

the minor prophets
the twelve

1:1—3:5

THE WORD OF YHWH CAME TO HOSEA BEN-BEERI during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah in Judah, and of Jeroboam ben-Joash in Israel.*

* Saul, David, and Solomon ruled over all twelve tribes of Israel. When Solomon died the country split in two: the northern half consisted of ten tribes and was called "Israel," "Ephraim," or "Samaria." The southern half consisted of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and was ruled over by Solomon's heirs. It is referred to as "Judah," "Jerusalem," or "Zion." Hosea preached in the northern half during the final decades of its decline, following the death of Jeroboam II. He spoke within a deflated and directionless political climate—the result of a generation of political leaders whose main interests were in consolidating personal power and maintaining positions of authority at the expense of all others. For this generation, God had become their warder and guarantor of personal advantage. The differences between the worship of God and the rites of Ba'al had been obscured to such a degree that God was prayed to as a

hosea

² When YHWH first spoke to Hosea, YHWH said: "Go! Marry a prostitute and beget children of prostitution! For the land is guilty of the most hideous kind of prostitution by forsaking YHWH."

³ So Hosea married Gomer bat-Diblaim,[†] who conceived and bore a son. ⁴ Then God said to Hosea, "Name him Jezreel, for soon I will take my revenge on the house of Jeru for the slaugh-

Ba'al-like figure who could be manipulated. The prophet uses "shock methods" to wake the people from their syncretic slumber.

[†] There is some speculation that Gomer may have been the name of a priestess of Ba'al. If this were true, it would add extra shock value to the text, given that Hosea was a rabid critic of Ba'al worship. Other biblical scholars believe that Gomer and her children were fictional characters created to illustrate a point. The cold tone of the first part of Hosea echoes the coldness that has come into the relationship between God and God's chosen child, Israel. Gomer, a prostitute, stands for Israel, worshipping first one god then another. The contemptuous names given to Gomer's children illustrate how far the relationship between Israel and God has deteriorated.

ter at Jezreel, and I will destroy the dominion of Israel.⁵ On that day, I will smash Israel's bow in the valley of Jezreel."⁶

⁶ Then Gomer conceived again and bore a daughter. God said to Hosea, "Name her Lo-ruhamah—'No Compassion'—for I will no longer hold dear the house of Israel,[†] nor will I forgive them. ⁷ But I will hold dear the house of Judah and will rescue them—not by the bow or by the sword or by battle or by horses or riders, but by YHWH their God."

⁸ Once Gomer had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived again, and bore another son. ⁹ God said:

"Name him Lo-ammi—'Not my People'—for you are not my people and I will not be your God.[‡]

2[¶] "Yet the people of Israel will be as numerous as the sands of the seashore that can neither be measured nor counted.[§] And one day, instead of it being said of them 'You are not my people,' it will be said, 'You are the children of the living God.'[¶] At that time, the children of Judah and the children of Israel will be reunited and they will choose a single leader, and they will arise from the land, for great will be the Day of Jezreel.[¶] Then you will call your brothers, 'Ammi'—'My people'—and your sisters, Ruhamah—'My Dear.'

⁴ "But accuse your mother—accuse her![¶]
She is not my spouse, nor am I hers!
Let her wipe her depravity from her face
and her unfaithfulness from between her breasts.

⁵ Otherwise, I will strip her naked
and make her as bare as the day she was born.
I will turn her into a desert—
shriveled her up like a dry land
and slay her with thirst.

⁶ I will show no mercy toward her children,
for they are the children of depravity!

⁷ Their mother has been faithless
and has conceived them in shame.

She said, 'I will seek out lovers who will provide me
with bread and water, wool and flax, oil and drink.'

⁸ So, I will obstruct her way with thorn bushes—
impede her so she will not find her way.

⁹ She will chase after lovers but will never catch them,
seek them but never find them.

She'll even say, 'I will return to my first love,
for I was better off then than I am now'—

¹⁰ But since she has never acknowledged that

* The name "Jezreel" refers to the plain between Galilee, Samaria and the Jordan; and while it has a different etymology, in Hebrew the name is a close homonym for Israel, thus associating God's vengeance on the one with future judgment on the other. The massacre refers to the overthrow of the Omrid dynasty in 2 Kings 9–10—the dynasty ruled by Ahab and Jezebel. The massacre was decreed by the prophet Elisha in 2 Kings 9:7. This event, which from the point of view of Elisha was justified punishment for the idolatrous Omrids, is now interpreted by Hosea as an act of selfish murder. "Smashing the bow" probably refers to the Assyrian invasion in 733.

† *Lo-ruhamah* is usually translated "she is not pitied." A closer translation might be "she who no longer has the love of her parent." The Hebrew stem connotes parental love. We have chosen the English word "dear" because it comes closest to expressing that kind of parental affection, and its subsequent withdrawal, than the more traditional translation.

‡ The name Lo-ammi—"You are not my people"—indicates that the covenant God made with Moses ("I will be with you") is at an end. God has disowned Israel. But as the next verse indicates, the promise is still alive, if Israel would but turn back to God.

§ The verse numbering of many English translations has chapter 1 continuing for two more verses, with chapter 2 beginning with our verse 3. This continues through the end of chapter 2.

¶ The sisters and brothers are the Southern Realm of Judah; the mother is Israel. The Hebrew *rib*, which we have translated "accuse," connotes a formal, juridical indictment.

I was the one

who gave her grain and wine and oil,
or that it was me

who covered her with silver and gold—
which she then sacrificed to Ba'al—

¹¹ now I will take it all away:

my grain as it ripens, my new wine when it is ready;
my wool and flax, given to cover her nakedness.

¹² I will reveal her lewdness to her lovers—
none of them will rescue her from my hand.

¹³ I will bring an end to all her celebrations—
her yearly festivals, her new moons, her Sabbaths—
all her solemn feasts.

¹⁴ I will destroy her vines and fig trees,
which she called 'gifts from my lovers.'
I will turn them into brushwood
and the animals of the field will feast upon them.

¹⁵ I will punish her for all the times she burned incense
to Ba'al,

adorning herself with rings and jewels
and slinking out to meet with her lovers,
forgetting all about me,"

says YHWH.

¹⁶ "After that, however, I will woo her;
I will lead her into the desert,
speaking tenderly to her heart.

¹⁷ There I will return her vineyards,
and change a valley of trouble" into a door of hope.
There she will sing as she did when she was
young—

as she did at the time when she came out of Egypt.

¹⁸ On that day," says YHWH,
you will call me Ishi—'My Spouse,'
and will no longer call me Ba'ali—'My Superior.'

¹⁹ For I will take away the names of the Ba'als^{††} from
her lips
and she will no longer pray to those names.

²⁰ On that day will I make a covenant for them
with the beasts of the field and with the birds of air,
and with the creeping things that move about the
earth.

I will smash the bow and sword
and abolish war from the land,
so that all may sleep in safety.

²¹ I will bind myself to you in love^{‡‡} forever—
yes, I will swear myself to you in rightness and
justice,

in tender love and in deep compassion.

²² I will swear myself to you in love and faithfulness,
and then you will truly know YHWH.^{§§}

²³ On that day, I will speak aloud," says YHWH.
"I will speak out to the heavens
and they will speak out to the earth.

²⁴ The earth will speak out to the corn and the new
wine and the oil,

** Literally, "the Valley of Achor," where Achan and his family were stoned.

†† Ba'als are images of the god Ba'al, or are the various forms in which Ba'al is worshiped. In addition, local Canaanite gods were known colloquially as the "ba'als" of their respective districts.

‡‡ Traditionally, "betroth you to me."

§§ The relationship of God to Israel is one of love, but Israel's proper response is "knowledge" (*yada*)—though the Hebrew word connotes experience rather than simple recognition or acknowledgment. This may be because the Hebrew word for love has erotic connotations that would tend to confuse worship of God with the erotic rites of the Ba'al worshippers. Hosea's concern throughout the book is to distinguish the worship of God from the cult of Ba'al.

and they will speak out to Jezreel.

- ²⁵ I will plant her in the earth for myself and I will cherish the one I called 'No Compassion'; I will say to Lo-ammi, 'You are my people,' and they will say, 'You are my God.' "

3¹ Then YHWH God told me, "Go! Make love to your spouse, even though she is loved by another and has been unfaithful. Love her the same way YHWH loves Israel, even though they worship other gods and love the raisin cakes."²

² So I ransomed her for six ounces of silver[†] and ten bushels of barley. ³ I said to her, "You will stay with me for many days. You must not be unfaithful or be intimate with any other, and I will do the same."⁴ For the people of Israel will live many days with neither a sovereign nor tribal leaders, with neither sacrifices nor sacred pillars, with neither an ephod nor household idols.[‡] ⁵ Afterward, the Children of Israel will return and seek YHWH their God and David their sovereign.[§] They will stand in awe at YHWH and all God's bounty in those final days.

4:1—14:9

Listen to the words of YHWH, Children of Israel! YHWH accuses all you who live in the land:

- "There is no fidelity or kindness, no knowledge of God, throughout the land.[¶]
- ² There is only cursing, lying, murder, and infidelity—these things run rampant throughout the land, and mayhem begets mayhem.
- ³ The land is in mourning because of this, and all who live in it are languishing, along with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea.
- ⁴ But let no one blame another; let no one accuse another— it is with you priests that I have my quarrel!
- ⁵ You stagger about during the day, and your prophets stagger with you come nightfall— and you have destroyed your own people."^{**}
- ⁶ My people are destroyed because you do not acknowledge me. And because you do not acknowledge me, I will reject you as my priests. Because you disregard the Law of God, I will disregard your children.

^{*} These were cakes used in ceremonies dedicated to the Canaanite fertility goddess, Asherah.

[†] Half the price of a bondservant.

[‡] The prophet is describing a period without any religious ceremony of any kind, neither the worship dictated by the Torah being practiced in the South, nor the idolatrous customs borrowed from the surrounding peoples being practiced in the North.

[§] That is, a ruler from the line of David.

[¶] Fidelity (*emet*) and kindness (*chesed*) are virtues appropriate to covenant relationships. Knowledge of God—both the acknowledgment of God's presence in daily life, and the direct experience of God—is a concrete expression of these values. The list of sins that follows are specific violations of the Commandments that refer to the unjust practices of debt-foreclosure, land-grabbing and court corruption committed by the leaders of Israel.

^{**} The original Hebrew text had no vowels; small marks, called vowel points, were added at a later date. The standard Hebrew text reads, "so I will destroy your mother"; our rendering, from using different vowel points, is supported by several medieval Hebrew manuscripts and reflected in Jerome's Vulgate.

- ⁷ The more your priests were admired,^{††} the more they sinned against me—they exchanged my glory for something scandalous.
- ⁸ They feed on the unjust deeds of my people and revel in their corruption.
- ⁹ So, this is the way it is: like people, like priest. I will punish both of them for their ways and repay them for their actions.
- ¹⁰ They will eat, but will never be filled; they will engage in licentious idolatry, but never be satisfied, because they have abandoned YHWH to give themselves
- ¹¹ to licentious idolatry and new wine, which takes away the heart of my people.
- ¹² They ask their idols for advice and are answered by a block of wood. For the spirit of idolatry leads them astray and they are unfaithful to their God.
- ¹³ They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains, and burn incense in the hills, under oaks and poplars and elms, where the shade is pleasant. This is how your children become idolaters and their spouses become faithless.
- ¹⁴ But I will not punish your children when they take part in temple rites,^{‡‡} or their spouses when they are unfaithful. For the parents themselves consort with idolaters and offer sacrifice with sacred prostitutes in these same temple rites! A people without understanding will come to ruin!^{§§}
- ¹⁵ Though you, Israel, are unfaithful, don't let Judah share your blame. Don't go to Gilgal or Beth Aven,^{¶¶} nor swear, "As YHWH lives!"
- ¹⁶ For Israel is as stiff-necked as an obstinate heifer. How, then, can YHWH shepherd them like sheep in a pasture?^{***}
- ¹⁷ Ephraim has made an alliance with idols—and so will be ignored.
- ¹⁸ When their drink is gone, they give themselves to decadent orgies. Their protectors love these shameful ways.
- ¹⁹ A storm wind will carry them off in its wings,^{†††} and their sacrifices will bring them nothing but shame.

^{††} Or possibly, "the more they increased in numbers."

^{‡‡} This refers to the fertility rites of the Canaanite religion in which ritual intercourse symbolized the conjoining of Ba'al and Astarte.

^{§§} In the ancient world, the heart, not the brain, was considered to be the organ of thought as well as the center of a person. The meaning of "understanding" is to take the Torah to heart—to make it the very center of our lives. In this sense, a people without heart—a people who do not make the Torah the very center of their lives—will surely come to ruin.

^{¶¶} Beth Aven means "House of Corruption," and is a derogatory name for Beth El (or Bethel), which means "House of God." Both Gilgal and Beth El were ancient sites originally sacred to YHWH but which had become centers of pagan worship after Jeroboam I.

^{***} Or possibly, "Soon YHWH will put them out to pasture," with the same connotation that our idiom holds.

^{†††} A prophecy, perhaps, of the fall of Israel in 721 B.C.E. and the subsequent Assyrian captivity.

5^a Listen, you priests!
 Now hear this, Israel!
 Pay attention, Royal House,
 for the judgment is against you.
 You have been a trap at Mizpah
 and a net spread out on Tabor.*

2 The traitors are deep in blood—
 I will rebuke them all.

3 I know all about Ephraim,
 and Israel is not hidden from me.
 Ephraim has become depraved
 and Israel has become corrupt.

4 Their ways will not let them return to their God.
 A spirit of depravity is in their heart
 and they no longer know YHWH.

5 The arrogance of Israel testifies against them—
 all of Israel, and even Ephraim,
 staggers in their guilt.
 Judah staggers with them as well.

6 They go out to their flocks and herds†
 to seek YHWH,
 but do not find God there,
 for God has abandoned them.

7 They have been unfaithful to YHWH
 and have given birth to children of their
 unfaithfulness.
 Now their New Moon festivals will be their undoing
 and will devour their fields.

8 Sound the shofar in Gibeah, and the horn in Ramah!
 Sound the battle cry at Beth Aven—‘Lead on,
 Benjamin!’

9 Ephraim will be razed on the day of judgment
 among the tribes.‡
 I say this for certain to the tribes of Israel.

10 The leaders of Judah
 are like those who move others’ boundary stones—
 I will pour out my anger on them
 like torrents of a great flood.§

11 Ephraim is put down, broken in judgment,
 because they willingly followed human
 commandments.¶

12 So now I will be like a hungry moth to Ephraim,
 like the worms that cause wood rot to Judah.

* Mountains in the east and west of Israel where pagan altars had been erected.

† I.e., to offer sacrifice.

‡ *yôm tôkehâ*, or day of judgment, here connotes remedial action rather than vindictive punishment.

§ This passage refers to what is sometimes called the Syro-Ephraimite War. What happened is part of a convoluted chain of events: The assassination of Zechariah ended the Jehu dynasty and Israel began to come apart; then Menahem tried to secure rulership over Israel by making an enormous payment of tribute to Assyria, paid for by a tax levied on tens of thousands of Israelite landholders. This helped to spur an anti-Assyrian reaction led by Pekah, who formed an alliance with Rezon of Damascus. Israel and Damascus tried to strong-arm Ahaz of Judah into joining them, which provoked Judah’s attack on Israel. Ahaz appealed to Assyria for assistance and the pressure on Judah was lifted when Assyria attacked Damascus and Israel, annexing most of the northern provinces. This left a weakened government in Israel and a territory that was limited to the mountains of Samaria. Hosea sees Judah’s action as a violation of the covenant and likens it to a landowner moving a neighbor’s boundary stone, which is condemned in Deuteronomy 27:17.

¶ “Human commandments” translates the word *tsaw*, which is only used here and in Isaiah, where it is a drunken slur. This may refer to Jeroboam’s command to worship his golden calf. Others feel the Hebrew word was a scribal error, and translate it “a lie,” “futility,” “idols,” or even “filth.”

13 When Ephraim saw this sickness,
 and Judah saw these wounds,
 Ephraim sought the aid of Assyria,
 and sent to their Great Ruler** for help.
 But that Ruler will not be able to heal you,
 or cure your sores.

14 For I will be like a lion to Ephraim,
 and like a young lion to the house of Judah.
 I will rip them apart and then go away.
 I will carry them off and no one will rescue them.

15 Then I will go back to my lair
 until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face.
 In their suffering
 they will make haste to seek me:

6^a ‘Come! Let us return to YHWH—
 the One who has torn us asunder
 will make us whole;
 the One who struck us down
 will bind our wounds.

2 In two days,
 God will bring us back to life
 and on the third day
 God will restore us
 so we will live in the presence of the Most High.

3 Let us come to know YHWH intimately,
 and pursue that knowledge zealously.
 And as sure as the sun rises in the morning,
 God will come,
 and will return to us like the rains of winter,
 like the rains of spring that water the earth.††

4 Oh, Ephraim, what am I going to do with you?
 And Judah, what am I going to do with you?
 Your devotion is like the morning fog,
 like the dew of the morning that vanishes!

5 So I hack them to pieces through my prophets
 and slay them with the words of my mouth.
 My judgments flash
 like lightning before you.

6 For I desire kindness toward others, not sacrifice,
 acknowledgement of God, not burnt offerings.

7 But like their first parents,‡‡
 they have broken the Covenant—
 they have betrayed me.

8 Giliad has become a city of evildoers,
 full of bloody footprints.

9 Gangs of priests,
 like marauders waiting to ambush travelers,
 are murderers on the road to Shechem,§§
 committing hideous crimes.

10 I have seen such terrible things
 in the House of Israel:
 Ephraim is given to licentiousness
 and Israel is corrupt.

11 And for you, Judah,
 a harvest is in store for you as well,
 when I have restored the fortunes of my people.

** A common epithet given to Assyrian rulers.

†† The prophet is mimicking words of false repentance on the part of Israel. There are allusions to idolatrous beliefs and practices throughout these passages: the reference to “two days . . . third day” may refer to the cult of dying and rising fertility gods, since the exhortation to repentance in verse 3 is replete with imagery that would be appropriate to one of the fertility gods of the region. God is still seen by the Israelites as a Ba’al-like figure whose favors can be curried.

‡‡ The Hebrew reads “like Adam.”

§§ Shechem was the first capitol of the Northern Realm. The priests, by enticing the people away from the true worship of YHWH, are being likened to murderers.

7¹ But each time I want to heal Israel,
the offense of Ephraim is exposed,
as are the crimes of Samaria.
They deal in deceit;
they are thieves who break into houses
and gangs of brigands who roam the streets.
² They never consider that I remember
all the evil they commit.
They are swallowed up in corruption,
yet their deeds stare me in the face.
³ They entertain the ruler with their corrupt deeds
and the leaders with their lies.
⁴ They are all adulterers,
burning like an oven
whose fire the baker does not tend
from the time the dough is kneaded until it rises.
At the Ruler's Day celebrations,
their leaders become intoxicated with wine
and join hands with the traitors.
⁶ They enflame the oven of their hearts
while they lie in wait, scheming.
Their 'baker' sleeps all night,
and in the morning,
their oven flares up like an inferno.
⁷ Everyone is as hot as an oven,
and they burn up their governors.
All of their rulers have fallen—
and none of them call on me.
⁸ Ephraim has mixed in with the nations—
Ephraim is an unturned cake,^{*}
⁹ Strangers have eaten away their strength,
but they do not recognize this—
their hair is turning gray,
but they pay no attention.
¹⁰ Israel's arrogance testifies against them,
but despite it all
they do not come back to YHWH their God,
nor do they seek the presence of God,
despite everything.
¹¹ Ephraim is like a dove, silly and senseless,
crying out first to Egypt and then going to Assyria.
¹² But even as they are going,
I will cast my net over them,
I will capture them like the birds of the air.
When I hear them roosting,
I will punish them.
¹³ Woe to them![†] They have abandoned me!
They will be destroyed
for their treacherous acts.
I yearn to set them free,
but they continue to slander me.
¹⁴ They do not cry to me from their hearts,
but instead howl in their beds.
They gash themselves for grain and new wine[‡]
and continue to rebel against me.
¹⁵ Even though I was the one who trained them,
and gave strength to their arms,
they plot evil against me.

¹⁶ If they return, they won't be useful—
they are like a defective bow.[§]
Their leaders will be slain by the sword
because of their disrespectful words.
Because of this, they will be a laughingstock
throughout the land of Egypt.
8¹ Put the shofar to your lips!
A vulture circles over YHWH's Temple
because the people have broken my Covenant
and gone against my Law.
² Israel cries out,
'But God, we know you!'
³ Yet Israel has rejected what is good,
and their enemy will hound them.
⁴ They have enthroned rulers without my permission
and have chosen leaders not of my choice.
They make idols for themselves out of silver and
gold—
which will be their downfall.
⁵ Hear this, Samaria:
Cast away your calf idol![¶]
How my anger burns against them!
How long can they remain defiled?
⁶ This calf—the product of the hands of an artisan—
is not God, it is of Israel.
It will be smashed to bits.
⁷ They have sown the wind—
so they will reap the whirlwind.
There is no bud upon the stalk,
so there will be no flour.
Even if it produced grain,
strangers would devour it.^{**}
⁸ Israel has been devoured.
Now they will dwell among the nations
like a thing without value.
⁹ For they have turned to Assyria
like a wild donkey drifting on its own.
Ephraim has sold itself to lovers.
¹⁰ Even though they have sold themselves to the
nations,
I will draw them together now.
They will languish for a time,
oppressed by a mighty ruler.
¹¹ Though many altars were built in Ephraim for sin
offerings,
the altars themselves are occasions for sin.
¹² I have written many profound Teachings,
but they are treated as something alien.
¹³ When they offer me sacrifices,
it is just flesh for them to eat—
YHWH has not accepted them!
I will remember their corrupt deeds
and punish their unjust deeds.

* Continuing the oven metaphor, Israel has intermingled with the nations like flour and water; now it's a pancake that didn't get turned over in time, and is ruined—scorched on one side, dried out on the other.

† "Woe" or "alas" translates the Hebrew (and Yiddish) word *Oy!*

‡ Like many agricultural fertility gods, Ba'al would die in the fall and rise again at the beginning of spring. Canaanite priests would cut themselves and pour some of their blood onto the ground to resurrect Ba'al and thus ensure the fertility of the crops during the next growing season.

§ In verse 15, God is the one who trains the warriors for battle; in verse 16, God is the archer, and the nation is a bow—but one that is warped and will no longer shoot straight and thus cannot be trusted. The first line of the verse is difficult; other versions have "They return, but not upward," or "They return, but not to the Most High."

