

# DAILY NOTES

Jeremiah to  
Malachi

## Daily Notes Jeremiah-Malachi

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These notes are a very simple aid to your daily reading as you make your way through historical books of the Bible. You'll find a simple reflection on each day's chapter followed by a short prayer in response. It is hoped that this will fuel your own prayers as you spend time with the Lord.

A suggested daily time with the Lord might look like this:

- **Read.** In our time with God, it seems right to let him speak first. Whether it's a chapter or just one line, it's all his word.
- **Reflect.** We want to understand what we read, and then think about what it says about God, us, life, and so on.
- **Respond.** Prayer based on what God has said to you through his word means that your prayers are shaped biblically.
- **Request.** God is glorified by our requests as we humbly acknowledge his power and grace.

If your daily time is very short, just pray. If you have a few minutes, read some of the Bible and pray. If you have a little more time, these notes will help you reflect on what you have read and respond to what God has said. If you have a few minutes more, think about how the notes meditate on the Bible passage. You may find that the written prayer doesn't quite match how the Scripture reading has spoken to you; in that case, pray your own response to what God has said.

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## Daily Notes

Jeremiah to Malachi

## **Jeremiah 1 – Appointed by God**

There are three things we'll note in this opening chapter of Jeremiah, the longest book in the Bible after the Psalms: (a) Jeremiah lived through Jerusalem's worst times and the three kings of Judah in v2-3 are key components in the history of the times. In fact, Jeremiah keeps circling back to key moments in time rather than presenting his material chronologically; (b) That said, v10 outlines the overall shape of the book with much included to tear down Israel's idolatry and apostasy before later chapters begin to bring a message of hope in Christ; (c) Lastly, we can hardly fail to see Jeremiah's reluctance to take up the role the LORD appointed him to before the prophet was even born (v5-6). Likewise, we don't get to choose the times we're in; we're to witness where we are.

*Living God, the idolatry and lostness around me is no different from your ancient people. You knew me before I was born, and you placed me here, with these gifts, in the place and time of your choosing. I confess to sharing Jeremiah's hesitancy: Help me to witness for you where I am.*

## **Jeremiah 2 – Fountain of Living Water**

After a brief recollection of Israel's early blessings as "holy to the LORD" (v1-3), the LORD spells out Israel's spiritual bankruptcy in Jeremiah's time. The LORD's special possession had made themselves "worthless" by following "worthless idols" (v5). The situation is summed up by the vivid imagery of v13: "They have abandoned me, the fountain of living water, and dug cisterns for themselves – cracked cisterns that cannot hold water." It's the double tragedy of apostasy and idolatry, fuelled by a lusty passion for novelty (v22-25) and spiritual ignorance (v26-28). So they will receive covenant curse instead of blessing, even to exile (v37-38). We must be more watchful for the idols we build for ourselves today.

*Living God, great Fountain of Living Water, I know it must grieve you to see the idols I have built and how I choose to be ignorant of my idolatry. Saviour, keep me in close dependence and fellowship, ever delighting in your presence, conscious of your love and help.*

## **Jeremiah 3 – Return, Return, Return**

The LORD's relationship with his people is described with the images of father/son and husband/wife. These are powerful, relational terms, highlighting that our sins are not like impersonal parking offences; they are the deep betrayal of wayward children or a promiscuous wife. Young King Josiah was a godly man who brought great reform to Judah and into Israel (2 Chron. 34-35), but we see here how most of Judah didn't turn in heart (v10). What does the LORD require of them? That they "acknowledge [their] guilt" (v13) and return to him (v12, 14, 22), and he will bring a future where no-one will need the ark of the covenant (v16) since the LORD will make his throne among his people (v17, Rev. 21:22).

*Holy God, how gracious and patient you are, how loving and faithful to wayward sinners like me. Thank you that as I confess my sin here now, you are faithful and just to forgive me. I thank you as much for what you have saved me to as all you have saved me from.*

## **Jeremiah 4 – The Earth Will Mourn**

These opening chapters are early prophecies of Jeremiah, given before the tumultuous events of invasion and exile ever happened. Judah was at peace, at ease, and Jeremiah's warnings would have sounded hysterical nonsense to many in Jerusalem. But to his later readers in exile, such unheeded warnings would have sounded like heart-breaking missed opportunities for Judah to turn to the LORD (e.g. v1-4). No doubt plenty of false prophets proclaimed "Peace," prompting Jeremiah's own confusion in v10 (he would confront false prophets later on). The words of judgment here are almost 'un-creation' (v23-26) reflecting the depth of punishment, while we also see the LORD's grief expressed in Jeremiah (v19-21). Must we likewise see Christ's return before we truly believe it?

*Eternal God, your word shows over and over how you accomplish all your holy will – both in judgment and grace. Forgive me that I don't live with the pressing reality of your judgment on those around me at Christ's return. Help me, as you helped Jeremiah, to speak your truth.*

## **Jeremiah 5 – An Appalling, Horrible Thing**

These ancient words of judgment resonate pointedly and powerfully with our own society. The LORD's name is used lightly (v2), our leaders don't fear him (v5), and our culture is filled with competing passions for anything but God (v8). The LORD's question, "Why should I forgive you?" (v7) is terrifying in pitiless logic: All judgment is deserved. Rich and powerful people love their riches and power, with greed and deceit used to maintain social inequality that is abhorrent to the compassionate heart of our God (v27-29). But even more terrifying is this: "My people love it like this" (v31). Jeremiah's role was the same as ours today: We're to declare and proclaim God's honour to a sinful world (v20-23).

*Holy God, you must surely grieve at all you see in this sinful society of ours. I'm uncomfortably aware that I'm not as appalled at cultural wickedness as I ought to be. Lord, give me greater spiritual sensitivities, and fire me up to speak to others in your name.*

## **Jeremiah 6 – "Find Rest for Yourselves"**

While Jeremiah's preaching was for those in Jerusalem to come to repentance for their idolatry and apostasy, the written book was compiled for the benefit of the exiles in Babylon. It spelled out for them the reason for the exile in devastating clarity, and they must have deeply regretted not heeding the LORD's calls to "find rest for yourselves" (v16). Likewise, there will be many who regret ignoring Christ's invitation to find rest in him (Matt. 11:28). But unbelief is a choice: "We won't listen!" (v17). By Chapter 6 our heads might already be spinning with Jeremiah's dark message, but we must see that warning of judgment is a gracious call to repentance from the LORD who grieves over rebellion and unbelief.

*Holy Father, all you do is righteous and good, and your warnings of judgment demonstrate great patience and grace. Thank you for calling me to your rest. Help me to be clear about sin and grace for others to come to Jesus for rest, to your glory.*

## **Jeremiah 7 – The Temple Sermon**

Jeremiah's words so far date from his early ministry in the time of King Josiah, but we leap forward 18 years into the reign of King Jehoiakim for this Temple Sermon in 609 BC (an occasion we'll return to in Chapter 26). He was to preach against their moral failure and sham religion; their trust was more in the Temple and ritual than in the LORD who dwelt among them. The tabernacle's place at Shiloh was long abandoned – and that would happen to Jerusalem's temple too. Jeremiah was not to pray for them in their systematic, domestic idolatry (v16-19); it was too late for them. The terrible imagery of judgment in 7:27-8:3 would be unbelievable to Jeremiah's first hearers, but heartbreaking to his first readers in Babylon. The crowd's response to Jesus quoting v11 was no less furious (Matt. 21:13).

*Gracious Lord, still no-one wants to hear your warnings or turn to know you. Still there is false worship and lip service. Have mercy, Lord, and revive your church so that we will be bolder and more effective in making you known. Help me to see and to smash the idols in my own life.*

## **Jeremiah 8 – “My Joy has Flown Away”**

After the Temple Sermon in Chapter 7, Chapters 8-10 continue in the prophetic tone of Chapters 4-6. Yet here we see the pain, hurt, and distress that arise from idolatry – with a particular emphasis on Judah's leaders. They thought themselves wise, yet “rejected the word of the LORD” (v9). In the end, all they have is hopelessness as they await their destruction (v14-17). But theirs is not the only distress. Their cry brings pain to the heart of God and to his prophet Jeremiah, just as the rebellion of later Jerusalem would bring tears to Jesus as he approached it on Palm Sunday (Luke 19:41-44). The real fruit of idolatry is grief.

*God of all compassion, how my sin must grieve you. You have saved me from sin's curse, united me to Jesus, and brought me into familial intimacy. Gracious Father, please forgive the idolatry I continue to cling to. Help me to live in joyful dependence on you alone.*

## **Jeremiah 9 – Boast in the LORD**

Jeremiah is sometimes known as the weeping prophet on account of his many tears shed. But as in v1 here, it's not always clear who is speaking – Jeremiah or the LORD. In v7-10, we can see that it's the LORD who speaks, declaring both his just action against Israel's sin (v9) and his deep grief at the necessary judgment (v10). Again and again the Bible is at pains to reveal the horrors of judgment, and v22 is a horrible summary of all that's been said. Yet the Bible also affirms the boundless grace of the LORD, and if this life holds any opportunity for boasting it is in a knowledge of the love, justice, and righteousness of the LORD – a knowledge granted by grace, worked in circumcision of the heart (v25-26).

*Saviour God, if you asked for only outward religion you would be worthy of our best, and yet you have stunningly completed all that is needed to satisfy your love, justice and grace at the cross of Christ. May I lean always to share your terrible grief at the sin in me and others.*

## **Jeremiah 10 – The LORD is the True God**

This lively chapter has two parts, the first of which is a poem oscillating between images of idols and the LORD. Idols are as powerless as “scarecrows in a cucumber field” whereas the LORD’s “name is great in power” (v2-7); idols are manmade objects but “the LORD is the true God” (v8-10); idols waste away and perish, but the LORD “is the one who formed all things” (v14-16). Our own blindness to our idolatry cuts us off from enjoying deeper knowledge of the LORD. Verses 17-25 switch to a scene of miserable exiles gathering their belongings to troop out of Judah, lamenting their condition and praying for the LORD’s judgment on the nations. Such misery is the fruit of the idolatry of v1-16.

*True God, Living Creator, it has been said that our hearts are idol factories, and I know it to be true for me. Lord, what joy of experience of you have I missed out on through leaning on lies and promises no stronger than a spider's web? Teach me more of you.*

## **Jeremiah 11 – Conspiracies**

Chapters 7 to 10 dismantled Judah's misplaced trust in its temple and idolatry. In Chapters 11 to 20, we read Jeremiah's own personal dealings with the LORD, firstly on covenant themes in Chapters 11 to 17. The LORD commanded Jeremiah to preach the warnings of covenant curse to Judah (v1-8) and then spoke of judgment to come on them for their conspiracy of apostasy and idolatry (v9-13), a judgment from which there will be no relief (v14). In v18-20 we read the first of six so-called "confessions of Jeremiah" – laments to the LORD. Jeremiahs' own neighbours and kin have a conspiracy to silence him (v21, 1:1, 12:6). If we speak the LORD's truth to a world hostile to God, we should expect to feel the pain of the LORD's rejection through us.

*Lord Christ, your word rightly identifies our natural inability and unwillingness to submit to your holy rule. Saviour, you have called me to serve in your kingdom, so I pray that you will equip me to hold out your truth faithfully and strongly, even as you work through me.*

## **Jeremiah 12 – Wrath and Compromise**

Verses 1-4 are Jeremiah's second lament and it holds the deep-rooted pain that many believers have felt: "Why does the way of the wicked prosper?" – not least because Jeremiah suffered for preaching truth. The LORD's response actually warns Jeremiah of worse to come (v5-6) and then spells out the tension between the LORD's justice and his compassion. His people have sinned and made themselves his enemy, earning his covenant curse (v7-13), so they are already suffering some of the judgement Jeremiah longed to see. Yet the LORD is slow to anger and full of grace, so his patience provides time for repentance. He will always welcome anyone who turns to him (v14-17, 2 Peter 3:8-9).

*Holy God, I thank you for your patience and grace towards me. Father, as I see the wicked prosper I know that that grieves you and I praise you for the patience that stays your hand of judgment. Lord, use me to speak your compassion to the lost.*

## **Jeremiah 13 – Unwearable People**

Rather than being underwear, the garment Jeremiah bought was probably a splendid, close-fitting item to be worn as a status symbol for all to see, such as a priest or a king might wear. He would look smart to everyone. But once it had rotted by burial it became unwearable. The key observation is in v11: Israel were to be such a garment to the LORD himself. Israel were to be intimately bound to the LORD for his “fame, praise, and glory” (v11), just as the church is to be today (Eph. 1:12,14). Do we make the LORD attractive to the world? Or are we so like the world that the LORD would regard us as unwearable? As v15-27 show, the LORD will not tolerate sin in his people forever.

*Living God, every revelation you give of yourself is perfect, and yet my sin and selfishness warp the display of your glory from your church to the world. Spirit of God, help me and our church to live in such union with Christ that unbelieving people would turn and praise you.*

## **Jeremiah 14 – Do Not Pray**

In v1-6 we read of the effects of God’s judgment on both man and beast in Judah, and in v7-9 the people cry out to the LORD. But the verdict in v10 is, “the LORD does not accept them.” Worse still, in v11-16 Jeremiah is told not to pray for Jerusalem and that their false prophets of peace will come under the city’s destruction. The pattern broadly repeats, with lament and petition in v17-22 being met with a refusal from the LORD to listen: It is time for judgment (15:1-9). Why? Because the sins of the people have reached full measure. Even the LORD is moved to say, “I am tired of showing compassion” (15:6) in the light of their unending idolatry. For there to be a day of judgment, there must be an end to patient compassion.

*Lord God, you are the Father of mercy, abounding in compassion, and yet you won’t be mocked by anyone perpetuating a life of sin. If not for your mercy, I would have no hope, so I thank you for the great compassion you have shown me in Jesus.*

## **Jeremiah 15 – “Like a mirage”**

Back in 2:13, Jeremiah recorded the LORD describing himself as the “fountain of living water,” and yet here in v18 Jeremiah says to God, “You truly have become like a mirage to me.” It’s one of the most shocking prayers in the whole Bible, coming in Jeremiah’s third lament (v15-18). Although he had once found the role of prophet to be a joy (v16), being constantly rejected and abused for years has brought him to emotional rock bottom. He is angry with everyone (including God) and calls for vengeance (v15). Though his words may appal us, he is at least still praying. We thank God for his reply: He calls Jeremiah to repent of his self-pitying verbal attack, and to keep going in the same assurance of protection that the LORD gave him at the start (v19-20, 1:18).

*Holy Father, you are good and wise and kind, even when we say foolish things to you. When I grow weary or want to shirk the works you have prepared for me, call me back to Jesus, to the start, to your promises. Lord, hope of Israel, give me strength.*

## **Jeremiah 16 – Withdrawal From Judah**

In the culture of his time, it was unthinkable strange for Jeremiah not to marry (v2). It was also unspeakably rude not to attend funerals or weddings, and yet the LORD instructs Jeremiah to stay away (v5, 9). Jeremiah’s conduct mirrors his message from God: “I have removed my peace from these people as well as my faithful love and compassion” (v5). The people still claim ignorance of their sin and Jeremiah has to recount their intergenerational idolatry and apostasy yet again (v11-12). Yet Jeremiah can speak of a time when “the nations” will come to the LORD, though Israel rejected him (v19). In our union with Christ, our message and conduct should unify as we take his gospel to all nations.

*Lord Christ, forgive me that my sinful self-centredness means that I fail to live out your commands to love. I pray for the Spirit’s help to change me so that there is alignment of gospel message and conduct, and so that others will be attracted to you as they experience you through me.*

## **Jeremiah 17 – Hearts of Deceit**

This book of Jeremiah is a collection of sermons and prophecies edited into one volume, and this chapter demonstrates that well. The connecting theme is the heart, which in Hebrew is more about the human *will* than emotions. So human will is locked onto idolatry (v1-4), determined to trust itself (v5-8), and utterly deceitful (v10). Yet the LORD cannot be deceived, and he alone knows us truly (v11-13). Jeremiah's fourth lament (v14-18) is a prayer for vindication of his message: It may sound harsh to us, but he's praying in line with what God has said through him. Why draw attention to the Sabbath in v19-27? Again, it's a heart/will matter: Will you love the LORD? Will you love your neighbour? Or do you love yourself and your money more?

*Holy Spirit, truly you know my heart far, far better than I know do. You must be grieved so often as I try to deceive myself and others as I choose to sin. Help me to fully experience the joy of union with Christ, living a life wholly incorporated into him who is Truth and Life.*

## **Jeremiah 18 – The Potter and the Clay**

A potter may find one lump of clay more suited to one shape than another. The outcome is the potter's choice, but the decision is related to the properties of the clay. So with God as the potter and the nations his clay, the response of a nation to God has a part to play in his dealings with it in his sovereign purposes (v1-12). Israel were stubbornly opposed to the LORD and locked into their "worthless idols" (v15), leading to a societal rejection of God's words through his prophet, and so to "plans against Jeremiah" (v18). After all Jeremiah's prayers for Judah (v20), he now prays the LORD's own words of judgment on them in his fifth lament. Still we must pray for our enemies; vengeance is the LORD's alone.

*Sovereign Lord, you are free to deal with this country as you see fit in your perfect justice, wisdom, and goodness. It's clear that this is not good clay. But I will follow Jesus, not Jeremiah, and pray for your mercy and forgiveness in our community, region, and country.*

## **Jeremiah 19 – Shatter the Jar**

Somehow, Jeremiah gathered a band of the very elders and priests who were now plotting against him (18:18) at Jerusalem's rubbish dump, the Ben Hinnom Valley. While chapter 18's image of the potter and the clay suggested hope for Israel, their complete apostasy, idolatry, and wicked practices had become locked in and hardened, like a finished clay pot. Smashing the pot in Jeremiah's hand, he pictured the irreparable damage that would come to the unrepentant nation. It was a devastating message, and a very sad day. Worse yet, he then went to the courtyard of the LORD's temple to cry out the same message for everyone to hear. It was a dangerous thing to do, but obedience to God sometimes is.

*Holy God, your judgments are true and just. Your power is terrifying, and yet your grace and mercy are abounding. Lord, I pray for your grace to my unsaved loved ones, that you won't count them as hardened pots, but will yet work them to bring them to repentance and faith.*

## **Jeremiah 20 – Fire Burning in my Heart**

Chapters 11 to 20 chart Jeremiah's personal dealings with God as he fulfils his role of God's prophet. His graphic potter/pot imagery landed him in stocks at the temple, seemingly making a mockery of his preaching. Such excruciating humiliation underpins the last of his six laments to the LORD in v7-18. Once again, Jeremiah holds nothing back in his raw prayer. He feels he can't win since he suffers from people if he preaches but suffers within if he doesn't (v9-10). Although Jeremiah knows that God is worth our "Hallelujahs" (v13), he still feels the sharpness of rejection and shame. He is a shadow of the man of sorrows to come, though Jesus' loving purpose never drove him to self-pity.

*Saviour, if I'm honest I rarely experience the need to tell others your gospel as a fire burning in my heart. Forgive me for my sloth and dullness of spirit. Holy Spirit, show me more of the grace that has been extended to me in Christ so that I might be more fervent in sharing it with others.*

## **Jeremiah 21 – Arrogant to the End**

Zedekiah was Judah's last king before the final exile to Babylon (1:3), so we've got quite a change of scene in Chapter 21. In fact, 21:1 to 23:8 is a collection of sayings against kings of Judah in Jeremiah's lifetime after the godly King Josiah. Why start this section with the last king? Because it highlights the blind arrogance of Judah's attitude to God, ridiculously hoping for a miracle despite their apostasy and idolatry (v2). But the warning of v5 is devastating: The LORD himself will fight against his people. Yet despite the kings, priests, and prophets and their wicked godless leadership, there was still a choice of life or death offered to the people (v8, Deuteronomy 30:15).

