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Prophets and Promises



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2024: Meeting God in Scripture



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Something New

In our long walk through the Bible, we now come to the seventeen books of prophecy, spanning Isaiah to Malachi and four centuries (800-400 BC). We can only scratch the surface of this wonderful body of Scripture, but it is my hope that this BA will ignite in you a passion for the prophets. Here are a few questions to get us started.

What manner of men are the prophets? Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel begins his landmark study, *The Prophets*, with this same question. His first insight is that the prophets have a “sensitivity to evil” — an indignation against corruption. Isaiah is indicative of this prophetic orientation: “Cry aloud, spare not; lift up your voice like a trumpet; tell My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins” (58:1; cf. Jeremiah 5:25; Amos 5:12). The prophets expose and rebuke sin.

What is the historic context of the prophets? In a word, *exile!* The threat of it, the fact of it, or its aftermath. Exile is exodus in reverse — the removal of God’s covenant blessing for Israel’s rebellion. Babylon looms large over this period as the instrument of God’s correction (Jeremiah 20:4-6) and the arrogant beast doomed for destruction (51:1-12; Daniel 7). The prophets confront the high, the low, Israel, and all nations (Ezekiel 5:8; Amos 1-2).

What future do the prophets see? If the prophets are sensitized to evil from their immersion in a holy God, then we are not surprised by their message of judgment. But they see another future too — one of grace and newness: a new thing and a new song; a new name; a new heavens and a new earth; a new covenant; and new hearts and new spirits, all signifying a new exodus, a new start beyond exile (Isaiah 42:9, 10; 62:2; 65:17; Jeremiah 31:31; Ezekiel 36:26). This new thing is *Jesus!*

The voice of the prophets resounds to this day, crying out against sin, warning of judgment, extending grace and hope as they point us to Christ. They declare, “Thus saith the LORD.” Confronting and comforting. Let’s listen — and anticipate something new.

— Jason Overman



Facing Perilous Times



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Making sense of the
beasts of Daniel 7.

by Dr. David R. Downey

Many accurate prophecies in Scripture are in the book of Daniel. Though it is by no means the only repository of prophecies, it is possibly unparalleled in references to historical events and the coming of Jesus. This book adds another layer of proof to the veracity of the Bible.

Daniel is sometimes hard to follow because of the way the book was recorded. The first six chapters are considered by most Bible scholars as the narrative section where everything was recorded chronologically. But

starting in the seventh chapter, the writing is largely prophetic. The first six chapters contain prophecies, but the last six are bristling with end-time predictions, and they are not chronological.

Our focus here is the seventh chapter. It occurred in the first year of Belshazzar's reign, several years prior to the events of the fifth chapter, when Belshazzar was judged with the writing on the wall.

Chapter 7 occurred approximately fourteen years before Daniel's experience in the lions' den under Darius, recorded in the sixth chapter.

Furthermore, the vision of chapter 7 corresponds to the vision of chapter 2 that was given to Nebuchadnezzar! The vision to Belshazzar in chapter

7 is more detailed. Where the vision of the great statue in chapter 2 was more dispassionate, this chapter is a moral interpretation of the same kingdoms.

Daniel received the vision as he lay on his bed, possibly meaning it was a waking dream. He received it from the four winds, as it rushed like a mighty tempest on the sea. The vision was more than regional, as it relates to the entire world. Daniel saw four beasts, and the operative words he used to describe them were *like* and *resembling*, as they were symbols of kingdoms to come.

The beasts

Beast one: a lion with eagle's wings (v. 4)

Both Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon are indicated here. Analogous to the golden head of the

statue in chapter 2, this showed royal preeminence, represented by the lion and eagle, first among beasts and fowl.

The creature's feathers/wings were plucked, and it stood upright and was given a man's mind. The scripture says that it would be given the heart of a beast and not of a man (4:16). When Nebuchadnezzar returned to his senses, he was given the dignity of man again.

Beast two: a bear (v. 5)

The bear was considered second in majesty to the lion. It "was raised up on one side" as the bear got up from slumber ready to attack. Remember again that this is the two-sided kingdom (as the arms of the statue in chapter 2) and that the side that raised itself actively first is likely the Medes, followed in concert by the Persians.

The three ribs were the result of a recent meal, which included Lydia, Babylon, and Egypt. They were told to "devour much meat," which was true of Medo-Persia's voracious conquests.

Beast three: leopard with four heads and four wings (v. 6)

Though the leopard, or panther, is not as royal as the lion or as strong as the bear, it was more agile in attacking than either of them.

Wings again represent speed, and they spread to the four corners of the earth (four wings), representing Alexander the Great and Greece. Remember, it is said that he sat down and wept because there were no more worlds left to conquer ("dominion").

"Four heads" represent the

division of the kingdom into four of Alexander's generals after Alexander's death: Cassander, Lysimachus, Ptolemy, and Seleucus. Here again is evidence for the great accuracy of Bible prophecy. Nebuchadnezzar's dream showed the two thighs representing Greece, and here there are four heads. We know that the immediate division was into four sections, but intrigue continued until only two divisions resulted, under Ptolemy and Seleucus.

Beast four: no name, as if an animal could not represent it (v. 7)

This beast was a monstrosity; it was Rome. It had ten horns (as ten toes were stomped in Nebuchadnezzar's statue), represent-

ing the might and political power of the godless world, seeking always to advance its agenda over God's.

The meaning

What does God show us in this vision?

The certainty of predicted events. When Daniel saw this vision, only the first kingdom had begun, and the rest must have seemed confusing. Yet surely each event came to pass just as it had been predicted.

Just so, one day the mouthy "horn" of Daniel 7:8 (the Antichrist of Revelation 13) and the final trampling kingdom (spiritual Rome) will be overwhelmed and surrendered to the flames

“We may be overwhelmed with the ferocity of the visions, but we can rest in the lovingkindness of God.”

ing totality as well as the number of kings.

Beast four of Daniel's prophecy resembled no known animal. It was the one with iron teeth. It trampled everything and was different than all of the others before it. Rome was the amalgamation of the three previous kingdoms.

In Revelation 13:2, all four beasts are combined in a one-world kingdom vision, which

of judgment, and God will set up His own final kingdom. This was certified when Jesus came and was seated on the throne of David, ushering in a kingdom that will never end.

The saints of God will reign. Jesus said in the last chapter of the Bible, "Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done" (Revelation 22:12).

These four kingdoms will be replaced by one of a different character. The kingdoms of the world, represented by these four, are characterized by sin and suffering, if not avarice and greed. History has been written in tears and blood.

One day, the Prince of Peace will reign, and all nations will call Him blessed. This is the message of Daniel 7:9-28. The Ancient of Days, God the Father, will set up His throne and invite Jesus to take sovereign control and dominion, and His kingdom “will not pass away” (vv. 14, 27). And so, in chapter 2, the stone, “cut out without hands,” destroyed the statue (v. 34). God previously delivered the first messianic prophecy of the Bible in Genesis 3:15 and said to Satan that Jesus “shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.” The bruise on the heel was temporary in Christ’s crucifixion (Isaiah 53:3, 4). The bruise on the head (which means “crush,” as in Romans 16:20) is mortal. The kingdom of Rome is still thrashing around like a wounded snake, but it is dying.

Romans 8:18 says, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

This prophecy gives us hope! The Bible is the only sacred text on earth that is entirely predicated on predictive prophecy. It rises and falls on whether its prophecies are true. Only God could predict and deliver His messages without error. All others would soon be shown as charlatans. Strengthen your faith by reading the many regular prophecies in the Bible, plus the

hundreds of Messianic prophecies that were accurately fulfilled.

Also, because all these prophecies given through the prophets were fulfilled with astounding accuracy, those predicted for future days through Daniel and the many other Old Testament prophets will come to pass as well. We can trust the words God has delivered. As Daniel, we may be overwhelmed with the ferocity of the visions, and we might be confused as to their meaning, but we can rest in the lovingkindness of God.

The wicked schemes of the devil and the strategies of this rebellious world will be rendered powerless. And God will bring His people home. **BA**

Dr. David Downey writes from Burleson, TX. Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*.



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Spotlight on Isaiah: Gospel Prophet

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“Come now, and let us reason together,” says the LORD; though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (1:18).

Isaiah, son of Amoz, married with two sons, was a statesman prophet from Jerusalem with access to royalty (1:1; 2:1; 7:3; 8:3). His name, like Jesus, means “Yahweh is salvation.”

Called by revelation, cleansing, and commission from the Lord (6:1-13), Isaiah prophesied when Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah reigned in Judah (1:1). The ten northern tribes of Israel were captured by Assyria in 722 BC, and Judah was severely threatened in 701 BC (7:17; 8:7,8; 36—37). Isaiah prophesied Jerusalem would be spared then but predicted its future Babylonian captivity and return (37:33-35; 39:5-8; fulfilled 586 BC; ch. 40ff).

Among prophets, Isaiah is . . .

- “major” by length — 66 chapters;
- contemporary with Hosea, Micah (compare Isaiah 2:1-4 and Micah 4:1-3);
- 100 years before Jeremiah, 150 before Ezekiel, 300 before Malachi;

- named 20 times, quoted 65 times, in the New Testament.