¶ When Israel split into two realms, Jeroboam I feared that his northern contingent would revolt and shift their loyalty to the southern ruler if they continued to offer sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem, the southern capital. So he established two shrines, at Beth El and at Dan, and set up a golden calf at each of them, encouraging the people to worship them instead of YHWH. Ba'al was represented by a bull, and his consort Astarte or Ashtoreth, "the Queen of Heaven," was depicted as a cow.

** I.e., the surrounding nations.

And they will return to Egypt.

- 14 For Israel has forgotten its Creator
and builds citadels instead,
while Judah keeps on building fortified cities.
So I will send a firestorm to their cities
that will devour their citadels!"

- 9^a Listen, Israel: Do not rejoice;
do not celebrate like the other nations!^b
For you have betrayed your God
with your unfaithfulness;
you lie on your back
and happily collect your wages—
on the very floors where you thresh your grain!^c
2 Neither the threshing floor nor the winepress
will feed the people—
the new wine will fail them.
3 They will not dwell in the land of YHWH.
Ephraim will return to Egypt
and will eat unclean food in Assyria.
4 They will not make drink offerings to YHWH,
nor will any sacrifice be pleasing to God.
Their sacrifices will become
like the bread of mourners—
anyone who eats them will be unclean.
Their food will be for them alone;
it will not enter the Temple of YHWH.
5 What are you going to do
on the days of the Solemn Feast?
On the festival days of YHWH?
6 Even if they escape destruction,
Egypt will conquer them
and Memphis will bury them.
Their treasure troves of silver
will be covered with nettles
and thorns will fill their tabernacle.
7 The days of chastisement are coming,
the days of retribution are at hand—
let Israel know it!
Because your offenses are so many,
and your enmity so great,
the prophet is considered to be an idiot,
and spiritual people are thought crazy.
8 The prophet—on God's behalf—
is meant to watch over Ephraim,
yet snares await the prophet on the road
and enmity fills the Temple of God.
9 They have become mired in corruption,
as in the days of Gibeah.^d
But God will remember their corrupt ways
and punish them for their evil deeds.
10 "When I found Israel,
it was like finding a grape vine in the desert;
when I saw your ancestors,
it was like seeing the first fruits on a fig tree.
But when they came to Ba'al of Peor,
they consecrated themselves to Bosheth,^e
and became as vile as the thing they loved.

^a With agricultural fertility cult festivals.

^b The reference to Gibeah may refer to the selection of Saul as ruler of Israel and implies that there has been a long line of corrupt rulers who brought about the weakening of Israel.

^c *Bosheth* means "shame," and is often used as a denigrating substitute for the name Ba'al. A number of individuals whose names had "Ba'al" in them were changed to "Besheth" or "Bosheth"—for example, Jerubbaal and Meribbaal, who were later called Jerubbesheth and Mephibosheth.

- 11 The glory of Ephraim[§]
will fly away like a bird—
no births, no pregnancies, no conceptions.
12 Even if they were to have children,
I will bereave them of every last one!
Woe to them when I abandon them!
13 I saw Ephraim, as I saw Tyre—
planted in a pleasant place.
But even Ephraim
will lead their children to slaughter."
14 Give them, YHWH!
—"Give them what?"
Give them bodies that cannot produce children
and homes that cannot sustain them!
15 "All their corruption began at Gilgal,
and there I came to hate them.
I will drive them out of my Temple
for the hideous things they do.
I will no longer love or accept them;
all their leaders are apostates.
16 Ephraim is blighted,
their root has dried up,
and they yield no fruit.
And even if they do give birth,
I will slay their beloved children."
17 My God will reject them
because they have not obeyed.
They will become drifters
among the nations.

- 10^a Israel was a fertile vine
that yielded abundant fruit.
The more its fruit increased,
the more altars they built;
the more the land prospered,
the more sacred pillars they erected.
2 Their heart is deceitful,
and now they must bear their guilt.
YHWH will destroy their altars
and knock down their sacred pillars.
3 Then they will say, "We have no ruler
because we did not have reverence for YHWH.
But even if we had a ruler,
what good would it do us?
4 All they've ever done is make empty promises,
solemnized contracts with false oaths,
and now litigation springs up
like poisonous weeds in a plowed field!"
5 The people of Samaria tremble with fear
because the calf of Beth Aven is gone.
Its people mourn for it,
its idolatrous priests cry out over it,
because its glory has been taken away.
6 Even the calf[¶] will be taken to Assyria
as tribute to the Great Ruler.
Ephraim will bow its head in shame
and Israel will be embarrassed
by their own carved images.
7 Samaria's ruler will be carried off
like a leaf on the water.

[§] Their children.

[¶] That is, in addition to the people.

8 The high places of Aven will be destroyed—
these are the crimes of Israel.
Thorns and thistles
will engulf their altars.
Then they will say to the mountains, “Hide us!”
and to the hills, “Fall on us!”

9 You have sinned, Israel,
more than in the days of Gibeah,
and you continue to do so.
Did not war overtake
the children of injustice in Gibeah?

10 “I disciplined those licentious people;
nations were gathered against them
and they were put in bondage
for their two crimes.*

11 Ephraim is a well-trained calf
who loves to thresh,[†]
so now I will put a yoke around its fair neck.
I will drive Ephraim, Judah will plow,
and Jacob will break up the ground!

12 Sow justice for yourselves,
reap the fruit of unfailing love,
and break up your unplowed ground.
Now is the time to seek YHWH
until the rains of justice fall upon you.

13 But you have sown injustice,
you have reaped evil,
and you have eaten the fruit of lies.
Because you have depended on your own strength
and your many warriors,

14 the roar of battle will rise against your people
and all your citadels will be destroyed,
just as Shalman destroyed Beth Arbel in battle,
when parents were thrown against the rocks
with their children.

15 So this will happen to you, Beth El,
because your crimes are many.
When that day comes,
the ruler of Israel will be completely destroyed.

11¹ “When Israel was a youth,
I loved it dearly,
and out of Egypt
I called my child.

2 But the more I called them,
the further they turned from me,
making sacrifices to the Ba’als
and burning incense to carved images.

3 I taught Ephraim to walk,
taking them by the arm—
but they don’t acknowledge that I was the one
who made them whole.

4 I led them on a leash of human kindness—
with bonds of caring.
I removed the yoke from their necks
and stooped to feed them.

5 Now they will return to Egypt
and Assyria will rule over them
because they refuse to return to me.

6 Swords will flash in their villages,
destroying their gates
and devouring them because of their plans.

7 My people are determined to turn away from me!
Even though they cry out to the heights,[‡]
they will not be lifted up.

8 How can I abandon you, Ephraim?
How can I hand you over, Israel?
How can I make you like Admah?
How can I treat you like Zeboiim?[§]
My heart is aching within me;
I am burning with compassion!

9 No, I can’t do it! I cannot act on my righteous anger!
I will not turn around and destroy Ephraim!
For I am God—no mere mortal—
the Holy One who walks among you!

10 They will follow YHWH,
who will roar like a lion!
When they hear that great roar,
the children of God will return from the west,
trembling.

11 They will come out of Egypt trembling like
sparrows,
from Assyria, like doves.
I will resettle them in their own homes,”
says YHWH.[¶]

12¹ Ephraim surrounds me with lies,
the house of Israel with deceit.
And Judah continues to wander restlessly with El
and transfers its loyalty to the “holy ones.”^{**}

2 Ephraim feeds on wind
and follows the east wind all day,
multiplying their lies and treachery.
They make a treaty with Assyria
while they send tributes of olive oil to Egypt.

3 YHWH accuses Judah
and will punish Jacob for what was done.
4 In the womb, Jacob grabbed Esau’s foot;^{††}
as an adult, Jacob wrestled with God.

5 Jacob fought the angel—and won.
Then Jacob wept and begged for a favor.
Jacob found God at Beth El,
and spoke to the Most High there—

6 YHWH God Sabaoth,^{‡‡}
YHWH is the Name of renown!

7 Now return to your God!
Walk in kindness and justice,
and place unswerving trust in your God.

* The two crimes are likely the grisly rape and murder of the woman in Judges 19, and the establishment of the monarchy against God’s wishes.

† The people have become like the object of their worship. In this section the prophet is employing more fertility cult language—threshing, plowing, sowing and reaping. The reference to threshing may echo the reference to licentiousness in chapter 9.

‡ Either to the mountains, where they worshipped Ba’al, or the heavens.

§ Admah and Zeboiim were two of the Cities of the Plain destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah.

¶ Many English versions continue chapter 11 through the next verse, so there is a one-verse discrepancy through the end of chapter 12.

** The “holy ones” are the *qedeshim*, or male temple prostitutes. The last line of the verse is difficult, and many different translations are possible. It could read, “But Judah still walks with God and is faithful to the Holy One,” but the word “walks” literally means to roam or wander restlessly, not to stand firm; “God” is not the usual plural Elohim, but is the singular El, which is the name of the chief Canaanite god and was often identified with Ba’al; and “the Holy One” is plural—and even if it were a “plural of majesty,” it is never used as a plural when its antecedent, God/god, is singular.

†† Jacob’s name means “heel-grabber” or, figuratively, deceiver.

‡‡ Sabaoth means “of hosts” or “of the armies,” and can refer to earthly armies, angelic forces, or even stars in the sky. It is often translated “Almighty.”

- 8 Ephraim is like a merchant using dishonest scales,
a cheater who loves to defraud others!
- 9 Ephraim says, "I have found wealth!
I have accumulated a fortune!
With all of my money, they will not find in me
any iniquity that is actually a sin!"^a
- 10 "I am YHWH,
your God since the land of Egypt.
I will make you live in tents again
as you did during the time of your solemn feasts.
- 11 I have spoken through the prophets
and given them many visions
and told you parables through them.
- 12 Is there corruption in Gilead?
They will come to nothing!
Do they sacrifice bulls in Gilead?
Their altars will become piles of stone in plowed
fields.
- 13 Jacob fled into the land of Aram;
Israel toiled for a spouse and tended sheep to pay
the dowry.
- 14 Through a prophet, YHWH brought Israel out of
Egypt;
through a prophet, God cared for them.
- 15 But Ephraim gave bitter offense
so YHWH will leave their bloodguilt upon them
and will repay them for their contempt.
- 13** ¹ When Ephraim spoke, the other tribes trembled—
so exalted were they throughout Israel.
But they were guilty of Ba'al worship,
so they died.
- ² Now they sin more and more.
They continue to make idols of silver and gold,
skillfully shaping images,
all of them the work of artisans.
It is said of them,
"They sacrifice humans but kiss calves!"
- ³ So they will be like the morning fog,
like the first dew that quickly disappears,
like the chaff that the wind blows around the
threshing floor,
like smoke escaping from a window.
- ⁴ For I, YHWH have been your God
ever since the land of Egypt.
You will know no God but me,
have no Liberator except me!
- ⁵ I took care of you in the desert,
that place of sweltering heat.
- ⁶ I let them graze in pastureland
until they were satisfied.
But when they became complacent,
they forgot me.
- ⁷ So now I will pounce upon them like a lion;
like a leopard I will lurk beside the road.
- ⁸ Like a bear robbed of her cubs,
I will attack them and tear them asunder;
I will devour them like a lion;
a wild animal will rip them apart.
- ⁹ You are destroyed, Israel,
because you are against me,
against your only help.
- ¹⁰ Where now is your ruler who will rescue you?
Where are your town chieftains
to whom you said, "Give me a ruler and leaders"?
- ¹¹ I once gave you a ruler in my anger;
now I'll take one away in my wrath.
- ¹² The guilt of Ephraim has been catalogued;
all their wrongdoing has been recorded.
- ¹³ The birth pangs come for them,
but they are children without sense—
though it is time,
they refuse to be born!
- ¹⁴ So will I ransom them from the power of Sheol?
Will I redeem them from death? No!
Bring on your plagues, Death!
Bring on your destruction, Sheol![†]
Compassion will be hidden from my thoughts!
- ¹⁵ Even though they thrive like a reed plant,
a scorching east wind will come,
a wind from YHWH blowing in from the desert.
Their springs will fail and their wells will dry up.
Their treasures will be plundered
of all their possessions.
- ¹⁶ Samaria will be held guilty
because they have rebelled against their God.
They will fall by the sword,
their infants will be flung against a rock
and pregnant women will be cut to pieces."
- 14** ¹ Listen, Israel: Come back to YHWH, your God.
Your corruption has been your downfall!
- ² Take words with you and turn to YHWH.
Say to God, "Free us from our wrongdoing
and accept our prayer
Instead of bulls, we offer you our lips.
- ³ Assyria cannot set us free.
We will not ride on their horses.
We will never again say "YHWH"
to something our hands have made,
for it is only from you
that the orphaned find mercy."
- ⁴ "I will heal their rebelliousness
and love them freely,
for my anger against them has subsided.
- ⁵ I will be as the morning dew for Israel
and they will bloom like the lily.
Their roots will spread like the cedars of Lebanon.
- ⁶ Their branches will stretch forth.
They will be as beautiful as the olive tree
and their fragrance like the Lebanon cedar.
- ⁷ People will once again find comfort in their shade.
They will be as abundant as the grain.
They will be as fruitful as a grapevine
and they will be as renowned as the wine of
Lebanon.
- ⁸ What more does Ephraim need with idols?
I will answer you and watch over you.
I am like a luxuriant cypress,
and all your fruit comes from me."
- ⁹ Those who are wise
will take these things to heart.
Those who are prudent
will learn these things well.
YHWH's roads are smooth.
Those who are just can walk on them,
But the corrupt stumble and fall.

^a This phrase echoes the refrain of corporate criminals being questioned about duplicitous business activities: "We are guilty of no wrongdoing."

[†] The Hebrew reads, "Where are your plagues, Death? Where is your destruction, Sheol?" but the context here indicates that "where" means "show them forth."

1:1—2:27

THIS IS THE WORD OF YHWH, WHICH WAS given to Joel ben-Pethuel.*

- ² Listen to this, you Elders,
pay attention, all you inhabitants of the land!
Has anything like this ever happened in your day,
or in the days of your ancestors?
- ³ Tell your children all about it,
and let your children tell their children,
and let one generation pass it on to the next.
- ⁴ What the bark-stripping locust left,
the locust swarm devoured.
What the locust swarm left,
the winged locust ate;
and what the winged locust left,
the scavenger locust finished off.†
- ⁵ Wake up, you drunkards, and weep!
Wail, all you guzzlers of wine!
Mourn for the new wine,
for the locusts have snatched it from your lips!
- ⁶ Vast and countless,
a horde has invaded my land!
Flashing like the teeth of a lion,
like the fangs of a lioness,
- ⁷ they have destroyed my vineyards
and splintered my fig trees;
they have stripped them, and sheared off their
bark—
their branches have turned white.
- ⁸ Grieve like a young bride dressed in sackcloth
wailing over her betrothed!
- ⁹ The grain offering and the drink offering
are cut off from YHWH's Temple.
The priests—those who minister to YHWH—
are in mourning.
- ¹⁰ The pastures are desolate
and the land mourns,
for the grain has been destroyed,
the new wine has dried up,
and the olive oil is but a trickle.
- ¹¹ The farmers despair and the vinedressers wail
over the wheat and barley,
for the field's harvest has been lost.

* Joel means "YHWH is God" and Pethuel means "vision of God."

† A plague of locusts and a severe drought had devastated the country's agrarian economy and consequently every important aspect of commercial, religious, and national life as well. Four different words for "locust" are used in this verse, *gazam*, *'arbeh*, *yeleq*, and *hasil*. Whether these words represent different life-stages of the locusts, or are synonyms meant to underscore the severity of damage caused by the relentless waves of locust invasion, is not entirely certain. But *gazam* means "cutter," and likely describes the ravenously early nymph that strips the bark from the trees. *'Arbeh* is the common word for locust, and may describe the adult locust swarm; they have been known to travel fifteen hundred miles, and are able to fly for seventeen hours at a time. A single swarm may contain up to ten billion locusts, cover a hundred square miles, and be so dense as to blot out the sun. *Yeleq* is likely the late nymph stage, when the locust molts its hornlike sheath and unfurls its wings. And *hasil* means to "finish off," so it probably describes scavenger locusts.

- ¹² The vines wither; the fig trees fail.
Pomegranate, palm, apple—
every tree in the land—
have dried up, and our joy has dried up as well.
- ¹³ Mourn, you priests! Put on sackcloth and wail!
Weep, you ministers of the altar!
Come—spend the night in sackcloth,
you ministers of my God,
for the Temple of your God
has been deprived of grain and drink offerings!
- ¹⁴ Order a fast! Proclaim a solemn assembly!
You Elders: Call the multitude
to the Temple of YHWH your God.
Cry out to YHWH and say,
- ¹⁵ "Agh, the Day!‡ The Day of YHWH is coming!
It will arrive as a great upheaval
from the Breasted One!§
- ¹⁶ Our food supply has been cut off as we watched;
joy and gladness are gone
from the Temple of our God."
- ¹⁷ Seeds shrivel under clods of dirt,
and granaries stand desolate.
Barns are torn down for lack of use—
no more harvests!
- ¹⁸ How the animals moan!
The cattle wander aimlessly for lack of pastures.
Even the flocks of sheep are suffering.
- ¹⁹ I cry to you, YHWH:
Fires devoured the pastures in the wilderness
and the trees in the fields have gone up in flames!
- ²⁰ Even the wild animals cry to you
for the streams have dried up,
and fires have destroyed the wilderness pastures.

- 2**¹ Blow the shofar¶ in Zion!
Sound the alarm on my holy mountain!
Let all the people of the land tremble!
For the Day of YHWH is coming—it is near—
² a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of fog and dense clouds.
A vast and countless horde appears
like soot spread over the hills;
it is like something never known before,
nor will be seen in ages to come.
³ Their vanguard is a consuming blaze;
their rearguard is a devouring fire.

‡ "Agh!" is actually a transliterated and accurate rendering for this frequent primal cry of anguish. The "Day of YHWH" is a common image in the Hebrew Scriptures. It can describe the sudden "visitation of God" upon the people, for either blessing or punishment, or a future time that sees the consummation of God's reign and the absolute cessation of all attacks upon it.

§ The Hebrew word, Shaddai, is frequently translated "the Almighty," under the assumption that it derives either from the word shadad, which means "burly" or "powerful," or from shadah, which means "mountain," making the name mean "God of the mountains." There is growing opinion, however, that Shaddai may derive from the word shad or "breast"—thus El Shaddai may be a feminine image of God meaning "the Breasted God" or "the One who Nourishes." Then again, since mountains are frequently shaped like breasts, perhaps these two interpretations are not mutually exclusive.

¶ The shofar is the ram's horn, frequently translated "trumpet." It summoned warriors to attention in battle, and called the people together for worship.

Ahead of them,
the countryside is like the Garden of Eden;
behind them is a desolate wasteland.
Nothing escapes them!
4 They look like horses,
they gallop like stallions.
5 With a racket like rumbling chariots
they leap over the mountain tops,
like crackling flames burning up straw,
like a vast army in battle array.
6 People tremble at their sight;
every face turns pale.
7 They charge like warriors in combat;
they scale walls like soldiers.
Each squad pursues its objective,
never swerving to the right or left.
8 Never jostling each other,
they move straight ahead;
like flying arrows, they continue their pursuit,
never breaking ranks.
9 They hurl themselves at the city.
They leap upon its walls.
They climb through windows
like thieves in the night.
10 The earth trembles at their approach;
the heavens shudder,
sun and moon grow dim,
and the stars withhold their brightness.
11 YHWH roars, leading this horde,
with innumerable regiments forming the army;
countless are those who do God's bidding.
Great and terrible is the Day of YHWH!
Who can endure it?



12 "But know this," says YHWH:
"Return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, weeping, and mourning.
13 Tear open your heart,
not your clothes!"
Return to YHWH your God,
who is gracious and deeply loving as a mother,
quick to forgive, abundantly tender-hearted—
and relents from inflicting disaster.*
14 Who knows? God may come back, relent,
and leave a blessing behind—
grain and drink offerings†
for YHWH your God.
15 Sound the shofar in Zion!
Order a fast!
Proclaim a solemn assembly!
16 Gather the people!
Purify the community!
Assemble the elders!
Gather the children—
even infants at the breast!

* This verse has an abundance of feminine imagery for God. The phrase "deeply loving" here translates the Hebrew word *rachum*, which derives from the word for "womb"—God is showing a mother's love. This is echoed by the word "tender-hearted" in the next line; usually translated "merciful," the Hebrew word *chesed* means devoted kindness. It is also the word for "stork," for the tender care she shows her young. Finally, the word for "relent" can mean "to be deeply moved," and has the same root as the word for "womb" used earlier.

† In other words, if God spares the people from the plague of locusts, there may yet be enough food left to give some of it back to God as an offering of thanksgiving.

Let the bridegroom leave his bedroom
and the bride her canopied bed!‡
17 Let the priests, the ministers of YHWH,
stand weeping between the portico and the altar
and say, "Spare your people, YHWH!
Don't let your heritage become an object of ridicule,
a byword for the Nations!
Don't let the peoples say, 'Where is their God?'"
18 Then YHWH will be stirred on behalf of the land,
and will take pity on the people.
19 YHWH will answer and say:

My people—
I will send you grain, new wine, and oil,
enough to satisfy you completely.
I will no longer allow you to be exposed
to the taunts of the Nations.
20 I will remove the northern army§ from you
and banish it into a land arid and waste;
its vanguard I will throw into the eastern sea,
its rearguard into the western sea.¶
Their stench and foul smell will rise,
for YHWH has done great things.
21 Forget your fear, my beloved land!
Rejoice and be glad,
for YHWH has done great things.
22 Forget your fear, you beasts in the field!
The wilderness pastures will once again
be carpeted in green, trees will bear fruit again,
and the fig and the vine
will give you their full yield.

23 Rejoice, Children of Zion! Rejoice!
Be glad in YHWH your God,
who sends you rain—
the autumn and spring rains as of old—
and a new spring crop.
24 The threshing floors will be heaped with grain,
the vats will overflow with new wine and oil.
25 I will repay you
for the years that were eaten away**
by the locust swarm,
the winged locust,
the scavenger locust,
and the bark-stripping locust—
my great army, which I sent against you.
26 You will eat your fill and be satisfied,
and praise the name of YHWH your God,
who has dealt wondrously with you!
My people will never again be put to shame!
27 You will know that I am in the midst of Israel,
and that I, YHWH, am your God,
and there is no other.
My people will never again be put to shame!††

‡ The Torah allowed for recently married couples to be exempt from certain mandatory services, such as military obligation, for a year. That newlyweds are summoned from their bed presupposes a time of great urgency which would override normal considerations.

§ The locust horde.