*Living God, it is comforting that while we are part of a godless society yet you have mercy on us individually. My sin would put me at enmity against you, and yet you have brought gracious and complete reconciliation to me in Christ. Saviour, thank you.*

## **Jeremiah 22 – The End of David's Line?**

Verses 1-9 could have been spoken against any of the kings of Judah after the godly king Josiah's death by the Egyptians. So Jeremiah speaks specific words to each of the kings: Josiah's son Shallum (aka Jehoahaz) was deported to Egypt and never returned (v10-12). Pharaoh Neco installed Jehoiakim who was selfish and godless and doomed for judgment (v13-23), so very unlike Josiah (v15-16). Coniah (aka Jeconiah or Jehoiachin) reigned for a few weeks between Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, and was part of the main exile to Babylon in 597 BC. He had many sons, but none would reign as king again in Jerusalem (v30). For us, however, he is of supreme importance as he carried David's line to Jesus (Matthew 1:11).

*Sovereign Lord, Jeremiah served you through such turbulent times and yet it's clear that you accomplished your purposes with wise precision. Thank you that I can know whatever goes on in the world today you remain sovereignly in control, and that evil rulers will give account to you.*

## **Jeremiah 23 – The LORD is our Righteousness**

The previous two chapters have condemned Judah's kings after Josiah, and the finality of 22:30 seemed to put an end to the promise of a king to rule forever in David's line (2 Samuel 7). But here that promise is amazingly reinstated – and he will be a king even better than Josiah (v5, 22:15). Zedekiah's name means "The LORD is My Righteousness" but Christ is "The LORD is Our Righteousness" since we live before God in union given by credited righteousness (v6). Such radical spiritual transformation must necessarily result in moral newness of life, so v9-40 condemn the false prophets and priests whose teachings were not from the LORD and did not call for turning from sin (v22). We need church leaders who know and obey God's word before daring to teach it.

*Lord Christ, your appearing was never in doubt, though it often seemed so unlikely in human terms. Thank you that my righteousness – my very grounds of hope of life with you – is actually from you. I pray that I might live out that righteousness, and that our church leaders would teach it.*

## **Jeremiah 24 – Good Figs and Bad Figs**

Chapters 24 to 29 all begin with an identifying date, but as ever with Jeremiah they're not in chronological order. The scene in this chapter is 597 BC. Jehoiakim has died (quite possibly murdered) and his son Jehoiachin (aka Jeconiah or Coniah) promptly surrenders Jerusalem to Nebuchadnezzar. This is a good strategic move after Jehoiakim's foolish rebellion against Babylon. The royal family and over 10,000 of Jerusalem's elite are deported to Babylon, leaving others with Jerusalem and its temple pilfered but still standing. The shock of this chapter is that God's grace and blessing go with the exiles (good figs), while his curse remains on those in Jerusalem (bad figs). Newly appointed Zedekiah will continue their wickedness (v8-10).

*Heavenly Father, we're so quick to interpret your actions for our own favour instead of humbly waiting on you. Spirit, grant me an ever-deepening wisdom to know myself and your will for me in Christ.*

## **Jeremiah 25 – Glimmer of Grace**

Chapters 7, 25, 36, 45, and 46 are all set in this pivotal year, the “fourth year of Jehoiakim”, the “first year of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon” (v1). It was 605 BC and the land was under Egypt since Pharaoh Neco killed Josiah in battle in 609 BC. Jeremiah had prophesied to a wilfully deaf nation for 23 years as just one of God’s “servants the prophets” who had called Israel/Judah to repentance (v4). So now the LORD would send “my servant Nebuchadnezzar” (v9) to be a voice that Judah could not ignore. Judgment would come to Judah and all the godless nations (v17-25) and crucially to Sheshak (Babylon) too (v26) – even to “the ends of the earth” (v31). Yet news of limited exile is a glimmer of grace (v11-12).

*Sovereign Lord, your goodness and wisdom aren't compromised even as you fulfil your purposes through men like Nebuchadnezzar, Pilate, or Judas, and they are no less culpable for their sins. Lord, I pray for glimmers of grace in this country, even as it drifts further from you.*

## **Jeremiah 26 – Back-to-Front Court**

We're back in 609 BC, Jehoiakim's first year as king following the death of godly king Josiah (v1). The land is under Egyptian rule, Jehoiakim having been installed by Pharaoh Neco. Verses 4-7 are an abbreviated version of the full 'Temple Sermon' recorded in Chapter 7. The response shown here is absolute outrage. A court is hastily convened (v10) and Jeremiah is on trial for his life. But what is really in the dock is whether he speaks the word of the LORD or not. Using case law from Micah and Hezekiah (v17-19), they decide not to execute Jeremiah (though Uriah's fate in v20-23 shows that the threat was real). They agree that Jeremiah spoke God's words, but they refuse to apply it. Jeremiah leaves court free, but the court condemns itself before God.

*Lord Christ, there was a day when you, the Judge of all the earth, stood trial in Jerusalem. It's easy to see the hard-hearted self-deception and unbelief that blinds us from truth. So I thank you for the Spirit's work in me, without which I'd have remained as lost as anyone.*

## **Jeremiah 27 – Wear the Yoke**

Jehoiakim is dead, and his son Jeconiah (Jehoiachin) has been exiled with thousands of others in 597 BC. Nebuchadnezzar installed Zedekiah as a puppet king. But here, four years later (28:1), Zedekiah has called a conference with envoys from neighbouring kingdoms – almost certainly to organise a rebellion against Babylon (v3). But Jeremiah's message is unmissable and missional: The LORD God of Israel is the one who "made the earth" (v5) and governs all nations (a shocking idea to those foreign envoys). Babylonian rule is God's decree, and to resist Nebuchadnezzar is to resist God himself. Jeremiah gives the same message to the king (v12-15) and to the priests and people (v16-22). We must learn to be bolder in proclaiming God's universal majesty.

*Eternal Son, glorified as King of kings and Lord of lords, it is comforting and encouraging to know that you reign over all humanity. I'm reminded that since you have such authority I'm to go and make disciples, teaching them all you have said. Spirit, give me such clear boldness.*

## **Jeremiah 28 – Test the Spirits**

In 26:20-24, the prophet Uriah was put to death by men for preaching the truth from God. Here, Hananiah is put to death by God for preaching the lies men want to hear. It is easy in hindsight to see who we would rather be, but in the moment of preaching Uriah was hated while Hananiah was honoured. We must be clear-sighted when we speak of Christ, seeking to please him and not people. But what of their hearers? Hananiah (like other false prophets) used the same language of declaration that Jeremiah used, so the only way anyone could tell who was right was to wait and see. There are still too many Hananiahs around today. We must test the spirits and hold tight to God's words.

*Holy God, you have spoken to us so clearly through your Son revealed in your word. Help me to speak with boldness in the face of rejection and opposition. Help me to hear your word preached well so that it changes my heart, mind, and will.*

## **Jeremiah 29 – A Future and a Hope**

Jeremiah's attention is being drawn more to God's grace in the future than his current judgments in Jerusalem. The letter in v4-23 is to the Israelites in Babylon while Zedekiah was in Jerusalem (597-587 BC). The letter would have been shocking: Not only will exile last 70 years, but the exiles are also to settle down and even pray for Babylon's prosperity (v7). Verse 11 is a classic 'fridge magnet' verse, but it's often understood only as comforting words that one's problems will soon be over. In context, the exiles were to embrace their situation and to be a blessing where they were. The New Testament identifies the church as exiles in Babylon (this world of sin, e.g. 1 Peter 1:1, Rev. 18). In difficulties, we often act as if there's some kind of mistake when we ought to embrace our situation and proclaim Christ where we are.

*Lord Christ, you are my future and my hope, and by your grace I have you now even in my toughest days. Forgive me for wanting easier times; help me to proclaim you in my weakness.*

## **Jeremiah 30-31 – A New Covenant**

Chapters 30 to 33 are often referred to as the Book of Consolation and are rich in promise for exiled Israel, for today's church, and for our future hope. As ever, Israel's suffering was a direct result of their sin (30:15), but God promises both the destruction of enemies and the restoration of Jerusalem. Why? Because the LORD can say of his bride, his people, "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (31:3). His people will grieve the world's evil (31:15), but Matthew's gospel quotes that verse to point us to the hope we have in Christ (31:15, Matt. 2:18). And so Christ ushered in the New Covenant for us, where our knowledge of God is founded on sins forgiven (31:34) and the unshakeable, unbreakable promises of the eternal God (31:37).

*God of promise and consolation, the covenant you have brought me into is beautiful and secure in your eternal goodness. Thank you for the complete and utter forgiveness you have granted me in Christ.*

## **Jeremiah 32 – Planted in the LORD**

The scene at v1-2 is awful. The Babylonian army had taken all of Judah and lain siege to Jerusalem. Jeremiah was in the palace prison for prophesying these very events. He had a visitor, his cousin Hanamel, inviting him to redeem some family land. It was a ridiculous thing to do under the circumstances, but Jeremiah bought the field from his prison with little expectation of ever even seeing it. Yet he bought it because the LORD told him to. In v16-25, Jeremiah prays humbly to the LORD, ending with an implied “Why?” The LORD’s answer from v26 is that although terrible judgment is coming to Jerusalem, yet he will extend grace and restore them: “Fields will be purchased” again (v44). The language of v38-41 find ultimate fulfilment only in Christ.

*Living God, your perspective of time and events is so clear and good, yet I know I so often share Jeremiah’s short-sighted confusion. Thank you that the future you have planned for your people is so secure. Help me to learn humility and trust when things aren’t as I’d choose.*

## **Jeremiah 33 – Joy, Praise, Glory, Righteousness**

Chapters 30 to 33 form Jeremiah’s so-called Book of Consolation and here we have restatements of earlier promises of both judgment and blessing. But notice the emphasis on covenants: (a) with day and night (Creation) in v20; (b) with Abraham to have descendants as numerous as stars in the sky and sand on the seashore (v22); with Moses (v6, see Deut. 26:18-19); with David to have eternal reign in his descendants (v21, 2 Sam. 7); and with Levi (v22, Num. 25:13) to have an everlasting priesthood. Also notice that all this is focussed on the “Righteous Branch” (v15) who will come to his people to be named “The LORD is our Righteousness” (v16). Jesus is our righteousness, the root and goal of God’s covenants, and our joy, praise, and glory (v9).

*Lord Christ, in whom all the promises of God are Yes and Amen, thank you for the utter security of credited righteousness resulting in joy, praise, and glory. Your sovereign grace is astonishing.*

## **Jeremiah 34 – Covenant Failure**

After the covenant-soaked hope of Chapter 33 (fulfilled in Christ), we have a pair of chapters on Judah's inability/ability to keep a covenant at all. Israel had been slaved in Egypt, so it's no surprise to see laws on slavery and freedom prominently placed in the Old Testament law (e.g. Ex. 21, Lev. 25). It's not clear why Zedekiah made a covenant with Jerusalem's people to free all slaves (v8-9), especially at a time of such dire opposition (v1). It pleased God (v15), but then they reneged on the release so quickly it was as offensive to the LORD as it was cruel to the poor and oppressed. Zedekiah's repentance had been an opportunity for blessing (v4-5), but Judah's inability and unwillingness to submit to God's covenant was consistent with centuries of rebellion and idolatry.

*Heavenly Father, I can't get on my high horse and condemn anyone for abuse of the poor. I am part of a society geared towards ease for the rich at the expense of others, and my heart is drawn in selfish sympathy. Give me the practice and compassion of Christ, my servant king.*

## **Jeremiah 35 – Covenant Success**

The editor of Jeremiah's great book (quite possibly Baruch, 32:12) takes us back more than ten years into the reign of Jehoiakim (v1) to complete this pair of chapters on covenant keeping. Jeremiah held a wine reception in the temple for the Rechabites, a family of teetotal tent-dwellers taking refuge in the city. They politely refuse the wine on the basis of keeping the command of their ancestor. They have obeyed him for generations, which the LORD holds up as a direct contrast with the inter-generational refusal of Judah to keep the LORD's commands. Moses said in Deut. 30:11, "This command... is certainly not too difficult" but hearts without love for the LORD will never sustain obedience.

*Gracious God, you are utterly faithful in all you do, perfectly keeping your perfect covenant promises. I am rather more like Judah than these Rechabites. Help me to live out the reality of life in you, based on a vital, living communion with you in Christ.*

## **Jeremiah 36 & 45 – Rejected and Dejected**

It's the year 605 BC again, the year of the Temple Sermon (Chapters 7 & 25), and Jerusalem is soon to fall under Babylonian rule. Jeremiah dictates as Barch writes, and the first to hear the words read are greatly affected. But when the words are read to king Jehoiakim, his wickedness beggars belief. It is not a whim; his destruction of the scroll in columns is as systematic and hard as his rebellion against all God's grace. As for the messengers of God's word, the focus here is Baruch. He had hoped for a cosy career (36:5) but finds only the misery of working for an outcast prophet (36:3). But we don't get to choose the times we're in or the tasks we're given, and neither do we deserve God's lavish grace.

*Gracious God, you have prepared works for me to do. Forgive me that I so often complain like Baruch. Help me to find joy in serving you rather than myself, and to humbly submit to your will even when I'm stubbornly fixed in the wrong direction.*

## **Jeremiah 37 – Is There a Word?**

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (Chaldea) had made Zedekiah king in Jerusalem in 597 BC. When Zedekiah rebelled against him, the Babylonian army laid siege to Jerusalem in 588 BC. When the Egyptians rose up, the Babylonian army withdrew to engage them in battle (v6-11). They would return victorious to take Jerusalem in 587 BC. So in 588, Zedekiah is pathetically and hypocritically asking Jeremiah to pray for Jerusalem (v3) and asking if there was a (different!) word from the LORD (v17). Jeremiah has been unjustly imprisoned, so pleads his case while also reminding the king of how his prophecies have proved true – and other prophets made liars. As with the burnt scrolls, speaking truth to power is rarely appreciated or heeded.

*Lord Jesus, it's easy to point the finger at unbelievers who only turn to you in vague, desperate hope when in dire trouble. But Lord you know that I so often tend that way too. Help me to stay in warm daily communion with you in times of ease as much as times of pain.*

## **Jeremiah 38 – Last Chance**

This might be an expanded version of the conversation in the previous chapter or a separate occasion, but either way it's the last conversation between Jeremiah and Zedekiah before Jerusalem's fall. The stinking slime Jeremiah had been left to die in must have been awful, but in his rescue by Ebed-Melek Jeremiah was still crystal clear and passionate in his urging of the king to surrender to Babylon's siege works. The appalling scenes of the next chapter could have been prevented if only Zedekiah had feared God more than people (v5, 19). Despite even the very personal warning of v23, Zedekiah would not make a decision. The fixed pot of Jerusalem is about to be smashed – and smashed *hard*.

*Living God, my own heart was once so hard and unable to turn to you. Thank you for the Spirit's work to call me to repentance and faith. Thank you that you have saved me from sin and its consequences. Give me Jeremiah's gospel passion, even in the pits of life.*

## **Jeremiah 39 – Jerusalem's Fall**

Jerusalem was always going to fall under Babylonian rule since that was what the LORD had decreed. Yet the brutal severity of all that came to Zedekiah, his sons, and the royal officials had been entirely preventable if only they'd heeded the warnings from God given through Jeremiah. The fact that Jeremiah was singled out for better treatment by Nebuchadnezzar (v11-12) shows that the Babylonian siege was supplied with military intelligence from within Jerusalem. This is the justice and mercy of God on display, singling out the faithful and separating them from judgment to others (as with Noah, Lot, and others). In the end, blessing comes to the poorest (v10) and a faithful foreigner (v16-18) – the very people God's laws said Zedekiah should care for.

*Lord Jesus, you spoke of a narrow way that few find, and I know I would never have even sought it if you had not sought me first. Saviour, thank you for including me in your kingdom and for the promise of life with you on the Day of your return.*

## **Jeremiah 40 – New Beginnings?**

As thousands of Judeans made their miserable march to Babylon in chains, and with Jerusalem and its temple reduced to rubble, there were the beginnings of a new kind of peace in the land. Jeremiah declined the surprisingly gracious offer from the captain of Babylon's guard (v4), choosing instead to remain in Judah under the newly-appointed governor Gedaliah (v7). This may well be partly because of Gedaliah's godly family (e.g. see 2 Kings 22:10-12, Jeremiah 36:10), or partly because of the wise policy of serving the Babylonians as Jeremiah wrote to the exiles in Chapter 29. As we read of Judeans returning from neighbouring lands and harvesting "a great amount of wine and summer fruit" (v11-12), things are looking up. Sadly, ungodliness and unbelief are always destructive.

*Holy Jesus, you are king and good to provide godly leaders for your churches. Give our church leaders the grace, love, and wisdom that they need; protect them from those who would do them harm.*

## **Jeremiah 41 – Assassination**

For the Judeans who escaped exile and settled in Mizpah under the new governor Gedaliah, their brief spell of peace was brutally shattered. Ishmael had been one of Zedekiah's chief officers (v1) so would have been livid to see Gedaliah (a Jeremiah sympathiser) appointed by Babylon to rule. His actions defy all that Jeremiah said and stood for and are therefore further rebellion against the LORD. We should not be surprised; passions run deep, often rejecting plain truth, especially when hardened by unbelief. The poor people of Mizpah are briefly taken to Ammon but are then rescued by Johanan. But where can they go? They're in limbo, in fear of everyone, but still not fearing the LORD.

*Heavenly Father, you gave your people so many wise prophets, judges, and leaders who were so roundly rejected. It's no surprise that when you sent your Son he was and is also rejected. Living God, have mercy and send your Spirit to open blind eyes for many to turn to you.*

## **Jeremiah 42 – Exodus Reversed**

At the end of the previous chapter, the last of Judah's population paused near Bethlehem as they fled to Egypt in fear of Babylonian reprisal after Gedaliah's assassination. So here they come to Jeremiah, rightly asking for guidance from the LORD through his prophet, and boldly promising to obey whatever he said. But ten days (v7) is long enough to break their nerve and by the time Jeremiah speaks their hearts and minds are already set on Egypt. If they stayed, then just as Nebuchadnezzar had been the LORD's instrument for judgment he would now channel the LORD's compassion (v12). In hoping for relief from war (v13), their disobedience would overtake them in judgment. In a reversal of the Exodus, they would never see Judah again.

*Gracious, patient, compassionate Father, you know how prone we are to rash promises and good intentions, only to disappoint and disobey you. Father, help me only to move forwards in your will, ever attentive to your word and the witness of the Spirit in me.*

## **Jeremiah 43 – Jeremiah Exiled**

What a spiritual shambles. Despite Jeremiah being proved true in everything he has prophesied for decades, this band of refugees still refuse God's words. It's often easier to affirm the truth of God's word when it clearly applies to others than when it directly affects us. We might not call it "a lie" (v2), but disobedience is no less sinful if we wrap it up in politeness and pragmatism. Having escaped exile to Babylon, the people make their way to Egypt – forcing Jeremiah and Baruch to go with them (v6). But neither the LORD nor his servants are limited by human boundaries: The words came to the Judeans in Egypt that God rules over all nations; judgment would overtake them there.