Confirmation! Copies of Isaiah were among the Dead Sea Scrolls found in 1947. One is 24 feet long, dates from the second century BC, and contains the complete Hebrew text of Isaiah.

Messianic prophecies: Christ’s reign from Mount Zion (2:1-5); virgin birth (7:14); marvelous names and kingdom (9:6, 7); peaceful reign on earth (11:1-10); miracles (35:5, 6); preparation by John (40:3-5); exaltation by all (45:23); servant songs (42:1-7; 49:2-10; 50:5-9); sorrows, suffering, death, triumph (52:13—53:12); attraction to Gentiles (59:20—60:3); ministry foretold (61:1-3); coming in judgment (62:11); bloody death (63:2, 3); new heavens and earth (65:17—66).

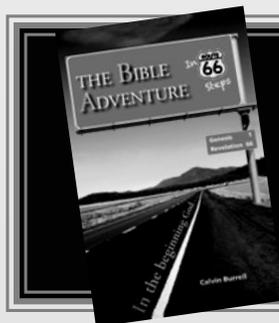
Key concepts

- Holiness (5:16; 6:3): Israel’s Lord is pure, radiant, glorious, and transcendent

(4:2; 11:10; 30:30; 33:21; 57:15; 60:13; 63:1, 12-15).

- Holy also are His Spirit, mountain, name, arm, day, temple, and people (2:1-4; 6:13; 11:9; 27:13; 52:10; 56:7; 57:13, 15; 58:13; 62:12; 63:10, 11; 64:11; 65:11, 25; 66:20).
- Monotheism: the One and Only challenges all others that claim to be “god” (40:18ff; 41:21ff; 42:8, 9; 43:8-13; 44:6ff; 45:5ff, 18-22; 46:5-9; 47:10b; 48:3-5, 11-16).
- Turn/return, remnant (6:13; 31:6; 35:10; 44:22; 51:11; 55:7; 58:13; 59:20): In all divine chastening, a righteous few will return to Zion and follow God faithfully: the remnant (10:20-22; 11:11, 16; 37:31, 32; 46:3).

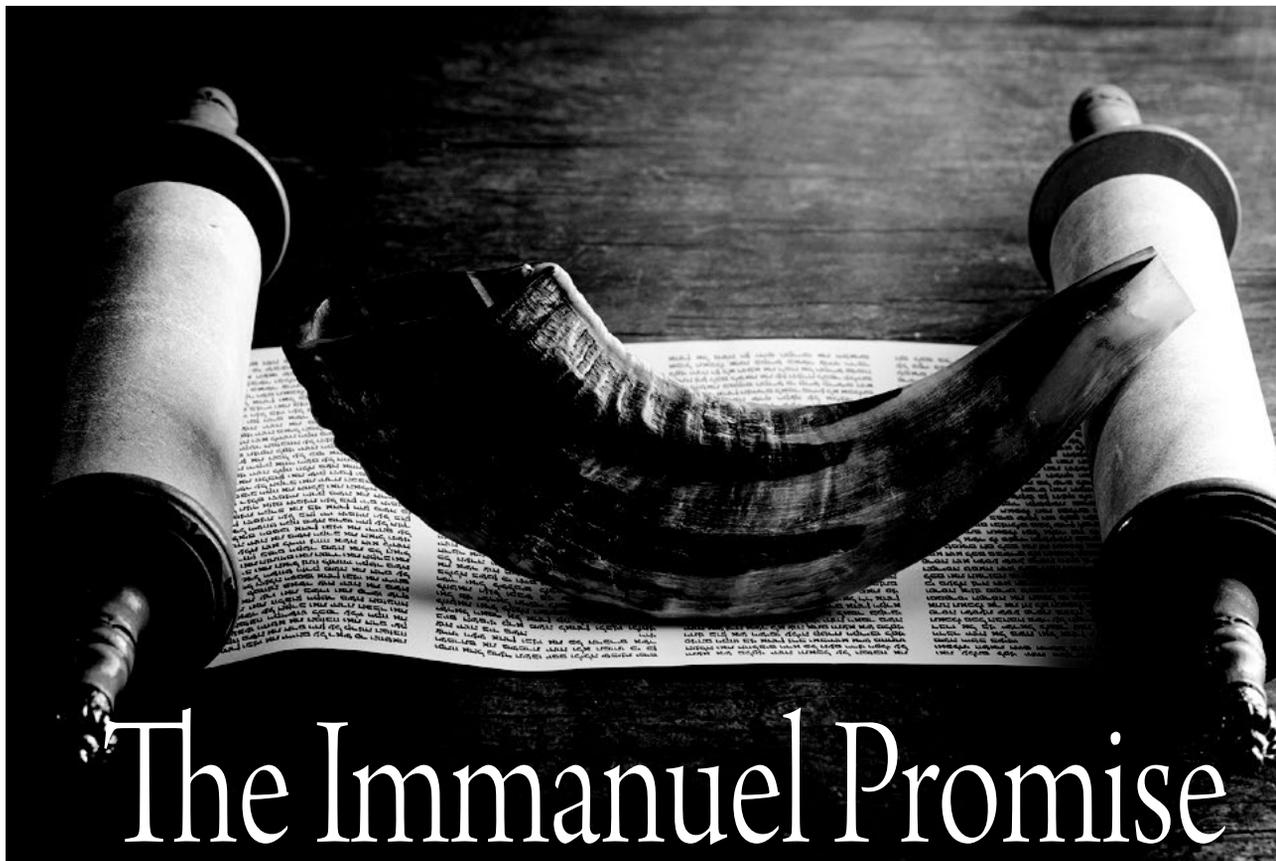
Isaiah in a sentence: Although the Holy One of Israel punishes His people for sins, He also calls them to arise and return with assurance that He is the only true God; He will deliver them from their enemies; and Messiah will suffer, reign, and bring Zion to glory.



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Examining the sign and the Son in Isaiah's prophecy.

by R. Herbert

Among the many promises God gave through His Old Testament prophets, one stands out in particular regarding His self-revelation and this year's theme "Meeting God in Scripture." That promise is the great Immanuel prophecy of Isaiah: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel" (7:14).

Immanuel means, of course, "God with us," and Isaiah's promise is one of the ultimate

meetings of God and humanity. But Christians and non-Christians have argued throughout history as to the meaning of this verse: first, whether the Hebrew word *betulah*, translated "virgin" in most English Bibles, should actually be translated as "young woman" and second, whether the promised son was for Isaiah's time or later. Even some Christian scholars opt for "young woman." They feel that the promised "son" was Isaiah's own son, Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, whose birth was predicted by God (8:1-4), or possibly Ahaz's son, Hezekiah.

We need to look at Isaiah 7:14 closely if we are to gain a firm understanding of what it really tells us.

Looking at a sign

First, we should notice the context of this verse. Isaiah's Immanuel promise was spoken as a result of King Ahaz of Judah not choosing a sign (when he was offered one) that God would overthrow two enemy kings who threatened Judah *at that time* (7:10-12). When Ahaz declined to see a sign, Isaiah then said:

"Hear now, you house of David! . . . the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. . . . before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste" (vv. 13, 14, 16).

Note also what Isaiah wrote just a few verses later:

Then I made love to the prophetess, and she conceived and gave birth to a son. And the LORD said to me, "Name him Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. For before the boy knows how to say 'My father' or 'My mother,' the wealth of Damascus and the plunder of Samaria will be carried off by the king of Assyria" (8:3, 4).

If Isaiah's son was indeed the promised son of Isaiah 7:14, the fact that his literal name was not Immanuel is irrelevant. It is no different than saying the promised Messiah would be a Branch (11:1), when His literal name is Jesus.

Others have argued that the king promised by Isaiah was Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, under whose rule Isaiah also prophesied. But the Scriptures show that Hezekiah was born nine years before Ahaz ascended the throne. So Hezekiah was born years before the Immanuel prophecy was given.

Nevertheless, chapters 7-8 of Isaiah do appear to show that the sign God gave would be fulfilled at that time. The most likely candidate for the promised son was Isaiah's own son (8:8).

Near and future son

But a fulfillment of the Immanuel promise as a person in Isaiah's time need not be its only fulfillment. It may be regarded as simply a "type," or foreshadowing, of a greater future individual — just as the Old Testament speaks of numerous other individuals who were also types of Christ (Matthew 12:40; Romans

5:14, etc.). This is particularly likely when we consider Isaiah's further prophecy of a promised child, recorded in Isaiah 9.

Both the title "God with us" in Isaiah 7:14 and the related titles regarding the promised child/king in Isaiah 9 (see sidebar, page 10) could not apply to Isaiah's son or to Hezekiah. They lived and died at a time of impending national downfall (39:5-7), rather than at the time of unprecedented greatness foretold by Isaiah (9:7).

In the same way, there is ample biblical evidence to show that the translation "virgin" in Isaiah 7:14 can be a correct one. The word can indeed mean both

events, collapsed into a single vision. Thus, the arrival of his son, Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz, was only a prior, limited fulfillment of a final and ultimate reality fulfilled through the virgin birth of Jesus, who also perfectly fulfilled the reality of the name *Immanuel*.