¶ The "eastern sea" is the Dead Sea; the "western sea" is the Mediterranean.

** This suggests that the plague of locusts was not limited to a single season.

†† Here we follow the Hebrew verse numbers; many English translations continue chapter 2 where the Hebrew begins chapter 3; and begin chapter 3 where the Hebrew begins chapter 4.

3:1—4:21

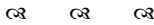
After that, I will pour out my Spirit on all humankind.* Your daughters and sons will prophesy, your elders will have prophetic dreams, and your young people will see visions.

² In those days, I will pour out my Spirit even on those in servitude, women and men alike.

³ I will show signs in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and pillars of smoke—

⁴ the sun will be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood†— at the coming of the great and terrible Day of YHWH.

⁵ But everyone who calls on the name of YHWH will be rescued. For there will be a remnant on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem—this is YHWH’s promise. Anyone who invokes the name of YHWH will be among that remnant.



4¹ Look! In those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem,

² I will gather all the Nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat—which means “YHWH has judged”— and there I will judge them on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel, because they scattered them among the nations. They divided my land among themselves,

³ cast lots for my people, traded boys for prostitutes, and sold girls for wine to drink.

⁴ What are you doing to me, Tyre and Sidon and all the regions of Philistia? Are you exacting vengeance for something? If you are exacting vengeance, I will turn your actions back upon your own heads swiftly and speedily.

⁵ For you took my silver and gold, and carried my precious treasures into your temples.

⁶ You sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks, removing them far from their own country.

⁷ But now I will rouse them to leave the places to which you sold them, and I will turn your actions back upon your own heads.

⁸ I will sell your daughters and sons into the hands of the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans,‡

to a nation far away. YHWH has spoken!

⁹ Tell all the Nations to prepare for war! Then awaken your warriors! Soldiers, advance! March swiftly!

¹⁰ Hammer your plowshares§ into swords, your sickles into spears. Let even the weaklings say, “I am invincible!”

¹¹ Wake up, you surrounding nations, and assemble! YHWH, let your warriors descend upon them!

¹² Let the nations rouse themselves, let them march to the Valley of Jehoshaphat, for I am going to sit in judgment there on all the nations around.

¹³ Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ready! Come and stomp the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats are overflowing— so great is their evildoing!

¹⁴ Horde after horde in the Valley of Decision! For the day of YHWH is near in the Valley of Decision!

¹⁵ Sun and moon grow dark, the stars withhold their brilliance.

¹⁶ YHWH roars from Zion, God’s voice is heard from Jerusalem! Heaven and earth tremble!¶

But YHWH will be a shelter for the people of God; a stronghold for the children of Israel.

¹⁷ You will learn then that I, YHWH, am your God, and I dwell on Zion, my holy mountain. Jerusalem will be a holy place, no foreigner will ever invade it again.

¹⁸ When that day comes, the mountains will run with new wine and the hills flow with milk, and all the river beds of Judah will run with water. A fountain will spring from the Temple of YHWH to water the Wadi of the Acacia Trees.**

¹⁹ Egypt will become a desolation, Edom will be a desert waste because of the violence done to the children of Judah, whose innocent blood they shed in their country.

²⁰ But Judah will be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem for all generations.

²¹ I will avenge their blood and let none go unpunished, and YHWH will dwell in Zion.

* Literally, “all flesh,” perhaps indicating humanity’s frailty in contrast to the power of God’s Spirit. Note that “Spirit,” or *ruach*, always expresses the divine feminine. At this point, the prophecy of the “Day of YHWH” takes a sudden turn: from the armies of locusts to the armies arrayed against Judah and Jerusalem, from the temporal to the apocalyptic. The Spirit is given to old and young, women and men, slave and free, explicitly encompassing even the most marginalized people in society and making them prophets and visionaries.

† The “blood red” color could be caused by fires, volcanic dust, sandstorms, or other atmospheric phenomena.

‡ The Sabaeans were influential merchants who followed the ancient caravan routes that traveled through Arabia.

§ A plowshare is a sharp steel wedge, the bottommost part of a plow, that cuts loose the top layer of soil.

¶ These verses echo the language used earlier to describe the locust invasion.

** Traditionally, “the Valley of Shittim.” Acacia trees are usually found in extremely arid locations, where they can survive better than other trees. The stream’s ability to revive the driest and most barren places near Jerusalem is a symbol for God’s restoration and refreshment of the people.

amos

1:1—2:16

THE WORDS OF AMOS, A SHEEP BREEDER FROM Tekoa.* These are the visions Amos had about Israel in the time of Uzziah ruler of Judah and of Jeroboam ben-Joash, ruler of Israel, two years before the earthquake.

- ² Amos said:
YHWH roars from Zion,
and thunders from Jerusalem!
The shepherds' pastures will dry up
and the summit of Carmel will crumble.
- ³ Thus says YHWH:
For the three atrocities of Damascus—no, four!—
I will not relent: †
Because they threshed Gilead
with iron threshing sledges,
⁴ I am going to hurl fire on the house of Hazael
to burn up Ben-Hadad's palaces;
⁵ I am going to break the iron gates of Damascus,
and cut down the inhabitants of the Valley of Aven
and the sceptered ruler of Beth-eden,
and the people of Aram will be exiled to Kir.
- ⁶ Thus says YHWH:
For the three atrocities of Gaza—no, four!—
I will not relent:
Because they have exiled an entire population
as slaves to Edom,
⁷ I will hurl fire on the walls of Gaza
and burn its palaces;
⁸ I will cut down the inhabitants of Ashdod
and the sceptered ruler of Ashkelon.
Then I will turn my hand against Ekron
until the last of the Philistines are dead,
says the Sovereign YHWH.
- ⁹ Thus says YHWH:
For the three atrocities of Tyre—no, four!—
I will not relent:
Because they have deported entire nations
as slaves to Edom
and have violated the treaty of the alliance,‡
¹⁰ I am going to hurl fire on the walls of Tyre
and burn up its royal residences.
- ¹¹ Thus says YHWH:
For the three atrocities of Edom—no, four!—
I will not relent:

- Because they pursued their treaty partner with the
sword,
suppressing all compassion
and letting their rage storm unchecked,
¹² I will hurl fire on Teman
to burn up the royal residences of Bozrah.
- ¹³ Thus says YHWH:
For the three atrocities of the children of
Ammon—no, four!—
I will not relent:
Because they disemboweled the pregnant women of
Gilead
during an invasion designed to extend their own
territory,
¹⁴ I will set fire to the wall of Rabbah
and burn up its royal residences;
amid the sound of war cries on the day of battle,
loud as a gale wind on a stormy day,
¹⁵ their ruler will go into exile with their officials,
says YHWH God.

- 2**¹ Thus says YHWH:
For the three atrocities of Moab—no, four!—
I will not relent:
Because they burned the bones of the ruler of Edom
and desecrated them,
² I am going to hurl fire on Moab
and burn up the royal residences of Kerioth,
and Moab will die amid chaos,
amid the sound of war cries and the blare of the
shofar.
³ I will cut down their governor inside the city
and slaughter all their officials at the same time,
says YHWH.
- ⁴ Thus says YHWH:
For the three atrocities of Judah—no, four!—
I will not relent:
Because they rejected the Law of YHWH,
and failed to keep its precepts,
because they were led astray
by the false gods their ancestors followed,
⁵ I will hurl fire on Judah
and burn up the royal residences of Jerusalem.
- ⁶ Thus says YHWH:
For the three atrocities of Israel—no, four!—
I will not relent:
Because they sold the innocent for silver,
and the needy for a pair of sandals;§
⁷ because you trample the heads of poor people into
the dust
and push the humble of the land off the road;
because both father and son go to the same Temple
prostitute,
thus profaning my holy Name,
⁸ having sex beside any altar

* Tekoa was town in the hill country of Judah, built by the first ruler of Judah, Rehoboam, some 150 years earlier. Amos preached between 760 and 750 B.C.E. Archaeological digs in the area have found evidence of a powerful earthquake during this period. Amos, who explicitly separates himself from the professional prophetic guild by stating that he is a sheep breeder, proclaims God's judgment on the northern realm, Israel; except for the oracle in 2:4, his theological and political perspective has very much a Judean slant, with God promising to "restore David's fallen house" in chapter 9.

† This is a common literary construction, especially in Hebrew wisdom literature; it means "atrocious after atrocious."

‡ Hiram, the ruler of Tyre during Solomon's reign, had made a "pact of equals" with Solomon and called him "brother"

§ Poor people often took out loans at exorbitant interest rates, with lenders accepting their coats and shoes as collateral. The Torah required that the garments be returned before nightfall, but these loan sharks kept the clothing anyway. They levied huge fines as penalties for missed payments, and when the impoverished borrowers defaulted on the loan altogether, they were sold into slavery—often for a relatively small price.

on garments taken as collateral,
 and drink wine in the house of their God—
 wine bought with the fines they imposed—
 9 even though I overthrew the Amorites when they
 attacked,
 warriors tall as cedars and strong as oaks!
 I destroyed them,
 both fruit above the ground and root below.
 10 I brought you out of the land of Egypt
 and led you through the desert for forty years
 so that you could take possession of the Amorite
 country,
 11 and raised up prophets from your children
 and Nazirites from among your young—
 is this not true, you Children of Israel?
 —it is YHWH who speaks!
 12 But you forced the Nazirites to drink wine*
 and ordered the prophets not to prophesy!
 13 So, I will press you down,
 the way a cart is pressed down when it is
 overloaded with grain.
 14 The fastest runners won't be able to hide,
 the strong will find no strength,
 warriors will not be able to rescue themselves.
 15 The archers will not stand their ground,
 the swift will not escape,
 not even those on horseback—
 16 the bravest warriors will flee unarmed on that day.
 —it is YHWH who speaks.

3:1—6:14

Listen, people of Israel! This is the oracle that YHWH
 speaks against you, against the whole family that I
 brought out of the land of Egypt:

2 You alone are the people I cared for
 among all the families of the earth.
 This is why I call you to account for all your sins.
 3 Can two travelers take the road together
 if they have not first met?
 4 Does the lion roar in the jungle if it has no prey?
 Does a young lion growl in its den
 if it had captured nothing?
 5 Does the bird fall to the ground ensnared
 if no trap was set for it?
 Does the net spring up from the ground
 unless it is to capture something?
 6 Does the shofar sound in the city
 without the citizens becoming alarmed?
 Does misfortune come to a city
 if YHWH didn't send it?
 7 Indeed, YHWH does nothing
 without revealing those plans to the prophets.
 8 The lions roar—who can help feeling afraid?
 YHWH speaks—who can refuse to prophesy?
 9 Proclaim it in the royal residences of Assyria
 and in the royal residences in the land of Egypt!
 Say: Assemble on Samaria's mountain†
 and witness the shameful deeds in that city—
 witness the oppression inside its walls!
 10 They know nothing of fair dealing—

it is YHWH who speaks—
 they cram their fortresses full
 through violence and extortion.
 11 Therefore, thus says Sovereign YHWH:
 An enemy will overrun your land!
 That enemy will strip you of your splendor,
 and plunder your fortresses.
 12 Thus says YHWH:
 Like a shepherd rescuing a couple of legs
 or a bit of an ear from the lion's mouth,
 so will these children of Israel who dwell in Samaria
 be rescued—
 with just the corner of a bed, or part of a couch.
 13 Listen!
 Warn the House of Leah and Rachel and Jacob!
 —It is the Sovereign YHWH who speaks,
 the God of Israel.
 14 On the day I punish Israel for its atrocities
 I will pass judgment on the altar of Bethel.
 The horns of the altar will be broken
 and smashed on the ground.
 15 I will wreck the winter residence
 as well as the summer residence.
 The house of inlaid ivory will be destroyed;
 the house of beautiful ebony will vanish
 —it is YHWH who speaks.

4 Listen to this word, you rich cows of Bashan
 living in the mountain of Samaria:
 You defraud the poor, steal from the needy,
 and call out, "Bring me another drink!"
 2 The Sovereign YHWH swears this in holiness:
 The days are coming
 when you will be dragged out in baskets,
 every last one of you in fish baskets.
 3 You will be taken out of the city
 through the nearest breach in the wall,‡
 to be flung onto the dung heap.
 —It is YHWH who speaks.
 4 Come to Bethel and sin!
 Come to Gilgal, and sin even more!
 Offer your sacrifices the next morning
 and your tithes on the third day.
 5 Burn your thank offering of leavened bread
 and announce your freewill offering in a loud
 voice—
 those are the things that make you happy,
 children of Israel!
 —It is YHWH who speaks.
 6 So I left you with empty stomachs (but clean teeth!)
 in your towns;
 I left you without bread in your villages.
 Still you never returned to me
 —it is YHWH who speaks.
 7 I withheld the spring rains
 three months from the harvest;
 I let rain fall on one town and not another,
 one field got rain, and the next dried up.
 8 Two or three towns would stagger
 into the next town for drinking water,
 and still you never came back to me
 —it is YHWH who speaks.
 9 I struck you with blight and rot,
 and withered your gardens and vineyards.
 Locusts devoured your fig and olives trees,

* Nazirites, or religious devotees, took a vow to abstain from alcohol.
 † This is Mt. Gerizim, the site of an ancient temple to Ba'al and, in later
 years, a temple to YHWH, in direct competition with the Temple at
 Jerusalem.

‡ That is, without even the dignity of passing through the city gates.

and still you never came back to me
—it is YHWH who speaks.

- ¹⁰ I sent you a plague
like Egypt's plague;
I slaughtered your young warriors with the sword,
while your horses were captured for plunder;
I filled your nostrils with the stench of your camps;
and still you never came back to me
—it is YHWH who speaks.
- ¹¹ I overthrew you as I overthrew Sodom and
Gomorrah,
and you were like a brand snatched from the blaze.
And still you never came back to me
—it is YHWH who speaks.
- ¹² I assure you, O Israel,
This is my plan for you,
and because I am going to do this to you,
prepare to meet your God, Israel!
- ¹³ Look—it is YHWH who formed the mountains
and created the winds,
whose intentions are revealed to humankind,
who makes both dawn and dusk,
who walks on the top of the heights of the world—
whose Name is YHWH, God Omnipotent!

5¹⁴ Listen to the word I speak against you.
It is a dirge, O House of Israel:

- ² You have fallen, never to rise again,
once-innocent Israel—
abandoned on your own soil,
with no one to lift you up!
- ³ For thus says the Sovereign YHWH:
The city that used to put a thousand in the field
will be left with a hundred,
and the one which used to put a hundred
will be left with ten.
- ⁴ Thus says YHWH to the House of Israel:
Seek me and live!
⁵ Don't seek Bethel;
don't go to Gilgal;^{*}
don't journey to Beersheba!
Gilgal will be exiled
and Bethel brought to nothing.
- ⁶ Seek YHWH and live!
Or else God will rush like a fire
on the House of Joseph,
and no one in Bethel will be able to put out the
flames.
- ⁷ Ah, you who turn justice to wormwood,[†]
and bring righteousness to the dust—
⁸ seek the One who made the Pleiades and Orion,
who turns the dusk to dawn,
and day to the darkest night,
who summons the waters of the sea
and pours them over the land—
seek YHWH!
- ⁹ YHWH rains down destruction on the strongholds
and brings ruin to the fortress.

^{*} Bethel and Gilgal were the centers of worship for the northern realm.

[†] A perennial symbol of bitterness, affliction, and punitive suffering, wormwood is an aromatic plant that produces a bitter extract used in flavoring certain wines, and as a medicine to expel intestinal worms. The Greeks called it *absinthion*, which means “undrinkable”; absinthe, the famous green liqueur of France that contained wormwood, is banned in many countries because of its toxicity.

- ¹⁰ You hate the arbiter who sits at the city gate,[‡]
and detest the one who speaks the truth.
- ¹¹ Rest assured: since you trampled on the poor,
extorting inhumane taxes on their grain,
those houses you built of hewn stone—
you will never live in them;
and those precious vineyards you planted—
you will never drink their wine.
- ¹² For I have noted your many atrocities,
and your countless sins,
you persecutors of the righteous,
you bribe-takers,
you who deny justice
to the needy at the city gate!
- ¹³ That is why the prosperous moan in times like this,
for such times bring disaster.
- ¹⁴ Seek good and not evil, so that you may live,
and so that YHWH God Omnipotent
may truly be with you as you have been claiming.
- ¹⁵ Hate what is evil, and love what is good;
maintain justice at the city gate,
and it may be that YHWH God Omnipotent
will take pity on the remnant of Joseph.
- ¹⁶ For thus says YHWH God Omnipotent:
There will be dirges in every public square;
in every street, wails of “Woe is me! Woe is me!”
Farmers will be called upon to lament,
not just the professional mourners:
- ¹⁷ there will be wailing in every vineyard,
for I am going to pass through your midst,
says YHWH God.
- ¹⁸ You who wish for the Day of YHWH to come—
why do you want it?
What will the Day of YHWH mean to you?
It will be a day of darkness, not light!
- ¹⁹ It will be like running from a lion
only to meet a bear,
or like getting home safe at last,
only to get bitten by a snake hiding in the corner!
- ²⁰ Rest assured:
the Day of YHWH will be darkness, not light.
It will all be gloom, without a single ray of light.
- ²¹ I despise and reject your feasts!
I am not appeased by your solemn assemblies!
- ²² When you offer me burnt offerings,
I reject your oblations,
and refuse to look at your sacrifices of fattened
cattle!
- ²³ Spare me the racket of your chanting!
Relieve me of the strumming of your harps!
- ²⁴ Instead, let justice flow like a river,
and righteousness flow like an unfailing stream.
- ²⁵ Did you bring me all these sacrifices and grain
offerings
during your forty years in the wilderness, house of
Israel?[§]
- ²⁶ Now you will carry off Sakkuth and Moloch and
Kiyyun your star god,
those idols you have made for yourselves,

[‡] The court in each town was located at the city gate, where elders would sit as judges and settle disputes. Honest arbiters were despised by the wealthy because they could not be bribed to find in their favor.

[§] In fact, Israel did offer sacrifices and grain offerings while they wandered in the desert. The point, however, seems to be that God places a much higher priority on justice and compassion for the poor than on a carefully codified system of religious observation—true obedience of the heart rather than an outward show of religious piety.

²⁷ for I will drive you into exile far beyond Damascus,*
says YHWH!

God Omnipotent is my name!

6³¹ Woe to you who live in luxury in Zion,
and to you self-important people on the mountain of
Samaria,

you distinguished leaders of the nation,
in whom the House of Israel places their hope!

² Cross over to Calneh and see,
go on from there to Hamath the great,
then down to Gath in Philistia.

Are you better off than these realms?
Is their territory larger than yours?

³ Yet you try not to think about the Day of Woe,
and you hasten the reign of violence!

⁴ Lying on ivory beds and reclining on their couches,
they dine on lambs from the flock,
and young calves from the stalls.

⁵ They hum to the tune of the harp,
and fancy themselves musicians like David.

⁶ They drink wine straight from the bottle,
and anoint themselves with the finest oils.

But they show no care for the ruin of Joseph!

⁷ That is why they will be the first to be exiled—
they will recline no more at festive banquets!

⁸ The Sovereign YHWH swears it—
it is YHWH God who speaks, God Omnipotent!
I detest the pride of Jacob; I hate its royal residences.
I will abandon the city and all it contains.

⁹ If ten are left in a single house,
they will die.

¹⁰ Only a few will escape
to carry the bones out of the house.
And if one person calls to another in the house,
“Is there anyone left with you?”
the other will reply,
“No! Hush!

The name of YHWH must not be mentioned!”

¹¹ For you see, YHWH alone orders it:
the great house will be smashed to pieces,
the small house to splinters.

¹² Do horses gallop on rocks?
Do people plow the sea with oxen?
Yet you have turned justice into a poisonous weed,
and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood.

¹³ You are happy over Lo-Debar,
and you brag,
“It was by our own strength that we took Karnaim!”[†]

¹⁴ But I will raise up a nation against you,
O House of Israel.
—It is the Sovereign YHWH who speaks,
God Omnipotent.

A nation will pursue you
from the Pass of Hamath
right down to the Arabah river.

This is what the Sovereign YHWH showed me:

I saw a swarm of locusts
at the time when the second crop started to grow,
a swarm of full grown locusts,
after the ruler’s harvest was over.

² After they had devoured the foliage of the land,
I said, “O Sovereign YHWH! Forgive us, I beg you!
How can Jacob survive, being so small?”

³ And YHWH relented—
“This will not happen,” YHWH said.

⁴ This is what the Sovereign YHWH showed me:
The Sovereign YHWH summoned fire to punish.
It had devoured the great Deep
and was already encroaching on the pastures.

⁵ Then I said, “Please stop, O God, I beg you!
How can Jacob survive, being so small?”

⁶ And YHWH relented.
“This will not happen either,” said YHWH.

⁷ This is what the Sovereign YHWH showed me:
God was standing by a wall, a plumb line[‡] in hand.

⁸ “What do you see, Amos?” YHWH asked me.
“A plumb line,” I said.

Then God said to me,
“Look, I am going to measure my people Israel by
plumb line.
I will no longer excuse their atrocities.

⁹ The high places of Isaac are going to be ruined,
the sanctuaries of Israel destroyed.
With sword in hand,
I will attack the House of Jeroboam.”

¹⁰ Amaziah the priest of Bethel then sent the following message to Jeroboam ruler of Israel: “Amos is plotting against you in the midst of the House of Israel. The country can no longer tolerate what he keeps saying. ¹¹ For this is what he says, ‘Jeroboam is going to die by the sword, and Israel is going into exile from its land.’ ”

¹² Amaziah told Amos, “Go away, seer! Go back to the land of Judah. Earn your bread there. Do your prophesying there. ¹³ We want no more prophesying in Bethel. This is the royal sanctuary, the national Temple!”

¹⁴ Amos answered Amaziah: “I am no prophet. Nor am I the disciple of a prophet. I was a shepherd, and gathered figs for food. ¹⁵ But YHWH took me from herding the flock, and said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’ ¹⁶ So listen to the word of YHWH! You say: ‘Do not prophesy against Israel. Utter no oracles against the House of Isaac.’ ¹⁷ Very well, this is what YHWH says: “Your spouses will be forced to take the most demeaning work, your children will fall by the sword, your land will be parceled out by measuring lines, and you yourself will die on unclean soil. And Israel will go into exile, far from its own land.’ ”

8³¹ This is what the Sovereign YHWH showed me:
a basket of ripe figs.

² God said, “What do you see, Amos?”
“I basket of ripe figs,” I replied.

Then YHWH said to me:
“The time is ripe for my people, Israel.

I will no longer tolerate their atrocities.