*Lord Christ, you were rejected for speaking truth that sinners didn't want to hear, and you wisely set the expectation for us that we can expect no different. Help me to live in bold, humble obedience to your word wherever that may take me, and to speak that word to lost sinners.*

## **Jeremiah 44 – Handed Over to Idolatry**

The places mentioned in v1 are up to 400 miles apart, so it seems we're seeing Jeremiah speaking to now settled Judean communities across northern Egypt. After all these years, his message is unchanged. In fact, events have only served to prove his prophecies to be true (e.g. v2). But the continued idolatry in Egypt will bring further wrath there, and the LORD asks them, "Why are you doing such terrible harm to yourselves?" (v7). In shockingly hard-hearted unbelief, the people reply, "we are not going to listen to you!" (v16). They even try to argue that their troubles came because they stopped their idolatry (v18). We are so quick to justify sin. This is the last we see of Jeremiah the man, no doubt still in pain to see his countrymen cut themselves off from God's blessings.

*Living God, I get shocked by seeing hard faced rejection of your grace, forgetting that I was once no different. Thank you for the Spirit's work in me. May I be as constant and as clear as Jeremiah in my witnessing.*

## **Jeremiah 46 – Oracle Against Egypt**

Chapters 46 to 51 are often known as Jeremiah's 'oracles against the nations' containing judgments against a range of nations beginning here with Egypt. The ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) has these chapters immediately after Chapter 25, but our Bibles follow the Hebrew manuscripts with them here at the end. There are two words against Egypt: First, Pharaoh Neco's defeat by Nebuchadnezzar in 605 BC is by God's hand (v2), and second (from v13), Babylon would soon come to the very Egyptian towns the Judeans settled in much later. Yet grace would come even to Egypt (v26, Isaiah 19), and Israel would be preserved. The LORD may be provoked to wrath but is gracious by nature.

*Holy God, you are mightily over the nations of the world in all times. You tear down and build up in your own wisdom and purpose. Thank you that in all this you have extended your grace to me, though I deserve only the same as all the unbelievers in the world.*

## **Jeremiah 47 – Oracle Against Philistia**

Although no specific sins or idolatries of the Philistines are spelled out, it's no surprise that this ancient enemy of Israel are to be caught up in the turmoil of the times. Pharaoh Neco swept through in 609 BC but then Nebuchadnezzar took the whole area from the north (v2) soon after. The destruction of Philistia is again attributed to God's hand (v6-7). There seems to be no hope for them, though Psalm 87:4 says that both Egypt ("Rahab") and Philistia will one day be counted as if born in Zion. Those who were once enemies of the LORD will be born again and adopted by God. We must always remind ourselves of our natural enmity against God lest we look down on the lost without compassion or empathy.

*Heavenly Father, I deserve no good thing from you, but rather I have earned your righteous anger and condemnation. How astonishing that Jesus should bear that for me, so that I should be called your child in salvation granted by grace, received by faith.*

## **Jeremiah 48 – So Close, So Far**

The Moabites were descended from Abraham's nephew, Lot (Gen. 19:36-37) and relations between Moab and Israel were always strained but geographically close. There had been an attempted alliance with Zedekiah's Israel against Babylon, but that was based on false hope in Moab's strength and their god Chemosh (v7). Their idolatry and rejection of the LORD (v42) brought on Moab the same destruction that came to neighbouring Judah. We might feel content to condemn Moab too, but the LORD calls you to mourn (v17) as he weeps (v32), ultimately ending in a word of hope for them (v46). We do well to weep over our neighbours and colleagues who are so close to us, but so far from the LORD.

*Saviour God, it is easy to condemn others and be forgetful of your grace to me. May I have your own grief and compassion towards the lost around me, even to leading some to faith in Christ.*

## **Jeremiah 49 – Nations and Individuals**

Like the Moabites, the Ammonites were also descended from Lot (Gen. 19:36-37) and their land had been allocated and protected by the LORD (Deut. 2:19). Similarly, although they would come under judgment there was the same hope of grace to come (v6). This chapter is a reminder that the LORD himself causes nations to rise and fall and, if he chooses, to rise again. Yet God's concern drills down into the detail of individual lives, having compassion for the fatherless and for widows (v11), bringing encouragement to us all in the midst of turbulent world affairs. It's also worth noting that some of the nations and places were represented by visitors at the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:9-11. The LORD keeps his word.

*God of all the earth, it is amazing that you should be so concerned with the detail of our particular lives. Thank you for your care for me, and for calling me to faith in Jesus at a particular moment in time.*

## **Jeremiah 50 – Judgment and Hope**

Given the way Babylon has dominated Jeremiah's book, it's appropriate that it is the subject of this mammoth oracle spanning Chapters 50 and 51. Babylon was to be under the LORD's condemnation for her idolatry and arrogant pride, and in particular for her contempt of Israel (e.g. v11). As Babylon was Israel's enemy from the north, so will Babylon's destruction come (v9); their punishment will match their crimes. This massive oracle was sent to the exiles in Babylon after the first deportation (51:59-60), giving them hope of return (e.g. v19-20) and of divine justice against Babylon. Israel were to settle in Babylon and pray for it (Chapter 29), but it would not be their forever home.

*Sovereign Lord, you truly reign over all the nations of the world. As I see idolatry, greed, and cruelty worked out on the international stage, I am comforted to know that you are just. More, as a citizen of heaven by grace, I rejoice that this world is not my home.*

## **Jeremiah 51 – Babylon Will Fall**

As this colossal oracle concludes there's no doubt in our minds that Babylon will be completely obliterated. More, it's clear that Israel will be extracted and preserved. But to limit our reading to ancient history is to miss out on a much bigger Bible picture. Babylon has been a symbol of rebellion since Babel (Gen. 11), and the New Testament describes this current world as Babylon. Revelation 18 describes the end of this wicked world as the fall of Babylon: God's people are to "Come out from among her" (v45, Rev. 18:4) before she sinks like a stone (v64, Rev. 18:21). We have confidence that the LORD is just and powerful to carry out all he has said, prompting in us an urgency in mission and a passion for holiness.

*Holy and Righteous Father, I can scarcely imagine the scale and terror of that final Day. And yet I know that you are good and wise, gracious and loving. Lord, in the light of Christ's return, give me an urgency in mission and a passion for holiness.*

## **Jeremiah 52 – Hope at Last**

We read at the end of the previous chapter, "The words of Jeremiah end here." The book's editor (Baruch?) has added this chapter as an epilogue with text almost word for word from the end of 2 Kings. Back in 1:10, Jeremiah was told that he was appointed "to uproot and tear down, to destroy and demolish, to build and plant." We have seen how the first four have been comprehensively fulfilled. Chapters 30-33 (the 'Book of Consolation') held out promise of a new hope, a New Covenant, but there has been little concrete evidence of building or planting. So ending this book with a ray of hope in the restoration of Jehoiachin must have been hugely encouraging to its first readers that David's throne would yet get its eternal occupant.

*Living God, over and over you are demonstrably seen as one who fulfils all that you have said. Thank you for preserving the line to Jesus through such times as Jeremiah's. I know you will continue to reign and rule perfectly through these godless days.*

## **Lamentations 1 – The Broken City**

We use poetry and music to convey emotion in a way that prose can't often match, and Lamentations is raw pain. It is also carefully expressed and constructed: The 22 verses of Chapter 1 are an acrostic of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Each chapter is a Hebrew poem with a definite theme, and Chapter 1 paints an image of Jerusalem's awful state after the final exile of 587 BC. (Lamentations is sometimes attributed to Jeremiah; it is certainly contemporary to him.) It is a terrible taste of hell: "She never considered her end" (v9); "The LORD is just, for I have rebelled" (v18); "there is no one to comfort me" (v21). Hell must be full of such hopeless, comfortless clarity.

*Holy God, I know I don't take seriously enough the awful, urgent reality of your just judgment. So I know that I also underestimate both the depth of my sin and the reach of Christ's love. Spirit, show me myself more truly so that I might worship Jesus and adore him all the more.*

## **Lamentations 2 – The LORD is Like an Enemy**

This chapter is another Hebrew acrostic poem and its theme is terrifying: "The LORD is like an enemy; he has swallowed up Israel" (v5). The description of Jerusalem's destruction is awful, reaching even to the suffering of infants (v11-12). In Romans 8:31, Paul asks, "If God is for us, who is against us?" And yet Lamentations 2 reminds us that if God is against us then his power and fury are beyond refuge or hope. Our sin puts us at enmity against God (Rom. 8:7, Col. 1:21) so this chapter's imagery ought to open our eyes both to the predicament of the lost and to the astonishing grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, on whom was poured the full cup of God's fury in our place. We're reconciled by him (Col. 1:22).

*Lord Christ, Eternal Son, you are glorious in your own nature, divine and wonderful in essence. How amazing that you should become human to suffer the full cup of judgment for my sins. Lord, there aren't enough words in any language to express my thankfulness or your glory.*

## Lamentations 3 – Hope in the LORD

This is yet another acrostic, but now v1-3 all begin with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, then v4-6 begin with the second, and so on: 3 verses per letter, 66 verses in all. The poet skilfully leads us into hope even in the depths of despair. He begins with his intensely personal sufferings (v1-18), and yet there's a turning point in v19-21 where he calls to mind truth about God which gives him hope. The LORD is a faithful, merciful, and good Saviour to all who humble themselves before him (v19-33), so there's a call to confession (v34-39) and repentance (v40-45), before the writer then appeals to the LORD in prayer (v46-66). If we try to defend our sinful actions we will never take the necessary steps towards confession, repentance, and restored fellowship with God.

*Righteous and holy Father, you know how I so often justify my sin with exceptions and excuses. Spirit, show me my sin so that I will keep coming to Jesus, and lead me into holiness of life to become more like him. Living God, all my hope of eternity is from you and in you.*

## Lamentations 4 – Dehumanised and Hopeless

The five poems of Lamentations are structured to focus on the hopeful movement of Chapter 3, so here we return to the theme of suffering in yet another 22-verse acrostic. All the things people might hope in in life are gone: Wealth, status, government, religion, even foreign aid. In the midst of siege and famine, the people resorted to conduct we find appalling even among animals (v10). We take so much for granted in life, neglecting to see the common grace of God in good society. What we see in this chapter is the awful absence of God's grace in lives that have only hopelessness and pain left. It's a scary vision of hell on earth.

*Gracious God, you are light, love, and life. You are good, and kind, and compassionate. Naturally, we are far from what we ought to be and yet we are given glimpses of your grace in so many ways. Have mercy on this country, and may many come to Jesus, the one who is full of glory, grace, and truth.*

## Lamentations 5 – Awful New Reality

After the dust has settled on ruined Jerusalem, this chapter is a communal prayer of lament. Their peaceful, ordered lives have been shattered. Even the poetry has broken down, with this chapter pointedly *not* an acrostic as if to highlight their final disarray. They have become slaves, widows, orphans, and penniless foreigners – just the very people they failed to care for. It's a poem of regret and loss, not least as they know the cause: "Woe to us, for we have sinned" (v16). And yet we must note that they are praying with sincerity and urgency, knowing that their only hope is in God: "LORD, bring us back to yourself, so we may return" (v21). Sometimes, we are brought low to help us see God more truly.

*Holy Father, if you dealt with me as my sins deserve I would be crushed. If you had not first brought me to yourself I would never have come. Lead me in paths of righteousness, abiding in Christ, pleasing and glorifying you in everything.*

## Ezekiel 1 – The LORD Was There

While a handful of Judah's nobles were taken to Babylon in 605 BC (including young Daniel), the main parts of exile happened in 597 BC (Jehoiachin's exile) and 587 BC (the destruction of Jerusalem). So the opening verses here place Ezekiel as an exiled priest, halfway between the two main events, having suffered Jerusalem's humiliation and the depressing walk to Babylon. It is hard for us to grasp the depths of misery and hopelessness surrounding this exiled priest so far from Jerusalem's temple. Yet Ezekiel is given a spectacular, overwhelming vision of God's glory right there on pagan soil. Likewise, our risen Saviour is glorious beyond words, yet utterly present to us in all our moments.

*Holy Son of God, it's clear that Ezekiel struggled to put into words the radiance of your glory. Yet how blessed he was to realise that you were with him in such a time and place. Teach me the depths of truth that you will never leave me nor forsake me, wherever I go even this week.*

## **Ezekiel 2 – Hard Faced and Hard Hearted**

Ezekiel is being commissioned by God to prophesy to the exiled Israelites in Babylon (even while Jeremiah continued in Jerusalem). But these are the very people whose idolatry and apostasy led to the divine punishment of exile, so the LORD warns Ezekiel that they remain hard-faced and hard-hearted (v4). Ezekiel is not responsible for their response, “Whether they listen or refuse to listen” (v5), but he is instructed to speak. The scroll’s sides are full: Ezekiel must speak *all* the words he is given, and *only* those words. This is empowering and liberating truth for us when we speak about the LORD to unbelieving people today: We *must* speak up, unafraid, whether they listen or not.

*God over all, you have commissioned your church to preach the good news of salvation in Christ. Forgive my hesitance and fear. Spirit, give me the clarity and boldness to speak, and the love of Christ to compel me.*

## **Ezekiel 3 – Stunned**

In Jeremiah 24, God pictured the people left in Jerusalem as ‘bad figs’ and those exiled to Babylon as ‘good figs.’ It would be Ezekiel’s job to preach to those good figs so that they would repent and return to the LORD. But their starting point was “hard-headed and hard-hearted” (v7), so God would strengthen Ezekiel for the work. For his part, Ezekiel was “left in bitterness and in an angry spirit” (v14). He was ‘supposed’ to be in priestly ministry at the temple, and after seeing Jeremiah’s rejection there he’d have known how lonely and humiliating his role as prophet in Babylon could be. But that was the LORD’s firm plan, and Ezekiel would be held accountable for his obedience to it.

*Sovereign and Gracious Father, we don’t get to choose the times we’re born into or the tasks you prepare for us. Thank you for the life of peace and ease that you have placed me in, and help me to face up to the works you would have me do.*

## **Ezekiel 4 – Siege, Sin, and Rations**

As long as Jerusalem and its temple still stood, the exiles in Babylon hoped that their nightmare would soon be over. Ezekiel's acted-out prophecies would shatter such false hopes. In v1-3 he shows how Jerusalem will come under siege, with the LORD (as it were) on the other side of an iron wall, impervious to their cries. In v4-8, Ezekiel would in lie down every day for all the exiles to see: 390 days for the 390 years since Solomon's heyday; 40 days for the sins of the current generation. His diet in v9-16 was balanced but very meagre: After a year of that he'd have been a gaunt shadow, a visible prophecy of what the people of Jerusalem would soon become. We must beware the idol of religious experience and rejoice that God is with us personally where we are.

*Lord Jesus, you know I sometimes have hopes of escaping situations, dreaming of easier times and places. Forgive me that I forget that you truly are with me where I am, and that you will strengthen me to do your will today.*

## **Ezekiel 5 – A Sword and a Shave**

After a year of physically wasting away as he acted out the impending siege of Jerusalem, Ezekiel acts out the final scene. As a priest, he was not to shave his head or beard, and to do so with a sword would have been a messy, painful, slow, and bloody process. A crowd of exile onlookers would have formed. Ezekiel's first spoken words in over a year are to explain the illustration: The sword is the LORD's (e.g. v12) and the triple destruction to come to Jerusalem will be devastating and will shave them of their role as a kingdom of priests to the nations. Instead, they will be "a warning and a horror to the nations" (v15). Why? Because Israel's idolatry and sin had become worse than the nations they were supposed to teach.

*Lord Jesus, you call us to live holy and distinct lives of love so that others will see you. Forgive me for when I am too worldly in thought and words and conduct. Help me to live for you, to make you known, to glorify you.*

## **Ezekiel 6 – Prophecy to the Mountains**

For the exiles near Ezekiel who longed for a return to their homeland, this prophecy against its mountains and hills, ravines and valleys must have been distressing. But the presence of pagan shrines on the hills of Judah and Israel was an idolatrous desecration of the Promised Land. Far from being a witness to the nations, this country had become as idolatrous as any. Everything in this book up to Chapter 24 is preparing the exiles for the fall of Jerusalem in 587 BC. They must understand the theological dimension of their catastrophic circumstances. Much later, in Chapter 36, Ezekiel will prophesy an altogether more promising message to the land, but the gospel is only good news when judgment is understood.

*Lord Christ, I'm reminded that just as the sins of Judah defiled the land, so too my own sins overflow and affect more than I realise. Spirit, please help me to know myself more truly to praise Jesus for his great grace.*

## **Ezekiel 7 – The End Has Come**

The LORD is slow to anger and graciously patient, but he won't be mocked, manipulated, or taken advantage of. There's an overwhelming sense of finality to this chapter (v2, 3, 6, 7, 10, 12) as the final curse of the covenant terms listed in Leviticus 26 is to be applied. There will be no hope left in wealth (v19), religion (v24), or government (v26-27). Calamity will come because of institutional idolatry (v20) and violence (v23). The outcome is that "Then they will know that I am the LORD" (v27), something they could have learned through the rich blessing of covenant obedience. The LORD is both Saviour and Judge, and it comes to every person at some point to see him.

*Great God, Saviour and Judge, surely here is a glimpse of the day of Christ's return, when every eye will see him and know that he is Lord. My sin would earn me only judgment, and I thank you that all your righteous wrath was fully spent on Jesus.*

## **Ezekiel 8 – Deeply Offensive Idolatry**

Once again Ezekiel sees the glory of the LORD and is taken in visions of God to Jerusalem. He's led to the temple's outer courts and shown foreign idols. Digging through a wall, seventy elders are seen in secret Egyptian worship. Going further in, women weep for the god Tammuz (possibly a Babylonian god). Surely the LORD is honoured in his own temple? No, most shocking of all he saw 25 men in front of the temple bowing "to the east in worship of the sun" – and showing their backsides to the LORD in his sanctuary (v16). Their ecumenical idolatry was deeply offensive, but what idols do we nurture in the secret places of our own hearts?

*Living God, it is easy for me to point the finger at such crass idolatry and yet choose to deny or deceive myself about the idols I set up in my own heart. Saviour, forgive me and help me to nurture living dependence on you.*

## **Ezekiel 9 – Judgment and Grace**

The appalling, offensive idolatry of the previous chapter is here met with final judgment. But first, someone is dispatched to put a mark on some people to be preserved. What marks them is not sinless perfection or religious effort, but hearts that "sigh and groan" (v4) over all they see. God will not be mocked, and no sin goes unpunished, yet he is merciful to all whose heart is turned to him. Ezekiel's response is noteworthy too: He doesn't rejoice at all, and his own immediate action is to intercede for the lost. As a kingdom of priests, our hearts should be so inclined. Lastly, we must see our own sin in the light of such chapters and work to put sin to death in our lives daily (Matt. 18:8-9).

*Holy God, I'm reminded of the blood of the lamb at Passover, and how Jesus' blood now atones for me. I'm also deeply grateful for the mark and seal of the Holy Spirit in me. Lord, give me Ezekiel's passion for intercession in the light of all that is coming on the day of Christ's return.*

## **Ezekiel 10 – Departing Glory**

The story arc of the whole Bible is how God will dwell on the earth with his people. The system of sacrifice at the tabernacle and temple was given so that sinful humanity could approach a holy God as he dwelt among them. So Ezekiel 10 is a shocking, devastating moment in Old Testament history: In a reversal of the glory of God descending on Solomon's temple in 1 Kings 8, here the LORD's glory actually departs from it. Israel had abandoned the LORD, so he abandoned them. It's no wonder that the siege of Jerusalem provides us with images of hell on earth. But notice that the images of God's glory here are the same as Ezekiel saw in Babylon in Chapter 1. God is with his chosen people.