Unique duality

When we read Isaiah's prophecy of the Immanuel to come, we tend to focus on the meaning of the name. But that is only half of the significance of this amazing verse.

If we think about it, the incredible promise of "God with us" is coupled with the equally

“The incredible promise of ‘God with us’ is coupled with the equally astounding prediction of Immanuel’s humanity.”



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“young woman” and “virgin.” So although the prophecy may have had a prior fulfillment in an individual of Isaiah's time who was born of a young woman, it also had a later realization in a much greater individual born of a virgin.

In other words, Isaiah prophesied of near-future and far-future

astounding prediction of Immanuel's humanity. The words “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son” show the humanity of Immanuel as much as His name shows His divinity. This duality is stated again a few chapters later when Isaiah takes up the theme of the promised child again:

For to us a child is born, to

us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (9:6).

The promised One's humanity is seen in the words "For to us a child is *born*," with the emphasis on His human birth, contrasted with "to us a son is *given*,"

signifying a non-human origin that is made clear in the titles that follow. And the four titles themselves are equally indicative of a human and divine duality, with Wonderful Counselor and Prince of Peace being essentially human titles and Mighty God and Everlasting Father being titles that could only apply to God (see sidebar).

So beyond its potential prediction of the Virgin Birth, the Immanuel promise of Isaiah stresses both the humanity and divinity of the One who was to come. It is a fact emphasized equally in the New Testament, as in the opening verses of John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (1:1, 14).

The statements that "the Word was God" and "the Word became flesh" are equally important in showing that the Immanuel promise was fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. Luke's Gospel confirms the duality in the same way:

"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end" (1:32, 33).

The words "Son of the Most High" and "his father David" once again proclaim the unique and unmistakable roles of Immanuel. We rejoice that He is the promised One who would be born divine and human, equally God and man, and who would bring the two together as the ultimate revelation of God and His salvation for us. **BA**

R. Herbert (a pen name) holds an earned doctorate in biblical studies and ancient Near Eastern languages and archaeology. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.

Four Titles of Immanuel

The four double titles in Isaiah 9:6 for the prophesied royal child are kingship titles similar to those used by human rulers in the biblical world. But although the first and last titles in Isaiah's prophecy could apply to human kings, the second and third titles stress the true divinity of Israel's promised King.

Wonderful Counselor. Like the others that follow it, this is a title consisting of two words that convey a single idea. The expression could mean "A wonderful Counselor" or "One who gives wonderful counsel." The second idea is found elsewhere in Isaiah (28:29) and is probably what the prophet intended.

Mighty God. In the Hebrew, this title (*el-gibbor*) is literally "Mighty God," an expression Isaiah also uses in 10:21. While Wonderful Counselor connects wisdom to the Messiah, Mighty God connects strength to Him — the two fundamental aspects of good kingship. In Isaiah 11:2, the prophet speaks of exactly these characteristics in "the Spirit of counsel and of might" with which the messianic child would be born.

Everlasting Father. This title is literally Father of Eternity, but it does not mean the promised One would be the Creator of time, nor does it describe the coming King as being eternal. Rather, it means the One who continually, eternally acts as a Father to His people.

Prince of Peace. This last title is unique among the titles of ancient Near Eastern kings. Although Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and other kings of nations surrounding Israel took titles emphasizing their warlike nature and abilities, these titles were often little more than empty boasts. Isaiah's prediction of the reign of a Prince who would make peace rather than war was shocking for its time. It is reflected again in Isaiah 9:7 as a promise that would truly be fulfilled.

— R. Herbert

Questions & Answers



The prophets critiqued the establishment of their time. What would be their criticism of the church today?

Notable is that “criticism” by the prophets of old was just one of their duties. But perhaps the greatest criticism of the church would be the same now as it was for Israel then. Just as Israel ignored God to satisfy herself in false religion and commit sin, so the church has forgotten the Great Commission and indulges herself in activities that are little more than the works of a civic club. The church often forgets the New Commandment of John 13:34, 35. Thus, sin abounds.

Prophets were mouthpieces for God. He told Ezekiel, “When I speak with thee, I will open thy mouth, and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God” (3:27, KJV). Likewise, the apostles spoke the words of the Messiah. First, like covenant lawyers, the prophets held Israel responsible for breaking the terms of the covenant. The apostles held to the same tradition. Second, the prophets called the Israelites to repent, to turn back to God. The apostles did as well. Third, the prophets spoke of God’s judgment and of God’s hope. The apostles repeated that message.

Prophets foretold of the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Today, they would continue to testify of Jesus, confirming His first advent, death, and resurrection. The prophets spoke of the unity of God, worship of God, His will and character, avoidance of idolatry and sin, and belief in the day of resurrection, or the day of judgment, and life after death. Today, they would continue the same message. Their most important message would remain to bear witness of Jesus Christ.

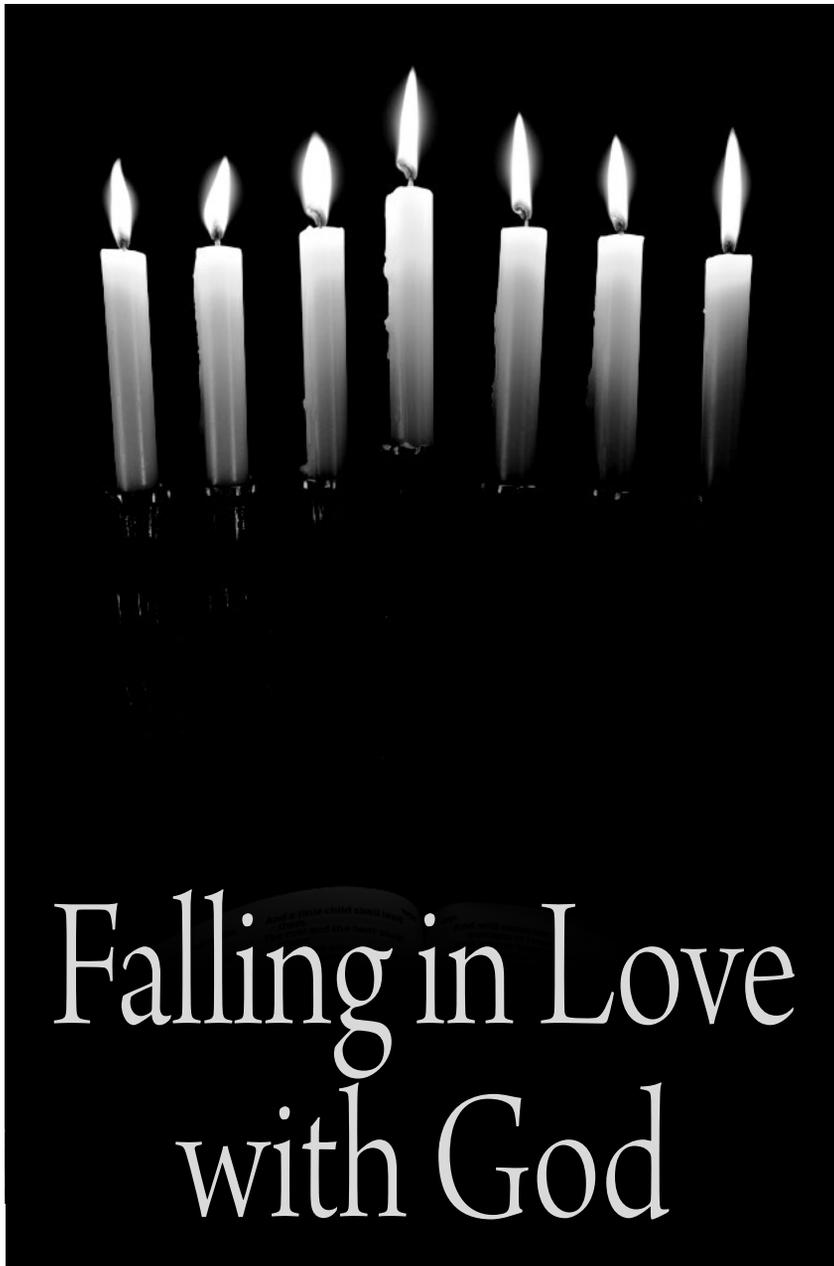
Jesus’ social criticism was the same as the prophets’. It circled around three main points: the spirit that dominated seekers of wealth, the methods most of them used to pursue their ends, and how they used their money. Therefore, we expect that if the prophets of old were to speak to the church today, they would deliver an identical message.

There were good biblical prophets back then, and there will be good biblical speakers for God today because God says He will pour out His Spirit, and our sons and daughters will prophesy (Joel 2:28). There were some bad biblical prophets, and there will be bad speakers for God today (Matthew 7:15; 24:24). Regarding the true prophets of God, the Bible says, “Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper” (2 Chronicles 20:20, KJV).

The prophet’s role in the early church was to reveal divine mysteries and God’s plan of salvation. Sometimes that prophecy was startlingly direct (1 Timothy 1:18). In 1 Timothy 4:14, Paul urges Timothy not to “neglect the gift (Greek: *charisma*) that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy. . . .” God wants His people to flourish, to experience peace and joy in a community of love. But sin destroys a community, so God sends His prophets to warn His people so they will turn from sin and its destruction.