³ The singers in the Temple will wail that day:
‘So many corpses scattered anywhere. Hush!’ ”

* In 721 B.C.E., less than 30 years after Amos preached, the northern realm of Israel was conquered by the Assyrians and its people taken into captivity, exiled to northern Assyria and the regions south of the Caspian Sea, never to return; these are the “ten lost tribes” of Israel (the large Jewish population in southern Russia is likely composed of their descendants). The road to Assyria ran through Damascus, Israel’s neighbor to the north.

† Lo-Debar and Karnaim are locations in northern Israel, but they are also puns: Lo-Debar means “nothing,” and Karnaim means “horns,” which are symbolic of strength. One could render this verse, “You are happy over nothing, and you brag, ‘It was by our own strength that we gained strength!’ ”

‡ A plumb line is a line with a small weight such as lead attached to it, used by builders to determine a true vertical line.

- It is the Sovereign YHWH who speaks.
- 4 Listen to this, you who live off of the needy
and oppress the poor of the land,
5 you who say, “If only the New Moon were over
so we could sell our grain,”
and, “When Sabbath is over,
we will sell our wheat
charging higher prices for smaller portions,
thus tilting the scales in our favor.
- 6 That way, we can buy the poor for silver
and the needy for a pair of sandals—
and even make a profit
on the chaff of the wheat!”
- 7 —YHWH swears by the Pride of Jacob,*
“I will never forget a single thing you have done.”
- 8 Will not the land tremble because of this,
and all who dwell in it mourn?
Will the land not rise up like the Nile,
rising and sinking like the river of Egypt?
- 9 “That day—
it is the Sovereign YHWH who speaks—
I will make the sun set at noon,
and darken the earth in broad daylight.
- 10 I will turn your feasts into funerals
and all your happy songs into dirges.
I will have your loins all in sackcloth,
your heads all shaved.
I will make the land mourn
as one would mourn for a dead child—
all of this on that bitter day!
- 11 The time is coming—
it is the Sovereign YHWH who speaks—
when I will send famine on the land:
not a famine of bread or thirst for water,
but a famine of not hearing the words of YHWH.†
- 12 People will stagger from sea to sea
and wander from north to east
seeking revelation from YHWH,
but will not find it.
- 13 That day,
beautiful young women and strong young men
will faint from thirst.
- 14 All who swear by the Shame of Samaria—‡
those who swear, “By your god’s life, Dan!”
and, “By your Beloved’s life, Beersheba!”
these will all sink, never to rise again.
- 9** I saw God standing at the side of the altar.
“Strike the top of the pillars,” God ordered,
“and let the roof come tumbling down
on the heads of all assembled there.
If anyone is left, I will slay them with a sword.
No one will escape! No one will survive!
- 2 Even if they burrow their way down to Sheol,
my hand will haul them out!
Even if they ascend to the heavens,
I will bring them down!
- 3 If they try to hide on top of Mount Carmel,
I will track them down and catch them.
If they try hiding from my sight
at the bottom of the sea,
I will command the serpent to bite them.
- 4 If they are carried off into captivity by their enemies,
I will order the sword to slaughter them there.
My eyes will be on them for their misfortune,
not their good.”
- 5 It is the Sovereign YHWH Omnipotent!
Who touches the land and makes it tremble
and all the inhabitants of the land mourn?
Who makes the land rise up like the Nile
and then subside like the river of Egypt?
- 6 Who built the high dwelling places in the heavens
and supported its vaulted dome over the earth?
Who commands the water of the sea
and pours them over the land?
—It is YHWH!
- 7 “Aren’t the children of Ethiopia the same to me
as you are, children of Israel?
—It is YHWH who speaks.
True, I brought Israel out of the land of Egypt.
But I also led the Philistines in their own exodus
from Caphtor,
and brought the Aramaeans out of Kir.
- 8 Now, I turn my eyes onto this sinful nation,
and I will wipe it off the face of the earth.
But I will not destroy the House of Jacob
completely—
it is YHWH who speaks.
- 9 For now I will issue orders
and shake out the House of Israel among all the
nations,
as one would shake sand through a sieve
so that not a single pebble would fall on the ground.
- 10 All the sinners among my people
are going to perish by the sword—
all those who brag,
‘No misfortune will ever touch us,
nor even come anywhere near us.’
- 11 On that day, I will set up again
the fallen tent of David.
I will mend its tears,
restore its ruins,
and rebuild it strong
as it was in the days of old,
12 so that they can conquer the remnant of Edom
and all the nations that belonged to me.
It is YHWH who speaks,
YHWH who will carry this out!
- 13 The days are coming—
it is YHWH who speaks—
when the one who plows
will meet the one who reaps,§
when the mountains will run with new wine
and the hills will all flow with it.
- 14 I will restore the fortunes
of my people Israel.
They will build the ruined cities and live in them,
plant vineyards and drink the wine,
dig their gardens
and eat their own produce.
- 15 I will plant them in their own land,
and they will never again be uprooted
from the land I have given them.
It is YHWH your God who speaks.”

* That is, God swears by the land itself.

† Amos is prophesying an end to divine revelation.

‡ The “Shame of Samaria” refers to the worship of Ba’al Hadad and Ashtoreth—the god and the Beloved, respectively.

§ In the blessing to come, crops will be so abundant that the harvest will not be finished before it’s time to plow the fields again.

1:1-21

THE VISION OF OBADIAH.*

I received a message from Sovereign YHWH.
A messenger was sent among the nations,
saying,
"Rise up! Let us march against them in battle!"

Thus says YHWH concerning Edom:

- ² "I will diminish you among the nations.
You will be utterly despised.
³ Your arrogant heart has led you astray,
you who live in mountain clefts,
whose home is in the heights,
you say in your heart,
'Who is able to bring me down to the ground?'
⁴ Though you soared like the eagle,
and built your nest among the stars,
I will still fling you down again—
it is YHWH who speaks.
⁵ If thieves came to rob you,
or intruders came during the night,
they would steal only as much as they needed!
And if grape gatherers came to your fields,
they would still leave some gleanings for you—
that's how completely you'll be destroyed!
⁶ And how Esau has been plundered,
their hidden treasures ransacked!
⁷ All your allies will drive you back,
to the borders of the land.
Your fine friends will deceive and overpower you;
those who ate your bread will set traps for you.
They'll say, 'Where is your wisdom now?'
⁸ When that day arrives—
it is YHWH who speaks—
I will remove the sages from Edom,
and leave no wisdom on Esau's mountain.
⁹ Your warriors, O Teman, will lose their courage,
and no one will survive on Esau's mountain. †
¹⁰ For the outrage done to Jacob your sibling,
you will be swallowed up in disgrace
and you will vanish forever.
¹¹ "On that day, you stood there aloof
while strangers carried off Jacob's wealth;
when foreigners passed through the gates
and cast lots for Jerusalem,
you behaved like the rest of them.
¹² How could you gloat over your sisters and brothers
on the day of their tribulation?
How could you exult over the children of Judah

on the day of their devastation?

How could you heckle them so loudly
on the day of their anguish?

- ¹³ How could you march through the gate of my
people
on the day of their destruction,
or join in the gloating
when disaster overtook them,
or pillage their treasures
on the day of their heartbreak?
¹⁴ How could you stand at the crossroads
to slay people while they were escaping?
How could you betray the survivors
on the day of their anguish?
¹⁵ As you have done, so will it be done to you!
Your deeds will recoil on your own head.
The Day of YHWH is near
for all the nations!
¹⁶ You will drink that cup on my holy mountain— †
and all the nations will drink from it in turn!
They will drink and drink
until their speech is slurred
and they will become
as though they had never been.
¹⁷ "But a remnant will survive on Mount Zion,
and it will be a holy remnant.
The House of Jacob will dispossess
those who had dispossessed them.
¹⁸ The House of Jacob will be a fire,
the House of Joseph a blaze—
and the House of Esau will be stubble!
They will set it on fire and burn it down,
and no member of the House of Esau will survive.
It is YHWH God who speaks.
¹⁹ And they will occupy the Negev
and the Mount of Esau,
as well as Shephelah and Philistia.
They will occupy the land of Ephraim
and the land of Samaria,
Benjamin along with Gilead.
²⁰ The exiles from this army,
the warriors of Israel,
will occupy the land of the Canaanites
as far as Zarephath;
and the exiles from Jerusalem now in Sepharad §
will occupy the towns of the Negev.
²¹ Victorious, they will climb Mount Zion
and judge the Mount of Esau.
And the sovereignty will belong
to YHWH."

* Obadiah means "servant of YHWH." Scholars believe it was written immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. The Edomites—descendants of Esau, Jacob/Israel's brother—cooperated with Babylon in despoiling Judah during the Babylonian exile and overtook Judean territory. Obadiah refers to the Day of YHWH as the time Edom would be punished, and looks toward a time when the exiles would return and Mount Zion would again be glorious. The first part of Obadiah is a direct parallel with Jeremiah 49:7-22, indicating either that Obadiah borrowed from Jeremiah or that they both draw on the same tradition.

† Teman was a major city in Edom; it was the name of one of Esau's grandchildren. "Esau's mountain" is Mount Seir, which was actually a mountain range rather than a single mountain.

‡ This verse is difficult. It is likely that the cup (of God's wrath) mentioned here is the retribution prophesied in the previous verses; however, the phrase actually reads "you drank that cup," suggesting to some commentators that it refers to the Edomites' celebration at despoiling the Judeans, though that creates a mixed metaphor in the next half of the verse—the cup of celebration becomes the cup of wrath—which is not a usual linguistic practice in Hebrew.

§ Spain. Sephardic Jews have their roots in Spain, Portugal, North Africa and the Middle East. Most American Jews today are Ashkenazic, descended from Jews who emigrated from France, Germany, and Eastern Europe in the mid- to late-1800s, although most of the early Jewish settlers of this country were Sephardic.

jonah

1:1—2:11

THE WORD OF YHWH CAME TO JONAH BEN-Amittai:

“Get up! Go to the great city of Nineveh right now. Raise a cry against it! Tell them that I know all about their crimes.”

³ But Jonah decided to run away from YHWH, and set out for Tarshish instead. He went down to Joppa and found a ship bound for Tarshish. He paid the fare and boarded the ship bound for Tarshish, in order to get away from YHWH.

⁴ But YHWH unleashed a violent wind on the sea, and the storm was so great that it threatened to break up the ship. ⁵ The frightened sailors, every one of them, appealed to their gods. Then they threw the cargo overboard to lighten the ship. Jonah, however, went below, laid down in the hold, and fell fast asleep. ⁶ The captain found Jonah and said, “How can you sleep at a time like this? Get up! Call on your god! Maybe your god will spare a thought for us, and not leave us to die.”

⁷ The crew, meanwhile, said to one another, “Come on, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for bringing this evil on us.”⁸ So they cast lots, and the lot fell to Jonah. ⁸ So they said to him, “You have brought all this misfortune on us—tell us, what is your business? Where do you come from? What is your country? What is your nationality?”

⁹ Jonah said, “I am a Hebrew, and I worship YHWH, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land.”

¹⁰ The sailors were seized with terror at this and said, “What have you done?” They learned that Jonah trying to escape from YHWH—he told them the whole story.

¹¹ Then they said, “What are we to do with you, to make the sea grow calm for us?” For the sea was growing rougher and rougher.

¹² Jonah replied, “Take me and throw me into the sea, and then it will grow calm for you. For I can see it is my fault this violent storm happened to you.”

¹³ The sailors rowed vainly in an effort to reach the shore, but the sea grew still rougher for them. ¹⁴ Then they called on YHWH and said, “Please, O YHWH, don’t let us perish for taking this person’s life. Don’t hold us guilty of innocent blood; for you, O YHWH, acted as you have thought right.”

¹⁵ And taking hold of Jonah they threw him into the sea; and the sea grew calm once more. ¹⁶ At this the sailors were seized with dread of YHWH; they offered a sacrifice to YHWH and made their vows.

2¹ Then YHWH sent a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and he remained in the fish’s belly for three days and three nights. ² From the belly of the fish he prayed to YHWH, his God, and said:

- ³ Out of my despair I cried to you and you answered me.
From the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice.
⁴ You threw me into the Deep,
into the heart of the sea,
and floods overwhelmed me.

* It is likely that they used small colored stones; in the ancient Middle East, casting lots was used as a means of divination to receive guidance from the gods about a particular situation; it was also a popular gambling game. Here it is likely that a number of similarly colored stones were put into a sack with one stone of a different color; everyone would draw one stone, and Jonah happened to draw the distinctive one.

All your waves, your torrents,
washed over me.

- ⁵ And I said, “I am banished from your sight!
Will I ever again look upon your holy Temple?”
⁶ The waters surrounded me right by my throat,
the Deep enclosed me;
seaweed was wrapped around my head.
⁷ I sank down to the roots of the mountains;
the vaults of the earth closed me in forever.
But you raised my life
back up from the pit, YHWH my God!
⁸ As my soul was ebbing away,
I remembered YHWH, my God,
and my prayer came before you
in your holy Temple.
⁹ Those who cling to worthless idols
forsake their own well-being.
¹⁰ But I will sacrifice to you
with a song of thanksgiving.
I will fulfill the vow I made.
Deliverance comes from YHWH!
¹¹ Then God spoke to the fish,
and the fish vomited Jonah onto the shore.

3:1—4:11

The word of YHWH came a second time to Jonah: ² “Get up! Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach to them as I told you to do.”

³ Jonah set out and went to Nineveh in obedience to the word of YHWH. Nineveh was a city large beyond compare:[†] it took three days to cross it. ⁴ Jonah moved on into the city, making a day’s journey. He proclaimed, “Only forty days more, and Nineveh is going to be destroyed!”

⁵ So the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast and dressed in sackcloth, from the greatest to the least. ⁶ When the news reached the ruler of Nineveh, he rose from his judgment seat, took off his royal robes and dressed in sackcloth, and sat down in ashes. ⁷ A decree was then proclaimed throughout Nineveh, by decree of the ruler and the ruler’s ministers, as follows: “Citizens and beasts, herds and flocks, are to taste nothing! You must not eat anything, and you must not drink any water. ⁸ You must all dress in sackcloth and call on God with all your might; you must all renounce your sinful ways and the evil things you did. ⁹ Who knows, maybe God will have a change of mind and relent! Perhaps God’s burning wrath will be withdrawn so that we don’t perish!”

¹⁰ God saw their efforts to renounce their evil behavior. And God relented by not inflicting on them the disaster that threatened them.

4¹ But Jonah grew indignant and fell into a rage. ² He prayed to YHWH and said, “Please, YHWH! Isn’t this exactly what I said would happen, when I was still in my own country? That’s why I left and fled to Tarshish: I knew that you were a God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in kindness, relenting from violence. ³ Now, YHWH, please take my life! I’d rather be dead than keep on living!”

⁴ Then YHWH said, “What gives you the right to be angry?”

† Literally, “a city great to God.”

⁵ Jonah then left the city and sat down to the east of it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat down under the shade to see what would happen to the city. ⁶ Then YHWH God sent a castor oil plant* to grow up over Jonah to shade his head and soothe his indignation. Jonah was delighted with the castor oil plant. ⁷ But at dawn the next day, God sent a worm to attack the castor oil plant and it withered. ⁸ And after the sun had risen, God sent a scorching east wind. The sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he was overcome

* The castor oil plant has been used from ancient times medicinally, usually as a purgative; there is likely a symbolic connection with the great fish that "vomited" Jonah back up on shore. It also grows up to ten feet tall, which would have provided Jonah with some pleasant shade.

1:1—2:13

THE WORD OF YHWH THAT CAME TO MICAH of Moresheth[†] in the time of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, rulers of Judah. His visions concerned Samaria and Jerusalem.

- ² Listen, people, all of you!
Let the earth and all that is in it pay attention!
The Sovereign YHWH
will give evidence against you—
the Sovereign One from the holy Temple
- ³ comes down from the divine realm
and walks upon the high places of the earth!
- ⁴ The mountains melt along the way
and valleys are torn open like wax beside a flame,
like torrents eating away a hillside:
- ⁵ all this for Jacob's rebellion and Israel's sin.
What is the rebellion of Jacob?
Isn't it Samaria?
And where are Judah's shrines to other gods?
Aren't they what Jerusalem has become?[‡]
- ⁶ I intend to make Samaria a ruin in open country,
a place where vines will be planted.
I will pour its stones into the valley,
and lay bare its foundations.
- ⁷ All its idols will be shattered,
and the earnings of its temple prostitutes
consumed by fire;
its statues will be broken into pieces,
for they were bought with wealth
from ritual prostitution,
and will bring them even more money.
- ⁸ This is why I will mourn and lament,
go barefoot and naked,
howl like a jackal and screech like an owl!
- ⁹ For Samaria's diseases§ is incurable;
and now the infection has come to Judah.
It knocks at every door of my people,
and reaches even into Jerusalem.

[†] The prophet Micah, who prophesied during the time of Isaiah of Jerusalem, was apparently well-respected by the ruler and the nobility, which gave him unusual entrée and allowed him to criticize the economic aristocracy with greater power. During this period, while Assyria was threatening to destroy the northern realm of Israel, Micah was calling for a change of heart for people in the southern realm, lest they suffer a similar fate.

[‡] Micah is saying that Judah is in danger of going the way of Samaria, which erected numerous "high places" or hillside shrines to Ba'al Hadad, Ashtoreth, and other gods.

§ The worship of other gods.

and begging for death, and said, "I'd rather be dead than keep on living!"

⁹ God said to Jonah, "What gave you the right to be upset about the castor plant?"

He replied, "I have every right to be angry, to the point of death!"

¹⁰ God replied, "You feel sorrow because of a castor plant that cost you no labor, that you did not make grow, that sprouted in a night, and that perished in a night. ¹¹ Is it not right, then, for me to feel sorrow for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than 120,000 people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, to say nothing of all the animals?"

micah

- ¹⁰ Don't tell Gath about it,
and don't let them see you weep in Acco;
but in Beth-leaphrah sit down in the dust.[¶]
- ¹¹ You who live in Shaphir, "Pleasantness,"
will go into captivity in nakedness and shame.
You who live in Zaanan, "Going Out,"
will be unable to go out of your walled city.
You, Beth-ezel, "House of Removal,"
will mourn as your supports are removed.
- ¹² You who live in Maroth, "Bitterness,"
will be desperate for something good,
for evil will come down from YHWH
to the very gate of Jerusalem.
- ¹³ Hitch the chariot to the horses and flee,
you people of Lachish,^{**} "Team of Horses"!
You were the ones who led innocent Zion into sin—
you are the source of Israel's rebellion!
- ¹⁴ Therefore you must provide a dowry
for Moresheth-Gath, "Gath's Betrothed."^{††}
Beth-Achzib, "Deceptive," will be to Israel's rulers
like a stream that disappoints
when it's needed most.
- ¹⁵ Once again a dispossessor will come you,
inhabitants of Mareshah, "Possession,"
and the "glory of Israel" will flee to Adullam.^{‡‡}
- ¹⁶ Cut off your hair in mourning
for the children that were your joy.
Shave your heads bald like the vulture,
for your children have gone from you into exile.

2¹ Woe to those who plot trouble,
who lie in bed planning evil!

[¶] This section, to the end of the chapter, is full of puns, and prophesies the transfer of the western part of Judah to Philistine control by the Assyrians. Gath sounds like the Hebrew word for "tell," while Acco sounds like the word for "weep." Gath was one of five Philistine cities at the Judean border, and Micah doesn't want Philistines rejoicing in Israel's misfortune; Acco was a town in the north mentioned in the book of Judges as one of the places from which the Israelites did not drive out the Canaanite inhabitants, so they would also be happy at Israel's downfall. Beth-leaphrah, "House of Dust," is one of the towns of Judah mentioned by Micah where he is calling mourning and repentance. In this section of the text, we include an English translation of the town names—in some cases this is the actual meaning of the Hebrew word; in others, a homonym, a pun crafted by Micah.

^{**} Lachish was a fortified city at the northern border of Judah and the base of Assyrian operations; it would have been among the first cities of Judah to be influenced by Jeroboam's worship of other gods.

^{††} Moresheth, which had at one time been controlled by Gath (hence the name), was Micah's hometown. Here Lachish, the protectorate, will be forced to give Moresheth-Gath away in "marriage" to a foreign power.

^{‡‡} Adullam, which means "Justice of the People," was the place where David hid in the caves after fleeing from his enemies. The "glory of Israel" refers to the country's leadership.

When morning comes they carry it out,
because they're the ones in power.

- ² They see a field and they seize it,
a house, and they take it over.
They defraud people of their homes,
then extort them of their land as well.
- ³ "Therefore," says YHWH,
"I am planning disaster for this family,
a yoke you cannot remove from your necks,
a yoke so heavy you will be unable to walk
upright—
it will be an evil time."
⁴ On that day they will taunt and humiliate you,
and sing a mocking lament about you:
"We are utterly despoiled,
for our people's land changes hands.
It is taken from us;
our fields are parceled out to apostates!"[†]
- ⁵ No one in YHWH's community
will ever again give them an allotment.[‡]
- ⁶ "Stop prophesying," your prophets say.
"Stop prophesying about these things!
No shame will overtake us!"
- ⁷ Can the House of Jacob be indicted?
Can YHWH have run out of patience?
Are these God's doings?" they say.
But aren't my promises intended
for those who walk on the right road?
- ⁸ You have become an enemy to my people,
stripping the cloaks from travelers who felt safe
as if they were your spoils after a war,
⁹ driving the women of my people
from their pleasant homes,
and robbing their children of my glory forever,
saying,
- ¹⁰ "Up! Get out! This is no resting place for you!"
You defile yourselves
with the extortionate pledges you exact from them.[§]
- ¹¹ If some windbag went about telling lies, saying,
"I preach in favor of wine and liquor,"
that would be the prophet for people like you!
- ¹² "House of Jacob, I will gather you together;
I will gather up the remnant of Israel.
I will guard them like a flock of sheep in their fold,
like sheep safe in their pasture,
a noisy multitude.
- ¹³ One will make a breach and lead the way;
the rest will break it open further
and leave as if through a gate.
Their ruler will pass before them
with YHWH at the head."[¶]

* The Hebrew reads, "naha, nehi, nihyah," or "lament with a lamentation of lamentations"—though since it is called a humiliating taunt, it sounds suspiciously like "nyah, nyah, nyah!"

† This is irony—the speakers are themselves apostates.

‡ When judgment passes and the people are restored, the greedy who disregarded the ancient land allotments will not be allowed to participate in the redistribution of the land.

§ The Law of Moses forbade taking pledges for loans that would be a hardship on the borrower, but loan sharks would routinely take the borrowers' cloaks (v. 8) as collateral, and seize their houses (v. 9) when the loan couldn't be repaid on time.