*Living God of all, Solomon said his temple could not begin to contain you, but neither are you limited by our ideas of worship (whether true worship or false). Thank you that Jesus is the radiance of the Father's glory; please help me to see more and more of him.*

## **Ezekiel 11 – Reversals**

In those days the very best meat was cooked in a pot, so the proverb in v3 suggests that the leaders still resident in Jerusalem saw themselves as special. The exiles, by inference, were waste offal, along with the poor left in the land. More, those in Jerusalem were taking over the homes and land of the exiles. Yet in a total reversal of spiritual fortune, judgment would come to the wicked in Jerusalem as the glory of the LORD left the city (v23), while the LORD himself would be the sanctuary for his people in exile (v16), promising hope, life, and restoration in gathering (v17-21). This vision from Chapters 8 to 11 is related to the exiled leaders in Babylon (v24-25) who would have known and once participated in the same idolatry. Faced with truth, we must confess and repent.

*Holy Father, it is deeply shaming and troubling to reflect on my sins, and yet I must thank you for the convicting work of the Spirit who leads me to repentance and forgiveness in Christ. Thank you for all your grace and mercy, without which I would have no hope.*

## **Ezekiel 12 – Acted-Out Exile**

There's no date to the events of this chapter but it seems likely that Ezekiel's prophetic ministry was being so closely observed that these acted-out messages had an audience. First, Ezekiel acts out the hasty, undignified exit of someone going into exile having first attempted to escape through a wall by night. It's a prophecy of King Zedekiah who would be blinded before being taken to Babylon (fulfilling v13). Ezekiel's second 'act' is to eat and drink trembling with fear as those in Judah would (v17-20). Still, the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel were ignored and ridiculed: "The days keep pressing by, and every vision fails" (v32). The LORD's reply: "The message I speak will be fulfilled" (v28).

*Loving God, your gospel is as unheeded and ridiculed now as then, with people still going about their business as in the days of Noah. Help me to be effective in communicating the truth of your word and the certainty of judgment.*

## **Ezekiel 13 – False Prophets**

There's a particular kind of wickedness in portraying spiritual realities in a falsely secure way. Some in Israel were prophesying "'peace' when there is no peace" (v10), and making things look far more rosy than they really were (rather like whitewashing a wall to cover up decay). The danger is that the seriousness of sin is played down and the gracious warnings of God's calls to repentance go unheeded. Who goes to God for forgiveness if they believe they've not sinned? Sadly, exactly this kind of false hope is found in many places today, giving a false sense that all will be peace even for those who have denied and rejected God all their lives. We must know and live out the truth.

*Living God of truth, I don't claim to have a perfect knowledge of all that you have revealed in your word, but I thank you for what you have enabled me to grasp: I have sinned against you, but in love and grace Jesus has been punished in my place. Lord, help me make such good news known to others.*

## **Ezekiel 14 – Repent from Idolatry**

Some of the elders of Israel came to enquire of Ezekiel, the prophet of the LORD. Yet these very elders have idols in their hearts which are spiritual stumbling blocks to truth (v1-5). So Ezekiel speaks: “Repent and turn away from your idols” (v6), lest the LORD send a false prophet who will speak the falsehood their itching ears want to hear, condemning both the prophet and his hearers (v9-10). But Ezekiel’s words will be proven true by the fourfold judgment of “sword, famine, danger animals and plague” (v21) on sinful Jerusalem. The idolatrous conduct of the remnant who will join the exiles in 587 BC will justify the LORD’s righteousness, bringing strange consolation to Israel in exile (v23).

*Holy God, all your actions are wise and righteous as you deal with humanity in all our idolatrous weakness. Show me my idols more clearly, Lord, so that I might repent and cling ever more tightly to you.*

## **Ezekiel 15 – Burn the Useless Vine**

When the vine is used as a metaphor for Israel, the emphasis is usually on the fruit. Here, however, Ezekiel draws attention to the quality of the wood itself, pointing out that it has no intrinsic worth or usefulness other than as firewood. It’s a deliberate re-statement of the judgments spelled out in the previous chapter. It seems likely that this image underpins Jesus’ words in John 15: He is the vine and we are the branches. We have no intrinsic worth or usefulness in his kingdom, and we will only bear fruit if we remain rooted in him. This is an urgent and radical wake-up call for anyone relying on nominal religion: Salvation is in Christ alone.

*Lord Jesus, it is humbling to realise that I can contribute no good thing to my salvation or your ongoing kingdom, except that which you work in and through me. And yet I rejoice, because this is glorious and liberating truth! Salvation is of the Lord!*

## **Ezekiel 16 – Stunning Offence**

The Bible often speaks of the people of God as his bride, but this chapter stands out for its graphic language. The LORD chose Israel from helpless infancy, raising her to fame and beauty, wealth and honour among the nations. That, at least, should give us pause for thought as members of Christ's bride, the church: None of us is here by our own merit or worthiness. In going after other nations, their gods, and their wicked practices, Israel were abusing and rejecting the love that the LORD had lavished on them. In judgment, he gave her over to her lovers. Yet the LORD never divorced her (Isaiah 50:1), remembering his covenant of love and grace to be fulfilled in Jesus.

*Lord Jesus, you love your church with a passion I can hardly grasp or imagine. Lord, I'm sorry that I sin in such ugly, offensive disregard for your covenant love and faithfulness. Lead me into righteous ways so that I might enjoy full and joyful communion with you.*

## **Ezekiel 17 – Two Eagles and One Majestic Cedar**

Ezekiel speaks yet another parable in his illustrative style in v1-10 and then immediately provides an explanation in v11-21. The exiles around him would be very familiar with the first huge eagle, Nebuchadnezzar, bringing the exile of Jehoiachin and many others in 597 BC. Zedekiah was "planted" (v5-6) but spread his roots to another great eagle, Egypt (v7). This would fail utterly, and Zedekiah would die in Babylon (v20). As Ezekiel spoke these words they were predictive prophecy, soon to be worked out in practice in 587 BC. The effect of that is to draw attention to the altogether different prophecy in v22-24: God will plant a new king, a new tree, to rule over the whole earth.

*Mighty Jesus, great King of kings, the earth is yours and your dominion is universal. Thank you that such passages remind me that your word is true and that you know the beginning from the end of all things – including the details of my life.*

## **Ezekiel 18 – Repent and Live!**

Ezekiel's forensic, pedantic style is in force in this chapter. There was a saying among the Israelites, "The fathers eat sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge" (v2), suggesting that God was not being fair on Ezekiel's generation in bringing calamity on them for their predecessors' sins. Ezekiel's word is instructive: (a) Each of us is personally accountable to God for good or evil, and the godliness of wickedness of our parents acts as neither merit or excuse; (b) While our sin provokes God's wrath and righteous judgment, he takes no pleasure in that since it is not his natural disposition; (c) the LORD would much rather call us to repentance and life (v32), and so came to save us.

*Gracious and Compassionate Father, all your actions glorify your perfect love and righteousness, seen most of all in your Son and the salvation you have extended to me. Forgive me my sins, Lord. Thank you for the Spirit's convicting work in my heart, leading me to repentance in Christ.*

## **Ezekiel 19 – Lions, Branches, and a Sceptre**

Ezekiel now turns to poetry to give us a lament for Judah's kings. In Genesis 49:9-10, Judah was called a lion and the tribe from which "the sceptre will not depart." So Ezekiel writes of two of her cubs, one taken to Egypt (king Jehoahaz, taken by Pharaoh Neco) and another to Babylon (scholars differ on whether that was Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, or Zedekiah). Ezekiel switched to vine imagery in v10, with Israel as a vine whose branches bore the sceptre of rule. But now the whole vine has been uprooted (v12) and "planted in the wilderness" (that is, in Babylon). But the devastating news is in v14: No strong branch is left. Has the sceptre been lost forever? What of David's line now?

*Mighty God, there are moments in your word when all seems lost and evil appears to have triumphed, only for you to demonstrate your sovereign power and faithfulness as events unfold. Thank you that this is as true of the details of my life as it is of world events.*

## **Ezekiel 20 – Rebellion DNA**

Two years after he began his ministry, Ezekiel is approached by the elders in exile “to inquire of the LORD” (v1). In reply, they get an extremely unflattering theological history of Israel in four parts: Most unusually, Ezekiel highlights Israel’s idolatry while they were in Egypt (v5-9) before mentioning the golden calf generation in v10-17. Even the generation after them angered the LORD in their idolatry (v18-26). So has Israel fared better in the age of kings? Have these very elders before Ezekiel remained true to the LORD, or are they part and parcel with an obstinate, idolatrous nation? The relentless teaching of these chapters emphasis both God’s justice *and* human culpability in the coming fall of Jerusalem.

*Holy God, I confess that I am often like these elders, quick to see fault in others while blind to my sin and presumptuous of your grace. Heavenly Father, forgive me. As the Spirit works in me, may I bear good fruit in your name.*

## **Ezekiel 21 – A Sword is Coming**

The previous chapter ended with people complaining that Ezekiel’s prophecies were riddles or parables, so here he spells things out in graphic detail. The LORD’s own hand will draw a sword against his own people (v3-4), bringing calamity to the whole nation, even the royal family (v13). Since we know that the sword would come through Nebuchadnezzar, it’s interesting to see exactly how: The scene from v18 pictures Nebuchadnezzar using pagan divination to decide to attack Jerusalem rather than the Ammonites (though they will later come under judgment, v28-32). Great outcomes often hinge on tiny moments, and the LORD uses them all for his good and glorious purpose.

*Righteous Father, surely your same sword of judgment is raised over this world still, ready to fall at Jesus’ return. Saviour God, work in the small moments of my conversations with unbelieving people to call them to life in Christ.*

## **Ezekiel 22 – The Fire of my Fury**

The full devastating news of Jerusalem's fall is coming in Chapter 24, so the sense in this chapter is of the gathering of violent storm-clouds of judgment. Judah's sins are spelled out in forensic clarity using specific references to the law. Some of the indictments are about abuse of power instead of care for the poor and vulnerable, some relate to family breakdowns and sexual ethics, while others speak of pagan idolatry. The references to profaning Sabbaths is more significant than we might realise: They were spurning the gift of rest with the LORD in favour of other pursuits. Even the priests paid no regard to the holiness of God (v26). Israel had become a pagan nation.

*Holy and Righteous God, all your judgments are just and true. Saviour, as you have called me into your kingdom of priests I pray for a greater awareness of your holiness and a bolder heart to express it before others. I pray it for your glory and praise.*

## **Ezekiel 23 – Two Adulterous Sisters**

Two sisters are presented to us: Oholah representing Samaria (the capital city of Israel) and Oholibah as Jerusalem (the capital city of Judah). The unified people of God are often portrayed as the LORD's bride and his love for her is passionate, strong, sacrificial, and eternally faithful. This chapter describes the two sisters in crude and graphic detail as they go seeking cheap and sleazy pleasure with other lovers (pagan nations). In truth, they are abused and hated by those lovers, and the ultimate exiles are in fact the result of God handing them over to their sinful lusts. The fullness of tragedy here is not only the terrible punishment but also the loss of the rich blessing of the loving tender fellowship of the LORD.

*Holy God, you alone know what is best for us in every way, and in your goodness you gave us good laws and called us into relationship in Christ. Saviour, lead me in good and righteous paths so that I might remain in joyful fellowship with you.*

## **Ezekiel 24 – The Delight of Your Eyes**

The opening verses pinpoint the date as when Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian army laid siege to Jerusalem in 588 BC. The parable of the boiling pot leaves no doubt about God's intentions, but the question still hangs in the air: Would God really do it? Would he really allow the destruction of beloved Jerusalem and its temple, the delight of the people's eyes? The death of Ezekiel's wife shocks us; we weren't expecting that. But it was given to the exiles as a sign of how inescapable and final God's judgment had become: Jerusalem would fall. More, their expected grief would be tempered by (a) realisation of their idolatry, (b) humility before the sovereignty of the LORD, and (c) news of coming hope from God delivered by Ezekiel.

God only wise, you are gracious to speak so powerfully through our misconceptions and unbelief. Forgive me that I don't prioritise my time or activity in a way that reflects the absolute certainty of Christ's return.

## **Ezekiel 25 – The Nations Will Know**

Ezekiel will keep us in suspense over Jerusalem's fall until Chapter 33, but in the meantime we have these carefully written oracles against the nations. Although king Zedekiah attempted to form a coalition of nations against Babylon (Jeremiah 27), these neighbours abandoned Judah utterly when Nebuchadnezzar's forces arrived for the final siege. These first four neighbouring nations are taken in geographical order and come under judgment for their opportunism and delight at Judah's fall. A repeating theme in the book so far is that Judah will know that the LORD is God, seen in both judgment and grace; the nations will learn it too by experiencing God's judgment and witnessing his grace to his people.

*Living God, you reign in power and justice, in love and grace. Your rule over the nations brings great peace of heart to us. Lord, I pray that many people would yet know you and praise you as Saviour, so help me as I witness to my friends and family so that they might know and praise you.*

## **Ezekiel 26 – Against Tyre**

Chapters 26-28 all relate to Tyre, which at that time was an island city in the Mediterranean coast about 100 miles north of Jerusalem. The text has 7 sections beginning with “this is what the Lord GOD says (v3, 7, 15, 19 in this chapter). As an island city, some of the formulaic siege-work language could never be literally fulfilled, but that doesn’t diminish the force of the message of judgment. It’s notable that the charges here are not about idolatry directly: Tyre was delighted when Jerusalem fell to Nebuchadnezzar because they hoped it would open up freer trade routes (v2) for the sea-based imports and exports. But the LORD is God of all nations, and every nation will know his power at some point.

*Living God, there remain plenty of people who are quick to celebrate any kind of setback for your people, ignorant of their mocking of your reign. Father, I was once among that mocking crowd but you called me. Please extend that same mercy to my unsaved friends and family, though they remain enemies of your gospel.*

## **Ezekiel 27 – Tyre is Sunk**

This curious chapter is a lament for the island city of Tyre. It is pictured as a ship, carefully and skilfully built, carrying strong and capable men from many countries (v4-11). The trade through Tyre in v12-25 is full of expensive luxuries sourced from all around the Mediterranean as far away as Spain (the likely location of Tarshish). Tyre’s downfall is like a sinking ship (v26-27), and the remaining verses record the shock and horror of everyone who came to hear of the city’s demise. It seems unthinkable to us that the technological and financial institutions of our time should ever fall, but that was how it seemed to every now-lost civilisation. In the end, only one kingdom remains forever.

*Great God of all, your reign is from everlasting to everlasting, whereas the culture I’m in will one day pass as they all do. Thank you that my citizenship is in heaven and that nothing on earth will ever challenge that.*

## **Ezekiel 28 – Lament for Tyre’s Ruler**

Three more sections beginning “This is what the Lord GOD says” (v1, 6, 11) conclude the oracle against Tyre, here focussing on its ruler. He considered himself a god (v2, 6) and yet he would soon be reminded of his mortality (v9). Just as he did for Tyre in Chapter 27, Ezekiel turns to poetic imagery for a lament for Tyre’s king. The language is typical of lofty ancient near-eastern poetry, reminding us of how richly God blesses those he appoints to high authority in the world – and also how he then holds them to account. After a very brief word against a 6<sup>th</sup> nation, Sidon, we have a word of encouragement for Israel in v24-26, right at the centre point of these oracles against the nations. We will see him as Judge, but we will know him as Saviour.

*Heavenly Father, you are good to us in appointing governments and rulers to limit the evil in the world. Yet you know how so much of that power is abused. Lord, have mercy, and call our world leaders to repentance. Thank you for the promise of eternity under your rule.*

## **Ezekiel 29 – Against Egypt**

This seventh oracle against the nations is as long as the first six combined. Like the oracle against Tyre, it’s in seven parts, each beginning with “the word of the LORD came to me” (e.g. v1) and usually precisely dated. Egypt had been a feeble hope to Judah (v7, Jeremiah 37) and had ridiculous claims to divinity for Pharaoh (v9); judgment was just. Verses 17-21 are by far Ezekiel’s latest words, and they seem to contradict the utter devastation of Tyre prophesied in the previous three chapters. Yet warnings of judgment are conditional: Jonah’s doom on Nineveh was averted by repentance; the destruction of Jerusalem could have been prevented by Zedekiah if only he’d listened to God through Jeremiah. Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.

*Great God of All, your words says that the wages of sin is death and I know that that is all I deserve. Thank you for the Spirit’s work, calling me to repentance and faith in Christ, my Saviour and Redeemer.*

## **Ezekiel 30 – Misplaced Hope**

In Jeremiah 37:5, the siege of Jerusalem was paused briefly when Nebuchadnezzar's forces withdrew to oppose the Egyptian army marching to Judah's aid. Those in Jerusalem (not least King Zedekiah) and the exiles with Ezekiel felt that Egypt was their last hope. But it was no hope at all. So the oracle against Egypt and Pharaoh speaks of one broken arm (likely the failed attempt to reach Jerusalem), later to become a second, signifying a total loss against Nebuchadnezzar's sword. All Egypt's power, wealth, and false gods would be destroyed and its people scattered. Israel's hope should have been in the word of the LORD, not in Egypt. Misplaced hope is the essence of idolatry.

*Heavenly Father, your word is truth. Your promises are abounding in grace and mercy. Your gospel brings life, hope, peace, and rest in Christ. While I thank you for the many material blessings you have showered on me, may I always rejoice in you, the Giver, far more than in the gifts.*

## **Ezekiel 31 – Egypt Like Assyria?**

In this chapter and the next Ezekiel continues his oracle against Egypt using the cosmic imagery of ancient near eastern mythology, beginning here with an enormous tree. Who would Egypt like to compare themselves to? Assyria, perhaps? Assyria had been a vast empire, a great 'tree' dominating the forest of other nations in its power, beauty, and grandeur. The LORD himself gave it its splendour (v9), but it grew proud and corrupt and was handed over to Babylon (v10-11). Would Egypt still want to be like Assyria? The message is clear: Egypt will indeed become like Assyria, "brought down to the underworld" (v18). There's nothing inherently bad about power or splendour, but humanity always twists and abuses them, as seen in every modern super-power.

*Lord God, we so often compare ourselves to others and want to be like them, coveting all manner of worldly things. Lord, keep me focussed on Jesus in all his beautiful perfections, conforming me to his likeness as I look to him with the eyes of faith.*

## **Ezekiel 32 – The Grave**

The oracle against Egypt concludes with these final two images from ancient near eastern mythology. Pharaoh is likened to a vast crocodile or monster, caught by God and dragged to die on dry land. Apocalyptic imagery (e.g. v7, 8) causes us to think beyond even Egypt and to see in their destruction a foretaste of the Day of the Lord to come at Christ's return. The final section (from v17) emphasises this perspective by listing one pagan nation after another in the land of the dead, soon to be joined by Pharaoh. (This is poetic vision, not a literal description of the afterlife.) So the oracles against the nations end with them in the grave.