Therefore, it is expected that if the prophets of old were to speak to the church of today, they would continue with the same message. In other words, the church does well when she does her best to “focus on Jesus and follow His plan.”

— Elder Chip Hinds



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A prophet illustrates
why we love Him because
He first loved us.

by **Bob Hostetler**

Not long ago, a friend of mine told me the story of an evening when he, his wife, and a few friends from church were sitting in his home, talking about the life of faith. During the conversation, someone used the phrase “falling in love with God.” A few moments later, someone else said something similar, and still another added a mention of being “in love” with God.

The conversation broadened and deepened over the next few moments until Melissa, a young mother in the group who usually listened and smiled without saying much, finally summoned all her courage.

“What are you all talking about?” she asked. “What do you mean, ‘fall in love with God’?”

The room fell silent. A few of them looked around at each other. Some stared at the ceiling. Or the floor. But no one had a ready answer.

Every human soul, whether he or she knows it or not, desperately longs to be united with God in a real, loving relationship – one like that of husband and wife, but greater; one like that of parent and child, but stronger; one like that of friend to friend, but sweeter.

But how does it happen? Though many people have experienced it, others can’t imagine what kind of person would speak in those terms, or what kind of experience that would be. Is it a mystical thing? Is it reserved only for the super-spiritual or the lunatic fringe? Can anyone do it? And why would anyone want to?

Falling in love with God is not a function of our intellect; we cannot think our way to it. Nor is it solely an emotional reaction. It is a process that involves the whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. And it begins as we ponder the dimensions of God’s love.

Divine dimensions

Grasp how deep God’s love is for you. How deep? This deep.

God told the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute to show how far God would condescend

to woo you, win you, and make you His own. In fact, that may be why the strange and wonderful book of Hosea is in the Bible: because God wanted to give us a graphic, impactful, unmistakable story that would help us fall in love with Him.

Hosea's story of heartbreak, betrayal, agony, and redemption is the tale of God's love for me and you. But it is not a story meant to be simply understood, the way you understand a movie or a book. If that were the case, God could have simply explained His love to Hosea. Rather, He had Hosea experience what God's love feels like.

Grasp how wide God's love is for you. How wide is God's love? Wider than Hosea's world.

No one in Hosea's circles could understand his actions in marrying, forgiving, pursuing, and restoring his wayward wife. In fact, God's love is wider even than our planet: "As far as the east is from the west," the Bible says (Psalm 103:12). No matter how far east you travel on this globe, you will never arrive to where west begins. Nor will you ever reach the limit of God's love.

Grasp how long God's love is for you. Hosea's story includes repeated, agonizing efforts to reclaim and redeem the bride God chose for the prophet. He persevered longer than human hearts can understand. Why? Because the Bible says, "The steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting" (v. 17, ESV). His love is infinite. It reaches to eternity past and endures forever.

Grasp how high God's love is for you. Hosea's patience and

devotion were surely tested by the woman God chose as his wife. But though the prophet's expectations were repeatedly crushed, his love endured. Similarly, God's love "is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth," the psalmist David said (v. 11, NLT). It can accurately be said that God is "over the moon" for you.

Hosea's story may have been recorded and preserved for us that we "may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the

love" God has for us in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 3:18). He will love you regardless of your past. He will love you in spite of your shame. And He will love you in, through, and beyond your pain.

You can love a God like that.

BA

Bob Hostetler writes from Las Vegas, NV. Scripture quotations are taken from the *New International Version*, except where noted.



Nine Verses in the Prophets about God's Love

"Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the LORD, who has compassion on you (Isaiah 54:10).

The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness" (Jeremiah 31:3).

Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail (Lamentations 3:22).

I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: "Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and keep his commandments" (Daniel 9:4).

"I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion" (Hosea 2:19).

"Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity" (Joel 2:13).

"Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them" (Jonah 2:8).

"The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing" (Zephaniah 3:17).

"I have loved you," says the LORD" (Malachi 1:2).



God Behind the Scenes

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by **Harriet E. Michael**

“Look at the nations and watch — and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told” (Habakkuk 1:5).

This was God’s answer to Habakkuk’s complaint — his prayer, his cry to God. In verse 2, Habakkuk says, “How long, LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen?”

So here’s the situation. Habakkuk is praying, seeking answers as he has been for a long time, but he doesn’t feel that God is listening. Yet when God does finally answer, He says He’s already at work. Habakkuk just needs to look with an observing eye to see how God is working. It’s a marvelous work that Habakkuk would not believe had he been told.

Just how was God working in Habakkuk’s day? The king of Babylon had overturned the Assyrian Empire, subduing one nation after another. Israel’s turn to be subdued would be soon. Habakkuk’s words were not intended for the heathen but for the Jews, for them to consider the work God was doing and His providence for the nations.

This work was the destruction of the Jewish nation, city, and temple by the Chaldeans. As disastrous as it may have seemed, it was nonetheless Providence — according to the will of God and by His direction.

Some living then would see this devastation happen, though the thing was so incredible, they would not believe it ever could come to pass. There are reasons for this attitude. One was the Chaldeans were good friends and allies of the Jewish people, or so they thought. Why would the Chaldeans turn on them and subdue them?

Another reason was that the Jews were the covenant people of God. They thought He would never

give them into the hands of another nation. Therefore, when the people were told repeatedly about it by the prophets of the Lord, especially by Jeremiah, they didn’t believe it. That’s what was happening in Habakkuk’s day.

Sometimes we, too, experience what feels like God’s destructive work in our lives. I have seen God act in a way that I would never have believed if He had told me.

I’m a writer today because of a difficult situation someone dear to me struggled through. As I struggled next to her, I longed to know more about prayer because I wanted my prayers for her to be effective. I began my own study of prayer as it is seen throughout Scripture and journaled what I found. This study ended up becoming my first book and whetted my desire to write biblical nonfiction pieces like this one.

My loved one’s journey is not something I saw coming, and certainly not something I would have ever wanted. My pain for her was also something I would rather not have experienced. But God brought fruit from adversity in both my life and hers, as He so often does.

What can we learn from Habakkuk’s experience? That when God is at work, things don’t always run smoothly according to how we think they should be. We also learn that even when we think God is not hearing our prayers, He is. He is already at work, sometimes in ways we could not imagine. We need only to look around and see what God is already doing. **BA**

Harriet E. Michael writes from Louisville, KY. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.



David Discovers

Jeremiah



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by Marcia Sanders

"Say, Dad, who's your favorite prophet?" David asked.

"Whoa there! Where did *that* come from?" Dad responded. "My favorite prophet?"

"Yeah. I know which one is my favorite: Jeremiah! He's so cool!"

"Cool, huh?" Dad smiled. "Why don't you tell me what makes him so cool."

"Well, first off, God chose him before he was even born — chose him to be a prophet before his actual birth. I can't imagine already knowing what role God wants me to fulfill in my life, but Jeremiah did. It scared him, though."

"How do you know it scared him?" Dad asked.

"Because Jeremiah himself said he didn't know what to say and that he was just a kid. But God told him not to say he was just a kid and that He, God, would put the right words in his mouth. Imagine having such a conversation with God!"

"That would be amazing," Dad said. "What else do you know about Jeremiah?"

"Well," David thought. "He got death threats because people didn't like what he was telling them. I mean, he was only saying what God told him to say, but the people got really mad. So mad that they actually beat him and put him into stocks, and they arrested him."

"Wow! He certainly didn't have it easy," Dad observed. "I'm not sure I knew all those things about Jeremiah. What else have you learned about what he endured?"

"Let me see. Oh yeah, he was imprisoned,

thrown into a cistern — that's like a well — to starve, and put into chains. I mean, it's almost like a movie reading about how Jeremiah just kept trusting God, preaching the words that God gave him no matter what the people threw at him."

"That's all really fascinating, David," Dad said. "But now tell me how this affects you. How has your life been changed by learning more about Jeremiah?"

"Hmmm. I guess I hadn't really thought about how it could relate to me," David pondered. "Well, sometimes I get discouraged when people laugh at me or make fun of me about something. But if I think about how people not only made fun of Jeremiah but really tried to hurt him, then I should be able to handle a bit of teasing — especially if they're teasing me about following God. You know, saying that reminds me of someone else who was made fun of, beaten, and even killed for following what God had told Him to do."

"Really? Who was that?"

"Jesus. He went through things as bad as Jeremiah did — even worse, since He was eventually killed. And Paul too. He was beaten, thrown into prison, and accused of things he didn't do. Examples like these help me realize how important it is for me to trust in God and follow Him no matter what. I know that if I trust Him, He'll help me through whatever I face." **BA**

Marcia Sanders writes from Fort Smith, AR, where she attends the Church of God (Seventh Day) with her husband, Randy.



The God Who Would Be Known

The Holy One of Israel

As God reveals Himself to and through the prophets, one name, one characteristic, stands out above the rest. The opening lines of the first book of prophecy establish a central theme that continues throughout the Prophets.

“Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity . . . They have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked to anger *the Holy One of Israel*” (Isaiah 1:4, emphasis mine).

The God of the prophets is the Holy One (Jeremiah 51:5; Ezekiel 39:7; Hosea 11:12; Habakkuk 3:3). He’s specifically called the Holy One of Israel 25 times in Isaiah. Perhaps we are most familiar with the holiness of God in Isaiah’s throne room encounter with Him in chapter 6. There, he hears the seraphim cry, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!” (v. 3).

Holy majesty. *Holy* (Hebrew: *qadash*) means “separate,” and, when applied to God, it refers first to His transcendence. Our God is other, unique, incomparable in His being. *Majesty* captures this exalted holiness that’s beyond comprehension. His matchless, transcendent glory is in view when we read, “To whom then will you liken Me, or to whom shall I be equal?” says the Holy One” (40:25).

Holy morality. *Holy* also refers to God’s moral purity and righteousness, His absolute separateness from and abhorrence of sin. Encountering the Holy One, as the prophets do, exposes and sensitizes them to the reality and rebellion of sin, as Isaiah’s opening message (1:4) and personal encounter (6:3-5) show. “Woe is me, for I am undone!” he confesses after experiencing the “holy, holy, holy” scene.

High and near. If the Holy One is utterly transcendent and faultlessly righteous, we might think of Him as a remote and angry God, at best. But that is not what the prophets reveal. Paradoxically, the Most High *comes near*. That is the significance of Isaiah’s favorite name for God: the Holy One of *Israel*. That is the significance of the seraphim’s worship. Though “holy, holy, holy,” God is not distant; *His glory fills the whole earth*. The Holy One relates intimately with His people and creation.

Maker and Redeemer. As we saw at the very beginning of Isaiah, forsaking the Lord for sin provokes the Holy One to anger — *because He is holy*. But that is not all. Sin also provokes the Holy One to save — *because He is holy!* We read this throughout Isaiah, as the Holy One of Israel is identified repeatedly as her Maker, Savior, and Redeemer:

Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel (48:17; cf. 41:14; 43:14; 47:4; 49:7; 54:5; cf. *Maker*, 17:7; 45:11; 54:5; cf. *Savior*, 43:3).

Seraphim speak. Back in Isaiah 6, we find this revelation of God as Holy Savior in the seraphim’s two singular statements. The first to God as “holy, holy, holy” (v. 3) and then to Isaiah, who is undone before the Holy One. To him the seraphim say, “Your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged” (v. 7).

High and near. Holy and dear. God’s judgment and grace proceed from the same place. The Holy One is Savior and Judge because He is *the Holy One of Israel*.

The Scarlet Thread of the Messiah

The Coming and Meaning of Christ

From a single thread, the promise of Messiah stretches from Genesis 3 through the books of Torah, History, and Poetry, weaving an ever-wider fabric that extends into a vivid tapestry by the time we get to the Prophets.

Early years. The Prophets provide a dizzying array of details about the coming Messiah: born in Bethlehem, of a virgin, and called Immanuel (Micah 5:2; Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23; 2:6); a stem of Jesse, raised in Galilee for the throne of David (Isaiah 9:1, 6, 7; 11:1, 10; Luke 1:32). He would be called out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:13-15).

Gospel ministry. A messenger would be sent to prepare Messiah's way: Elijah the prophet (Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1; 4:5; Mark 1:1-3; Matthew 11:14). He would be filled with the Spirit and minister the gospel (Isaiah 11:2; 42:1; 61:1-2; Matthew 3:16; Luke 4:16-21). He would inaugurate a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31; Matthew 26:28).

His death and why He died. Messiah would enter Jerusalem on a donkey, be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver, and be pierced in death (Zechariah 9:9; 11:12, 13; 12:10; Matthew 21:1-7; 26:14, 15; John 19:31-37). He would carry our transgressions on the cross as an atonement for sin (Isaiah 52:13—53:12). A portion of the prophecy:

"Behold, My Servant . . . He is despised and rejected by men . . . Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and

afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. . . . Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, . . . By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities. . . . Because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (52:13; 53:3-6, 10-12; Matthew 8:16, 17; 20:28; 26:28; 27:59, 60; Mark 10:45; 14:24; Luke 22:20; John 12:37, 38; Acts 8:32-35; Romans 10:16; Hebrews 9:28; 1 Peter 2:21-25).

He is risen. Finally, the grave would not hold Him. After three days and nights, Messiah would rise and be exalted (Isaiah 53:10-12; Jonah 1:17; Matthew 12:40).

The Prophets do not just predict the coming of Messiah. They tell us the meaning of Messiah! He is the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, made flesh for our salvation.



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Highly Esteemed

by Loren Gjesdal

Among the most remarkable compliments a human being has ever heard is this: “At the beginning of your supplications the command was issued, and I have come to tell you, *for you are highly esteemed*” (Daniel 9:23, emphasis mine). Daniel was told twice that he was highly esteemed in heaven by no one less than the angel Gabriel, one who stands in the presence of God (10:11; Luke 1:19)!

The word translated “esteemed” in Daniel 9:23 in the NASB is translated “greatly beloved” (ASV, KJV), “greatly loved” (ESV), “precious” (NLT), and “highly respected” (GW). According to *Strong’s Hebrew Dictionary*, the root word has the sense of delight. The translators’ challenge was to find a word to express God’s delight in Daniel. What word would the translators search for to express God’s heart toward me or you?

What would prompt the God of all creation to dispatch one of only two named messengers in Scripture to rush an answer to Daniel’s prayers? What was it about Daniel that the God of heaven would delight in him? This should make us consider

the kind of people we need to become to be highly esteemed in heaven.

Faithful prophet

Think back over Daniel’s life, and remember some of the notable events recorded in Scripture.

Taken hostage to a foreign country as a teenager, Daniel took the lead to live according to his convictions, even though he had no official standing (1:3, 8). When he was audited by jealous rivals, they could find no fault in his performance or integrity (6:4). When commanded to pray to the king of Babylon, Daniel instead went to his open window to pray to the God of Israel (v. 10). It’s no wonder he became the trusted advisor and right-hand man to multiple kings in the greatest known empire of his time (2:48; 5:29; 6:3)!

There are still two more events to consider in Daniel’s extraordinary life that might help us get closer to the character trait we should emulate, even in ordinary circumstances — a trait that Scripture notes as hall-of-faith worthy.

Overseeing Babylon

One of those events involved King Nebuchadnezzar.

There was a time when God had to humble Nebuchadnezzar. Otherwise, the world would think that he had conquered Judah and burned the temple of God under his own power, rather than as God’s servant of judgment against Judah’s idolatry. For seven years Nebuchadnezzar was insane, eating grass like an ox, utterly incapable of preserving his place on the throne (4:30-33).

After interpreting Nebuchadnezzar’s earlier dream about a statue, Daniel was appointed administrator of the province of Babylon (2:48). It is not improbable that Daniel held the reins of power over Babylon during those seven years. If so, then it would also be true that Daniel protected Nebuchadnezzar and fulfilled God’s promise to restore the kingdom once the king acknowledged that “it is Heaven that rules” (4:26).

Kings have fallen victim to palace intrigues for far less than seven years of insanity. It would have taken tremendous skill to hold the kingdom together, let alone preserve Nebuchadnezzar’s ability to return to the throne. It would have also taken a particular kingdom perspective.

Why didn’t Daniel take the throne himself and reign in

in Heaven

righteousness? Why didn't he take advantage of the opportunity to seize power, release the Jews from captivity, and use the wealth of Babylon to rebuild the temple?

One reason is certainly that God had determined seventy years as the term of exile (9:2). Another is that He had named Cyrus as the one to give the command to rebuild (Isaiah 44:28), and still another is that Daniel knew firsthand not to usurp God's sovereignty.

Belshazzar's feast

But a similar event gives us essential insight to understand the heart of a man who would not yield to the temptations of fame, fortune, or power.

Belshazzar, a successor to Nebuchadnezzar, held a prolonged drunken party to show off his wealth. He brought out the vessels used to worship God in the temple and used them to worship Babylonian idols. A giant hand appeared and wrote some unintelligible words on the wall, bringing a sober hush to the raucous scene.

The terrified king offered wealth and a position as third in command to anyone who could interpret the writing. Daniel was

summoned and gave this telling response to the king's generous offer: "Keep your gifts for yourself or give your rewards to someone else; however, I will read the inscription to the king and make the interpretation known to him" (Daniel 5:17).

Why was Daniel so highly esteemed in heaven? Why was God's heart delighted in him? Because God was Daniel's delight. He had his heart set solely on treasuring God's kingdom. Daniel resisted the temptation to abuse power. He could be trusted to hold power and would rather die than compromise, because what was most important to Daniel was God's approval. The wealth, power, and approval of men held no appeal and so had no tug on his heart.

Leadership qualities

This column is written under the heading of "Leadership," so let's take a quick peek at some of the qualities that made Daniel such a respected leader in multiple administrations.

