Jonah may have been the son of a prophet or priest, we are not sure. He came from Gath Hopher, in the tribe of Zebulun (Joshua 19:13).

Israel's enemy, Syria, had captured towns on the borders of Israel. At that time, the word of the Lord came to Jonah and he told the king (Jeroboam II, 793-753 BC) that the borders of Israel would be taken back from the enemy (2 Kings 14:25).

Because Syria had been devastated by war with Assyria, King Jeroboam was able to take back these border towns and return Israel's borders to where they had been in the time of King Solomon.

Often, God sent His prophets to "preach against" the sins of God's people, in the prophet's own country. Isaiah faced King Ahaz and told him, "Be careful, keep calm, and don't be afraid" (Isa 7:4). The enemy was outside the gates of the city of Jerusalem.

God told Jonah, "Go to the great city of Nineveh (in Assyria) and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before Me" (1:1).

Instead, Jonah headed for Tarshish (Tar'-shish) ...perhaps a port on the Red Sea (2 Chron 20:35). He hoped for a ship and found one at Joppa. He paid the fare and the ship set sail. Jonah did not obey God's command.

JONAH FEARED THE ASSYRIANS

(Jonah 1:4-17)

God sent Jonah to Nineveh to preach there. Most prophets rebuked nations from a safe distance. God sent Jonah into 'a lion's den' of evil.

Jonah knew that Nineveh was a 'stronghold' of darkness. He also knew its people lived in bondage to a host of demons. Jonah knew he could be arrested and tortured for just being there.

Satan did not want the people of Nineveh to repent. That is why the Bible calls Satan "the adversary," the one who stands against the true God and His message (1 Peter 5:8).

Jonah thought of the Ninevites as enemies. Why should he risk his life to tell them of God's mercy? A Nineveh spared God's judgment might fall upon his people as they had in the past!

God had to teach Jonah a lesson: That "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness of it." No nation or people are outside of God's love.

Instead of going to Nineveh, Jonah took a ship to Tarshish (Jonah 1:3).

capital city of Assyria. Assyria was famous for its power and cruelty. Israel hated the Assyrians who conquered them; God has no respect for persons. He loved the people of Nineveh and did not want them to perish in their sins (2 Peter 3:9).

When Jonah preached God's message in Nineveh, king and people repented and God spared their city. One hundred and fifty years later, the people turned back to worship idols. The prophet Nahum told them God would judge their city. Nineveh was destroyed in 612 BC by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

TALK ABOUT 1. How do we know Jonah was a real person (Matt 12:39-41)? 2. What did God tell Jonah to do? 3. Why was Jonah so afraid to go to Nineveh and preach God's message? 4. Do not delay doing what you know God wants you to do? He does not promise us a second chance.

THE GREAT ASSYRIAN EMPIRE

Assyria and Babylonia were two great world powers at that time. Both nations fought for the fertile lands of the Mesopotamia Valley, also known as the "fertile crescent."

Assyria, with its capital city Nineveh on the upper Tigris river, is named many times in the Bible. Little was known of its past until, over 100 years ago, men dug into the sandy mounds of Mosul in Iraq and found scores of baked clay tablets. They had writing on them in the ancient cuneiform language.

After many years men learned to read this ancient Babylonian-Assyrian form of writing and they learned a great deal about ancient Nineveh.

When Assyria invaded the northern tribes of Israel and captured Samaria, a complete record of their victories was made on clay tablets. These were kept in the king's library at Nineveh. A large number of clay tablets found in the libraries of Nineveh are the royal records of rulers Tiglath-Pileser (Pul), Sargon and Sennacherib. All these monarchs are well known to Bible scholars.

The culture of Assyria was one of war and conquest. Assyria was the first nation to have a system of warfare and many war-like sculptures remain to prove this. The Assyrian warriors were hard, cruel men who skinned their victims alive and hung their dead bodies on poles.

In the palaces of Nineveh, the Assyrian kings gathered the treasures of the world. All the nations they conquered paid tribute money to them in the period 745 BC to 615 BC.

TALK ABOUT 1. Who was Jonah? 2. Why did God send him to preach in Nineveh? 3. Why did Jonah run away from God? 4. Has God ever told you to do something you did not want to do? 5. Are you running away from God?