*Lord Christ, passages such as this remind me of the utter difference between the hope that you give your people and the desperate hopelessness of those who face the grave without you. Saviour, thank you for calling me; please hear my prayer for unsaved friends and family.*

## **Ezekiel 33 – Turning Point**

Back in Chapter 3, God appointed Ezekiel to be a watchman over the exiles. Here, Ezekiel is told to explain that role to the people, reiterating the forensic analysis of culpability for sin that we saw in Chapter 18. But this chapter is a key turning point in the book, since as the people finally acknowledge "our sins" (v10) they are powerfully called to "Repent, repent" (v11). The pause for the oracles against the nations mirrored the two-year wait for news over Jerusalem, finally reported in v21 in full vindication of Ezekiel as a true prophet of God. So v23-29 cancel any notion that the tiny remnant still left in Judah might be blessed; they will suffer for ongoing sin (see Jeremiah 40-44). Lastly, Ezekiel himself is warned about flattery in his new celebrity status from those who hear his words with delight, but heed none of them.

*Living God, you are gracious to us to speak of your greatness and mercy, your truth and justice. You are more gracious still to cause my heart to turn in repentance. Give me a teachable spirit, Lord, so that I might apply all I read and hear of you in my life, not simply agree with it in my mind.*

## **Ezekiel 34 – The Good Shepherd**

What's left of Israel is now in exile in Babylon. Jerusalem is in ruins. The nation is at rock bottom. Yet here in Ezekiel 34 we get hopeful news: God still regards Judah as "my flock" (e.g. v6, 8, 10), holding their shepherds to account for years of abuse (referring to centuries of ungodly kings and rulers). God himself will seek out his flock and be their perfect Shepherd (v11-16). He will *also* appoint David as one shepherd over them (v23). So in deliberate contrast to the bad shepherds of this chapter, Jesus identified himself as God and heir to David's throne when he said, "I am the Good Shepherd" (John 10:11) over "one flock" (John 10:16).

*Great Good Shepherd, Lord and Saviour, thank you for coming to seek out and save me. I had gone astray and would have remained lost but for you. Lord, give grace and gentle strength to those who serve you as under-shepherds in our church.*

## **Ezekiel 35 – Justice on Edom**

Much of our personal identity is bound up with our nationality and home country. It's hard for us to imagine the dispiriting anguish of exile, of seeing one's home ransacked and taken over by others. The Edomites were Judah's neighbours (to the South East), descended from Esau, and permanent opponents. They rejoiced over Jerusalem's fall (as Obadiah makes clear). So the word of judgment on Edom's hills here is actually a word of encouragement to the Judean exiles; the LORD will put things right. The first 15 verses of the next chapter complete this unit, being a word to Israel's hills that God would bring restoration in a reversal of the prophecy of Chapter 6 and in contrast to Edom's condemnation. Despite the darkness, there is hope in God's promises.

*God of Covenant Promise, your word is truth. You have put hope in our hearts of a blissful eternity with you on your earth. Thank you for the comfort and encouragement this brings when all the world is so chaotic and evil.*

## **Ezekiel 36 – New Heart, New Spirit**

Verses 1-14 are part of a unit which includes the previous chapter: God will restore Israel's land to the people of Israel. But will the people be any less sinful or idolatrous than before? Will they continue to downgrade the holy name of the LORD (v22)? God himself will act in them to give a new heart (new thoughts) and a new spirit (new wills), and it's only through this inward change that there can be any lasting renewal. So we get the gracious promise of God's own Spirit to cause us to obey him (v27). Israel's sins in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah show that God's promise was fulfilled later than that. We rejoice in the gift of the Holy Spirit to every believer since Pentecost.

*Holy Spirit of God, how blessed I am to have you dwell within me, renewing me daily, convicting me of sin, prompting my conscience, leading me in truth and wisdom, and showing me more of Jesus. You are worthy of worship and praise, my great God.*

## **Ezekiel 37 – Raised to Life**

This is probably the best-known chapter in Ezekiel, and the key to its meaning is in v11-14. The exiles felt dead and buried in Babylon, completely without hope. But as Adam was formed and given life, this valley of bones was reconstituted into corpses by the word of God and then given life by the Spirit of God. Similarly, the exiles would be 'resurrected' from their graves of exile. Inasmuch as Christ was literally resurrected from his tomb and we are united to him by faith, we are likewise raised from the dead, alive in him. The political reunification suggested in v15-28 is only a picture of the spiritual oneness that defines the true Israel of God today: "There will be one flock, one shepherd," said Jesus (John 10:16).

*Lord Jesus, risen and glorified, you smashed death once and for all. Thank you that I am raised in you, alive in you already. Thank you even that such life came to me by your power and grace alone, knowing that only in you can the dead receive new life.*

## **Ezekiel 38 – Looking Ahead**

The wonderful chapters of restoration 33-37 end with God dwelling among his people forever and all nations knowing that the LORD sanctifies his people (37:28). Ezekiel's visions turn to the future in 38-48, beginning with the nations in Chapters 38 and 39. There is no firm historical identification of a king called God or a land of Magog, so it's helpful to see this prophecy as a pattern to be repeated many times over as evil regimes gather together to oppose the people of God. Seven sections begin with, "This is what the Lord GOD says" (e.g. v3, 10, 14, 17), reminding us that (a) opposition is certain, (b) God is in control, and (c) the enemies of God's people will fail.

*Sovereign Lord, as ever it is reassuring that you are governing and judging humanity with perfect knowledge, power, and justice. Give me strength to stand up and stand out for you, confident that you will always do good.*

## **Ezekiel 39 – God and Magog**

The prophecy against King Gog of the land of Magog concludes in grim fashion. Having gathered all the nations together against the people of God, defeat comes from God himself. Their final state is a brutal reversal of the valley of dry bones. This patterns of opposition has been and will be repeated many times, to culminate in a single ultimate battle when Gog is finally identified as Satan leading a cosmic assault against "the encampment of the saints, the beloved city" (Rev. 20:7-9), the people of God. Satan and all his work will be destroyed, removed forever from God's new earth. That is the end we deserve for *our* sins, and it's what we are saved from in Christ so that we might know the LORD.

*Lord Christ, I don't know if your return is in the near or distant future, but I know it will be a complete and final victory over darkness, sin, and death. Thank you for calling me to life in yourself, so that I might stand in the Day of your return.*

## **Ezekiel 40 – Temple Dimensions**

The next three chapters are filled with measurements of a visionary temple set “on a very high mountain” (v2). The physical city of Jerusalem certainly isn’t on a very high mountain, but mountains are an ancient near-eastern symbol of the place of God’s dwelling. Since Ezekiel had seen a vision of the LORD’s glory leaving the physical temple in Jerusalem twenty years earlier, he would have been thrilled at the prospect of a new dwelling place for God among his people. The only reference to height in the measurements is in v5; any attempt to model this temple soon has to fill in gaps with guesses. It is more helpful simply to marvel at the symmetry, precision, and peace of God’s dwelling place.

*Lord God, it is beyond gracious of you to choose to dwell among your people. Thank you for Jesus, our only sacrifice, our perfect High Priest, and our place of atonement and worship. Saviour, keep me coming into your presence daily.*

## **Ezekiel 41 – The Most Holy Place**

The measurements continue, with the silence only broken once as the strange man explains to Ezekiel, “This is the most holy place” (v4) – a reminder that it was out of bounds to Ezekiel even in a vision. When Moses was given instructions for the tabernacle, there were repeated commands that it should be built exactly as shown. There are no such commands here. The whole image is of a new temple to be established as God’s dwelling place among his people – a place of utter perfection. The New Testament specifically identifies Jesus as our temple: He is the atoning sacrifice, our High Priest, our entrance into God’s presence. Ezekiel’s strange vision gave hope to the exiles and points us to Jesus.

*Lord Jesus, you are exalted and beautiful in all your holy perfection. Where Ezekiel could not enter the most holy place even in a vision, you take me there in union with you in your death and resurrection. Lord, reveal to me afresh the astonishing spiritual realities you have brought me to.*

## **Ezekiel 42 – Shadows of Temples**

The temple actually built after the exile in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah was nowhere near as perfect or as grand as this one in Ezekiel's vision. It was, however, the place of worship as God's dwelling-place among his people. In addition to Jesus being identified as the ultimate temple in the New Testament, the church is also called a temple since the Holy Spirit of God dwells in every believer. The church, like Nehemiah's temple, might be far from perfect but we are immeasurably blessed to have God dwell among us. The perfect symmetries of Ezekiel's temple would cause Judeans to long for future perfection, just as we yearn to be with Christ, free from sin and imperfection forever.

*Lord Christ, we are blessed to have your presence with us in this broken world, yet how we look forward to seeing you and being with you forever. Saviour, help me to live that kingdom life now, experiencing you every day, rejoicing in holiness of life.*

## **Ezekiel 43 – Glory and Shame**

Back in Chapter 8, Ezekiel was shown visions of abhorrent idolatry in the temple complex at Jerusalem. Men and women, elders and priests, were all engaged in pagan worship in the very place the LORD should be most honoured. So in Chapter 10, the glory of the LORD abandoned the temple. Here, then, we see with relief and delight that the glory is to return (v2). This time there will be no shared space with pagan idols. As Ezekiel gave this vision to the exiles they were to ponder everything it meant and all they had done and "be ashamed of their iniquities" (v10). As walking, talking temples of the Holy Spirit, we do well to do likewise, ashamed of our indwelling sin, grateful for his purifying work in us.

*Holy Spirit, it is a privilege beyond words or understanding to have you dwell in me. When I reflect on my sinful thoughts, desires, words, and actions, I am ashamed to think how they are on display to you, grieving you. Lord, continue your purifying, sanctifying work in me.*

## **Ezekiel 44 – Serving the LORD, Serving the People**

The system of approach to worshipping the LORD given in Leviticus was based on separating the holy from the common, and recognising that common things were either clean or unclean. But all this was forgotten in the idolatry brought into the temple (v6-8), so the Levites could no longer serve in the holy things but they would serve the people (v11). The faithful Levitical priests descended from Zadok would stand before God to serve him (v15). They were to teach, obey, and apply the law of God, dedicated to him with no income other than the offerings of the obedient nation. This mutual material and spiritual dependence is maintained by churches paying their pastors appropriately today.

*Lord Jesus, you are wise, good, and kind to provide deacons and elders for godly administration and spiritual leadership in your churches. May those set apart for teaching be diligent students, obedient disciples, and holy examples. May they also be provided for by your people.*

## **Ezekiel 45 – Worship**

The architecture and sacrificial system at the temple emphasised both the lofty holiness of the LORD and his grace in dwelling among sinful humanity so that we might approach him. The “prince” here denotes the civil head of state, and whereas Israel’s kings had often thought of themselves too highly, the allocation of land and limits on access to the temple for the prince make it clear that Israel was to be a theocracy; the head of state would not be holy (like the priests) but would be subordinate to God as king. That said, the prince had special responsibility for worship and the provision of sacrifices for the people. In this, civil authorities are to be lead worshippers, examples for us all of our dependence on God.

*God of Grace, you are infinitely kind to provide a means for us to come to you. Lord, you know how our civil authorities are opposed to you. May I be a lead worshipper at home, in church, in work, in life, so that others would follow you.*

## **Ezekiel 46 – Rhythms of Worship**

In these temple chapters we have been shown a huge, perfect, unblemished temple complex ready for worship which was then occupied by the glory of the LORD. Now we have instruction for regular worship at the temple based on the Levitical system (but with some variation). So many regular worshippers are expected that a simple form of crowd control is envisaged (v9). Their worship is to be under the leadership of the prince, the civil head of state. The whole image is of a society that revolves around true worship of God in its weekly, monthly, and seasonal rhythms. As the Spirit of God dwells in us, we also ought to have our lives built around such rhythms of worship.

*Living God, it's lovely to hear the antidote to your ancient people's idolatry was to reset and reorient their lives around your personal dwelling with them. Lord, help me to be constantly conscious of your presence, living in holiness and peace and joy in you.*

## **Ezekiel 47 – The River of Life**

Ezekiel's temple imagery has shown us how the LORD has returned to dwell among his people, who themselves are reoriented towards worship. But this vision of a river highlights how the blessings of God flow out from him in supernatural abundance. There is no expectation of a literal fulfilment: This is visionary, symbolic imagery. For Ezekiel's co-exiles, the image brought hope of life and restoration in their own land. Jesus, so clearly identified as a new temple in John 2:21, used Ezekiel's river image to promise "streams of living water" – the Holy Spirit from deep within every believer (John 7:38-39). Rev. 22:1-5 takes the river image to its conclusion where it flows bringing life and healing to all, eternally flowing out blessing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

*Life-giving God, everything that exists is either of you or from you. You enable us to come to you only that we might know you and experience your abundant life. Lord, may I not be a still pool, but rather a conduit through which the life and blessing of the Spirit will flow freely to others.*

## **Ezekiel 48 – The LORD is There**

The setting of boundaries and allocations of land begun at 47:13 and into this chapter are highly idealised. Nothing like them was ever achieved, and with the loss of the northern tribes to Assyria 150 years or so earlier such allocations were impossible. Yet for the exiles, the vision of a restored Israel must have been comforting. As we note the remarkable inclusion of foreigners having ownership and inheritance rights, we see the theological point of Ezekiel's geography: By God's grace, even Gentiles like us are "grafted in" to the people of God (Romans 11:17). The high point of the vision is a city of all God's people with God present among us, all dwelling in holiness (Rev. 21:10-12).

*Lord God, you dwell with your people where we are and call us together as one in Christ. Help me to live out that oneness with all your people, even those so unlike me. Help me to live consciously aware of your presence for comfort, help, and holiness of life.*

## **Daniel 1 – Immersed in Babylon**

It was 605 BC, the year Jeremiah's book returns to so often, the year Nebuchadnezzar swept through Judah and took Jerusalem. Daniel, aged perhaps 14 or 15, was taken with others "from the royal family and from the nobility" to be trained for leadership in Babylon. For 3 years they would study commerce, religion, geography, astrology, divination, politics, and much else. Despite being immersed in Babylonian culture, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah retained personal conviction and devotion to the LORD. Their polite and reasonable request to abstain from the king's meat and wine was a simple, private statement of identity and solidarity with the people of God – and the LORD honoured their faith.

*Lord God, I'm barely aware of the extent to which I am immersed in this Babylonian world around me. Grant me Daniel's wisdom to live well for you in the world while retaining a clear conviction and devotion of heart for you.*

## **Daniel 2 – Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream of a Statue**

If Nebuchadnezzar had described his dream to his wise men it’s likely they’d have identified him as the rock that smashed the statue and went on to fill the earth. His challenge to them was as shrewd as it was unreasonable. Daniel’s interpretation actually spells out that Nebuchadnezzar’s glory would pass – a bold thing to say to such a man. The kingdoms of the statue were probably Babylon first, then the Medes & Persians, Greece (under Alexander the Great), and then Rome. The rock that established an everlasting kingdom is Christ himself, the true King of kings. Daniel and his friends then engaged with and benefitted the pagan society they were part of while publicly honouring the LORD. We have so much to learn from them.

*Lord Christ, kingdoms and regimes come and go. Even the dominant world powers of today will fade. And yet you will reign for ever and ever! Lord, give me wisdom to live as a citizen of heaven bringing good news and blessing to the world around me.*

## **Daniel 3 – Faithful to Death**

Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were renamed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as part of their immersion into Babylonian culture. They were talented and held responsible positions in Babylon itself. Yet their refusal to bow down and worship a gold statue showed that their faith in God remained unchanged; they would choose to serve God rather than men when circumstances demanded a choice. They knew that God *could* save them from the fire but they didn’t presume it: Their faith wasn’t conditional on being rescued. In joining them and preserving them from the flames, the Lord brought glory to himself. Likewise, he is present with us in every situation whether he rescues us or not.

*Lord Jesus, you have already rescued me from the fires of hell – their heat and smoke will never reach me. It is further reassuring and comforting that you will never leave me nor forsake me whatever fiery trials come to test me. Thank you.*

## **Daniel 4 – Ruler Over Human Kingdoms**

The Old Testament was written almost entirely in Hebrew. Chapters 2 to 7 of Daniel, however, were written in Aramaic, the 'global' language of its time. These chapters are to be proclaimed to the whole world. They are carefully constructed and balanced to pivot on 4:34-35 where the greatest world leader of the day praises God whose dominion is everlasting and global. Chapter 4 builds up to this gradually in 3 sections, each of which says that the living will know that "the Most High is ruler over human kingdoms" (v17, 25, 32). God has the might and the right to rule over us as our Creator and Sustainer, though like Nebuchadnezzar we often need to be humbled before we acknowledge him.

*Great God in heaven, when I consider you majestic power and rule I realise again how absurd I am to choose go my own way rather than yours – yet I do it over and over. Lord, forgive me. Thank you that in granting me forgiveness you call me to be your child. That's amazing.*

## **Daniel 5 – Writing on the Wall**

This brilliant narrative reveals information to us that clearly shows the passage of time. Nebuchadnezzar has been succeeded by Belshazzar who does not share his predecessor's knowledge of God. Rather, Belshazzar shows utter contempt (v3-4). The hand writing on the wall killed the party, terrified the king, and baffled the magicians. Daniel has clearly been demoted from high office but is brought back to memory by the queen (probably the queen mother). Belshazzar tries to assert authority in his gestures (v16), but Daniel rebukes him for not choosing to submit to the LORD as Nebuchadnezzar eventually did. Belshazzar would pay for his deliberate unbelief with his kingdom and his life. Head knowledge of truth isn't enough; we must believe with our hearts.

*Living God, it is far better to know and serve you than to be ruled by allegiance to idols. You number our days and weigh our offences with perfect knowledge. If you counted our sins against us, none could stand. So I thank and praise you for your mercy to all who will turn to you.*

## **Daniel 6 – Daniel’s Faithfulness**

Daniel spent his whole life in the administration of Babylon’s government and yet his enemies “could find no charge or corruption, for he was trustworthy, and no negligence or corruption was found in him” (v4). He was in his eighties. His enemies could only devise a scheme where doing *right* became *wrong*, confident that he could continue. Sure enough, Daniel maintained his life-long personal devotion to the LORD his God (v10), since any temptation to abandon the LORD would be more dangerous to his soul than the lions could be to his body. Darius, the most powerful man alive at the time, was unable to save Daniel. But we don’t put our trust in men or armies; we trust in the LORD.

*Holy Father, I can hardly compare my prayer life with Daniel’s. Lord, help me to develop such regular intimacy with you that I would never be tempted to shy away from dependence on you or to own you publicly. Keep me from putting my hope in people instead of you.*

## **Daniel 7 – One Like a Son of Man**

In the balanced structure of Daniel 2-7, the four beasts here match the four kingdoms represented by the statue in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. But the fourth beast introduces a complex development, suggesting a succession of evil powers with a single wicked ruler over them all (the little horn, v8). Yet their arrogance is no match for the majestic ascension of Jesus, the one like a son of man, given all power and glory by the Father following the work of the cross. When all we see is the violence and self-loathing of the world around us, dominated by godless ideologies and influences, we do well to recall that Jesus is already and eternally reigning over all.

*Lord Christ, majestic and glorious beyond my imagination, powerful and reigning beyond all challenge, thank you for including me in your kingdom. May the Spirit ever give me desire to serve you and protect me from the devil’s schemes.*

## **Daniel 8 – I Know Who Hold the Future**

The interpretation of Daniel's vision is that it's about a sequence of coming kings. Daniel himself was "overcome and lay sick for days" (v27), but a glance at the history books enables us to see clearly how the vision was fulfilled. Belshazzar's reign was ended by the Medes and the Persians (v20) who were then swept away by Alexander the Great of Greece (v21). After him came the particularly unpleasant Antiochus Epiphanes IV (v23-25). Some of Daniel's prophecies are so specific and verifiable that the reader is forced to decide what to think of Scripture itself: Is this book a deceitful work written after the event, or is it the work of God who really is outside of time and who knows the future?