¶ Most Middle Eastern sheepfolds were a stone fence. After the sheep were led into the fold for the night, the shepherd would seal the entrance with rocks or debris, often sleeping across the threshold. In the morning, the shepherd went to the fence and shoved the rocks out of the way, making a breach in the wall that the sheep pushed through, widening the opening. Then the shepherd—the breach-maker or "breaker" (Hebrew *poretz*)—would lead the sheep back

I said, "Now listen, you leaders of the House of Jacob,
rulers of the House of Israel,
you should know how to judge rightly,
² yet you still hate good and love evil;
you skin my people,
stripping them to the bone.

³ You devour the flesh of my people,
flay their skin and crush their bones,
then chop them up for the kettle,
more meat for your stewpot.

⁴ Someday you'll cry out to YHWH,
but God will not answer you.
God will look the other way
because of all the crimes you've committed."

- ⁵ Thus says YHWH:
"You prophets who lead my people astray,
who cry 'peace' when they have something to eat,
but declare war against those
who have nothing to put in their mouths—
⁶ you will have nightmares, not visions;
you'll have darkness, not prophetic light.
The sun will set for the prophets;
your day is no more."
- ⁷ Seers and diviners will be humiliated
and overcome with shame;
they'll put their hands over their mouths,
because God no longer speaks through them.
- ⁸ But I am full of strength by YHWH's Spirit,
full of justice and courage,
to declare the crimes of Jacob and Israel
to their faces:
- ⁹ Listen, you leaders of the House of Jacob,
rulers of the House of Israel,
you who loathe justice
and pervert all that is right,
- ¹⁰ you who build Zion with bloodshed
and Jerusalem with violent injustice!
- ¹¹ Her leaders sell their verdicts for bribes,
her priests accept fees for their rulings,
her prophets practice divinations for money.
Yet they rely on God, saying,
"Isn't YHWH in our midst?
No disaster will overtake us!"
- ¹² Because of you,
Zion will become a plowed field,
Jerusalem a heap of rubble,
and the Temple mount overgrown with brush.

4¹³ But at the end of days,
the mountain of YHWH's Temple
will be established as the most important mountain
and raised above all other hills—
all nations will stream toward it.

out into green pasture. Verse 13, ending as it does with a triumphal march led by God, has been viewed by many commentators as a prophecy about the return of the people of Israel from exile; others, including a rabbinic midrash, have seen it as a messianic prophecy, with Elijah as the *poretz*. Yet the "breaking forth" of the sheep was not a singular event, but an everyday occurrence for a flock that, as in verse 12, has already been gathered together into a sheepfold. In light of this, the "triumphal march" becomes Micah's vision of the ideal society: the people, safe and secure from outside threats, are led forth into green pastures each morning by their shepherd, a just and caring ruler, with God—like the Angel of YHWH in the days of old—leading them all.

- ² Many people will come and say:
 “Come, let us climb YHWH’s mountain
 to the Temple of the God of Jacob,
 that we may be instructed in God’s ways
 and walk in God’s paths.”
 Instruction* will be given from Zion
 and the word of YHWH from Jerusalem.
- ³ YHWH will judge between many peoples
 and arbitrate between mighty and distant nations;
 They will beat their swords into plowshares,
 and their spears into pruning hooks;†
 one nation will not raise the sword against another,
 and never again will they train for war.‡
- ⁴ People will sit under their own vines and fig trees
 with no one to make them afraid.
 The mouth of YHWH Omnipotent has spoken.
- ⁵ Though all the nations walk in the names
 of their own gods,
 we will walk in the name
 of YHWH our God forever and ever.§
- ⁶ “On that Day,” says YHWH,
 “I will gather in the lame of the flock,
 and retrieve the sheep who had strayed¶—
 the people whom I afflicted.
- ⁷ Out of the lame I will make a remnant,
 and from the outcasts, a mighty nation.
 YHWH will reign over them from Mount Zion
 from now on and forever.
- ⁸ And you, watchtower of the flock,
 citadel of the people of Zion,
 your former sovereignty will be restored,
 the dominion of beloved Jerusalem.”
- ⁹ Why are you now crying out in distress?
 Have you no ruler? No counselor?
 Is that why your pain seizes you
 like a woman in labor?
- ¹⁰ Writhe and cry out, Zion, like a woman in labor,
 for now you must leave the city
 and live in open country.
 You will go to Babylon,
 and there you will be rescued;
 there YHWH will ransom you
 out of the power of your enemies.
- ¹¹ Now many nations are mustered against you!
 “Let Jerusalem be desecrated!” they say,
 “Let us feast our eyes on the ruins of Zion!”
- ¹² But they don’t know YHWH’s thoughts,
 and they fail to understand God’s purpose.
 For God will gather them together
 like stalks of grain on the threshing floor:
- ¹³ “Up, Zion my daughter, and thresh them!
 For I will give you horns of iron and hooves of
 bronze,

and you will trample many nations!”^{***}
 You will dedicate to YHWH
 the plunder you take from them,
 and devote their treasures
 to the Sovereign of the whole earth.

- ¹⁴ But for now, withdraw behind your walls,
 people of the Walled City;
 they’ve laid a siege against us,
 and Israel’s ruler is struck on the cheek with a
 scepter.
- 5**^{††} “As for you, Bethlehem in Ephrathah,” says YHWH,
 “small as you are among Judah’s clans,
 from you will come a ruler for me over Israel,
 one whose goings out^{‡‡} are from times long past,
 from ancient days.”
- ² But God will give them over to their enemies^{§§}
 until the time when she who is in labor^{¶¶} has given
 birth;
 then the remnant of the ruler’s sisters and brothers
 will return to the Children of Israel.
- ³ The ruler will rise up to shepherd them in the
 strength of YHWH,
 by the power of the Name of YHWH their God.
 They will live in security, for now the ruler’s
 greatness
 will reach to the ends of the earth.
- ⁴ They’ll say, “This at last is the one
 who will be our peace!
 When Assyria invades our land
 and tramples our fortresses,
 we will raise up against the invaders
 seven—no, eight!—shepherds,
 leaders of the people.
- ⁵ They will shepherd Assyria with the sword,
 the land of Nimrod with drawn sword.
 Our ruler will deliver us from the Assyrians,
 when they invade our land,
 and encroach on our frontiers!”
- ⁶ Then the remnant of Jacob,
 surrounded by many peoples,
 will be like the dew that YHWH sends,
 like showers on the grass

* Literally, Torah, the Law or Teaching, the complete revelation of God’s mind and heart.

† A plowshare is the sharp blade of a plow that cuts the earth and creates a furrow; a pruning hook is a device that looks like a pole with a curved knife on it, used by gardeners to reach and prune the tallest trees and vines.

‡ Micah 4:1-3 is a nearly verbatim quotation of Isaiah 2:2-4, which suggests perhaps that Micah was a student of Isaiah of Jerusalem.

§ To “walk in the name of” someone is to accept their authority over one’s life.

¶ Or possibly, “who had been driven away.” God is taking the broken, the outcasts, the dwellers on the fringes of society, and making them into the nucleus of a new people.

** Threshing floors were used to separate grain from its chaff. The cut stalks of grain were spread on the threshing floor, and oxen (to which Jerusalem is being likened here) were used either to trample the stalks, or to pull a threshing sledge, a heavy board with sharp stone or metal runners on the bottom, like a sled, that would break the heads of grain from their stalks. The broken stalks were then tossed in the air with a winnowing fork; the wind would blow the chaff away, and the grain fell into a pile. Most threshing floors were communal, located on hilltops or in open fields, and often used as landmarks or meeting places.

†† The Hebrew manuscripts begin chapter 5 here, but in most English translations, it begins with the previous verse, so there is a one-verse discrepancy through the end of the chapter.

‡‡ “Goings out” could refer to either the origins (perhaps lineage) or the activities (perhaps type of government) of the ruler. When the phrases “from times long past” and “from ancient days” occur elsewhere in the scriptures, they refer sometimes to ancient eras of the world, and sometimes to the formative period in Israel’s history; “from ancient days” could also be translated “from eternity.” The reference to Bethlehem signifies a ruler of Davidic lineage.

§§ Or possibly, “leave them helpless” or “abandon them.” This likely refers to the Assyrian invasion that was close at hand.

¶¶ Many understand this to be suffering Jerusalem, though knowing the close relationship between Micah and Isaiah of Jerusalem, it could refer to the young woman of Isaiah 7:14 who gives birth to Immanuel (“God Is With Us”). The Children of Israel are the northern tribes, and the “remnant of the ruler’s sisters and brothers” are the southern tribes, suggesting a future reunification.

- that do not depend on human effort
or wait with longing
for any mortal to provide for them.*
- 7 The remnant of Jacob among the nations,
surrounded by many people,
will be like a lion among the animals of the forest,
like a young lion among flocks of sheep,
trampling them and eating ravenously,
with no one daring to rescue the prey.
- 8 “Your hand will prevail over your adversaries,
and all your enemies will be cut down.
9 In that day,” says YHWH,
“I will cut off your horses from among you
and destroy your chariots;
10 I will destroy the walled cities of your land
and demolish all your strongholds;†
11 I will cut off magical practices from your hand,
and you will have no more fortune-tellers;
12 I will destroy your idols
and remove your sacred pillars from your midst,
and you will bow down no longer
to the work of your hands;
13 I will uproot your sacred Asherah poles
from among you,
and destroy your towns.
15 And in anger and wrath I will execute vengeance
on the nations that do not listen.”

6:1—7:20

- H**ear now what YHWH says:
“Come, plead your case before the mountains,
and let the hills hear your voice!
- 2 Listen to YHWH’s indictment, you mountains
and you enduring foundations of the earth;
for YHWH has a dispute with the people,
and is putting Israel on trial.
- 3 O my people, what have I done to you?
How have I wearied you?
Give me an answer!
- 4 For I brought you up from the land of Egypt,
and redeemed you from the house of slavery;
and I sent Moses to lead you,
and Aaron, and Miriam!
- 5 My people, call to mind the plans
devised by the ruler Balak of Moab,
and how Balaam ben-Beor answered him!
Remember the journey from Shittim to Gilgal,
and recall how YHWH brought you justice!”
- 6 “What shall I bring when I come before YHWH,
and bow down before God on high?” you ask.
“Am I to come before God with burnt offerings?
With year-old calves?
- 7 Will YHWH be placated by thousands of rams
or ten thousand rivers of oil?
Should I offer my firstborn for my wrongdoings—
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

* Dew and rain come from God and don’t depend on human agency to bring them to earth; by the same token, the remnant will have God’s power and won’t need to depend on other nations for their help.

† In other words, war will be nonexistent, so they will need neither horses and chariots for offensive battle, nor walled cities and strongholds for defense.

- 8 Listen here, mortal:
God has already made abundantly clear
what “good” is, and what YHWH needs from you:
simply do justice,
love kindness,
and humbly walk with your God.
- 9 Your voice, YHWH, cries out to the city—
and it is sound advice to tremble before your Name!
“Hear me, O tribe, and those assembled in the city!
- 10 Will I forget the dishonest gain
hoarded away in your dishonest house,
or the accursed short bushel
with which you cheat your neighbor?
- 11 Can I acquit those with dishonest scales
and bags of fraudulent weights?
- 12 Your wealthy are full of violence,
your citizens are liars with forked tongues!
- 13 But now I inflict severe punishment on you,
bringing you ruin for your sins:
14 you will eat, but not be satisfied—
your stomach will always be empty;
you will become pregnant, but not deliver;
and if you bear a child, I will give it to the sword.
- 15 You will sow, but not reap;
you will press the olives, but not use the oil;
you will tread the grapes, but not drink the wine.
- 16 You have kept the precepts of Omri
and all the practices of Ahab;
you have adopted all their practices.‡
So I will lay you utterly waste;
your citizens will be objects of derision,
and other nations will mock you.”

- 7**^a Woe is me!
I’ve become a searcher for leftover fruit,
a gleaner after the grape harvest:
I find not even a single cluster to eat,
not even an early fig that I so long for.
- 2 The faithful have vanished from the land;
not one honest person is left.
All who remain lie wait for blood;
and they hunt one another with nets.
- 3 Their hands are skilled in doing evil;
the official and the judge demand bribes,
and the powerful dictate whatever they wish—
and everyone scurries to make it happen.
- 4 The best of them are like briars,
the most upright like thorn hedges.
But their day of reckoning has arrived—
finally they will be confounded!
- 5 Don’t trust your friends,
don’t rely on your loved ones;
be careful of what you say
to the one who lies in your embrace—
- 6 for son treats father with contempt,
daughter defies mother,
daughters-in-law battle mothers-in-law:
your enemies are your own household.
- 7 But as for me, I will look to YHWH
and wait for the God who will save me;
my God will hear me.
- 8 Don’t gloat over me, my foe:
though I have fallen, I will rise;
though I live in darkness, YHWH is my light.

‡ Ahab was famous for corruption and oppression.

9 Because I have sinned against YHWH
I must bear the divine anger,
until God champions my cause
and rights my wrongs.
Then God will bring me out into the light
and I will rejoice to see God's justice.

10 When my enemies see this,
they will be covered with shame;
they will say to me,
"Where is YHWH, your God?"
I will gloat over them,
and they will be trampled underfoot
like mud in the street.

11 "The day is coming for you to rebuild your walls,"
says YHWH.
"Your frontiers will be extended that day,
12 a day when your people will return to you
from Assyria to Egypt, from Egypt to the Euphrates,
from sea to sea and from mountain to mountain.

13 But the earth will be desolate
because of its inhabitants,
because of what they did."

14 Shepherd your people with your staff, O God,
the flock that belongs to you!
Now they dwell alone in a forest

surrounded by meadows;
let them pasture in fertile Bashan and Gilead
as in the days of old!

15 As in the days when you brought us up from Egypt,
show us marvelous things!

16 The nations will watch and be ashamed,
despite all their power!
They will put their hands to their mouths in awe,
they'll cover their ears and cover!

17 Let them lick the dust like serpents,
like things that crawl on the ground.
They will come trembling from their strongholds
to YHWH our God, full of fear and dread.

18 What god can compare to you?
You take away guilt,
you forgive the sins of the remnant of your people.
You don't let your anger rage forever,
for you delight in mercy and steadfast love.

19 In your love, take us back!
Conquer our iniquities,
throw all our sins to the bottom of the sea.

20 Grant Jacob your faithfulness
and Abraham your mercy,
as you swore to our ancestors
in days long ago.

nahum

1:1—3:19

AN ORACLE ABOUT NINEVEH.* THE BOOK OF
the vision of Nahum and Elkosh.

² YHWH is a jealous and vengeful God!
YHWH the avenger is full of wrath;
YHWH takes vengeance on foes
and stores up fury for God's enemies.

3 YHWH is slow to anger—but immense in power!
Most surely YHWH will not leave the guilty
unpunished!
God's way is in whirlwind and storm,
and the clouds are the dust of God's feet.

4 God rebukes the sea and makes it evaporate,
and dries up all the rivers.
Bashan and Carmel wither,
and the bloom of Lebanon fades.

5 The mountains quake before God, and the hills melt;
the earth heaves before God,
the world and all who live in it.

6 Who can stand before God's indignation?
Who can stand the heat of God's anger?
God's wrath is poured out like fire,
and it breaks the rocks into pieces.

7 YHWH is good,
a stronghold in a day of troubles,
protecting those who take refuge in God,
even in rushing flood.
YHWH will make a full end of all enemies,
and pursue them into the darkness.

8 Why do you plot against YHWH, Nineveh?
God will make an end of you—
no enemy rises against God a second time!

9 You are tangled like thorns,
drunk like drunkards;

and you will be consumed
like dry straw.

11 From you, Nineveh, one has gone out
who plots evil against YHWH,
of one mind with Belial.†

12 These are the words of YHWH to Judah:
"Though your enemies were strong and numerous,
they will be cut down and disappear.
And though I have afflicted you,
I will afflict you no longer.

13 Now I will break the yoke from your necks
and snap the ropes that bind you."

14 Nineveh, this is what YHWH has ordained for you:
children will no longer be born to you!
From the temple of your gods
I will remove your idols and images.
I will prepare your grave,
for you are utterly worthless.

2‡ How welcome upon the mountains
are the feet of one who brings good news,
who announces peace!§
Celebrate your pilgrim feasts, Judah,
and fulfill your vows!
Never again will the evildoers overrun you;
they will be totally destroyed.

2 The Hammer is coming against you, Nineveh!
Take to the ramparts;
keep a watch on the road;

† Belial became a proper name—an epithet of Satan, or at least a principal demon—rather late; most texts translate the Hebrew *beliyyaal* as "worthlessness," though it may derive from the name of the Babylonian goddess Belili.

‡ This is the last verse of chapter 1 in many versions; we follow the numbering of the Hebrew text, so there is a one-verse discrepancy through the end of chapter 2.

§ A direct quotation from Isaiah 52:7. "Second Isaiah," the author of that passage, was a contemporary of Nahum.

* Nineveh was the capital of the tyrannical and oppressive Assyrian empire. This prophecy was given sometime between 650 and 612 B.C.E., when Nineveh was destroyed.

brace yourselves;
 summon all your strength!

- 3 YHWH will restore the pride of Jacob and Israel alike,
 for pillagers spoiled them
 and ravaged their vines.
- 4 The shields of their warriors are bright red,
 and all their warriors are dressed in scarlet;
 their steel chariots flash
 as they are thrown into battle,
 and the cavalry chafe for action.
- 5 The chariots storm through the streets
 and rush to and fro through the city
 like torches,
 like the zigzag of lightning.
- 6 The ruler calls out the officers,
 stumbling to defend their place at the wall,
 setting up their movable shield tower.*
- 7 The floodgates of the river are opened;
 the palace is deluged and its foundations melt.
- 8 Its standing columns collapse and wash away,
 while its attendants moan like doves,
 beating their breasts.
- 9 Nineveh is like a pool of water ebbing away.
 A cry goes up, "Stop! Stop!"
 but no one turns back.
- 10 Plunder the silver! Plunder the gold!
 The treasures are endless, valuables by the ton.
- 11 The palace is pillaged and emptied and ruined;
 hearts melt, knees buckle,
 bodies tremble, and every face is pale!
- 12 See what has become of that den of lions,
 that cave where the lion cubs lived,
 where lion, lioness, and cubs prowled,
 with no one to frighten them!†
- 13 The lion tore its prey for the cubs,
 and for the lioness it broke its victim's neck;
 it filled its lair with prey, its dens with torn flesh.
- 14 "But now, as you see, I am against you,"
 says YHWH Omnipotent;
 "I will set fire to your chariots,
 and the sword will devour your young lions.
- 15 You will no longer prey upon the land,
 and the voices of your envoys
 will no longer be heard."

3 Woe to bloodstained Nineveh,
 steeped in deceit, plunder, and violence!

- 2 Crack of whip, rumble of wheels,
 galloping horses and bounding chariots!
- 3 Charging cavalry, flashing swords, glittering spears!
 Numberless wounded, piles of corpses,
 staggering losses—they stumble over the dead—
- 4 all because Nineveh sold itself,
 beautiful and faithless, maven of deadly charms,

* This is a wheeled protective shield or mantelet to cover the soldiers from arrows and spears from above, often giving them time to advance their siege on the city by building a rampart or breaking through the city walls. The Neo-Assyrians used two kinds of these shields: small, hut-like shelters that could be carried by a few soldiers, and larger, tower-like structures with wheels.

† The Assyrians often depicted themselves as lions, particularly in royal inscriptions.

enticing the nations with its beauty
 then teaching them all to worship its false gods,
 bewitching people everywhere.

- 5 "No wonder I stand against you,"
 says YHWH Omnipotent.
 "I will tear off your clothing
 and expose your nakedness,
 I will show nations your true nature
 and empires your shame.
- 6 I will pelt you with filth,
 hold you in contempt, and make you a public show.
- 7 All those who see you will recoil and say,
 'Nineveh is a ruin!'
 But who will mourn for you?
 Where can I find someone to comfort you?"
- 8 Are you more secure than Thebes,
 sitting on the Nile, surrounded by water,
 with the river as its rampart, water as its wall?
- 9 It counted on Ethiopia and Egypt,
 powerful without limits;
 Put and Libya were its allies.
- 10 But even Thebes was taken captive
 and went into exile,
 and its infants were dashed to death in the streets;
 lots were cast for its nobles
 and its leaders were thrown into chains.
- 11 Now you, Nineveh, will drink the cup of wrath
 until you are overcome;
 you too will flee for refuge from the enemy.
- 12 All your fortifications are like the first ripe figs—
 shake the tree,
 and they fall into the mouth of the eater.
- 13 Your warriors are weaklings,
 and there is no one to defend your walls!
 The gates of your land stand open to your enemies—
 fire has burned down your barred gates!
- 14 Draw water for the siege
 and strengthen your forts—
 knead the mortar, trample the clay,
 and make mudbricks to rebuild your walls!
- 15 But even then the fire will consume you,
 and the sword will cut you down;
 it will devour you like locusts.
 Locusts! —You have multiplied like locusts,
 increased your numbers like grasshoppers—
 you have more merchants than the stars of heaven!
- 16 Locusts! —The locust sheds its skin and flies away,
 and your sentries are just like them—gone!
 Your marshals are like locusts
 that settle on stone fences on a cold day—
 but when the sun rises, they fly away,
 and no one knows where they went!
- 18 Your shepherds are asleep, O ruler of Assyria,
 your leaders slumber;
 your people are scattered all over the mountains,
 with no one to gather them.
- 19 Your injury is incurable;
 your wound is fatal.
 All who hear the news
 clap their hands in joy.
 For who has not felt
 your relentless cruelty?

habakkuk

1:1—2:20

THE ORACLE THAT HABAKKUK^{*} THE PROPHET received in a vision.

² “How long, YHWH, am I to cry for help while you do not listen?

How long will I cry ‘Oppression!’ in your ear and you do not save?

³ Why do you make me look upon injustice? Why do you countenance tyranny?

Outrage and violence—this is all I see! All is contention, and discord flourishes.

⁴ The law loses its hold, and justice never shows itself.

The corrupt triumph over those who are righteous, and justice is perverted once again.”

⁵ “Cast your eyes over the nations, take a look, and be amazed, astonished.

For I am doing something in your days that you would not believe even if a messenger came and told you.[†]

⁶ For now I am stirring up the Chaldeans, that fierce and fiery people who march miles across the country to seize the houses of others—

⁷ a people feared and dreaded: their ‘might makes right’; they make their own rules.

⁸ Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves in the dark; their cavalry gallop on, their cavalry fly from afar, like eagles swooping down to catch their food.

⁹ All of them come for plunder, all of them, their faces scorching us like an east wind; they scoop up prisoners like sand.