NINEVEH WAS A WICKED CITY

(Read: Jonah 1:1-3)

In Jonah's day, Nineveh (Nin'-e-veh) was a very wicked city. Many temple buildings honoured Ishtar, the Babylonian goddess of love and war. Ishtar was always associated with Nineveh. She was one of the most powerful idol-goddesses in the entire region.

The heathen idea of love is the opposite to God's love (John 13:35). New Testament writers used the word 'agape' for God's love. There is no agape love in the heathen religions of the world. True love is found only in Christ and among His followers. Jonah had only hatred for Nineveh.

Historian Thorkild Jacobsen lists several Babylonian texts and hymns celebrating Ishtar as the 'divine harlot,' an idol-goddess whose sexual demands could never be satisfied.

Other historians tell us that dancers, who took on the dress and behaviour of the opposite sex, were part of the 'cult of Ishtar.' The devilish dance of the animist is always a dance to appease evil spirits. The vile practices that go along with the worship of any idol, destroys the human spirit.

The "powers of darkness" still rule in the hearts of millions of people living in that part of the world (Eph 6:10-12). The power of the gospel of Jesus Christ can pull down these strongholds of Satan and set men free.

George Otis writes, "the invisible ruling powers of this world have not changed, or relocated their headquarters" (The Last of the Giants).

Born again Christians are the only ones who have any hope of understanding such forces of darkness. Satan knows this and will keep whole nations 'blinded' and misinformed as long as he can (2 Cor 4:4).

SATAN'S STRONGHOLDS HAVE NOT CHANGED

The high priestesses of Ishtar were known as the 'Entu'. These priestesses pleased the gods and satisfied the worshippers on a soft couches atop the ziggurat. "Ishtar's legacy of temple prostitution extended well beyond the Entu" (George Otis).

A ziggurat was a tall, stepped tower or pyramid. It had three to seven levels with a small temple at the top. Men believed that the gods rested in the temple on their way from heaven to earth. In the temples, ancient civilizations worshipped the sun, moon and stars. People brought offerings to the Queen of Heaven (Jer 7:18).

In the Bible, the Tower of Babel is the most famous ziggurat of all (Gen 11).

After the flood, Noah's descendants had one language. They said to each

other, "Come, let us build ourselves a city with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves...." (Gen 11:4).

But God was not pleased. The people were proud and rebelled against His command to "fill the earth." So God "confused their language" and men were scattered over the face of the earth.

Archaeologists discovered a crumbling ziggurat in Ur of the Chaldees, where God spoke to Abraham (Gen 12:1).

TALK ABOUT 1. Why did the people living in the Assyrian empire live in fear? 2. What have men learned about Nineveh? 3. What did Jonah do (1:3)? 4. What word did God have for the people of Nineveh (3:4)?

THE SPIRIT OF BABYLON

The "spirit of Babylon" showed itself as a spirit of fear, cruelty, death and destruction. This dark 'spirit' is still very much alive in the Middle East. Fear, violence, death are the sacrifices not only required but demanded by the invisible spiritual rulers of this world (Eph 6:12).

In the late 1980's, just an hour's drive from Baghdad, visitors were surprised to see the forty-foot high yellow-brick walls of Babylon

rising again! The "Spirit of Babylon the Great" has been revived. Saddam Hussein tried to identify with Iraq's greatest ancestor, Nebuchadnezzar! Saddam has restored the blue-tiled Ishtar Gate and built a copy of Nebuchadnezzar's coronation hall. Over the new Ishtar Gate he hung a smiling portrait of himself and Nebuchadnezzar looking down at the new palace.

More than bricks and mortar were used to remind his people of their history. The excesses, grandeur, fear, cruelty, violence and death of Sadam Hussein's reign must remind us of King Nebuchadnezzar's empire and reign.

Paul makes it very clear that deceiving spirits can only deceive those who reject the truth (Rom 1:18-25). He said this about those who had been deceived by Satan: "Although they knew God, their neither glorified Him as God nor gave Him thanks, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened...they (willfully) exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator" (Rom 1:21-25).

TALK ABOUT 1. What do you know about Assyria? 2. What is a ziggurat and where were they found? 3. What were ziggurats used for? 4. What does idol worship do to the human spirit? 5. In the beginning men knew the true God __ True __ False (Rom 1:18-25)? 6. Why did their minds become dark?