*Eternal God, you are from everlasting to everlasting and you know the beginning from the end. All my days are in your hand. This encourages me greatly, both as I consider the chaotic power struggles in world events and as I know your hand on the details of my life.*

## **Daniel 9 – Treasured by God**

In Jeremiah 25 and 29 the prophecy was given that the exile in Babylon would last 70 years. Daniel's magnificent prayer takes that promise back to God in godly humility: He acknowledged that the exile was deserved, and that return is still undeserved. The basis of Daniel's prayer is therefore the LORD's own honour (v17) and compassion (v18). Though this is a long prayer, an answer went out as soon as he'd started (v23) because he was "treasured by God." The enigmatic prophecy of 70 weeks answers his prayer: They would indeed return to Jerusalem and, at some point in the future, the Anointed One (Messiah, Christ) would come, atoning for iniquity.

*Lord Christ, how blessed we are to know something of your greatness and your atoning sacrifice for our sins. Thank you for your compassion, without which I would never have been saved. Thank you for hearing my prayer and for loving me as someone treasured by God.*

## Daniel 10 – The Full Armour of God

In the first year of King Cyrus, he decreed that the Judean exiles could return to their own land. They went and rebuilt the altar in Jerusalem but were discouraged from rebuilding the temple itself. This loss of blessing is likely the reason for Daniel's three weeks of mourning (v2) and prayer (v12). Alarming, this angelic visitor had been prevented from reaching Daniel for the whole of the three weeks, highlighting a spiritual battle of which we mortals are barely aware. We know that Jesus has already secured victory, but Satan remains a hate-filled liar in violent opposition to the LORD and his people. Our hope is in Christ and the armour of God we've been given (Eph. 6:10-18). May we know, like Daniel, the reality of sustained fervency in prayer.

*Lord God, my prayers are so scant and shallow. Worse, I live as if I were not in a spiritual battle and therefore I neglect the armour you have given. May I know more and more of the preciousness of your presence and power in prayer.*

## Daniel 11 – King After King

It's possible to trace through this chapter alongside the history books and identify the various kings and their reigns. While we marvel at the prophecy given to Daniel ahead of time, the actual contents feel remote to us. But we do well to note that no matter how awful each reign was, it did not last forever. The final king from 11:36 to 12:3 is like the "man of lawlessness" who Paul mentions in 2 Thess. 2, suggesting that Daniel's prophecy reaches even into our own future today. So we expect that reign also to be cut short – this time by Jesus himself at his return. This chapter then becomes important to us: All that God has spoken will come to pass, both the coming of wicked rulers *and* the final victory of Christ.

*Messiah Jesus, King of kings, your eternal reign is beyond challenge or question. This encourages me as I see lawlessness in society and still feel it in my own heart. May your kingdom come, not least in my own obedience of faith, subject to you in joy.*

## **Daniel 12 – Resurrection Hope**

We naturally have many questions of a chapter like this, and it's notable that so did Daniel (v8). But the LORD tells us all we need to know when we need to know it, knowing that we lack the capacity to know all things. What we do see here is one of the Old Testament's clearest teachings on the resurrection (v2) and what that will mean for believers like Daniel (v13). The fuller understanding of life beyond the grave came at the resurrection of Christ, and the fuller revelation of this age came when the sealed-up scroll in God's right hand was opened as Christ's ascension (Rev. 5:5). We are immeasurably blessed to have the full revelation of God's word, rejoicing in the resurrection of Jesus, the firstfruits from among the dead (1 Cor. 15:20).

*Living Saviour, all my hope of life is in you. You alone were worthy to open up the Father's plan for this age by your death, resurrection, and ascension. How blessed I am to be able to approach you, knowing something of your gracious welcome.*

## **Hosea 1 – Love Rejected**

The twelve "minor prophets" from Hosea to Malachi have much to say about God's wrath, but they begin by grounding all God's actions in his love. He loved his people, but the continued idolatry of northern Israel meant a declaration of a broken covenant and judgment to come at the hand of Jehu and others (1 Kings 19:17). But Jehu was over-zealous and cruel, delivering a bloodbath at Jezreel (2 Kings 10:6-11). In telling Hosea to marry a promiscuous woman, we glimpse God's own heart at promiscuous Israel. Of the three children born to Gomer, only the first is Hosea's. The others are symbols of unfaithfulness and memories of spurned love. And love rejected becomes wrath.

*Faithful God, I feel the unfaithfulness of my own heart, less than wholly devoted to you. Father I confess that I rarely meditate on the grief my sin must cause you as a perfect loving Father. Spirit, please continue your convicting and sanctifying work in me.*

## **Hosea 2 – You Are My People**

Hosea 1:10-2:1 promises restoration for the people of God in language rooted in Genesis 22 but ultimately fulfilled in Christ's church (1 Peter 2:9-10). Verses 2-13 are a sustained rebuke for Israel's idolatry, acting like a promiscuous wife going after other lovers. It will only bring her disaster. In v14, the LORD is emphatic: "Therefore / am going to persuade here." He will woo his beloved and speak to her heart. The Valley of Achor (v15) was where Achan stole some of Jericho's forbidden wealth (Joshua 7:20-21), so here God is calling his people to repent and go back to the start. Verses 19 & 20 are spectacular, especially as we understand the bride of Christ to be his church, loved for all time.

*Gracious God, you called me from my idolatry to faith, and you did so because of your own great love and patience. Forgive me that my head is still often turned away to idolatry, and keep my heart tuned to your faithful love and holiness.*

## **Hosea 3 & 4 – Love Her Again**

Chapters 1-3 form a powerful introduction both to Hosea and the Minor Prophets as a whole. God's love for us is on display, seen most beautifully in 3:1; Hosea wasn't simply to tolerate his promiscuous wife, he was to buy her back at cost and love her again. So too God bought the church at the cost of Jesus' sacrifice, making v5 gloriously true for us. Chapters 4 & 5 combine to describe the promiscuous idolatry and apostasy of the world around us: "There is no truth, no faithful love, and no knowledge of God in the land" (v1), a sadly perennial statement. The parody of religion on v7-11 and the false faith of v12-14 stem from a worldly, truthless, godless spiritual leadership failing to know or teach about the LORD (v6).

*God of grace and love, I was very much part of the godless world around me until you called me. Lord, I know I slip into sin every day. Thank you for your faithful love, choosing to love me again and again and again. Lord, help me to know that love and to express it to others.*

## **Hosea 5 & 6 – Faithful Love, Not Sacrifice**

Chapter 5 completes the unit with Chapter 4, spelling out the spiritual barrenness of Israel. It is summed up by the phrase in v7: “They betrayed the LORD.” Hosea 6:1-3 sounds like a lovely prayer of repentance, but the short-term expectation of blessing in v2 shows that their turning to the LORD is a paper-thin veneer in the hope of securing divine blessing. It's just sham religion. The LORD replies with a lament over the people, and Jesus quoted v6 to the Pharisees of his day (e.g. Matthew 9:9-13). The LORD calls us to relationship, not religion. As Christians we naturally have religious practices (worship, prayer, etc), but they are to be an expression of living faith in Christ, not a substitute for it.

*Living God, you are gracious to call me to faith in Christ so that I might know you. Forgive me for the times when I go through the motions of devotion but neglect the reality of relationship. Saviour God, help me to know you more and more in my life.*

## **Hosea 7 – “I Want to Redeem Them”**

Hosea uses a string of similes to describe Israel's spiritual mire. In v3-7, they're an oven that can't cool down, such as when you're so entangled in your own sin and the sins of others that you can't escape the fire. In v8-10 they're like bread on a grill, half raw and half burned; their dependence on the world is burning them though they can't see it, while they have no spiritual comfort within. Going to Egypt and Assyria for aid in v7-12 is like asking bullies for help; they will only abuse you. Israel was a silly dove to flit that way. And in v13-16 they're a faulty bow, always off target, moaning to God but never really crying out to him. And in all this, God's response is compassion: “I want to redeem them” (v13).

*Gracious, patient Father, you know the restlessness that often traps my heart when I ought to be knowing the grace, peace, and rest that Christ brings. Lord, forgive my sinful forgetfulness. Keep me close to you, trusting in you, putting sin to death.*

## **Hosea 8 – Reap the Whirlwind**

This chapter sounds a dire warning to anyone who deceives themselves that they are right with God when they aren't. Despite Israel's transgression, rebellion, and rejection (v13), they would still say, "My God, we know you!" (v2). Verses 4-6 spell out their false worship of the LORD through golden calves at Bethel and Dan. Israel's "altars for sin" became "altars for sinning" (v11), since parody worship is as offensive as pagan worship. The tone of v7-14 reminds us that rejection of the gospel is a personal offence against the LORD. He has given us so much, and by the death and resurrection of Christ he holds out to us life with himself. To reject that love is to "sow the wind and reap the whirlwind" of God's wrath in eternity (v7).

*Holy God, thank you that the whirlwind of your righteous anger at me was directed with full force on Christ in my place. Thank you for graciously calling me to know you. Help me to worship you truly in word of truth and spirit of life.*

## **Hosea 9 – “The Prophet is a Fool”**

In times of abundance and prosperity, both individuals and whole societies revel in their worldly pleasures without giving glory, thanks, and praise to God. But Israel's blessing was very much from the LORD who loved them with covenant love. Over and over, God sent prophets to warn them of the consequences of their unfaithfulness, but they mocked his prophets as insane fools (v7). So the prophecy here is doubly chilling: They can expect exile to Egypt and Assyria, and their descendants will be cut off. Sure enough, northern Israel never recovered from the Assyrian invasion and exile. As the gospel of Christ goes out today, v17 is still sadly repeated: "My God will reject them because they have not listened to him."

*Lord God, today you speak to us still, through Christ as revealed in your word and applied to us by your Spirit. Father, if you had not first chosen to give me life, I would never have listened to your word. Thank you.*

## **Hosea 10 – It is Time to Seek the LORD**

Jeroboam son of Nebat installed golden calves at Bethel and Dan to prevent people going to Jerusalem to worship the LORD. He established a wicked parody of true worship. Hosea calls Bethel (“House of God”) Beth-aven (v5, “House of Empty Idolatry”) and speaks of its coming destruction in judgment. A yoke of exile is coming, but God calls them to plough the hard ground of their own hearts and “seek the LORD” (v12). It is likely that Jesus had these verses in mind when he invited us to “Come to me... Take my yoke... find rest for your souls” (Matt. 11:28-30). Israel’s rebels would discover they’d rather have mountains fall on them than face God’s judgment (v8), and so it will always be (Rev. 6:16-17).

*Lord Jesus, it seems absurd in the light of these verses to reject your gracious invitation to rest. It’s clear just how hard-hearted we naturally are until you work in us by grace. Lord, keep me from sham, dry, ritualistic worship; keep me in close daily communion with you.*

## **Hosea 11 – My Son**

Once again Hosea reveals to us the open heart of God, oozing compassion and love for his rebellious people. He had called Israel his son when he had chosen and redeemed them from slavery in Egypt, and through he cared for them with parental love they did not acknowledge him (e.g. v3). Though the LORD’s justice brings covenantal judgment on them (v5-7), his love and mercy stay his hand from wiping them out entirely (v8-9). We end the chapter with hope of restoration in the future (v10-11). The early chapters of Matthew’s gospel show how Jesus’ life mirrored Israel, and Hosea 11:1 is applied to Jesus’ return from Egypt (Matt. 3:14-15). But where Israel failed in covenant unfaithfulness and idolatry, Jesus triumphed in holiness and love.

*Holy Father, you are gracious indeed to call anyone other than Jesus your son or daughter. We are not worthy of such exalted privilege. Thank you that you gave your Son up to death so that my sins would be atoned for and all that I have done may be forgiven. Thank you for Jesus.*

## **Hosea 12 – Return to Your God**

Hosea reminds us of Jacob who wrestled with God in Genesis 32. It was a hard, night-time struggle at the end of which God changed Jacob's name to Israel. But by Hosea's day the people of Israel had forgotten all God's care and had become idolatrously independent of him (v8,9,11). Yet in grace and justice, the LORD sent prophets to call them to repentance (v10, 13) as he continues to do in the gospel message through his church today. And the message is the same: "You must return to your God. Maintain love and justice, and always put your hope in God" (v6). We are grateful we have this message written down for us; we must proclaim it.

*Living God, you know how often I grapple with problems instead of grappling with you in prayer. Forgive my independent heart, and help me to develop a close, dependent spirit. Teach me what it is always to put my trust in you.*

## **Hosea 13 – Inescapable Judgment**

Judgment was coming on Israel, just as we proclaim the judgment to come to the earth when Christ returns. The unbelieving response of Israel is similarly echoed in the rejection of the gospel today: They contented themselves with idolatry (v2-3), became self-satisfied and self-sufficient (v4-9), and trusted in human rules (v10-13). An atheist will rebel against God confident that they will escape justice in death. But v14 says that death itself is no escape, since nothing can have victory over God. Paul applies v14 to Christ's resurrection in 1 Cor. 15:55; Jesus will raise everyone from the grave to be judged and death itself will be thrown into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:14).

*Risen Saviour, you are glorified in your resurrection and are victorious over death. You will judge every person, every sin, with perfect wisdom, knowledge, and power. Lord, help me to point lost sinners to life and hope in you.*

## **Hosea 14 – Take Words to God**

In Hosea 13:4 God said, “no Saviour exists besides me” and in v9, “you have no help but me.” As we recall Hosea 6:6 (which was so much in Jesus’ mind) we do well to consider our approach to this Saviour God. Shall we go with more vibrant worship? A more diligent approach to love and holiness, perhaps? No, 14:2 spells out the simplicity of it all: “Take words of repentance with you and return to the LORD.” The promises of covenant blessing that flow to Israel in v4-8 are in response to their repentance, their abandonment of idolatry, and their turning to the LORD. And as Hosea was to love Gomer again (Hosea 3), so God “will freely love” all who turn in repentance and faith.

*Gracious Lord, you call us to come only with words of repentance and a sacrifice of praise. You yourself have atoned for all my sin in Christ – as perfect and complete a demonstration of your love for me as there could be. Saviour, thank you.*

## **Joel 1 – Locusts!**

We don’t know who Joel was or when he lived, but he was the first prophet Peter quoted at Pentecost in Acts 2. In Joel’s day, the land had been utterly devastated by locusts (as still happens today) and all crops were ruined. “Has anything like this ever happened?” asks Joel in v2. In fact, it has, and Joel uses language taken from the plagues of Egypt in Exodus to describe the events of his day. The inference is that the locusts are from God, sent as a call to repentance. The only right response is not merely to lament, but to gather together and lament to God (v13-14). Further, this terrible day is a foretaste of the “day of the LORD” to come (v15), echoing down the years until Christ’s return.

*Holy God, you graciously give us so many calls to repentance – so many of which are ignored, unheeded. Thank you for the Spirit’s work in me, causing me to lament my sin and to cry out to you for forgiveness. Father, thank you for choosing to save me in love.*

## **Joel 2 – Sound the Alarm, Call an Assembly**

“Blow the ram’s horn... sound the alarm...” (v1) because something worse than a swarm of locusts is coming: A fearsome foreign army bringing devastation in the LORD’s day of judgement. Is there any hope of escape? Yes, v12-14 remind us of God’s nature, calling us to repentance, to turn to the LORD. So for a second time, “Blow the ram’s horn” (v15), this time to call an assembly of everyone before God in prayer (V17). So v18-26 describe a return to the LORD’s blessing, crowned with the promise that he will be “present in Israel” (v27). Later still, v28-32 were quoted by Peter at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came on all God’s people, present with us forever. “Then everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved” (v32). Such grace!

*Living God, you are gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in faithful love towards me. Thank you for so great a salvation in Jesus and for the unchanging presence of the Holy Spirit. Lord, use me to sound the alarm of judgment to others.*

## **Joel 3 – The Day of the LORD**

Joel 1 spoke of locusts and how difficulties in life are often a call to repentance, foreshadowing the Day of the LORD. Joel 2 said that God’s people are to sound out alarms for coming to judgment and assembly for turning to God, now enabled by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Joel 3 looks ahead event our future, to the great and final Day of the LORD. God himself will gather the nations for final battle (v9-11), summoned to the Valley of Jehoshaphat (not a known place, but Jehoshaphat means “the LORD judges”). All the LORD’s enemies will be trampled decisively (v13-15), “But the LORD will be a refuge for his people” (v16). We will be made holy, dwelling with the LORD forever, a forgiven people.

*Holy God, I don’t always read such prophecy with the urgent compassion for the lost that I ought to have. Surely that Day to come will be beyond awful for those who don’t know you or honour your name. Lord, help me to proclaim your salvation, your Good News in Christ.*

## **Amos 1 – Every Sin Counted**

Amos was from Judah, sent by God to prophesy to Israel in the north. His message is not a happy one, as “The LORD roars from Zion” (v2) calling out sin. The book begins with these prophecies against the surrounding nations. The formula “for three crimes, even four” is a Hebrew idiom, here indicating that the nations’ specific sins are known, counted, and brought against them in perfect justice. As we’re taken through the surrounding nations we read of specific events – some known to us in Scripture and others not. But they are all known and recorded by the LORD who brings perfect justice. We praise God that the charge sheet against us has been nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14).

*Holy God, your knowledge is perfect and your justice unquestionable. Thank you that every single sin of mine – in word, thought, and action – is wholly known and fully atoned for in Jesus’ sacrifice. Spirit, help me to put sin to death.*

## **Amos 2 – Judgment Comes Home**

In each of the five judgments against the nations in Chapter 1, God said he would “send fire” against them, and so it continues here. Fire speaks of God’s righteousness and wrath. It’s not a surprise to see Moab as the sixth nation listed, but Amos’s hearers in Israel would have been delighted to hear of fire against Judah. Yet the most pointed charge sheet against any nation is for Israel itself who trampled the poor, turned away from the afflicted, abused women, worshipped other gods, exploited the poor, forgot the LORD, and defiled Nazirites and prophets (v6-12). Yet in all this, they believed they were the LORD’s people. If we say we are without sin, we deceive ourselves. But you can’t kid the LORD.

*Holy God, by grace you have declared me righteous, counting my sins against Jesus instead of me. Forgive me that I still sin, still give in to temptation, and even look down on others in their lives of sin. Father, forgive me. Spirit, change me.*

## **Amos 3 – A Lion Has Roared**

Chapters 3 to 6 contain five oracles (or pronouncements). The first three begin, “Listen” and the other two begin, “Woe.” The first oracle opens with a series of simple but inevitable cause-and-effect images, emphasising the certainty that God will speak (indeed, “a lion has roared”, v8) whenever and wherever there is evil. So, given the cause that is Israel’s perpetual sin in v9-10 then the effect of God’s word in v11 is just and inevitable. Even so, the LORD won’t wipe Israel out completely, and a tiny remnant will survive (v12). But the system of false worship and self-serving government will be destroyed (v13-15). Given the evil in our world, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah is bound to roar again.

*Holy God, all your judgments are right, true, and appropriate. Your wrath is as great as your love, and so I thank you that in love you spent all your wrath against me on your Son, Jesus. Help me to take this news of your love to unbelieving people.*

## **Amos 4 – Prepare to Meet Your God**

A second oracle begins with “Listen” (v1), said this time to the “cows of Bashan” – women of wealth and ease who cared nothing for the poor and needy. Judgment would come to them in ugly exile (v2-3). There is a somewhat sarcastic call to worship in v4-5, spelling out specific ways in which their religious practices were so very different from what the LORD had commanded in Leviticus. False worship of the true God is never acceptable; it is just another form of rebellion. Under the covenant terms of Leviticus 26, the LORD had sent hunger, drought, plagues, and war as calls to repentance, and “yet you did not return to me” (v6, 8, 9, 10, 11) – so he comes to them in judgment: “Prepare to meet your God” (v12).