¹⁰ They are a people that scoff at rulers and mock at leaders.

They laugh at fortresses, and raise siegeworks to capture them.

¹¹ Then the wind changes and they are gone; they ascribe their strength to their gods.”[‡]

¹² “YHWH, you are eternal!

My God, my Holy One, you do not die![§] YHWH, you appointed them as instruments of justice;

my Rock, you commissioned them to punish us.

¹³ Your eyes are too pure to countenance evil, you cannot look on at tyranny. Why then do you look with favor on the treacherous?[¶]

Why do you keep silent while the wicked swallow those who are more righteous?

¹⁴ They treat humankind like fish in the sea, like creeping things without a ruler over them.

¹⁵ They catch them on their hooks, gather them in their nets, or drag them in their trawls—so they make merry and rejoice,

¹⁶ offering sacrifices to their nets, and burning offerings to their trawls for providing them with luxury and lavish food.

¹⁷ Their nets are forever open, and they will continue to slaughter the nations unceasingly.

2¹ I will stand on my watchtower, and take up my post on my battlements, watching to see what God will say to me, what answers God will make to my complaints.”

² Then YHWH replied, “Write down this vision, inscribe it legibly on tablets

so that a herald can easily read it,

³ since this vision will stand as a witness to the appointed time of judgment; it gives faithful testimony about a time that will come.

If it is slow in coming, wait for it—for come it will, without fail:

⁴ “Look—those whose hearts are corrupt will faint with exhaustion, while those who steadfastly uphold justice will live.”

⁵ Moreover, greed^{††} is treacherous, the arrogant do not endure.

They open their throats wide as the grave; like death, they never have enough.

They gather all the nations for themselves, and collect all peoples as their own.

⁶ Surely with taunts and insults the people will turn on them, and say:

“Woe to you robbers!

At last justice has caught up with you!

Now you will be justly punished for your oppression and extortion.

^{*} The prophet Habakkuk was active in Judah during the first part of “the Babylonian crisis,” that is, the rise of Chaldea (or neo-Babylonia), shortly before the battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C.E. This first section takes the form of a dialogue between the prophet and God.

[†] We would say, “You wouldn’t believe it even if you saw it on the news.”

[‡] Or possibly, “Their strength is their only god.”

[§] The Hebrew says, merely, “No die,” so it could also be translated, “We will not die” or “You will not let us die.”

[¶] “The treacherous” refers to the Chaldeans, and specifically to Nebuchadnezzar, the greatest and most powerful of all the Babylonian rulers.

^{**} The Hebrew is undeniably murky in this verse, made all the more problematic because of its fame. St. Paul quoted the second half of this verse several times, and some feel it formed the basis for much of his theology of justification by faith. Much controversy surrounds the Hebrew word that ends the first part of the verse. Many scholars derive it from a root word meaning “to swell,” yielding translations like “their soul is puffed up, and not upright within them” or “as for the proud, their spirit is not right within them.” However, we feel this is a scribal error, and believe it comes from a word meaning “will faint, be exhausted” (or, as the New Jerusalem Bible puts it, “will succumb”). This also restores the parallelism that the second half of the verse demands. In addition, the word usually translated “by faith” (“those who are righteous by faith will live,” in many versions) actually means “in faithfulness, steadfastness, or firmness”—not, in this case, belief or trust in God. And “the righteous” are, particularly in the Prophets, those whose lives are directed toward righting wrongs and working against social injustice.

^{††} Following the Dead Sea Scrolls; the traditional Hebrew text has “wine.”

7 Your creditors will suddenly rise up,
and the collection agents will hound you!
Then you will be their plunder, like the spoils of war.

8 Since you plundered many nations,
all that remains of the peoples will plunder you;
for you shed human blood and ravished the
countryside,
the city and all who dwell in it!

9 “ Woe to you who grossly exploits others
for the sake of your own house,
building a nest on a height
to be safe from the onset of disaster!

10 You contrived to bring shame on your house—
by making an end of many peoples,
you made your own end.

11 The stones will cry out from the wall,
and the rafters will answer them.

12 “ Woe to you who build a town on bloodshed,
and found a city on crime!

13 Isn't it the will of YHWH Omnipotent
that the people labor
only to see their work go up in flames,
and all the toiling of nations come to nothing?

14 The earth will be as full
of the knowledge of YHWH's glory
as the waters fill the sea![†]

15 “ Woe to you who make your neighbors drink,
upending your wineskin until all are drunk,
just so you can see them naked![†]

16 Now you will become drunk—
with ignominy, not with glory!
Your turn to drink and expose yourself![†]
The cup of YHWH's right hand
will come around to you,
and your shame will exceed your glory.

17 You will be overwhelmed by the same violence
you used when you deforested Lebanon,
terrified by the same ruthlessness
with which you destroyed the wild animals there,[§]
because of the bloodshed and violence you inflicted
on cities and their inhabitants over the earth.

18 “ What use is a carved idol,
since it was carved by human hands?
What use is a molten image, since it teaches lies?
Why trust in what you have made with your hands,
an idol that cannot speak?

19 Woe to you who say to a piece of wood, “Wake up!”
or to a dumb stone, “On your feet!”
Plated it may be with gold or silver,
but not a breath of life in it.

20 But YHWH is in the Holy Temple:
let all the earth be silent in God's presence.’ ”

* That is, recognition of God's sovereignty will someday be universal; until then, human labor and accomplishment will all be for nought.

† The Chaldeans were particularly violent in their attacks on neighboring countries, and the aftermath for those overrun was both disorienting and humiliating; here it is being likened to drunken exploitation and sexual humiliation.

‡ Literally, “show yourself to be uncircumcised,” which has a dual connotation: display to the world that you are not part of God's covenant, and be the object of mockery and derision.

§ Nebuchadnezzar despoiled the cedar forests to get wood for new building projects, and overhunted the wilderness so excessively that it was tantamount to extermination.

A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet;
a wild musical rant.

1 YHWH, I have heard of your renown;
your work, YHWH, inspires me with awe.
Revive it in our time, reveal it in our time;
in your wrath, remember to be merciful.

2 Eloah[¶] is coming from Teman,
and the Holy One from Mount Paran.^{**}
The congregation responds freely.^{††}
Divine glory covers the sky,
and God's praise fills the earth—

3 a brilliant light with rays flashing forth,
concealing the very power of God.

4 Pestilence marches before the Holy One,
and plague follows behind.

5 When God stands, the earth quakes;
when God looks down, the nations panic.
The everlasting mountains crumble
and the ancient hills collapse
along God's age-old pathways.

6 The tents of Ethiopia are wrecked;
the tent curtains of Midian tremble.

7 YHWH, are you angry with the rivers?
Is your wrath against the floods?
Did you rage against the sea[‡]
when you mounted your steeds
and rode your chariots to victory?

8 You uncover your bow,
you ply its string with arrows.
The congregation responds freely.
You split the earth with streams.

9 The mountains shiver when they see you;
great floods sweep on their way,
the Deep roars aloud,
its waves reaching to the sky.

10 Sun and moon stay in their houses,
avoiding the flash of your arrows,
the gleam of your glittering spear.^{§§}

11 Raging, you stride the earth;
in anger you trample the nations.

12 You come forth to save your people,
to deliver your anointed;
you have razed the evildoer's house,
bared its foundations to the rock.

¶ “God” is the usual translation of *'elohim*, which is a plural; *'eloah* is the singular form of the word, and is usually reserved for other nations' gods, or is used in poetry as a deliberate archaism.

** Teman and Paran are locations in the region of Edom, southeast of Israel but north of the Sinai peninsula. Habakkuk is seeing God coming to help Judah from the direction of Mount Sinai, following the path that the Israelites took as they wandered in the wilderness.

†† This is our rendering of the rather cryptic word *selah*, a word found frequently in the book of Psalms that literally means to “lift up.” Some scholars believe that this “lifting up” indicated a pause in the music, or perhaps a musical interlude when singers were silent; others believe it denoted a crescendo or even a diminuendo. We believe that *selah*, which almost always appears at emotional high points in the psalms, denoted a pause in the singing during which the congregation was invited to freely add their own praises, blessings, or heartfelt interjections, as is done today in the worship services of a number of traditions—hence our rendering of the phrase as a direction to the congregation, to “lift up” their voices in reply to the poet's words.

‡ Hebrew Neharim and Yam, personifications of the watery Deep, were names of ancient sea monsters whom YHWH battled at the beginning of time. Here, however, they stand beside many other features of the land that tremble as God arises to set things right.

§§ “Glittering spear” and “arrows” are euphemisms for lightning.

Selah

- ¹⁴ With your shafts
you pierce the heads of their leaders.
But like a whirlwind they try to sweep us away,
shouting joyfully
as if they were devouring the poor in secret.*
- ¹⁵ So you tread the sea with your horses
as the mighty waters foam.
- ¹⁶ I hear that roar, and my body quakes;
my lips quiver at the sound;
weakness overcomes my limbs,
and my feet totter in their tracks;
I long for the day of disaster

* That is, without any opposition.

- to dawn over our attackers.
- ¹⁷ The fig tree has no buds,
the vines bear no harvest,
the olive oil yield fail,
the fields produce no yield,
the sheep vanish from the fold,
and there are no cattle in the stalls.
- ¹⁸ But I will rejoice in YHWH,
I will exult in God my Savior.
- ¹⁹ My sovereign YHWH is my strength!
God makes my feet as agile as a deer's,
and teaches me to walk on my high places.

*This prayer is for the choir leader,
to be accompanied by stringed instruments.*

zephaniah

1:1—2:3

THE WORD OF YHWH THAT WAS ADDRESSED TO Zephaniah ben-Cushi ben-Gedaliah ben-Amariah ben-Hezekiah, during the reign of Josiah ben-Amon, ruler of Judah:

- ² I will sweep away everything
from the face of the earth,
says YHWH.
- ³ I will sweep away humans and animals,
birds of the air and fish of the sea!
I will make evildoers stagger,
and wipe humankind from the face of the earth,
says YHWH.
- ⁴ I will raise my hand against Judah
and against all those who dwell in Jerusalem;
I will wipe out every last vestige
of Ba'al worship in this place,
even the names of the idolatrous priests
who served alongside the priests of YHWH—
- ⁵ those who worship the host of heaven
in secret, from their rooftops,
those who worship YHWH
but swear oaths to Milcom,[†]
- ⁶ turn their backs on YHWH,
neither seeking YHWH nor turning to God.
- ⁷ Remain silent in the presence of Sovereign YHWH,
for the Day of YHWH is near.
YHWH has prepared a sacrifice
and set apart those invited.
- ⁸ On the day of YHWH's sacrifice,
I will punish the ministers, the royal officials,
and assimilationists who dress in foreign attire.
- ⁹ On that day I will punish those
who dance on the Temple terrace[‡]
and fill YHWH's house
with violence and fraud.
- ¹⁰ On that day, says YHWH, a cry will be heard
from the Fish Gate,
a scream from the Second Quarter,
a loud crash from the hills.
- ¹¹ Those dwelling in the Lower Town will wail,
for all the merchants are destroyed
and all weighers of silver are all wiped out.

[†] Milcom, also known as Molech, was the god of the Ammonites (present-day Jordan); his religious rites often involved child sacrifice.

[‡] This was a ritual associated with Dagon, a Philistine god.

- ¹² When that time comes I will search Jerusalem with
lamps,
and punish those who are complacent in their sin,[§]
who say in their hearts,
"YHWH has no power for good or for evil."
¹³ Their wealth will plundered,
their households looted.
They will build houses and never live in them,
plant vineyards but never drink their own wine.

☞ ☞ ☞

- ¹⁴ The great Day of YHWH is near
and coming fast!
How bitter the sound of the Day of YHWH,
the day of the warrior's war cry!
- ¹⁵ That day will be a day of wrath,
a day of distress and agony,
a day of ruin and of devastation,
a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of cloud and fog,
- ¹⁶ a day of trumpet roar and battle cry
against fortified towns and high corner towers.
- ¹⁷ I will bring such distress on the people
that they will grope like the blind
because of their sins against YHWH.
Their blood will be poured out like dust
and their flesh like dung;
- ¹⁸ neither their gold nor their silver
will save them.
On the day of YHWH's wrath,
in the fire of divine jealousy,
all the earth will be consumed.
For YHWH intends to destroy—
yes, destroy—
all who dwell in the land.

2¹ Humble yourselves, you shameless nations,
be humble,

- ² before you are driven away to disappear like fodder,
before the burning anger of YHWH comes upon you,
before the day of YHWH's anger comes upon you.
- ³ Seek YHWH,
all you living humbly on the land,
you who obey God's laws!

[§] Literally, "those who let their sediment thicken," like thick sediment that turns wine into syrup.

Seek integrity, seek humility,
that perhaps you may find security
on the day of the anger of YHWH.

2:4-15

Gaza will be deserted, Ashkelon a waste;
the citizens of Ashdod will be evicted before noon,
and Ekron will be uprooted.

⁵ Woe to you who live on the coast, people of Crete!
The word of YHWH is against you,
Canaan, land of the Philistines,
and I will destroy you completely,
and leave you without inhabitants!

⁶ The seacoast will become pastures
a home for shepherds and folds for sheep,
⁷ and the coast will belong to the remnant of Judah.
They will pasture their flocks by the sea
and lie down in the evening in the houses of
Ashkelon,
for YHWH their God will turn to them,
and restore their fortunes.

⁸ I heard Moab's insults, the taunts of the Ammonites,
how they slandered my people and usurped their
territory.

⁹ For this, as I live—
it is YHWH Omnipotent who speaks, the God of
Israel—
Moab will become like Sodom
and the children of Ammon like Gomorrah:
a land of nettles, a heap of salt, eternal desolation.
What is left of my people will plunder them;
the remnant of my nation will dispossess them.

¹⁰ This will be the retribution for their pride, for they in-
sulted the people of YHWH Omnipotent and invaded their
land. ¹¹ YHWH will bring terror on them and starve all the
gods of the earth. Then the nations in all the coasts and is-
lands will worship God, each in their own land.

¹² You Cushites also will be slain
by the sword of YHWH.

¹³ YHWH will point to the north and destroy Assyria,
making Nineveh a waste, arid as a desert.

¹⁴ Flocks will gather there
along with every kind of wild animal.
The horned owl and the vultures will roost there;
the owl will hoot at the windows;
the raven croaks on the threshold;
and its cedar work will rot.

¹⁵ This is the city
that took pride in its security, and said,
'I and I alone am supreme!'
And what is it now but a waste,
a refuge for wild animals,
at which every passerby jeers and mocks.

3:1-20

Trouble is coming to the rebellious, the defiled,
the tyrannical city!^a

² They heeded no warning voice,

took no rebuke to heart;
they did not put their trust in YHWH,
nor did they draw near to their God.

³ The leaders among them were roaring lions,
their rulers wolves of the plains
that left nothing over till morning.

⁴ Their prophets are braggarts and imposters;
their priests profane the holy sanctuary
and do violence to the Law.

⁵ But YHWH in their midst is just and honorable,
and never does wrong;
morning after morning God makes the law known,
each dawn unflinching;
yet these wrongdoers
know no shame!

⁶ I have cut off the nations,
their battlements are in ruins;
I laid waste their streets,
so that no one could use them;
their cities have been made desolate,
without people, without inhabitants.

⁷ I said, "But surely Jerusalem will fear me;
they will accept corrections;
surely the punishment I brought upon the nations
won't be lost on them."
But they were the more eager to make
all their deeds corrupt.

⁸ Therefore wait for me, says YHWH,
wait for the day I stand up to accuse you;
I have decided to assemble nations
and gather governments together
in order to pour my wrath on them,
all my burning anger;
the whole world will be consumed
by the fire of my jealousy.

⁹ Then I will restore pure lips to all peoples,
that they may invoke YHWH by name
and serve God with one accord.

¹⁰ My worshipers, dispersed beyond the river Cush,
will bring offerings to me.

¹¹ When that day comes,
your rebellious deeds
will no longer earn you shame,
for I will remove your proud boasters
from your midst,
and you will cease to strut on my holy mountain.

¹² In your midst I will leave
a humble and lowly people,
and they will find refuge in the name of YHWH.

¹³ Those left in Israel will do no wrong and tell no lies;
no words of deceit will pass their lips;
they will graze and lie down to rest
with no one to terrify them.

☪ ☪ ☪

¹⁴ Shout for joy, fair Zion;
shout, Israel, be glad!
Rejoice with all your heart, fair Jerusalem!

¹⁵ YHWH has averted your punishment
and swept away your foes.
Israel, YHWH is among you as ruler;
never again need you fear disaster.

¹⁶ On that day this must be the message to Jerusalem:
Fear not, Zion,
let not your hands hang limp in despair,

^a The city in question is Jerusalem.

¹⁷ for YHWH your God is in your midst,
 a warrior to keep you safe;
 who will rejoice over you and be glad of it;
 who will show you love once more,
 and exult with songs of joy
¹⁸ and soothe those who are grieving.
 At the appointed time
 I will take away your cries of woe
 and you will no longer endure reproach.
¹⁹ When that time comes,

I will deal with all who oppress you;
 I will rescue the lost and gather the dispersed.
 I will win for my people praise and renown
 throughout the whole world.
²⁰ When that time comes,
 I will gather you and bring you home.
 I will win for you renown and praise
 among all the peoples of the earth,
 when I restore your fortunes before your eyes.
 It is YHWH God who speaks.

haggai

1:1—2:23

IN THE SECOND YEAR OF DARIUS THE RULER, on the first day of the sixth month,* the word of YHWH came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel ben-Shealtiel, the high commissioner of Judah, and to Yehoshua ben-Yehozadak, the high priest.

² “YHWH Omnipotent declares: These people say that the time has not yet come to rebuild the Temple of YHWH.† † But YHWH, through the prophet Haggai, asks, † Is this a time for you to live in your paneled houses, when this House lies in ruins?

⁵ “Now, YHWH Omnipotent says, reflect carefully how things have gone for you. † You have sown much and harvested little; you eat but never have enough, drink but never have your fill, put on clothes but do not feel warm. You earn wages only to put them in a purse riddled with holes. † That is why YHWH Omnipotent says to reflect carefully how things have gone for you!

⁸ “So go to the hill country, cut timber, and rebuild the Temple. Then I will take pleasure in it, and be glorified there, says YHWH. † You’ve been expecting much, but getting little. When you brought in the harvest, I would destroy it with a breath. And why? asks YHWH Omnipotent. —Because while my House lies in ruins, you are busy with your own houses, each one of you! † That is why the sky withheld the rain and the earth its yield. † I called down a drought on land and hills, on wheat, on new wine, on oil and on all the produce of the ground, on people and cattle and all the labor of your hands! †”

¹² Now Zerubbabel ben-Shealtiel, and Joshua ben-Jehozadak, the high priest, and all the remnant of the people paid attention to the voice of YHWH their God and to the words of the prophet Haggai, because YHWH had sent him to them. And the people were filled with awe before YHWH.

¹³ Haggai, the messenger of YHWH, gave YHWH’s message to the people: “I am with you—it is YHWH who speaks.”

¹⁴ And YHWH roused the spirit of Joshua ben-Jehozadak,

the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and set to work on the Temple of YHWH Omnipotent, their God. † This was on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month.



2¹ In the second year of Darius the ruler, on the twenty-first day of the seventh month,† the word of YHWH came through the prophet Haggai and told him, † “Speak to Zerubbabel ben-Shealtiel, the high commissioner of Judah, and to Joshua ben-Yehozadak, the high priest, and to all the remnant of the people. Ask them, † Who is there left among you who saw this Temple in its former glory? And how does it look to you now? Doesn’t it seem like nothing in comparison? † But take courage now, Zerubbabel!—it is YHWH who speaks. Courage, High Priest Joshua ben-Jehozadak! Courage, all you people of the country!—it is YHWH who speaks. To work! I am with you—it is YHWH Omnipotent who speaks— † as I promised I would be when you came out of Egypt, and my Spirit remains among you. Don’t be afraid! † For YHWH Omnipotent says this: A little while now, and I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, and the sea and the dry land. † I will shake all nations, and the treasures of all the nations will flow in, † and I will fill this Temple with glory, says YHWH Omnipotent. † Mine is the silver, mine the gold! says YHWH Omnipotent. † The new glory of this Temple is going to surpass the old, says YHWH Omnipotent, and in this place I will give peace, † says YHWH Omnipotent. †”



¹⁰ On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, † in the second year of Darius, the word of YHWH came through Haggai the prophet. † YHWH Omnipotent told him to ask the priests for a ruling on the law:

¹² “If someone carries consecrated meat in a pocket of a

* The prophecy is given during a New Moon festival near the firstfruits harvest, when the size of the grain harvest to take place in November will be fairly evident.

† In 539 B.C.E., Cyrus, the first ruler of the Persian empire, allowed the Jews of the Diaspora to return to Judea, and provided financial support for them, encouraging them to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. But the work of rebuilding their lives after exile was difficult, and work on the Temple, though begun shortly after 538, soon ground to a halt. In 520, during the reign of Darius, the third ruler of Persia, the prophet Haggai gave five addresses urging the Jewish leaders to assume responsibility for the project and finish it. While the people were busy reestablishing their own standard of living, they put off rebuilding the Temple, and Haggai demanded that they reverse their priorities. In large measure because of Haggai’s urging, the Temple (called the Second Temple to distinguish it from the Temple of Solomon) was completed in 515.

† The people started working on the Temple twenty-four days after Haggai began prophesying (1:15), having waited until the firstfruits harvest was completed. As this chapter opens, nearly a month more has passed; this prophecy takes place on the last and greatest day of the Feast of Tabernacles, when all the people of Israel are commanded to come to Jerusalem and worship.

§ The King James version translates this phrase, “and the desire of all nations shall come,” which many commentators have seen as a messianic prophecy.

¶ “Give peace” could be translated “grant prosperity.”

** Three months have now passed since the people began rebuilding the Temple. Meanwhile, the grain harvest has taken place, and the fields have been plowed though not yet replanted for the following year. Haggai uses the occasion to announce that God will turn the curse into a blessing and that, from this time forward, the ground will yield a harvest sufficient for all the people’s needs.

garment, and the garment touches bread, stew, wine, oil, or food of any kind, does such food become holy?"

The priests answered, "No, it does not."

¹³ Haggai continued, "But what of a person who is ritually unclean after having contact with a corpse—if that person touches any of these things, does such food become unclean?"

The priests answered, "Yes, it does."

¹⁴ Haggai then said, "It is the same with this people, the same with this nation as I see it—it is YHWH who speaks—the same with everything they turn their hands to: everything they offer here is unclean."