He demonstrated competence, dependability, and integrity. These three pillars will support the respect of men and women in secular or sacred realms. A loss of any one of these supports

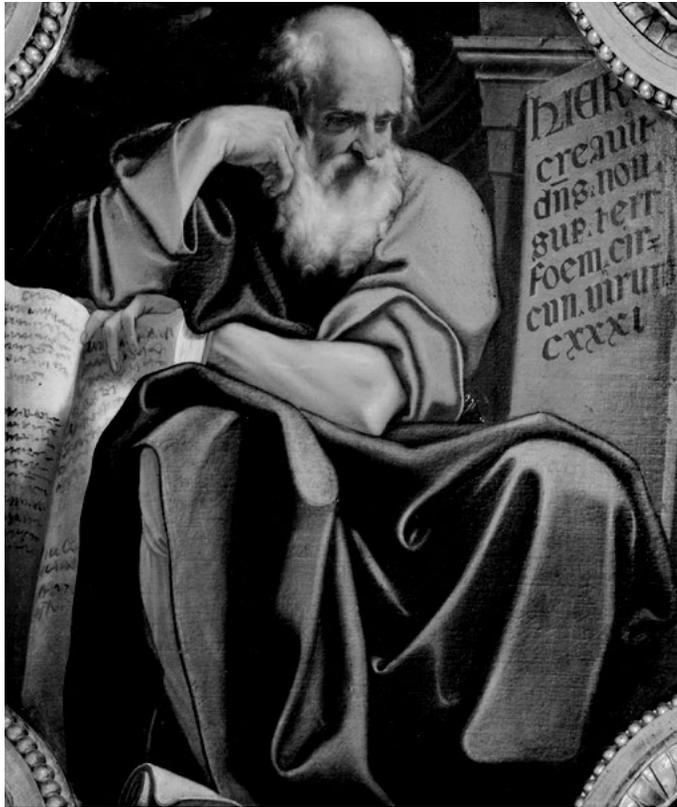
will result in a loss of respect, and thereby, loss of effective leadership.

To hold high esteem in heaven, however, to be God's delight, to have angels dispatched with urgency to answer our prayers, something more must be added to the three leadership pillars. Our highest allegiance must be to the King of Kings, our life like that of an exile estranged from our homeland, considering the reproach of Christ as greater riches than anything this world can offer (Hebrews 11:13, 26).

May we be God's delight because, like Daniel, God's kingdom is our whole world. Such men and women are highly esteemed in heaven, eligible to hear the greatest compliment ever to be spoken: "Well done . . . enter into the joy of your master" (Matthew 25:21). **BA**

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A Prophet's Lament

In judgment and grief,
there is still hope.
by **Dorothy Nimchuk**

How lonely sits the city
That was full of people!
How like a widow is she,
Who was great among the
nations!
The princess among the
provinces
Has become a slave!
(Lamentations 1:1).

God's promised punishment of His people had come to pass. The elite were carried captive, fulfilling Ezekiel's prophecy (21:27), with those remaining fated to either sword or famine. Forgotten, the years of Egypt's slavery, their forebears' forty-year wilderness trek, their worship of the God who provided for all their needs.

Chosen, sanctified, ordained prior to conception, Jeremiah had been forewarned: *These people won't listen. They will fight against you. But I am with you and will deliver you from their attacks.* His youthful reluctance overridden, he delivered God's rousing messages:

"Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls. But they

said, 'We will not walk in it.' Also, I set watchmen over you, saying, 'Listen to the sound of the trumpet!' But they said, 'We will not listen.' Therefore hear . . . I will certainly bring calamity on this people . . . they have not heeded My words nor My law, but rejected it" (6:16-19).

"O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps. O LORD, correct me, but with justice; not in Your anger, lest You bring me to nothing" (10:23, 24).

"It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the adversities which I purpose to bring upon them, that everyone may turn from his evil way, that I may forgive their iniquities and their sin" (36:3).

However, labeled as stubborn rebels and as lead consumed in a defective smelter with wickedness undrawn, God's people were considered rejected silver. The dreaded Babylonians had come, conquered, and displaced many, leaving a repressed people to face starvation.

Deserted roadways mourned the passing of devoted pilgrims wending their way to Sabbath celebrations and joyful feasts. Deep-seated ruts missed the rolling wheels transporting beast or burden as sacrificial offerings. Children's laughter no longer rebounded off city walls. Near-empty streets watched silently as boys and girls fainted from lack of food.

Temple ruins stirred no memories of priest or Levite performing their prescribed service. Hidden within the rubble, the Book of the Law neither invoked nor proclaimed vision. Broken walls looked askance as women, in an effort to stave starvation's rages, killed and cooked infants once cuddled to their breasts. City gates slunk down into the ground, ashamed of the pervasive devastation. Winds that had carried words of false prophets aloft remained silent.

Doesn't anybody care? The cloud of God's anger lingered over His "footstool" (Jerusalem) as the rain mingled with the tears of the daughters of Zion.

Birds of the air, however, picked up on the prophet's hope:

Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed,

... His compassions fail not.
... Great is Your faithfulness.
"The LORD is my portion, ...
Therefore I hope in Him!" ...
He does not afflict willingly
(Lamentations 3:22-24, 33).

Meanwhile, the streets of surrounding nations reverberated to stamping feet, clapping hands, and rejoicing heartbeats at the downfall of the once proud "golden" city (Ezekiel 25:6, 7).

Jerusalem's punishment was greater than that of Sodom. *Sure-*

hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!" ... "I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land" (vv. 11, 14).

God also reiterated His promise of Messiah to come (vv. 24, 25).

Captivity over, roadways groaned under the weight of many feet pilgrimaging homeward. Restored gates rose grace-



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ly, one killed by the sword was better off than those who starved to death! And the air waves carried a sad refrain. *Your throne remains forever, Lord.* "Why do you forget us forever, and forsake us for so long a time? Turn us back to You ... Unless You have utterly rejected us, and are very angry with us!" (Lamentations 5:20-22).

Through the prophecy of dry bones (Ezekiel 37:1-14), God held out a thread of hope:

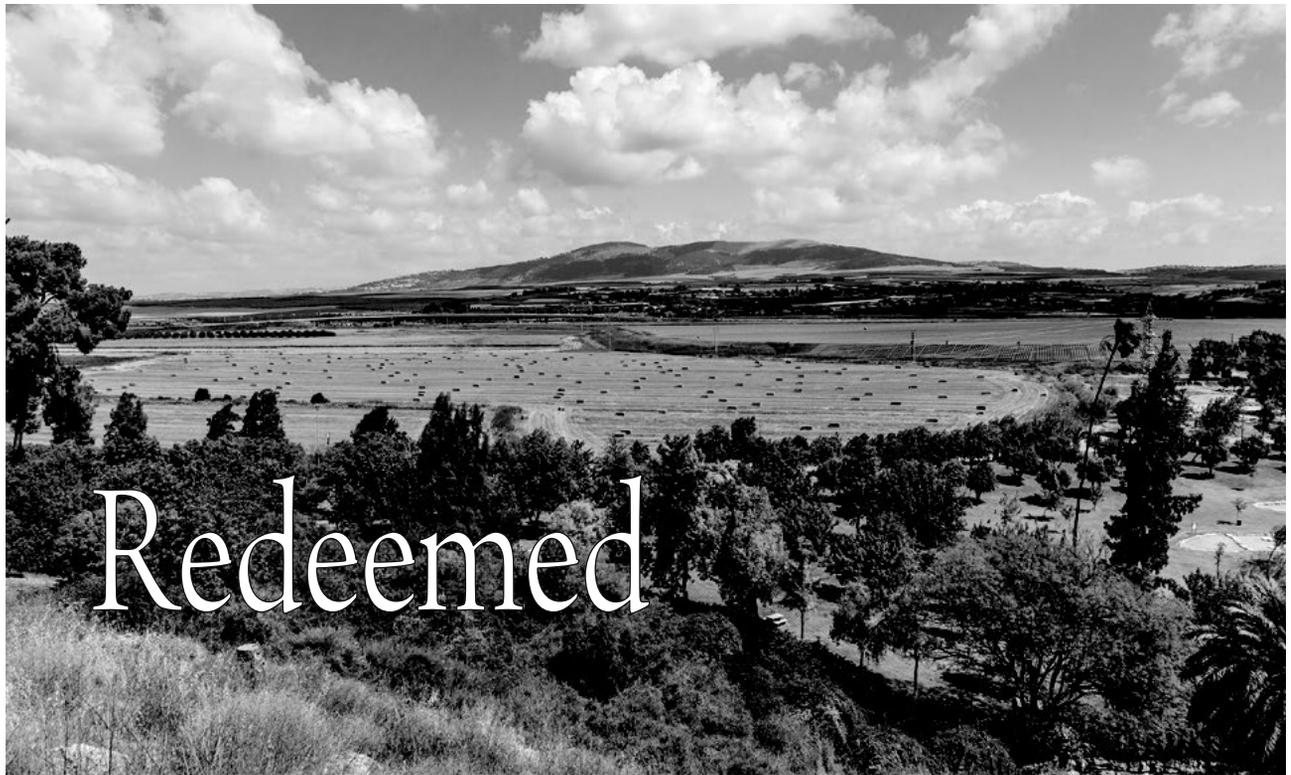
Then He said to me, ...
"these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our

fully from the mire with new bolts and bars installed, ascending walls echoing to the sounds of children at play.