*Lord Christ, I long for your coming. I can’t wait to see you in your glory and power. Even so, I know it will be overwhelming. Lord, at your return there will be many who won’t be prepared to meet you. Use me to warn and to witness today.*

## **Amos 5 – Seek the LORD and Live**

A third oracle begins with “Listen” in v1 as Amos cites a lament over Israel. He calls them to “Seek the LORD and live” (v4, 6) – to abandon their idolatrous worship and the godless morality it produces. Two key Old Testament words are spoken against Israel in v7: “Justice” has the sense of putting wrongs right, while “righteousness” is about doing right things – but Israel had rejected both when they rejected the true worship of the LORD. They are urged to “Pursue good and not evil... Hate evil and love good” (v14-15). The fourth oracle begins with “Woe” in v18 since Israel expected a “day of the LORD” when he would be victorious over his enemies but they didn’t realise that they were included. Again, they are called on to let justice and righteousness flow (v24).

*Holy God, you are gracious to call us rebel sinners to you, to life with you forever. Help me to live for you now, looking to do right things and to put wrongs right whenever I can in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of the Son.*

## **Amos 6 – The Pride Problem**

The fifth and final oracle is another “Woe” (v1). Israel are urged to see how God has dealt with neighbouring pagan nations. The problem in Israel was pride (v8) so that they believed that no judgment from God would come on them. But the question in v2 condemns them: “Are you better than these kingdoms?” It’s easy to look at other churches that are in decline or struggling to survive and think that that could not happen to our own church for some reason. Are we better than those churches? Even as individual Christians we can become full of pride, forgetting the grace that saved us, comparing ourselves favourably with others. The remedy is always the same: “Seek the LORD and live” (Amos 5:4, 6).

*Heavenly Father, the salvation in Christ you have brought me to leaves no room for pride or boasting. And yet I do find myself comparing with others and finding fault in them. Lord, forgive my foolish pride and keep me in humble dependence on you.*

## **Amos 7 – Visions and Opposition**

Chapters 7 to 9 contain five visions, the first three of which are here in v1-9. Locusts and fire would be devastating judgments that could wipe out Israel, and Amos's prayers were heard. The plumb line measured Israel and found them tilted, skewed, far from upright. Amos did not intercede this time at the judgment against Israel's false worship and ungodly rule. The record of visions is interrupted by the opposition of Amaziah, priest at Bethel. He deliberately misrepresents Amos's words as if they were words from a man and not God; he sends a false message to the king when he ought to listen to the word of God for himself. As we witness for the Lord, let us intercede even as we expect opposition.

*Lord Christ, you have made us a kingdom of priests to teach others about you while also interceding for them to you. Lord, forgive my negligence in both roles. May I be more like your servant Amos, even in the face of direct rejection and opposition.*

## **Amos 8 – Devastating Famine**

The fourth vision of Amos is a basket of summer fruit where all the fruit has ripened and been harvested. The Hebrew word for summer fruit is similar to the word for 'end' – and the end has come for Israel (v2). The LORD is patient and slow to anger, but he won't be mocked by shoddy, vacuous shows of religion that only mask hearts of idolatry, greed, and injustice (v4-6). The famine to come is particularly damning for Israel: "not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD" (v11). It is an act of judgment when God delivers us over to the desires of our hearts, no longer calling us to repentance.

*Patient, Gracious God, your word is truth and life in that as it shows me my sin and calls me to salvation in Christ. Lord God, may your word be preached and lived out by everyone in our church, not least in me.*

## **Amos 9 – David’s Tent Restored**

The final vision of Amos is of the LORD standing by the altar declaring extensive judgment against Israel. The searching language of v2-4 reminds us that the judgment against the nation would be felt and experienced person by person, not in some vague sense but in individual, personal suffering. We need to remember such specificity in our prayers and evangelistic efforts. The book ends on a surprisingly positive note: “In that day I will restore the fallen shelter of David” (v11), followed by Old Covenant imagery of God’s blessing. James quotes v11 at the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15; the promised royal descendant of David is Jesus, and the inclusion of Gentiles in his kingdom fulfils v11.

*Lord Jesus, risen and reigning, I am beyond blessed to be included in your kingdom. You know how I repeat the sins of ancient Israel that Amos spoke against. Lord, help me to live for you truly, living out holiness in every aspect of my daily life.*

## **Obadiah – Do Not Gloat Over Your Brother**

Abraham’s son Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau. Jacob was renamed Israel and became the father of that nation. Esau became the father of the neighbouring country, Edom. There was inter-generational animosity between the two nations, despite being ‘brothers’. When the Babylonians exiled Jerusalem, the Edomites mocked the exiles, stole their possessions, and even handed over surviving refugees (v12-14). Obadiah is a word of prophecy against Edom, promising their complete destruction from the LORD’s hand in judgment. Return from exile is promised, but should Israel then rejoice over Edom’s destruction? Not at all. Verse 12 swings both ways. We who are saved by grace have no grounds for boasting or gloating.

*Gracious Saviour, I have no grounds for rejoicing over the fate of the lost since I know I deserve no better. As ever, it is humbling that you took the mockery, rejection, shame, and punishment that I do deserve. Lord, grant me great compassion for the lost around me.*

## **Jonah 1 – Disobedience and Hypocrisy**

Of all the minor prophets, none has as much narrative as Jonah. As a man, he is often depicted in comic fashion but in truth his actions are despicable. The LORD gave this prophet a clear command to go east, inland to Nineveh, but Jonah went west across the sea. We won't discover why until Chapter 4. What we do see here is the empty, hypocritical way he describes himself as someone who fears the LORD (v9) and yet has so little concern for the lives of others. The sailors work hard to preserve life and they only reluctantly agree to throw Jonah overboard. When they do, their fear transfers from the storm to the God who sent it and then calmed it, just as the disciples did so much later on Galilee in Mark 4.

*Lord Christ, you have given your church clear instruction to go and make disciples. Forgive me for my disobedience painted over with excuses. Forgive me for my lack of compassion and my judgmental heart even as I give thanks to you for forgiving me.*

## **Jonah 2 – Out of the Depths**

Despite common perception, this little book isn't really much concerned with the fish (or, possibly, whale). The focus is on Jonah's obedience to God when it comes to making the name of the LORD known to Gentiles, and how Jonah is very much a representation of Israel. In Jonah's prayer here in Chapter 2, the LORD is greatly glorified in preserving Jonah and answering his prayers. The image of death and resurrection is striking and one Christ used of what was to happen to him (e.g. Matt. 12:30). The negative description of Jonah being "vomited" onto dry land alerts us to something amiss in his prayer: There is no mention of repentance or of making good on his commission to go to Nineveh.

*Lord God, how often do I pray for relief from a situation for my own sake rather than for the good of your kingdom? Help me to keep your purposes and proclamation at the forefront of my hopes, prayers, and actions.*

## **Jonah 3 – Nineveh Repents**

The opening two verses are almost identical to the first two verses of Chapter 1; Jonah's standing is reset, starting again. The LORD is gracious to use us over and over as we fail him and then return to him in the obedience of faith. The outcome in Nineveh was remarkable. Despite Jonah preaching only condemnation rather than repentance, the people of the city were greatly affected by what they heard. We're told in Chapter 4 that there were 120,000 people in the city, so how did the entire population hear so quickly? Jonah simply could not have spoken to them all, nor would he have met with the king. We must take great encouragement that God's Spirit is on display here in the power of the message, not the messenger.

*Lord God, I'm often too timid and hesitant to speak your good news to those who really need to hear it. Lord, I'm so sorry. Help me to have confidence in the power of the gospel, and please lead those unbelieving people closest to me to faith in Jesus.*

## **Jonah 4 – Selfishness on Display**

Now we see why Jonah disobeyed God's command to go to Nineveh: Jonah wanted the city to come under judgment, not grace. He knows that the LORD is "a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in faithful love, and one who relents from disaster" (v2), yet Jonah wanted fire and brimstone, not compassion and grace. But there's worse: His attitude to the loss of the plant's shade shows that he felt that he somehow deserved better on account of being a Hebrew. He forgot what grace is. Jonah preached condemnation instead of repentance, prayed only for himself without interceding for the lost, and found fault in the LORD's gracious compassion. He is uncomfortably like us.

*Loving God, so rich in compassion and grace, if you were not so then I would have no hope. Forgive my judgmental heart when I see sin in the world, and give me the warm compassion of Christ himself towards the lost.*

## Micah 1 – Lament

Verse 1 places Micah at the time of Assyrian dominance and threat, and it would be the Assyrians who would put an end to northern Israel in exile. Israel were to make the LORD known to the nations through covenant blessing, but their disobedience led to the sad reversal of v2. As Bible readers we sometimes skim such chapters as we have read so much of this before. But notice (a) the LORD will always act for his glory because it is humanity's good to see the glory of God; (b) there is no joy in judgment for the LORD, only lament; (c) the aptness of the Hebrew play on words in v10-14 (e.g. Beth-leaphrah means "House of Dust") highlights the just, targeted, specific nature of judgment on particular people for their own sins.

*Holy God, I sometimes lose sight of the certainty and grim reality of the judgment to come, even though I so often praise you for my own salvation. Thank you that you have sent us Jesus; help me to speak more of him so that others might know you.*

## Micah 2 – Quit Your Preaching

Rebellion against the LORD is the heart of a heart of sin. We just want to choose for ourselves and take what we want. The words of the prophets are calls to repentance, to return God's blessings, and so they are full of grace and mercy. The response in v6 is typical of what we'd hear today: "Quit your preaching." The sins listed against the people are all to do with abuse of power and lust for wealth, so very different from the way Jesus reigns and rules for the good of his people. To preach the gospel of Christ is to proclaim the goodness of God (v7), but people often choose to follow preachers and influencers who reflect their own ungodly desires (v11). But we will choose the LORD to lead us (v13).

Lord Christ, you are gracious to speak truth to the world – both in warning of judgment and in calling to salvation. Spirit, keep our church as a place where this true gospel of Christ is proclaimed, heard, and lived out, to the Father's glory and pleasure.

## **Michah 3 – Sinful Self-Delusion**

A core aspect of government is to be just, acting without favouritism or bias, and yet the leaders of Isreal were anything but just (v1-3). So where they ignored the appeals of the abused, so too the LORD will ignore the leaders' cries in their day of trouble (v4). The prophets were to speak truth and justice from the LORD, not lead people astray with false hopes (v5). So where they would not speak the LORD's words, he would now no longer speak his truth to them (v6-7). An alarming dimension of all this is the self-delusion of the leaders, priest, and prophets in v11: "Isn't the LORD among us? No disaster will overtake us." Likewise many will say to Jesus, "Lord, Lord" but he will turn them away at his coming (Matt. 7:22-23).

*Holy God, you are gracious to speak to us, merciful to hear our prayers. Saviour, may I never take your salvation for granted, but rather humbly keep turning to you personally in joyful dependence. Keep me from taking grace for granted.*

## **Micah 4 – God's Glorious Reign**

In contrast to the grasping, greedy, unjust rule of Israel's leaders so condemned in Chapter 3, here we're given a glimpse of the future world-wide reign of the LORD. His mountain (symbolising deity, power, and rule) will be above all others. Nations will approach him (v2); he will instruct goodness in his word (v3), rule in justice and peace (v4) and bring great blessing to his people (v5-8). Clearly, we still await this future. So Micah speaks of harder days to come first, beginning with Judah's exile into Babylon (v10, still 100 years in Micah's future) though with hope to come (v13). As citizens of heaven, we must live under our rulers well, but serving the risen Jesus gives us a taste of the glories to come.

*Lord Jesus, risen and resplendent in glory, ruling in justice and peace, thank you for including me in your kingdom. Grant me wisdom to live well in this world, and may I taste heaven itself by living for you now, obedient to your word.*

## **Micah 5 – Bethlehem Ephrathah**

The images of Chapter 4 (e.g. that nations “will never again train for war,” v3) are so far off, we might wonder how they could come about. Here, v1 opens with Jerusalem in trouble, not peace. But v2 heralds the coming Messiah, God’s chosen ruler over his people, to be born in insignificant Bethlehem (as the chief priests later told Herod in Matt. 2:4-6, quoting v2). Jesus, the promised Messiah, brings strength and security for his people (v4) and is himself our peace (v5). He blesses us all by removing idolatrous confidence in things of this world, along with our idols, purifying us for his work. We are then to be “like dew from the LORD” (v7), bringing his blessing to the whole world.

*Saviour Jesus, born into David’s line and fulfilment of royal promise, you are gracious to do your saving and purifying work in me. Thank you that you are my peace with God. Help me to live at peace with others.*

## **Micah 6 – What Does The LORD Want?**

The opening “Now listen” of v1 introduces us to the third section of Micah’s book (see 1:2, 3:1), and it begins with a scene common in the prophets: A courtroom. The LORD is arguing his case against his people, reminding them of how he rescued them, sustained them, and gave them victory. Verses 6 and 7 reveal Israel’s heart of reluctant, begrudging religion with ridiculous and offensive escalating questions about what the LORD wants of them. The answer is given in v8: “to act justly, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly with your God.” The LORD calls us to know him, to walk with him, and to be like him, and the Spirit within us works to that end.

*Holy, Righteous Father, it’s amazing that you call us to know you. Thank you that Christ walks with me and that the Spirit dwells in me. Forgive my cold routine of religion, and keep me in vibrant, humble relationship.*

## **Micah 7 – “Who is a God Like You?”**

Verses 1 to 7 are Micah’s own sad reflections on the sinful state of society around him, yet concluding with a renewed determination to “wait for the God of my salvation” (v7). Verse 6 highlights the family breakdowns that sin brings, and yet Jesus applied it to how families can fracture when some do as Micah did and follow Jesus (Matt. 10:34-36). Verse 8 onwards is a poem speaking of the discipline and restoration that Israel will experience, ultimately ending in the shame of God’s enemies and glory to the LORD. Micah ends with three majestic verses rejoicing in the forgiving, loving, compassionate nature of God, words that are only further amplified when we consider Christ and his incarnate sacrifice to save us.

*Lord Christ, if you had not called me I would still be among the lost, ignorant of my sin and condemnation. You are glorious in your compassionate nature, delighting in faithful love. Saviour, thank you that all my sins are cast into the sea, all my iniquity forgiven.*

## **Nahum 1 – Only Judgment**

An unusual feature of the book of Jonah is that he actually went to Nineveh. Mostly, prophets’ oracles against foreign nations were spoken for Israel’s ears so that they would see the justice of the LORD. So Nahum’s prophecy against Nineveh is only judgment: There is no call to repentance. The LORD had used Nineveh’s Assyrian forces as an instrument of judgment on northern Israel following years of apostasy and idolatry. But that does not mean Nineveh would themselves escape justice. God acts in unchallengeable sovereign power to do all his holy will for his own glory. This is humbling for those of who have been chosen to receive his mercy revealed in Christ.

*Holy and Righteous Father, it is only by your grace that I have been called to know you, called from death to life in Christ. Forgive me for ever feeling like I have any spiritual merit; use me to proclaim life to others.*

## **Nahum 2 – Desolation, Decimation, Devastation**

This chapter describes an overwhelming attack on the city of Nineveh. It was highly fortified and considered impregnable, but it's believed that it was its river that proved to be a fatal vulnerability (v6). For those of us who have only ever known peace, we can barely imagine the horror and terror of invasion by hostile forces. The cinematic descriptions in v3-6 help us visualise the invasion somewhat, while v7-10 provide images of agony: "Desolation, decimation, devastation! Hearts melt, knees tremble, insides churn, every face grown pale" (v10). There is nothing light or vague about judgment from God: It is traumatic, physical, and very real. This should fuel urgency in our mission to the lost.

*Holy and Just God, forgive me for having so a low view of your holiness that I downplay the reality of judgment in my mind. Thank you for Jesus, who took the full cup of your wrath against me. Saviour God, give me a heart of urgency in mission.*

## **Nahum 3 – Woe to the City of Blood**

Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria, and the Assyrian army spilled much blood on the pages of our history books with their brutal cruelty. This chapter hints at their wickedness, but also makes it clear that the judgment to come on them is proportionate to their crimes before God. There will be no-one to rescue them and no-one will mourn. It's easy for us to join in their condemnation, and certainly there will be a day when we sing Hallelujahs over God's victory over this sinful world (Rev. 19:1-3). But we must never lose sight that it is only by grace that the LORD has called us out of that world of darkness into his kingdom of light.

*Holy Saviour, Lord Jesus, you have extended grace to me that I don't deserve, calling me to share eternal bliss with you because you took my punishment on yourself. Forgive my judgmental, condemning heart towards others and help me to point them to life in you.*

## **Habakkuk 1 – How Long?**

Habakkuk chapters 1 and 2 form a dialogue between the prophet and God. Verses 1-4 show us this man of prayer: (a) He is bold and direct; (b) He laments the long-term sinful state of the nation around him; (c) Habakkuk has clearly been diligently praying for the LORD to act even though the reply doesn't seem forthcoming. The LORD's reply in v5-11 reveals much about God: (a) He is the God of all nations, not just ancient Israel; (b) His plans cross boundaries of time and space beyond what we might imagine in prayer; (c) He can use the wickedness of men to achieve his good purposes. Habakkuk's reply in v12-17 shows that he could not grasp the power, range, and goodness of God's sovereignty.

*Living God, you know that I lack the prayerful passion and diligence of your servant Habakkuk. Yet I thank you that I can see that you can use Nebuchadnezzar, Pilate, and Judas to accomplish your good purposes. Lord, help me to move with your will, not against it.*

## **Habakkuk 2 – Faith, Life, and Woes**

Habakkuk was dismayed and confused that the LORD would use wicked Babylon as an instrument of judgment on Israel. But God speaks five "woes" against Babylon and all cities like it: Woe (v6-8) to nations who steal and stockpile (they'll lose it all); Woe (v9-11) to nations who isolate themselves (they'll be cut off from life); Woe (v12-14) to empire-builders (only the LORD's glory covers the earth, v14); Woe (v15-17) to crude and drunk nations (they will drink God's wrath); Woe (v18-20) to those who worship created things (they'll learn that God lives). How we must pray for our own nation! Paul quotes 2:4 in Romans 1:16-17 – we are saved by faith in Christ, and Habakkuk is broader still: We live by faith every day in this wicked world.

*Holy God, the society I'm in doesn't escape these woes but is content in its spiritual ignorance, oblivious to its eternal jeopardy. Lord, have mercy. Saviour, please save. Thank you for the faith you gave me; help me to know what it is to live by faith every day.*

## **Habakkuk 3 – Yet I Will Celebrate**

This chapter is different from the previous two in that it's a song, a psalm (v1, 19), and yet it is similar in that it's a prayer to the LORD. Habakkuk was shocked that the LORD would use wicked Babylon to execute God's judgment on Israel, but here he prays with humility and awe that God would indeed act. He says, "I stand in awe of [literally, 'I fear'] your deeds" (v1), knowing that a Babylonian invasion would affect everyone including himself. He boldly prays, "In your wrath, remember mercy" (v1). Verses 3-15 spell out the devastating power of God when he acts in judgment. So Habakkuk's final words in v16-19 are a powerful statement of faith: When everything's stripped from us, we still have joy in the LORD.