¹⁵ "Think back. Before one stone was laid on another in the Temple of YHWH, ¹⁶ what state were you in? You would come to a twenty-measure heap and find only ten; you would come to a fifty-measure wine vat to draw off fifty measures and find only twenty. ¹⁷ It's because with blight and mildew and hail I struck you and everything you turned your hands to—but still you would not return to me! says YHWH. ¹⁸ Think back to how things were on the twenty-

fourth day of the sixth month,[†] when you began restoration of the Temple of YHWH.

¹⁹ "The seed for next year is still in the barn, isn't it? And the vine and the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive, as of now they bear no fruit. But from today onward, I will bless you."



²⁰ On the twenty-fourth day of the month the word of YHWH came a second time to Haggai: ²¹ "Speak to Zerubbabel, the high commissioner of Judah. Say this: 'I am going to shake the heavens and the earth. ²² I will overturn the judgment seats of entire countries and destroy the power of the rulers of the nations. I will overthrow their chariots and charioteers, and bring down their horses and riders; they will fall to the sword of their own comrades.

²³ "'When the day comes,' says YHWH Omnipotent, 'I will take you, Zerubbabel ben-Shealtiel, my servant—it is YHWH God who speaks—and make you my signet ring.‡ For I have chosen you,' says YHWH Omnipotent."

* Haggai reminds the people that once again living in their land and offering sacrifices will not make their offerings acceptable so long as they themselves are unclean through neglect of the Temple. As commentator Joyce G. Baldwin puts it, "The ruined skeleton of the Temple was like a dead body decaying in Jerusalem and making everything contaminated."

† The Hebrew says "ninth month," but this is a scribal error; Haggai is clearly referring to the sixth month, three months earlier, when the work of restoration began.

‡ The signet ring was a symbol of royal authority. It was used by a ruler or the ruler's representative to seal important documents, proof that the decree had come from the ruler and no one else.

1:1—8:23

IN THE SECOND YEAR OF DARIUS, IN THE EIGHTH month, this message from YHWH came to the prophet Zechariah ben-Berechiah ben-Iddo:§

² Tell the people, "YHWH was exceedingly angry with your ancestors." ³ Tell them, "These are the words of YHWH Omnipotent: If you return to me, I will return to you, says YHWH Omnipotent. ⁴ Don't be like your ancestors! When the prophets of old said, 'These are the words of YHWH Omnipotent: Turn back from your evil behavior and your evil actions,' they refused to listen or pay attention to me, says YHWH. ⁵ Where are your ancestors now? And the prophets, do they live forever? ⁶ Did not my words and my orders, with which I charged my servants the prophets, overtake your ancestors? YHWH was stirred to anger against your ancestors. So they repented, and said, 'YHWH Omnipotent dealt with us as our behavior and our actions deserved.' "



⁷ On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, the month of Shebat, in the second year of Darius, this message from YHWH came to the prophet Zechariah ben-Berechiah ben-Iddo:

⁸ I saw a vision during the night: I saw a rider on a bay horse that stood among the myrtle trees in the ravine; near-

§ Zechariah, a contemporary of Haggai, prophesied in Jerusalem around 520 B.C.E., during the Babylonian captivity; the first part of the book (ch. 1–8) was almost certainly written by Zechariah, and is full of apocalyptic imagery strongly reminiscent of the visions of Daniel and Ezekiel. However, the second part (ch. 9–14), known as Second Zechariah, was written by an unnamed prophet in the late fourth and early third centuries B.C.E. and contains two oracles about the restoration of Israel.

zechariah

by were three other horses, bay, sorrel,[¶] and white. ⁹ I asked the angel who had brought me the vision,^{**} "Please, what do these represent?"

The angel replied, "I will show you what they are."

¹⁰ Then the rider standing among the myrtles said, "They are those whom YHWH sent to patrol the earth."

¹¹ They then gave their report to the Angel of YHWH^{††} standing among the myrtles: "We have been patrolling the earth, and the whole world is at peace."

¹² Then the Angel of YHWH said, "Sovereign YHWH, how long will you withhold your compassion from Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, on which you have vented your wrath these seventy years?"

¹³ In reply, YHWH spoke kind and comforting words to the angel who had brought me the vision.

¹⁴ The angel who had brought me the vision said, "Proclaim this: 'I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion, says YHWH Omnipotent, ¹⁵ but I am deeply angry with the nations that are enjoying their ease, because although I was angry only slightly, they overdid the punishment.‡‡

¹⁶ "'Therefore these are the words of YHWH: I will return to Jerusalem with compassion; my Temple will be rebuilt there, says YHWH God Omnipotent, and the measuring line will be stretched over Jerusalem.' ¹⁷ Proclaim further: 'These are the words of YHWH Omnipotent: My cities will again brim

¶ A bay horse is reddish brown, usually with a black mane and tail; sorrel is a lighter brown with more orange or yellow in the color.

** Literally, "the messenger (i.e., angel) who was talking with me."

†† It is unclear whether the rider is now revealed to be the Angel of YHWH, or if the Angel is a separate individual. The Angel of YHWH, as opposed to other angelic messengers, is generally addressed and referred to as if it were the visible manifestation of God (but see verses 12 and 13, where YHWH and the Angel are clearly distinguished from one another).

‡‡ In other words, the other nations were instruments of God in punishing Judah, but their actions were not commensurate with the level of God's anger.

with prosperity. Once again YHWH will comfort Zion; once again God will choose Jerusalem.’”

2¹ I looked up and saw four iron horns.² I asked the angel who brought me the vision what they were, and the angel replied, “These are the horns that scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem.”³ YHWH then showed me four blacksmiths. ⁴ I asked what they were coming to do, and the angel said, “Those horns scattered Judah so completely that no one could hold up their head; but these blacksmiths came to rout them, overthrowing the horns that the nations raised against the land of Judah to scatter its people.”

⁵ I looked up and saw someone carrying a measuring line. ⁶ I asked where the person was going, and the angel replied, “To measure Jerusalem and discover its breadth and length.” ⁷ Then, as the angel who brought me the vision was going away, another angel approached the first angel and said, ⁸ “Run to that youngster† and say, ‘Jerusalem has so many people and so much livestock in it that its walls will not be able to contain them. ⁹ I myself will be a wall of fire all around it,’ says YHWH, ‘and a glorious presence within it.

¹⁰ “ ‘Away, away! Flee from the land of the north,’ says YHWH, ‘for I dispersed you to the four winds of heaven,’ says YHWH God. ¹¹ ‘Away! Escape, you people of Zion who live among the Babylonians.’”

¹² These are the words of Sovereign YHWH, who sent me on a glorious mission to the nations who plundered you: “Whoever touches you touches the apple of my eye![§] ¹³ I will wave my hand over them, and they will become plunder for those they enslaved.” You will then know that YHWH Omnipotent has sent me!

¹⁴ “Shout aloud and rejoice, people of Zion! I am coming, I will make my dwelling among you,” says YHWH God. ¹⁵ Many nations will give their allegiance to YHWH on that day and become God’s people, and God will dwell in your midst. Then you will know that YHWH Omnipotent sent me to you. ¹⁶ YHWH will claim Judah as God’s own portion in the holy land, and will once again choose Jerusalem. ¹⁷ Silence, all mortal flesh! Be silent in the presence of YHWH, who has been bestirred once again and come forth from the holy dwelling place!

3¹ Then God showed me Yehoshua the high priest[¶] standing before the Angel of YHWH, with the satan^{**} standing at the Angel’s right hand, harassing Yehoshua about various things.² And the Angel of YHWH said to the satan, “May YHWH

silence you, Satan! May YHWH, who chose Jerusalem, silence you. Isn’t Yehoshua a stick snatched from the fire?”

³ Standing before the Angel, Yehoshua’s clothes were covered in excrement. ⁴ The Angel said to the attendants, “Help him take off those filthy clothes!”

Addressing Yehoshua, the Angel said, “I have taken away your guilt, and I will clothe you in splendid priestly robes!”

⁵ Then, to the attendants, “Now, put a clean turban on his head!” They dressed Yehoshua as instructed to them, as the Angel of YHWH stood nearby.^{††}

⁶ The Angel of YHWH gave Yehoshua this solemn charge: ⁷ “These are the words of the YHWH Omnipotent: If you walk in my ways and keep my ordinances, you will govern my Temple and watch over my courts, and I will give you free access among those who are in attendance here.^{‡‡} ⁸ Listen, High Priest Yehoshua—you and your colleagues seated here before you are a sign that I am going to bring my servant, the Branch.

⁹ “Here is the stone which I set before Yehoshua, a cornerstone on which are seven eyes. Look, I will engrave an inscription on it, says YHWH Omnipotent, and in a single day I will wipe away the guilt of this land. ¹⁰ On that day, says YHWH God Omnipotent, you will invite each other to come and sit under your own vines and fig trees.”

4¹ Then I asked the angel of YHWH who talked with me, “What are these things?”^{§§}

² The angel replied, “Don’t you know what they are?”

“No,” I replied.

³ The angel said, “This is the word of YHWH concerning Zerubbabel:^{¶¶} Neither by force nor by strength, but by my Spirit! says YHWH God Omnipotent. ⁴ How does a mountain, the greatest mountain, compare with Zerubbabel? It is no higher than a plain. Zerubbabel will pull out the keystone to shouts of: ‘All blessings be upon it!’”

⁵ This word came to me from YHWH: ⁶ “Zerubbabel with his own hands laid the foundation of this Temple; with his own hands he will finish it. Then you will know that YHWH Omnipotent sent me to you. ⁷ No one should despise a day of small beginnings! These seven eyes will rejoice when they see Zerubbabel writing the inscription on the cornerstone—they are the eyes of YHWH, and they range over the whole earth.”

4¹ The angel who talked with me returned and roused me as someone is roused from sleep,² then said, “What are you seeing?” I answered, “I see a menorah made entirely of gold with the bowl for its oil sitting on top. It holds seven lamps, and there are seven pipes for the lamp on top of it.

³ There are also two olive trees standing by it, one on the right and one on the left.”

⁴ Then I asked the angel, “What are these two olive trees on the right and on the left of the lampstand?” ⁵ I asked further, “And what are the two sprays of olive beside the golden pipes which discharge the golden oil?”

⁶ The angel said, “Do you know what they mean?”

“No, your excellency,” I answered.

* The Hebrew text starts chapter 2 here, whereas many English translations begin chapter 2 with our verse 5.

† Horns are a symbol of strength; here they represent military powers. The four horns, like the four blacksmiths, represent other nations. The number four symbolizes the world; Judah’s enemies, like the blacksmiths who rescue it (e.g., Cyrus of Persia), come “from the four directions,” as it were.

‡ Zechariah, not the person measuring the city.

§ Our idiom, “the apple of one’s eye,” has been used since the ninth century to mean someone who is most precious to us; the “apple” denotes the pupil, because it resembled a small sphere and was, in that era, a precious commodity. The text actually reads “gate of the eye,” but in Hebrew, “gate” was also a metaphor for the pupil, which was considered one of the most treasured—though vulnerable—parts of the body. So our colloquialism expresses the Hebrew idiom remarkably well.

¶ This is Yehoshua ben-Jehozadak, mentioned in Haggai 1:1. Yehoshua (usually translated Joshua) means “YHWH is Deliverance” or “Savior”; in later Hebrew and Aramaic, Yehoshua was generally shortened to Yeshua, the Greek form of which is Jesus.

** “Satan” means “adversary” or “accuser,” and was, depicted throughout the Hebrew scriptures not as the progenitor of evil but as the prosecuting attorney in the heavenly courts. It was not so much an individual personage (“Satan”) as a role or job (“the satan”), with the word usually taking the definite article.

†† Yehoshua’s disgusting clothing, the satan’s harrassment of him, and the image of him as a “stick snatched from the fire” before it is completely burned all testify to his unfitness to be high priest—and, symbolically, of Judah’s sad state during the Babylonian captivity: sent into exile because of apostasy, yet snatched from the fire in the nick of time. His purification is emblematic of the purification of the land and the restoration of its people.

‡‡ This prophecy indicates the elevated role the high priest would play after the people returned from exile, especially since the monarchy would never be reinstated.

§§ Verses 1-3 of chapter 4 became displaced at some point over the centuries. They properly belong after verse 10.

¶¶ Zerubbabel was the governor of Judaea under whom the rebuilding of the Temple at Jerusalem took place.

¹⁴ “These are the two dignitaries consecrated with oil* who attend the Sovereign of all the earth.”

5¹ Again I raised my eyes, and this is what I saw: a flying scroll. ² The angel who was talking to me said, “What can you see?”

I replied, “I can see a flying scroll; it is thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide.”

³ The angel told me, “This is the ‘Curse’ which goes out over the whole land; for according to the writing on one side, every thief will be swept away, and according to the writing on the other side, every perjurer will be swept away. ⁴ I have sent it out, says YHWH God Omnipotent, and it will enter the house of the thief and the house of the one who swears false oaths by my Name; it will stay inside the house and demolish it, both timber and stone.”

⁵ The angel who talked with me came out and said, “Look at this thing that is approaching.”

⁶ I asked what it was, and the angel said, “The thing that is approaching is a large bushel basket.”¹⁴ The angel added, “It is a symbol of the people’s guilt throughout the land.”

⁷ Then its cover, which was made of lead, was lifted, and sitting inside the bushel was a woman. ⁸ The angel said, “This is Wickedness,” and thrust the woman down into the bushel and pressed the leaden weight down onto the opening.

⁹ I looked again and saw two women coming forth with the wind in their wings—for they had wings like those of a stork—and they lifted up the bushel between earth and sky. ¹⁰ I asked the angel who talked with me where they were taking the bushel, ¹¹ and it answered, “To build a temple for ‘Wickedness’ in the land of Shinar; once the temple is ready, the bushel will be set on its rightful pedestal there.”

6¹ I looked again and saw four chariots coming out between two mountains, which were mountains of copper. ² The first chariot had bay horses, the second black, ³ the third white, and the fourth dappled.

⁴ I asked the angel who talked with me, “What are these?”

⁵ It answered, “These are the four winds of heaven. After attending the Sovereign of the whole earth, they are now going forth. ⁶ The chariot with the black horses is going to the land of the north; the white horses are going to the land of the far west; the dappled are going to the south; ⁷ and the bay to the land of the east. They were eager to set off and range over the whole earth. “Go,” the angel said, “range over the whole earth,” and they did so.

⁸ Then the angel called me to look, and said, “Those going to the land of the north give rest to my spirit there.”

⁹ The word of YHWH came to me: ¹⁰ “Receive the gifts from

* Literally, “sons of fresh oil,” in keeping with the olive tree imagery. The two are Yehoshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the governor; traditionally, only the high priest and the ruler were anointed for service.

† Noted Hebrew scholar Thomas McDaniel believes, with excellent lexical support, that this phrase should be translated, “This thing is a mobile shrine,” and that the phrase “a woman” in verse 7 should be translated “the first lady,” that is, a manifestation of the Goddess. He sees this shrine as the Babylonian counterpart to the Ark of the Covenant, or to the sacred palanquins used to transport a deity in Shinto festivals. This shrine is being carried to Shinar, or Babylon, where a temple would be built for it—suggestive of the shrines located on top of Babylonian ziggurats. McDaniel also notes that the Hebrew word for “Wickedness,” with a different vowel pointing, becomes “Their Help”—so the female figure hidden in the shrine had her rightful place of worship in Shinar, though not in Judah. For her legitimate devotees, she was “Their (Shinar’s) Help,” but when the shrine became a cult center in Judah, it was “a symbol of the people’s guilt.”

the exiles Heldai, Tobiah, and Jedaiah who have returned from Babylon, and go that same day to the house of Josiah ben-Zephaniah. ¹¹ Take the silver and the gold and make a crown; place it on the high priest, Yehoshua ben-Jehozadak, ¹² and say, “These are the words of YHWH Omnipotent: Here is a person whose name is The Branch; he will branch out from where he is, and will rebuild the Temple of YHWH. ¹³ It is this person who will rebuild the Temple, and when finished will wear royal insignia, sit on the judgment seat, and rule. A priest will also sit on the judgment seat and there will be harmony between them.[†] ¹⁴ The crown will serve as a memorial for Heldai, Tobiah, Jedaiah, and Josiah ben-Zephaniah in the Temple of YHWH.

¹⁵ “Workers will come from far away and work on the rebuilding of the Temple of YHWH; so you will know that YHWH Omnipotent sent me to you. This will come about if you listen with diligence to YHWH your God!”

7¹ In the fourth year of the reign of the ruler Darius, the word of YHWH was addressed to Zechariah. On the fourth day of the ninth month, the month of Chislev, ² the town of Bethel sent Sharezer and Regem-Melech and their attendants to entreat the favor of YHWH. ³ They were to say to the priests of the Temple of YHWH Omnipotent and the prophets, “Am I to continue to lament and fast in the fifth month as I have these many years?”[§]

⁴ Then this word of YHWH Omnipotent came to me and said, ⁵ “Say to the people of the land and the priests: When you fasted and lamented in the fifth and seventh months these past seventy years, was it for my sake that you fasted so faithfully? ⁶ And when you ate and drank, was it not to please yourselves? ⁷ Didn’t YHWH proclaim the following message through the prophets of old, while Jerusalem was still populous and peaceful, as were the towns around it, and there were people settled in the Negev and the Lowlands?” ⁸ The word of YHWH to Zechariah continued, ⁹ “Didn’t I tell them, ‘Thus says YHWH Omnipotent: Administer true justice; show kindness and mercy to one another; ¹⁰ do not oppress the widowed or the orphaned, the resident alien or the poor, and do not plot evil against one other?’ ¹¹ But they refused to listen; they turned a stubborn shoulder and stopped their ears in order not to hear. ¹² They were adamant in their refusal to accept the Law and its teachings which YHWH Omnipotent sent by the spirit through the prophets of old. ¹³ Since they did not listen when I called, I would not listen when they called. ¹⁴ I scattered them out among all the nations unknown to them, leaving their land deserted behind them, so that no one came and went. So their pleasant land turned into a desert.”

8¹ The word of YHWH Omnipotent was addressed to me as follows:

² YHWH Omnipotent says this:
I burn with jealousy for Zion,

‡ This passage as provoked much debate. Many scholars feel that there is text missing, as the person being crowned should be Zerubbabel; we have already seen Zerubbabel and Yehoshua depicted as the two olive trees, both anointed for service, and Zerubbabel was identified in 4:8 as being the one to build the Temple. Other scholars view Yehoshua as a “priest-king”—one individual serving in two capacities—with the “harmony” being between the two offices; they see Yehoshua serving as the archetype of a future messiah.

§ This fast was undertaken on the anniversary of the destruction of Solomon’s Temple seventy years earlier. The seventh month mentioned in verse 5 refers to the assassination of Gedaliah, governor of Judah, soon after the Temple was destroyed. The people of Bethel—which means “House of God,” and which was the first home of the Ark of the Covenant before moving to the Temple in Jerusalem—want to know if they need to continue the ritual remembrance of the first Temple now that Zerubbabel is rebuilding it.

I am fiercely jealous for it.

³ YHWH says this:

I am returning to Zion
and I will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem,
which will be called the faithful city,
and the mountain of YHWH Omnipotent,
the Holy Mountain.

⁴ YHWH Omnipotent says this:

Old women and old men will again
sit in the squares of Jerusalem
each leaning on holding staffs
because of their advanced years.

⁵ And the squares will be filled
with girls and boys playing happily.

⁶ YHWH Omnipotent says this:

If this resembles a miracle to the remnant of this
people,
will it also seem a miracle to me? says YHWH.

⁷ YHWH Omnipotent says this:

Now I will save my people from the east countries
and the west countries.

⁸ And I will return them
to live in Jerusalem.

They will be my people and I will be their God
in faithfulness and integrity.

⁹ YHWH Omnipotent says this: May your hands be strong,
you who today hear these words spoken by the prophets,
who were present when the foundations for the house of
YHWH Omnipotent were laid, so that the Temple can be
rebuilt. ¹⁰ Before that time there was no hiring of people or
animals; because of enemies, no one could go about their
business safely. I had set every person against everyone
else. ¹¹ But now, with the remnant of this people, I am not as
I was in the past. It is YHWH Omnipotent who speaks. ¹² For
I mean to spread peace everywhere; the vine will produce
its fruit, the earth its increase, and the heavens its dew. I am
going to bestow all these blessings on the remnant of this
people. ¹³ Just as once you were a curse among the nations,
you House of Judah and later the House of Israel, so now
I mean to save you, and you will become proverbial as a
blessing. Courage! Do not lose heart!

¹⁴ YHWH Omnipotent says this: Just as I once resolved to
inflict evil on you when your ancestors provoked me, says
YHWH Omnipotent, and as I did not then relent, ¹⁵ so now
I have another purpose, and I intend in the present day to
confer benefits on Jerusalem and on the House of Judah.
Do not fear. ¹⁶ These are the things you must do. Speak the
truth to one another; administer sound and true justice in
your courts. ¹⁷ Do not plot evil against each other, and do
not love false oaths; for all this is what I hate. It is YHWH
who speaks.

¹⁸ The word of YHWH Omnipotent was addressed to me
as follows: ¹⁹ "YHWH Omnipotent says this. The fast of the
fourth month, the fast of the fifth, the fast of the seventh and
the fast of the tenth are to become gladness and happiness
and days of joyful feasting for the House of Judah. But love
the truth and justice."

²⁰ YHWH Omnipotent says this: There will be other peo-
ples yet, and citizens of great cities. And the inhabitants of
one city will go to the next and say, ²¹ "Come, let us go and
entreat the favor of YHWH, and seek YHWH Omnipotent. I
myself am going." ²² And many people and great nations
will come to seek YHWH Omnipotent in Jerusalem and to
entreat the favor of YHWH.

²³ YHWH Omnipotent says this: In those days, every Jew-
ish person will have ten Gentiles—people from nations of
every language—grabbing them by the sleeve and saying,

"We want to go with you, since we have learned that God
is with you."

9:1—14:21

An oracle. Because the eyes of humanity, and all the
tribes of Israel, are upon YHWH, the word of YHWH
is against the land of Hadrach; this burden comes to
rest on Damascus, ² and Hamath, which borders it, and Tyre
and Sidon, though they are very wise.