The Jews had long yearned for Christ's coming. Their calculations were correct, but failure to recognize Him left them totally confused. Where were the angels? Trumpets? Attendants? Pomp and ceremony? The unacknowledged, rejected Servant-Messiah would weep over Jerusalem for their unbelief.

The rending of the temple veil at Jesus' death negated the old covenant written on stone, and

continued on page 25



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Ransomed for eternity —
and today.
by **Caroline S. Cooper**

According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, *redeem* means “to buy back . . . release from blame . . . reform . . . atone for.” With such a specific meaning, *redeem* is not your typical, everyday kind of word.

Still, I have encountered this word often since childhood. I grew up in a Christian home and welcomed Jesus into my heart at about ten years of age. I sang about being redeemed, heard pastors teach about the redeeming work of Jesus, and knew I’d been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.

But life is filled with ups and

downs. I found myself struggling to hold on to my faith and didn’t recognize the deep significance of redemption in my everyday life.

Redeemed for life

Thirty years after giving my life to Christ, I turned down a dark path. My relationships with family and friends began to suffer. My children were confused and left to fend for themselves, and my husband voiced his concerns and attempted to hold me accountable. Yet I still turned away.

I could have blamed my behavior on untreated depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but I knew I had stepped out of God’s will. Hopeless and helpless, I yearned to restore my relationships with my loved ones and with my Savior. I knew my eternal salvation was secure, but I needed God’s

redeeming power to save my life in this world.

One day as I lay sobbing in my room, God’s still, small voice brought me to my knees. He reminded me that Jesus had paid the ransom for my sin. With repentance, I could come into His presence unashamed because my sin and guilt had been nailed to the cross. I could rest in His peace.

Through that time in my life, God reminded me that He would never leave me. I discovered that Jesus could save me in many ways, even from self-destructive habits I could not defeat on my own. Only Jesus could bring me back to life. Only Jesus could redeem me again.

Promise of redemption

God’s plan to redeem us originated well before Jesus came into this world to save

us. It existed when Adam and Eve heard God's words to the serpent: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He [Jesus] shall bruise your [Satan] head, and you [Satan] shall bruise His (Jesus) heel" (Genesis 3:15).

God had a plan to buy us back from the world. He took the blame for our sin and made atonement for us. Jesus may have been bruised at the Crucifixion, but He has crushed our enemy for us. We are redeemed!

From Genesis forward, the redemption story is evident throughout the Old Testament. The Hebrew word *ga'al* is translated as a form of *redeemed* 104 times, with about half of those occurrences in the Law (Genesis-Deuteronomy). *Ga'al* is defined as "avenged, revenged, or ransomed." The word can also refer to a family member or other individual who plays the role of a kinsman-redeemer on behalf of one who cannot save themselves.

By the time Jeremiah served as the Lord's prophet, the Israelites had witnessed God's redeeming work for centuries. God brought them out of slavery in Egypt. He routinely rescued them from invading nations in the days of the judges. And they achieved victory after victory over their enemies under the leadership of King David.

But even during Solomon's prosperous reign, God's people began to turn away — until it was too late. Jeremiah proclaimed that God would carry out judgment against His people.

Jeremiah served in the days

before and after the Southern Kingdom of Judah fell to Babylon. He is known as the weeping prophet because of his sorrow over the Israelites' rebellion. Despite Jeremiah's warnings, they continued to follow false gods and engage in immoral practices.

How could Jeremiah persevere in these circumstances? Because he also reinforced God's promise of restoration and redemption.

"Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, 'He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd does his flock.'



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For the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of one stronger than he" (31:10, 11).

Later in Jeremiah, we find the new covenant that God established to write an unkeepable law in our hearts (vv. 31-40). Speaking to a primarily Jewish audience, the author of Hebrews restated this covenant in the New Testament:

But the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us; for after He had said before, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them," then He adds, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin (10:15-18).

Now and for eternity

Jesus played the role of kinsman-redeemer for us (Mark 10:45). We cannot save ourselves; only He can. The new covenant looks forward to Christ's second coming when He will reign on the earth and gather His chosen people together. It also represents how the Holy Spirit works in our hearts today, reminding us of His words and transforming us from the inside out.

Being redeemed means we can enjoy eternal life in God's presence because of Jesus' sacrifice. It is significant to remember that God is our Redeemer. It is significant to know that Jesus saves us once and for all time. And it is significant to remember that He can also save us moment-by-moment. God redeemed us to live *for* Him in this world and *with* Him in the next. **BA**

Caroline S. Cooper writes from Harrisonville, MO.



When He is Silent

When fears arise, 'mid sorrows deep,
When there's no rock beneath my feet,
When terrors grip and hearts despair,
Can He be found? Is He not there?

When hear I not His calming voice,
When doubting seems my only choice,
To go alone and not return,
But will I then His love discern?

So speak to me, oh silent One,
Please take my hand and call me son.
Stay by my side in times like these;
Please turn and see me on my knees.

Will darkness plague me to the end?
If light is gone, should I pretend?
Or is His touch what now I feel?
He bids me stand, but still I kneel.

And softly do His fingers rest
Upon my brokenheartedness.
And for an instant, see Him there,
Beside me in my faltering prayer.

He speaks in whispers to my heart,
And tells me He will never part.
Through stormy seas, my soul will keep,
And find my rest at His dear feet.

Nathanael Reed



A Prophet's Lament

continued from page 21

the risen Christ was appointed High Priest, even as Melchizedek, "according to the power of an endless life" (Hebrews 7:16). "For the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God" (v. 19).

Peter preached this "better hope" at Pentecost, with thousands of Jews baptized daily (Acts 2:14-36). He preached this same hope to Gentiles gathered in Cornelius' house. The Holy Spirit descended, and more baptisms ensued (10:24-46).

"Thus says the LORD: 'I will return to Zion, and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. . . . Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age. The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets. . . . They shall be My people and I will be their God'" (Zechariah 8:3-5, 8).

Christ's death reconciles us as holy, blameless, and above reproach if we remain steadfast (Colossians 1:22, 23, 27). When we're committed to Christ, this same Spirit indwells our hearts, bringing absolute assurance of eternity (Romans 5:5; 8:25).

So in the Spirit, we eagerly wait! **BA**

Dorothy Nimchuk
writes from Medicine
Hat, Alberta, where
she lives with her
husband Nick.



Bible-Based Riddles

Isaiah to Malachi

Who/What Am I?

Isaiah saw these above God's throne the year king Uzziah died.

"Holy, holy, holy", to each other they all cried.

They stood while God sat on His throne lifted up on high.
With six wings they covered face, feet and also they did fly.

Before the Lord a messenger comes preparing his way.

He returns like a refiner's fire, I tell of that day.

Windows of heaven open to you if faithful and obey.
Elijah comes before the Lord's great and dreadful day.

Book of Nahum condemns this city.

Earlier God upon this city had pity.

Its people and king became disturbed,
When coming judgment from Jonah they heard.

I destroyed their city and took captive the best of their land.

Immersed in our ways some became leaders, oh so grand.

Under my brow they would not bow, the fire they did defy.
My dreams were told. My pride sent low. Their God I glorified.

Sycamore fruit I gathered, Tekoa herdsman.

Israel has sinned, disobeyed God's command.

Prepare to meet your God, you have tread upon the poor.

Purified return, from the land pulled up no more.

*Answers on page 27. Excerpted from 250 Old Testament Riddles
by David Keith Robinson. Used by permission.*



Readers Write



An easy read

Yesterday we had a Sabbath here in South Africa with no fellowship, and I took the opportunity to read big portions of the Nov-Dec BA. I particularly liked Jody McCoy's article on Rebekah. An easy read (as BA articles tend to be, putting the cookies on the bottom shelf where all the kids can get them). The article was both simple and clever.

G. F.
South Africa

Quarterly lessons

The church has been greatly blessed and inspired by the lessons of the quarterly on *Revelation: Hearing the Voice of Jesus - Part 1*.

We thank God for giving the author and the editors such inspiration to write such a beautiful quarterly. He has also given us a wonderful teacher who has the gift of teaching: Brother Devon Lynch.

God continue to bless [Elder] Rick Straub [and the editorial staff] as you write and edit to His glory.

L. G.
Boston, MA

True love

Your story ["Finding Mom," *Now What?*] has touched the core of my spirit. . . . I was not adopted but was thrown into a life of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. I had an inferiority complex, and wanted to find love, but I was looking for it in the wrong places.

I was [brutally abused at sixteen] by someone who offered to love me. I had four children with four different fathers. I was searching for love and belonging in all the wrong places and people, but still my heart was yearning for something more. Then one day, I met Jesus, and He loved me in the way I desired to be loved. Unconditionally!

C. W.
Online

Blessing

[The] *Bible Advocate* is a blessing every time I receive it. Such good reading. Keep up the good messages.