*Eternal, Powerful God and Judge of all the earth, it's no surprise when you hand a nation over to its own sinful desires in acts of judgment. As your child in this godless world, help me to live in the strength you give and in the joy of my salvation.*

## **Zephaniah 1 – The Day of the LORD**

The prophet Zephaniah's primary focus is the Day of the LORD, a double-edged sword of devastation and hope. In 1:2-2:3 he speaks judgment against Judah in apostasy, then in 2:4-3:8 against the nations and Jerusalem, and then 3:9-20 bring a message of hope. The striking thing is that he brings such a strong condemnation during Josiah's reign, a godly king who drove spiritual renewal throughout the land. It was during Josiah's reign that the book of the law was rediscovered in the temple (2 Kings 22). But neither the zealously religious leadership of a godly king nor the forthright preaching of the prophet Zephaniah were enough to change the hearts of unbelieving people. We must pray for the Spirit to prepare hearts to receive Christ.

*Holy Spirit, the Day of the LORD draws nearer, that great Day of Christ's return. Unless you work in the hearts of the lost then no effort from your people can bear any fruit. Spirit, have mercy. Revive your church and lead many lost souls to repentance and faith in Jesus.*

## Zephaniah 2 – All Nations

Chapter 1 ended with the news that the “whole earth will be consumed” on the Day of the LORD (1:18), and so this chapter opens with a call to the whole earth to “Seek the LORD... Seek righteousness, seek humility” (v3). The reason is given from v4 (which begins, “For...”): God will judge all the nations, both near (e.g. Ammon, Moab) and far (e.g. Assyria, Cush). Jerusalem will be included in this list of nations under judgment in the next chapter. So while there is no nation, power, or authority that can escape the judgment of God, yet he remains graciously committed to anyone who seeks him, seeks righteousness, seeks humility. Again, we must pray for the Spirit to turn sceptics into seekers.

*Holy Spirit of God, the people of this world invest hope in all manner of passing powers and will continue to do so unless you move hearts. Lord, please have mercy and call lost people to Jesus, not least those unbelievers I bring before you so often in prayer.*

## Zephaniah 3 – A Warrior Who Saves

Zephaniah is a good example of how prophets' words often have multiple time horizons. Certainly, his words applied to the sins of Jerusalem in his day (v1-4), to her impending doom (v6-8), and to restoration after exile (v9-20). But the apocalyptic language has a much wider application too, just as the phrase “Day of the LORD” puts us in mind of Christ's return. So v8 suggests the final battle between Jesus and all those opposed to him (Rev. 19:11-21); v9's reference to “pure speech” hints at an undoing of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11) and possibly looks to Pentecost (Acts 2); and Rev. 14:15 alludes to v13 with the removal of deceit. On that day we will sing Hallelujah, but what joy to hear our warrior saviour God sing over us (v17)!

*Holy, righteous God and Saviour, we have surely barely begun to understand your majestic power. What a day it will be when I see you and hear your voice! May by voice ever be one of praise to you in song and speech.*

## **Haggai 1 – Priorities**

Haggai and Zechariah were preaching at the same time in Jerusalem after the exiles had returned from Babylon. Their primary task was to reinvigorate the spirit of the people to rebuild the temple since work had halted under pressure from pagan neighbours (Ezra 4). It's clear that the LORD was displeased with their lack of urgency, but why? Three reasons: (a) They had prioritised their own comfort over the rebuilding of the temple; (b) Though the LORD needed no temple for himself, he knew that it was for the good of the nation that he should dwell visibly among them again; (c) They would be blessed greatly to gather to him. Such thinking should help us to prioritise gathered Sunday worship.

*Lord Jesus, Head of your church, we are blessed to be able to gather together in your name to come before you for worship. Forgive me for ever having wrong motives and attitudes, and keep me thrilled about church on Sundays.*

## **Haggai 2 – “I Will Bless You”**

The rebukes of the LORD are so often loaded with promise and hope for those with the humility of heart to listen. The returned exiles are given a command a promise: “Work! For I am with you” (v4). Who will pay for the work? The LORD will shake the nations for their gold (v6-9, Ezra 6:8-10)! The people are to reflect on how things have not gone well so far because of their lack of rebuilding progress, but their faithful obedience now has a promise of blessing to come (V13-19). The success that God will give to Zerubbabel, descendant of King David, will be the LORD's own signature of blessing. The fullness of these promises began when Jesus entered the temple and is yet to be wholly realised (v6, Heb. 12:26).

*Saviour, you came into this dark world as light, yet people still prefer darkness. You have given me tasks to do within your own great work of sovereign mercy and divine glory. Help me to hear and obey your commands, certain of your strength and presence.*

## **Zechariah 1 – Night Visions**

It's immediately clear that Zechariah was prophesying in the same time and place as Haggai, and the focus here is the same: Rebuilding the temple after returning from exile in Babylon. The people are called to return to the LORD and so not repeat the rebellion of earlier generations (v1-6). Zechariah has eight night visions, the first two of which are here in this chapter. The first vision is of horsemen who have patrolled the earth and found it to be "calm and quiet" (v11). This is a complaint because the earth is at ease in its sin and idolatry and the shining witness of Israel is dimmed. So in mercy, the LORD has returned to Jerusalem (v16). The enemies of Israel will be scattered by craftsmen (v18-2) rebuilding the temple of the LORD.

*Holy Spirit, deity dwelling in me and in the church, forgive me that the name of Jesus is not proclaimed loudly, and that unbelievers around me are left comfortable in their sin and idolatry. Lord, work through me to make Jesus known.*

## **Zechariah 2 – Think Big!**

In this third vision, a man was halted from measuring the width and length of Jerusalem. The priority for the returned exiles wasn't to rebuild the city walls but to get going on the temple. Two reasons are given for not building the walls: (a) The LORD says, "I myself will be a wall of fire around it, and I will be the glory within it"; (b) The city will be too small anyway for the vast numbers of people the LORD will call to himself. When we think of the church of Christ today all over the world we see how Zechariah's prophecy is truly fulfilled in Christ. It is natural and necessary for local churches to have a passion for both local and international mission.

*Lord Christ, you are building your church right now all over the world. Forgive me for my small thinking, as if to constrain your gospel by fixed measurements of buildings and places. Help me to see your glory among your people.*

## **Zechariah 3 – The High Priest**

This fourth vision has Jeshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD. The key thing to recall is how the high priest represents the whole people of God in the LORD's presence, most notably on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). The silencing of Satan's accusations and the clothing of the high priest in clothes fit for the presence of God are significant both for the high priest himself and for the whole people of God. The restoration of true worship at a rebuilt temple would be a sign from the LORD of his greater works: "I am about to bring my servant, the Branch... I will take away the iniquity of this land in a single day" (v8, 9). And so Jesus is the great atoning sacrifice for our sins, our ruler and high priest, and silencer of Satan.

*Risen Jesus, great king and high priest, ruling and interceding with goodness, wisdom, righteousness, and justice, thank you for silencing all Satan's accusations against me by your complete atoning sacrifice. Help me to wear this righteousness you give and to bring glory to you.*

## **Zechariah 4 – By My Spirit**

This fifth vision is richly encouraging as we contemplate how God enables us to do his will. The lampstand is unlike any ever unearthed from antiquity, with its sevenfold lamps each with seven spouts, all fed with oil by two living trees. The trees signify "two anointed ones" (v14) meaning Jeshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the governor and descendant of King David (see Matt. 1:12). The oil flowing through them is no less than the Holy Spirit of God (v6). The nation will achieve the rebuilding of the temple and its worship under their Spirit-filled leaders. It's a picture of how Christ fuels his church with the Spirit today.

*Holy God, I still try to achieve things seemingly in your name but really in my own strength. How foolish I am, how quick to forget the rich blessing of seeing you work through me. Lord, keep me in deliberate dependence on you to your glory.*

## **Zechariah 5 – Away With Sin**

These two visions continue to prepare Judah for the rebuilt temple and the presence of the LORD among them. Both visions are about cleansing from sin. The vision of the scroll reminds us that every sin of every person is known and recorded. While the new clothes for Jeshua the high priest promised atonement for sin, the flying scroll condemns those who refuse to repent and choose a life of secret sin. The vision of the woman in the basket is chosen because sin is attractive and alluring to us, so is best put away and sent away. The basket goes to the land of Shinar, also known as Babylon, the place where the Tower of Babel was built. The world adores its shrines to sin, but we will gather to the LORD in purity.

*Holy God, I have no righteousness or holiness of my own. My motives are never entirely pure, and my desires are never without sin's taint. Help me to put sin to death, to send it away, and to separate from the world's values. Spirit, sanctify my heart in growing likeness to Jesus.*

## **Zechariah 6 – Chariots and Crowns**

After all these visions about rebuilding the temple, atonement, and purification, this last one relates to the LORD dealing with his enemies. As Solomon's temple had two bronze pillars, these bronze mountains suggest chariots going out from heaven itself. Chariots were the tanks of the ancient world, so this is an image of war – a war the LORD will win. The message to Jeshua the high priest is most unusual as there is no situation where a man would be both priest *and* king over God's people (other than Melchizedek in Genesis 14 and, of course, Jesus). So the temple spoken of here is a shadow the all that's to come at Christ's appearance – now a spiritual reality in his church.

*Great Lord Jesus, these images cause me to raise my thinking about your kingly and priestly perfections. What a ruler you are. Help me to live under your good reign in a way that both honours and pleases you.*

## **Zechariah 7 – Not So Fast**

Two years on from the visions, and with the temple itself now half-built, thoughts now turn to religious practice. It seems the Israelites not exiled to Babylon have been holding an annual fast in memory of the exile. They want to know if they should continue now that exiles have returned. The answer comes in four parts, two here and two in Chapter 8. So v4-7 makes the uncomfortable charge that their fasting wasn't really out of devotion to the LORD (just as many people now make their annual trip to church at Christmas). Worse still, v8-14 highlight the hypocrisy of anyone who will make a show of religion while rejecting God's Spirit and harbouring sin. Nominal religion actually draws God's wrath (v12).

*Lord Jesus, it's very easy for me to point the finger at people with part-time, nominal acquaintance with matters of faith. Yet you know of often my own worship and private devotion is routine and ritual. Lord, keep me in close, living relationship. And may that overflow healthily into life.*

## **Zechariah 8 – Love Truth and Peace**

Verses 1 and 18 mark the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> parts of the response to the question relating to religious practice in the previous chapter. In v1-17, the LORD promises a return to blessing, calling on his people to speak truth and act justly (v16-17) – effectively a call to display the LORD's own character. This is at the heart of true worship: Daily godliness. So the promise in v18-23 is that times of fasting will be replaced by times of feasting under the LORD's favour. In this, Judah would become a beacon of God's light and glory to the nations which is why they must "love truth and peace" (v19) even as God does. It is a terrible thing to have the name of the LORD sullied by the sins of his people, but those around us are blessed by our holiness of life.

*Holy Father, by grace you have united me to Jesus and caused the Holy Spirit to dwell in me. Lord, may I know such a joy in you that even in difficult times others might praise your name for what they see. Bless others through me even as you do your sanctifying work in me.*

## **Zechariah 9 – King of Peace**

The rest of the book comprises two pronouncements (or oracles), the first of which takes up Chapters 9-11. The temple is rebuilt and the matter in hand is who leads God's people and how. First, v1-8 speaks against neighbouring kingdoms, a reminder that all nations ultimately come and go at God's command. But v9 speaks of a new king, a king of peace riding a donkey rather than a chariot or war-horse. He will rescue his people because of the blood of a covenant (v11), lifting them and causing them to "sparkle" (v16)! Yet the salvation of his people requires victory over his enemies to their cost. When Jesus publicly fulfilled this prophecy on Palm Sunday he grieved over the consequential condemnation of all who reject him (Luke 19:41, John 12:15).

*Lord Christ, in my natural sinful state I was very much at enmity against you. How gracious you are to save your enemies, grieving over my sin and rebellion. Lord Jesus, help me to live out your kingdom of peace, loving even those who deny you.*

## **Zechariah 10 – Pray for Rain**

The theme of leadership continues with God's people described as a flock of sheep and their leaders as shepherds. Since God alone sends blessing (v1) and "idols speak falsehood" (v2), we need rulers who are devoted to God. The LORD will punish the awful leaders of his flock, those who lead them astray (v3). He will be their shepherd himself, transforming them from silly sheep into a strong army gathered around God himself as the true Good Shepherd. His motivation is not any intrinsic merit in the sheep since we all go astray. The LORD is clear: "I will restore them because I have compassion on them" (v6). Confident of the compassionate heart of Christ (Mark 6:34), we pray for the life-giving rain of his blessings as we follow him.

*Great Good Shepherd of your sheep, thank you that you sought me out when I was astray. Thank you for bringing me into your flock. Saviour, thank you for laying down your life for me and leading me all my life long.*

## **Zechariah 11 – 30 Pieces of Silver**

Again the theme of leadership of God's people continues in the metaphor of shepherd and sheep, though some of the details here are a little obscure to us. Zechariah was a prophet, not a king, so it seems he's told to act out certain prophecies (rather like Ezekiel). In response to the bad shepherds (leaders), he's told to shepherd the people with these two staves of Favour and Union (v7) and he quickly removes three bad shepherds. But the sheep "detested" godly rule (v8), bringing an end to both covenant and union as the LORD handed them over to the foolish rulers of their choice. They dismissed godly rule for just 30 pieces of silver, the price Judas was paid for handing Jesus over (Matt. 26:15). We do well to embrace our Good Shepherd's perfect rule.

*Lord Jesus, you have the words of eternal life and there is no rule or authority that compares with your goodness and power. Forgive me, Lord, for going astray daily, forgetting your gentle kindness and wise rule. Lord Christ, keep my heart tuned to you.*

## **Zechariah 12:1-13:1 – In That Day**

The second pronouncement of Chapters 12 to 14 is so filled with phrases quoted or alluded to by the New Testament that its heartbeat phrase "In that day" can only mean the time of Christ's work. The scale of these chapters is staggering and quite out of keeping with ancient Judah under Persian rule. So the events of Jerusalem in v1-9 that will have such far-reaching impact are explained by v10-14 viewed from a New Testament perspective. God himself – in human flesh – was pierced at the cross (v10, John 19:37, Rev. 1:7), the Spirit poured out at Pentecost (v10, John 16:7, Acts 2), and the emphasis on individual mourning is grief over our own sins that caused Christ's suffering.

*Convicting Spirit of grace and prayer, thank you for your work in me. Lord Christ, I am so sorry for my sins that caused you such pain and punishment. Holy Father, thank you for including me in your great plan of salvation for the world.*

## **Zechariah 13:2-9 – Strike the Shepherd**

Verse 1 is a rich promise of a sanctifying, purifying work of God in his people. But holiness always requires the eradication of falsehood, so v2-5 speak of the removal of idols (false gods) and prophets (false gospels). The sleazy business of prophecy for profit will be ashamed into retreat. The poetry of v7-9 continues the purifying theme as an unidentified shepherd is removed from office in an act of judgment that has painful repercussions for God's flock. Even so, some of the flock will be purified, and refined, calling on God's name (v9). Jesus quoted v7 on the night of his betrayal (Matt. 26:31, Mark 14:27) – a reminder of both his fulfilling of Zechariah's "in that day" and the disciples' dependence on the Good Shepherd.

*Saviour Jesus, you are the Good Shepherd who laid down your life for me. Thank you for the purifying, living water of the Holy Spirit in me. Help me to put away idols, to live only in truth, and to experience dependence on you.*

## **Zechariah 14 – Holy to the LORD**

This complex chapter is using words to convey a future beyond human language to explain, though as we read this side of the cross we do have added insight. The LORD fights for his own people while providing them with supernatural safe haven (v1-5). There will be a day of extraordinary darkness and then light, with living waters flowing from Jerusalem to the world in imagery of a new creation (v6-8). Jesus owned these images for himself at the Feast of Shelters (booths, tabernacles) in John 7 & 8, and it is he who determines those who will receive grace or punishment. "Holy to the LORD" (v20) was originally only on the high priest's clothes (Ex. 28:36), but Christ's kingdom will be holy in every corner (v20-21).

*Holy Saviour, as I live in this world of sin and feel the sinful desires of my own heart, I can barely imagine dwelling with you in perfect, sinless holiness. Thank you that such hope is yours to give and that you give it so freely. Lord, help me to live worthy of so great a salvation.*

## **Malachi 1 – “I Have Loved You”**

Malachi's book is in a 'disputation' style of question and answer. We're right at the end of the Old Testament timeline, but those re-settled in Jerusalem and Judah have slipped into loveless and mediocre religious routine. When the LORD says, "I have loved you" in v2, the people display staggering ingratitude by asking, "How?" God's reply could be a thousand things, but he simply reminds them of their status as his chosen people. Their love for God has grown cold, shown in their make-do, substandard offerings that would be unacceptable even to a human governor (v8). These are challenging words for us in settled times and we must examine our heart attitude to the God who has loved us.

*Eternal God of love, you chose to love me and you loved to choose me, all simply in your own pleasure and grace. May the Spirit ever be turning my mind to contemplative gratitude and my heart to devoted love.*

## **Malachi 2 – Truth Taught**

A core function of Jerusalem's priests was to teach and Malachi gives a beautiful description of how godly, spiritual teaching should happen: First, the priests have reverence and awe of God (v5). Then they speak true instruction, walking with God in peace and integrity, turning others from iniquity (v6). But when pastors and teachers lose their personal awe of the LORD it often leads to personal and church ruin. The condemnation of Judah's attitude to divorce (v10-16) is because their slack ethics betray their ignorance of the spiritual dimension of marriage; ignoring the union of a man and a woman in marriage shows contempt for the God who united them. Truth taught by godly leaders is never optional for a healthy church.

*Lord Jesus, you have given evangelists, pastors and teachers to nourish your church through your holy word taught and applied. May the leaders of our church never lose their reverence and awe of your holy name, and may the Spirit give them truth and fire.*

## **Malachi 3 – Preparing the Way**

Mark 1:2 quotes v1 as referring to John the Baptist, preparing the way for Christ's coming by preaching a message of repentance. So "the Lord you seek... the Messenger of the covenant you delight in" is Christ himself. Jesus refines and purifies in holy judgment (though few see him that way). So v7 is a call to repentance, though the people claim not to know their sin (v8). The LORD's response reminds them that he is a loving and generous God who longs to bless, not curse. Lack of tithing was a symptom of a lack of love for God. So we note that the LORD's book of remembrance (v16) is not filled with the obedient (there are none), but those who fear and revere his name.

*Holy God, if you counted our sins against then none would stand. My heart would not naturally turn towards you either, and yet the Spirit caused me to hear your command to turn to you and your invitation to life in the living Saviour. Thank you for this rich salvation life.*

## **Malachi 4 – Sun of Righteousness**

When an angel spoke to John the Baptist's father, Zechariah, in Luke 1:17, he said that John would be the Elijah of Malachi 4:5-6. As Israel awaited its Messiah, they were to remain true to the LORD and his covenant given through Moses at Horeb (Sinai, v4). And what a Messiah! No less than the sun of righteousness, a burning fire to consume his enemies but a sun of healing for his own people. Ancient near-eastern art pictured the sun's rays of warmth and light as 'wings'. Christ's people will be healed of sin and curse, doubt and fear, worry and grief. We will leap like calves released from a stall after a long winter, worshipping him in the warmth and light of the radiance of the Father's glory.

*Saviour, as your ancient people were to remain true to your commands awaiting your first appearance, so would the Spirit please help me to live as we await your return. Sun of Righteousness, thank you for the prospect of being eternally healed in mind, spirit, body and soul, dwelling in your presence for ever.*