- ³ Tyre itself built a rampart,
and heaped up silver like dust,
and gold like the dirt of the streets.
- ⁴ But YHWH will take from it all it possesses,
and break its sea power
and the city itself will be destroyed by fire.
- ⁵ Seeing this, Ashkelon will be terrified,
and Gaza seized with trembling, as will Ekron,
at the ruins of its prospects;
the ruler will disappear from Gaza
and Ashkelon remains abandoned.
- ⁶ A mixed race will settle in Ashdod,
and I will cut down the pride of the Philistines.
- ⁷ I intend to take the blood out of the mouths
and their abominations from between their teeth.
They too will become a remnant of YHWH
and be like a family in Judah,
and Ekron will be like the Jebusite.
- ⁸ I will take my stand near my house
like a sentinel guarding against prowlers;
the tyrant will pass this way no more
for now I take notice of their suffering.
- ⁹ Rejoice in heart and soul, daughter of Zion!
Shout with gladness, daughter of Jerusalem!
Look! Your ruler comes to you:
victorious and triumphant,
humble, riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
- ¹⁰ The ruler will banish chariots from Ephraim
and horses from Jerusalem;
the bow will be banished.
The ruler will proclaim peace for the nations;
the empire stretching from sea to sea,
from the River to the ends of the earth.
- ¹¹ As for you, due to the blood covenant with me,
I am returning your prisoners
from their waterless pit.
- ¹² Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope!
Today I declare that I will give you back double!
- ¹³ For my bow is strung, Judah;
I laid the arrow to it, Ephraim;
I will stir up your children, Zion,
against your children, Greece,
and wield you like a warrior's sword.
- ¹⁴ YHWH will appear over them,
with arrows flashing forth like lightning;
YHWH will sound the trumpet,
and advance like the storm winds of the south.
- ¹⁵ YHWH Omnipotent will protect them;
God's sling stones will devour, and prevail,
and they will be roaring drunk as if with wine,
soaked in it like the horns of an altar.
- ¹⁶ On that day YHWH their God will save them,
God's own, like a flock.
For they are the precious stones in a crown,
which sparkle throughout the land.

¹⁷ What wealth is theirs, what beauty!
They will produce young men like new grain,
and young women like new wine.*

10 ¹ Ask for rain from YHWH in the season of spring rains,
from YHWH who creates the storm clouds,
who gives you showers of rain,
the vegetation in the field to everyone.

² For the idols speak delusions
and the diviners see lies;
the dreamers tell false dreams,
and get empty consolation.
Consequently the people wander like sheep;
they suffer for lack of a shepherd.

³ My anger burns hot against the shepherds,
and I will punish the leaders of the flock.
Yes, YHWH Omnipotent will take care of the flock,
the House of Judah,
and will transform it into war horses,
from Judah will issue the cornerstone,
from Judah the tent peg;
from Judah the battle bow,
from them every commander.

⁵ Together they will be like warriors in battle,
trampling the foe in the mud of the streets;
they will fight, for YHWH is with them,
and they will humiliate the cavalry.

⁶ I will strengthen the house of Judah,
I will save the house of Joseph.
I will bring them back
for I have compassion on them,
and they will be as though I had not rejected them;
for I am YHWH their God, and I will answer them.

⁷ Then the people of Ephraim
will become like warriors,
with hearts gladdened as if by new wine.
They will see it and rejoice;
their hearts will praise God.

⁸ I will signal for them and gather them in,
for I have redeemed them,
and they will be as numerous as before.

⁹ Though I scattered them among the nations,
they will continue to remember me,
and rear their children and return.

¹⁰ I will return them from the land of Egypt,
and return them from Assyria;
I will bring them to Gilead and to Lebanon,
until there is no more room for them.

¹¹ They will pass through the sea of distress,
and the waves of the sea will collapse
and the Nile will dry up.
The pride of Assyria will be laid low,
and the scepter of Egypt will depart.

¹² I will make them strong in YHWH
and they will walk proudly in my Name,
says YHWH.

11 ¹ Open your doors, Lebanon,
so that the fire can devour your cedars!

² Wail, cypress, for the cedar has fallen,
and the glorious trees are ruined!
Wail, oaks of Bashan,
for the thick forests have been felled!

³ The wailing of the shepherd is heard,
their glorious pastures are no more.
The roaring of the young lions rings out;
the thickets of the Jordan are laid waste.

⁴ This is how YHWH spoke to me: "Pasture the sheep bred for slaughter, ⁵ whose buyers kill them and go unpunished, whose sellers say of them, 'Thanks be to YHWH, for now I am rich.' Even their shepherds feel no pity for them. ⁶ For I will no longer have pity on the land's inhabitants, says YHWH. I am about to put everyone under the power of the shepherds and their ruler, and when the land is crushed I will not rescue them from their hands."

⁷ So I became a shepherd to the flock destined to be slaughtered, especially the most unfortunate sheep. I took two staffs: one I called Favor and the other Unity, and so I looked after the flock.

⁸ In a single month I got rid of three shepherds.[†] I had lost patience with the flock, and they came to abhor me.

⁹ Then I said to them, "I will not be your shepherd anymore. Any that are to die, let them die; any that are missing, let them stay missing; and the rest can devour each other."¹⁰ I took my staff called Favor and snapped it in two, annulling the covenant YHWH made with all the nations. ¹¹ So it was annulled that day, and the dealers who watched me knew that this was a word from YHWH.

¹² I said to them, "If it suits you, give me my wages; otherwise, keep them."

Then they weighed out my wages—thirty pieces of silver.

¹³ YHWH said to me, "Throw it into the treasury."

I took the thirty pieces of silver—the princely sum at which I was paid off by them!—and threw them into the house of YHWH, into the treasury. ¹⁴ Then I broke in two my staff called Unity, annulling the family ties between Judah and Israel.

¹⁵ YHWH said to me, "Equip yourself once more as a shepherd, but a worthless one. ¹⁶ For I am about to install a shepherd in the land who will neither care about any that are missing, nor search for those who have strayed off, nor heal the injured, nor nurse the sickly, but will eat the flesh of the fat beasts and throw away the broken bones.

¹⁷ "Trouble is coming to the worthless shepherds who desert their flocks!
May the sword strike their arms
and their right eyes!
May their right arm wither entirely,
and may their eyes be totally blinded!"

12 ¹ An oracle. The word of YHWH about Israel. It is YHWH who speaks, who spread out the heavens and founded the earth and formed the spirit of humankind within them:

I am about to make Jerusalem an intoxicating cup for all the nations pressing around it; and Judah will be caught up in the siege of Jerusalem.³ On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered to attack it, I will make Jerusalem a rock too heavy for any people to remove, and all who lift it will grievously hurt themselves. And all the nations of the world will come together against it.⁴ On that day, says YHWH, I will strike every horse with panic, and its rider with madness. But on the horse of Judah I will keep a watchful eye, when I strike every horse of the peoples with blind-

* This sentence could also be translated, "Grain (i.e., beer) will make the young men cheerful, and new wine the young women."

† The "month" may be euphemistic, and may refer to the last three rulers of Judah—Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah—who succeeded one another in rapid succession (though their combined reigns actually lasted about 22 years).

ness.⁵ Then the clans of Judah will say to themselves, “The inhabitants of Jerusalem have strength through YHWH Omnipotent, their God.”

⁶ On that day I will make the families of Judah like a burning brazier in woodland, like a burning torch among the sheaves. They will consume all the surrounding nations, right and left, while the people of Jerusalem remain safe in their city. ⁷ YHWH will set free all the families of Judah first, so that the glory of David’s line and of the citizens of Jerusalem may not surpass that of Judah.

⁸ On that day YHWH will shield the inhabitants of Jerusalem; on that day the weakest of them will be like David, and the line of David, like the angel of YHWH going before them.

⁹ On that day I will set about the destruction of every nation that attacks Jerusalem, ¹⁰ but I will pour a spirit of pity and compassion on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Then they will look on me, the one they pierced, they will mourn for the pierced one, as one mourns for an only child, and weeps bitterly for it, as one mourns over a firstborn. ¹¹ On that day the mourning of Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo. ¹² The land will mourn, each family by itself—the family of the house of David by itself, the women mourning separately from the men; the family of the house of Nathan by itself, the women mourning separately from the men; ¹³ the family of the house of Levi by itself, the women mourning separately from the men; the family of the house of Shimeites by itself, the women mourning separately from the men; ¹⁴ and all the families that are left, each by itself, the women mourning separately from the men.

13¹ On that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity.

² On that day, says YHWH Omnipotent, I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, so that they will be remembered no more, and also I will remove from the land the “prophets” and the spirit of uncleanness.³ And if any “prophets” appear again, their fathers and the mothers who bore them will say to them, “You will not live, for you speak lies in the name of YHWH.” And their fathers and the mothers who bore them will run them through with a sword when they prophesy. ⁴ On that day, every one of the “prophets” will be ashamed of their visions when they prophesy; they will no longer put on a prophet’s hairy garment[†] in order to deceive the people, ⁵ but each one of them will say, “I am not a prophet, I am a tiller of the soil; for the land has been my possession since my youth.” ⁶ And if anyone asks them, “What are these wounds on your chest?” they will answer, “The wounds I received in the house of my friends.”

⁷ Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the person who is my associate, says YHWH Omnipotent. Strike the shepherd, and let the sheep be scattered—I will turn my hand against the little ones.

⁸ In the whole land, says YHWH, two-thirds of them will be cut off and will die,

and one-third will be left alive.

⁹ And I will put this third into the fire, refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on my Name, and I will answer them. I will say, “These are my people”; and they will say, “YHWH is our God.”

14¹ Look, the Day of YHWH is coming—and spoils that were taken from you will be divided among you once again.

² First, I will gather all the nations to make war on Jerusalem; the city will fall, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the remainder of the population will not be moved from the city.

³ Then YHWH will go forth and fight against those nations as when fighting on the day of battle. ⁴ On that day, YHWH’s feet will rest on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem from the east. The Mount of Olives will be split in half from east to west, forming a huge gorge. Half of the Mount will recede northward, the other half will recede southward. ⁵ And the Valley of Hinnom will be blocked, for the new valley between them will reach as far as Azal. It will be blocked as it was by the earthquake in the time of Uzziah the ruler of Judah. And YHWH my God will come to you, attended by all the holy ones.[‡]

⁶ When that day comes there will be neither heat nor cold nor frost. ⁷ It will be continual day—only YHWH knows when it will be—and there will be no distinction between day and night. Even in the evening there will be light.

⁸ On that day, whether in summer or in winter, running water will issue from Jerusalem, half flowing to the eastern sea and half flowing to the western sea. ⁹ YHWH will become ruler over the whole world; on that day, all will worship one God, and all will call God by the same name—YHWH.[§] ¹⁰ The whole land will become like the Arabah from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem. But Jerusalem will stand high in its place, and be full of people from the Benjamin Gate to the point where the former gate stood, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Nananel to the ruler’s winepresses.

¹¹ Jerusalem will be inhabited, and never again will it be placed under the sacred ban and doomed to destruction; all who will live there will be secure.

¹² YHWH will strike with all the nations who waged war against Jerusalem with this plague: their flesh will rot while they still are on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths. ¹³ On that day, a great panic from YHWH will fall on them, so that each will seize the hand of a neighbor, and the hand of the one will be raised against the other. ¹⁴ Even Judah will fight at Jerusalem.

And the wealth of all the surrounding nations will be gathered up—gold, silver, and garments in great abundance.[¶]

¹⁵ And a plague like this plague will fall on the horses, the mules, the camels, the donkeys, and whatever animals may be in their camps.

¹⁶ Any survivors among the nations which fought against Jerusalem will go up annually to worship the Ruler, YHWH the Sovereign, and observe the Feast of Tabernacles. ¹⁷ Should any of the families of the earth not go up to Jerusalem to worship the Ruler, YHWH the Sovereign, no rain will fall on them. ¹⁸ If

* “The prophets” here are the false prophets; the “spirit of uncleanness” is ritual impurity and the worship of other gods.

† Elijah and Elisha both wore animal skins; after the nation divided into northern and southern realms, a professional prophetic guild emerged, and the prophets often donned cloaks of animal hair as a sign of their office, much as shamans might wear a ceremonial headdress in honor of their power animal.

‡ “Holy ones” here could mean righteous people or angels.

§ Literally, “on that day, it will be YHWH alone and YHWH’s name alone.”

¶ These are the spoils spoken of in 14:1.

the Egyptians do not go up and enter the city, then the same disaster will overtake it as that which YHWH will inflict on any nation that does not go up to keep the feast. ¹⁹ This will be the punishment that will befall Egypt and any nation that does not go up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.

²⁰ On that day there will be inscribed on the horses' bells, "Sacred to YHWH." And the cooking pots in YHWH's Temple will be as holy as the bowls in front of the altar; ²¹ and every

cooking pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be sacred to YHWH the Sovereign,* so that all who sacrifice may come and use them to boil the flesh of the sacrifice. And there will no longer be merchants in the Temple of YHWH the Sovereign on that day.

* This is the essence of the messianic era: a time when all of creation, even the most mundane household items are understood as being sacred and imbued with God's presence.

1:1—2:9

AN ORACLE.† THE WORD OF YHWH TO ISRAEL through Malachi.‡

¹ I have loved you, says YHWH.

But you ask, "How have you shown your love?"

Esau and Jacob were brothers, weren't they? replies YHWH.

Yet I loved Jacob, ³ but hated Esau.§

I have reduced Esau's hill country to a waste, and their ancestral land to desert pastures.

⁴ Whenever Edom says,

"We are beaten down,

but let us rebuild our ruined homes,"

YHWH Omnipotent¶ replies,

If they rebuild, I will tear them down!

They will be called "Country of Evildoers"

and "The People of YHWH's Anger."

⁵ Your own eyes will see it,

and you yourselves will say,

"YHWH's greatness reaches beyond the confines of Israel!"

⁶ Children honor their parents,

and laborers their overseer.

If I am a parent, where is the honor due to me?

If I am an overseer, where is the respect due to me?

says YHWH Omnipotent.

Yet you priests despise my Name!

"How have we despised your Name?" you ask.

⁷ By offering polluted food on my altar!

"How have we polluted it?" you ask.

By saying that YHWH's table isn't worthy of respect!

⁸ When you offer a blind animal,

you say there's nothing wrong with it,

and when you offer an animal that is lame or diseased,

you say there's nothing wrong with it!

If you brought such a gift to your governor,

would the governor welcome you,

or show you favor?

says YHWH Omnipotent.

⁹ And now you plead and implore God's favor—

"Be gracious to us!"

† *Massa*, a technical term in prophetic literature indicating a message from God, is from a verb meaning "to carry." It literally means "burdensome message," that is, one with ominous content.

‡ The name means "my messenger."

§ In covenant language, "love" and "hate" are synonymous with "choose" and "reject."

¶ "Omnipotent" here translates *tsava'ot*, which means "of hosts" or "of the armies," and can refer to earthly armies, angelic forces, or even stars in the sky. The word is often translated "Almighty," and is a picture of universal power and authority, indicating that all created beings and forces are under God's dominion.

malachi

This is what you have done—

do you think God will accept any of you?

says YHWH Omnipotent.

¹⁰ Oh, that someone among you would shut the

Temple doors,

so that you would stop lighting pointless fires on my altar!

I take no pleasure in you, says YHWH Omnipotent,

and I will accept no offering from your hands!

¹¹ For from the rising of the sun to its setting

my Name is honored among the nations,

says YHWH Omnipotent.

¹² But you profane it when you say

that YHWH's table is polluted,

and its food isn't worthy of respect!

¹³ "How tiresome it all is!" you sniff,

says YHWH Omnipotent.

You bring animals that are injured

or deformed or diseased,

and these you bring as your offering!

Shall I accept them from your hands?

says YHWH.

¹⁴ A curse on the cheater

who promises me a choice animal from the flock,

yet pays the vow with something damaged!

For I am a great Ruler, says YHWH Omnipotent,

and my Name inspires awe among the nations.

2¹ And now, you priests, this decree is for you:

² unless you listen to me and take it to heart

to give honor to my Name, says YHWH Omnipotent,

I will lay a curse on you.

I will turn your blessings into a curse;

in fact, I've done so already, for you pay no heed.

³ I will deprive you of the shoulder,"

fling offal in your faces—

the offal from your pilgrim feasts—

and I will banish you from my presence.

⁴ Know this—that I issued this decree against you

so that my covenant with Levi will endure,

says YHWH Omnipotent.

⁵ My covenant with Levi was one of life and peace,

and I gave him the duty of reverence.

Levi revered me and lived in awe of my Name.

⁶ Because Levi, a priest, gave true instruction,

and no word of injustice fell from his lips,

Levi walked in harmony and uprightness with me,

and turned many people from evildoing.

⁷ For the faithful hang on the words of the priests

and seek knowledge and instructions from them,

for they are called to be messengers of YHWH

Omnipotent.

** The shoulder was the part of the sacrificial animal given to the priests in return for their service at the altar; depriving them of this is a symbolic rejection of their priesthood.

- 8 But you turned aside from that path—
you caused many to stumble with your instructions!
You have corrupted the covenant of Levi,
says YHWH Omnipotent.
- 9 So I in turn made you contemptible and vile to the
whole people
because you did not keep to my path
but showed partiality in the way you administered
the law.

2:10–16

Are we all not the daughters and sons of God?^{*}
Did not one God create us?
Why, then, do we break faith with one another
and defile the covenant of our ancestors?

11 Judah broke faith,
and detestable things are done
in Israel and in Jerusalem.
In turning to a foreign god,[†]
Judah violated the sacred place that YHWH loves.

12 May YHWH banish from the tents of Jacob
any who do this, whether nomads or settlers,[‡]
even though they bring offerings to YHWH
Omnipotent!

13 And that’s something else you do:
you weep and moan trying to get God’s attention,
drowning YHWH’s altar with tears,
but God still refuses to look at your offerings
or accept them from you with pleasure.

14 You ask why?
It is because YHWH has borne witness against you
on behalf of the spouse you loved from your youth.
You broke faith even though you were partners,
espoused by solemn covenant.

15 Did God not make you one,
belonging to God in both body and soul?
And what does the One seek
but daughters and sons, God’s own progeny?
So keep watch on your spirit,
and let none of you be unfaithful
to the spouse of your youth.

16 “Couples who divorce in a spirit of hate,”
says YHWH, the God of Israel,
“cover each other with garments of violence,”
says YHWH Omnipotent.
So keep watch over your spirit,
and do not be unfaithful.

2:17—4:5

You have wearied YHWH with your talk.[§]
“How have we wearied you?” you ask.
By saying that all evildoers are good in the eyes
of YHWH,

- and God is pleased with them,
or by asking, “Where is the God of justice?”
- 3 Well, pay attention!
I am sending my Messenger[¶]
to prepare the way for me;
the One you seek^{**} will suddenly come to the Temple,
the Messenger of the Covenant whom you long for
will come,
says YHWH Omnipotent.
- 2 But who can endure the day of that Coming?
Who can stand firm when that One appears?
That day will be like a smelter’s fire,
a launderer’s soap.
- 3 The One will preside as refiner and purifier,
purifying the Children of Levi,
refining them like gold and silver—
then they will once again
make offerings to YHWH in righteousness.
- 4 Then the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem
will be pleasing to YHWH as they were in former
days,
in years long past.
- 5 I will appear before you in court,
to testify against the sorcerers, adulterers, and
perjurers,
against those who cheat the hired laborers of their
wages,
and oppress the widow and the orphan,
who rob foreigners of their rights
and have no respect for me, says YHWH Omnipotent.
- 6 No—I, YHWH, do not change,
and you, children of Jacob, are not ruined yet!
- 7 Ever since the days of your ancestors
you turned aside from my statutes and did not keep
them.
If you return to me,
I will turn back to you, says YHWH Omnipotent.
You ask, “How can we return?”
- 8 Dare a human being defraud God?
Yet you defraud me!
You ask, “How have we defrauded you?”
In your tithes and offerings!
- 9 There is a double curse on all of you,
your entire nation,
because you defraud me!
- 10 Bring the entire tithe into the storehouse^{††}
so there be food in my house!
Put me to the test,
says YHWH Omnipotent,
and see if I do not open windows in the sky
and pour so much blessing on you
that you cannot contain it!
- 11 I will keep pests from destroying
the produce of your soil,
and prevent your vines from dropping their fruit,
says YHWH Omnipotent.
- 12 All nations will call you happy,

* Here the prophet speaks his own thoughts rather than speaking for God.

† Literally, “in marrying the daughter of a foreign god.” Marriage is a metaphor of Judah’s idolatry, of being unfaithful to YHWH and “marrying” itself to pagan gods.

‡ This phrase is highly disputed, prompting nearly as many variations as there are biblical translations, such as “tempter and tempted,” “teacher and scholar,” “witness and advocate,” “root and branch.” The phrase may literally mean “those who awaken and those who answer.”

§ From here to the end of the book, God is once again the speaker.

¶ “My messenger” is the same word as the name Malachi, though here it would appear to refer to someone different than the prophet.

** Literally, “the Adonai you seek.” Adonai, usually translated “lord,” refers to the Messenger of the Covenant. Ancient Hebrews viewed this Messenger as a messianic figure, though New Testament writers saw “the one who prepares the way” and “the Adonai who will refine the corrupt priesthood and make them true ministers of God again” as two different people.

†† This was the Temple warehouse, where grain, oil, and wine was stored so that poor people would have a supply of food, which operated rather like our modern food pantries for the homeless.

for yours will be a land of delight,
says YHWH Omnipotent.

- ¹³ You use harsh words about me, says YHWH.
“How have we spoken against you?” you ask.
- ¹⁴ You’ve said, “It is useless to serve YHWH.
What do we gain from God by observing the laws
and walking in humble submission?”
- ¹⁵ Arrogant people are the blessed ones;
evildoers prosper all the time,
they flout God, and come to no harm.”
- ¹⁶ But those who revered YHWH talked together,
and YHWH listened and took note.
A record* was written before God
of those who stood in awe of YHWH
and honored God’s Name.
- ¹⁷ They will be mine, says YHWH Omnipotent,
my own possession on the day I am preparing,
and I will have compassion on them
as a parent has compassion on an obedient child.
- ¹⁸ Then once again you will be able to distinguish
the righteous person from the evildoer,
the servant of YHWH
from the person who does not heed God.

* Literally, “a scroll of remembrance.”

- 4**¹ The Day is coming, burning like an oven,
when all the arrogant and all the evildoers
will be stubble;
the Day that comes will burn them up,
says YHWH Omnipotent,
and it will leave them neither root nor branch.
- ² But for you who revere my Name,
the sun will rise, a sun of justice,
with healing in its rays.
You will go out leaping
like calves released from their stall.
- ³ And you will trample on those who are corrupt,
for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet,
on the Day when I act, says YHWH Omnipotent.
- ⁴ Remember the teaching of my servant Moses,
the statutes and ordinances
that I commanded Moses at Horeb for all Israel.
- ⁵ Know this:
I will send you the prophet Elijah
before the great and terrible day of YHWH comes,
to reconcile parents to their children
and children to their parents,
so that, when I come,
I need not strike the land with utter destruction.