M. L. A.
Missouri



Don't miss this issue's Online Extra:

The Meaning of Redemption
by Terry Murphy

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Understand the history of the church — her struggles and her real needs. Become a congregation that sponsors projects and the development of the gospel where needed. Contact GC Missions Director Bryan Cleeton at gcmissions@cog7.org.



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Thank you for your generous heart!

Riddle answers (p. 25)

Seraphim (Isaiah 6:1-3)

Malachi (Malachi 3:1-3, 10; 4:5)

Nineveh (Jonah 3; Nahum 1:1; 3:7)

Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 1; 3; 4)

Amos (Amos 1:1; 4:12; 5:11; 7:14; 9:15)



On Mission in Guatemala

Zone 2 Leadership Meeting Report

by **Bryan Cleeton**

On March 21-23, pastors and leaders of the churches in Central America gathered near Guatemala City, Guatemala, for a meeting of Zone 2. The theme was “United with the Same Purpose.”

Approximately 300 pastors and leaders from Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica participated. The church in Panama was not able to attend. Also present were Robert Crawford (UK), Daniel Flores (US), and Bryan Cleeton (US), representing the Church of God (Seventh Day) International Federation. Also attending were Jason Overman (US), Ramon Ruiz (US), and Yair Moreno (US).

The meeting took place at the Guatemala Conference’s beautiful, well-developed convention center that can host and provide accommodations for approximately 800 people.

Presentations were given on the meeting theme, the history of the International Ministerial Congress (IMC), and the congress that took place last November in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. This is where the structure of the IMC was updated to better serve and represent the Church as a global organization, forming what is now called the Church of God (Seventh Day) International Federation.

On Sabbath afternoon, congregations throughout Central America joined the meeting online, with

approximately 1,200 devices connected. Participants were greatly encouraged, and there was a strong sense of unity and commitment of our global evangelistic work to carry out the Great Commission. Glory to God!



Parade of Nations in Zone 2, with over 62,000 baptized members across eight nations



Mexico



Guatemala



Belize



El Salvador



Honduras



Nicaragua



Costa Rica



Panama





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God's Mission in the Prophets

by Jason Overman

Long before Messiah came and died for the sins of the whole world, the prophets of old proclaimed the good news that God's mission of salvation would reach not only Israel, but all nations. This fulfilled God's promise to Abraham to bless all the families of the earth through faith (Genesis 12:3; Galatians 3:8, 14).

Here is just a sample of the prophets' witness to Jew and Gentile alike.

■ [On Mission]

Isaiah 42:6: "I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles."

Isaiah 49:6: "Indeed He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

Jeremiah 3:17: "At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the LORD, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem. No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts."

Joel 2:28: "And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions.

Amos 9:11, 12: "On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name," says the LORD who does this thing.

Jonah 3:2, 5, 10: "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you." . . . So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. . . . Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

Micah 4:1, 2: "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.'"

Habakkuk 2:14: "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."

Zechariah 2:11: "Many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and they shall become My people. And I will dwell in your midst. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you.

Malachi 1:11: "For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations," says the LORD of hosts.



God Has Spoken

Our deepest human deficits may be our poor understanding of God's holy sovereignty, of our own arrogant sinfulness, and of God's written Word. These deficits reveal themselves in casual opinions that a truly loving God could not possibly condemn anyone to everlasting damnation, or that a truly omnipotent and loving God would never allow horrible things to happen. In ignorance, people reason that if there is a God who does or allows such things, He is not truly loving, nor is He truly omnipotent. In ignorance, they think, *God couldn't, because I wouldn't*. They make themselves judges of God.

Others try to protect God's reputation. Agreeing it unthinkable that God's will would allow or cause the harm or death of an "innocent," they seek to blame someone or something other than God. Christ's disciples, for example, asked about a man who had been born blind, "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" (John 9:2, NASB throughout). Often people's efforts to protect God ultimately deny His sovereignty. Unknowingly, they, too, make themselves judges of God.

God himself makes no effort to deny the ultimate responsibilities of His absolute sovereignty. Through Old Testament prophets, God proclaims:

"Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes him mute or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?" (Exodus 4:11).

"See now that I, I am He, and there is no god besides Me; it is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded and it is I who heal, and there is no one who can deliver from My hand" (Deuteronomy 32:39).

"Is it not from the mouth of the Most High

that both good and ill go forth?" (Lamentations 3:38).

"If a trumpet is blown in a city will not the people tremble? If a calamity occurs in a city has not the LORD done it?" (Amos 3:6).

"The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and raises up" (1 Samuel 2:6).

We dare not forget that the same God who so loved the world that He sent His Son also sent a flood that killed all humanity except Noah and his family. His thoughts and ways are higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8, 9).

When asked whose fault it was that the man had been born blind, Jesus answered, "It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him" (John 9:3). In other words, God willed it. God has holy and righteous purposes for everything He allows to happen or exist — even evil. If God effectually willed anything not to exist or happen, it wouldn't.

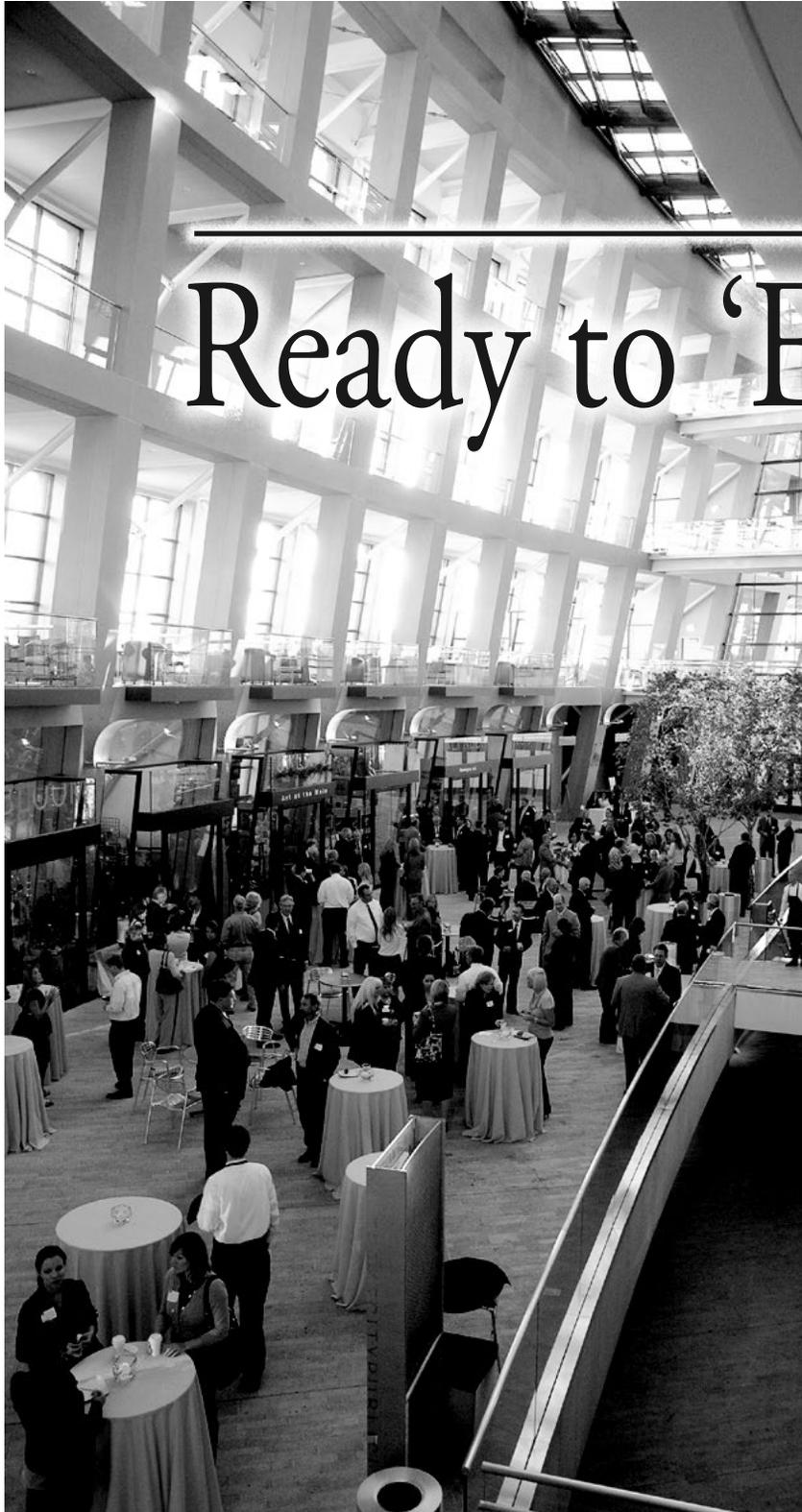
The New Testament epistle to the Hebrews begins, "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets . . . in these last days has spoken to us in His Son" (Hebrews 1:1, 2). Jesus Christ himself is the greatest revelation of God given to humanity (John 14:9). Nevertheless, we dare not ignore God's revelations of Himself through Old Testament prophets. We would do well to remember Who we are dealing with. God's holiness and our sinfulness are greater than we think. To know God, we must take Him at His Word. His entire Word.

— Loren Stacy



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