

The question must be kept before you: have the conditions of this threat or promise been met?"

CHAPTER III

THE COVENANT THEME IN THE PROPHETS

"The Blood Red Thread" which holds the Bible together is the covenant in which God promised to bless all the nations of the earth through the seed of Abraham. To think of the Judaeo-Christian system as "Man's search for God" is to think of a mouse in search of a cat! Not that God is playing cat and mouse, but that the search is so obviously in the other direction. It is God who seeks man, not man who seeks God. Redemption is God's idea, not man's!

The search began with God's cry, "Adam, Where art thou?" (*Genesis* 3:9) The answer came back from Calvary; "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (*Matthew* 27:46) Both were the cries of anguish from the broken hearts of parent and child.

When the very best Man cried out from the cross it was because He was face to face with the experience of being lost. The ultimate of this experience is death, "the wages of sin." When Jesus was "made sin on our behalf" (*II Corinthians* 5:18-19), He experienced, in our behalf the meaning of "lost."

Whatever God may have done in the eons of time touched so briefly in the first eleven chapters of Genesis, it was the call of Abram in *Genesis* 12:1-3 which set in motion the "Scheme of Redemption" that was to climax at Calvary. In the making of the everlasting covenant, established at this call, God revealed to man the only way back to God by virtue of His unmerited favor made effective through obedient faith.

The covenant was proposed by God, not man. Man can only respond on God's terms. (*Ephesians* 2:8) The heart of the covenant was the promise that through it all the nations of the earth will be blessed in the seed of Abraham. The New Testament identifies that "seed" as Christ, (*Galatians* 3:16) and as those baptized into Him. (*Galatians* 3:27-29)

The theme of the Bible is the history of this covenant, and its fulfillment in Christ, through the new covenant people. It is the record of God's working in the history of His covenant people to "recon-

THE COVENANT THEME

cile the world unto Himself." (*II Corinthians 5:19*). The Covenant of Promise first began to be fulfilled in "all that Jesus began to do and to teach (*Acts 1:1*) and continues to be fulfilled through the new covenant people, the church (*Galatians 3:29*).

Jesus indicated that two things stand written in the *Old Testament* Scriptures: (1) that the Christ should suffer and be raised the third day and, (2) that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all the nations beginning at Jerusalem. (*Luke 24:44-48*) The church thus becomes, under the New Covenant the continuing presence of Christ in the world" . . . His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all . . ." (*Ephesians 1:23*)

It has always been God's intent, ultimately, to offer reconciliation to every man who would respond to Him in obedient faith. In the Old Testament, those descendants of Abraham *who remained in the covenant relationship* through obedient faith were His people. Those who went off after strange gods were cut off. It was not physical ancestry that maintained this arrangement, but obedient faith. *Through the covenant* Abraham became the father of the *faithful* under both the Old and New Covenant. (*Galatians 3:6-9*)

Since it was the task of the prophets to call a rebellious people back to obedient faith in order to maintain the covenant through which all the families of the earth would be blessed, we must be familiar with the covenant in order to understand the message of the prophets.

The first mention of the covenant between God and Abram is brief and to the point. Recorded in *Genesis 12:1-3*, this simple statement contains all the essential elements to be found in the expanded records of the covenant seen progressively throughout the rest of the Old Testament. In this sense, Genesis twelve is the beginning of the Bible. The first eleven chapters of Genesis are the preface.

The heart of the covenant, indeed the heart of the Bible is, "For God so loved the *world* that He gave His only begotten Son, that *whosoever* believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (*John 3:16*) This is the Gospel which God "preached beforehand unto Abraham, saying "In thee shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." (*Galatians 3:8*)

God's eternal purpose in man, so far as it has been revealed to man, is that God shall rule, as Father, within each man through the obedience of faith. As W. O. Carver has put it, "(the purpose of God) is the *spiritual* ideal wherein all shall know God, from the least to the greatest."

Since man first sinned, it has been God's intent to call, out of

MINOR PROPHETS

the rebellious race, a people for His own possession . . . a people who will commit themselves to Him as Father so as to allow Him to adopt them as sons. (*Ephesians 1:3-5*)

The call began with Abraham, when he lived in Ur. All that is necessary to bring sinful man back into divine sonship is implicit in the covenant made with this man. Whom God *chooses* He *calls*, whom He *calls*, He *blesses*, whom He *blesses* He *commissions*. The *called* continue to receive the *blessings* of God only so long as they continue to carry out the *commission*. *The commission in every age always moves toward the bringing of men back into God's family by His grace made operative through obedient faith.*

In the case of Abraham, the call was direct. God spoke to him personally and called him out of his home, away from his people. The Hebrew writer reminds us that "by *faith* Abraham, when he was called, *obeyed* to go out, not knowing whither he went." This is faith expressing itself in obedience. Upon this obedient faith, Abraham was blessed. God said; "I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee and make thy name great." (*Genesis 12:2 (a)*).

As the recipient of these blessings, Abraham was commissioned; "Be thou a blessing." (*Genesis 12:2 (b)*). Being faithful to the commission, he would receive further blessing; "I will bless them that bless thee and curse them that curse thee." (*Genesis 2:3 (a)*).

The conclusion of this brief first account of the covenant is a simple statement of its purpose; ". . . in thee shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."

Throughout this passage (*Genesis 12:1-3*) it is impossible to escape the implication that the call, the blessings, the commission, the continued blessings and the purpose are not intended for Abraham alone, but for all those who by obedient *faith* were to become the sons of Abraham. This implication is to be found in all the great historical epochs of the Bible. As C. C. Crawford points out, "We do not have three religious systems revealed therein . . ." (*i.e.* patriarchal, Jewish, and Christian). Rather, we have the record of God at work in His covenant people to accomplish His eternal purpose in man by reconciliation of all humanity through the covenant people in general and the "*Seed*" (singular) of Abraham (*i.e.* Christ) in particular. (*Galatians 3:16*)

The expanded record of the covenant found in Genesis seventeen forcefully reiterates that which is stated in the shorter record of *Genesis 12:1-3*. Here emphasis is placed upon the multiplication of Abraham's descendants. Abraham was to be multiplied exceedingly. Three

THE COVENANT THEME

times it is said he shall be the father of many nations. His name is changed to Abraham (from Abram) for this season. Kings were to come out of him.

The Covenant is to be established not only between God and Abraham, but between Him and Abraham's descendants "in their generations," (*i.e.* each in its own time for an *everlasting* covenant. *He* will be *God* to these *covenant* people, beginning with Abraham and continuing through his descendants. *His descendants are those who trust and obey God.* (*Galatians 3:7*).

All the land of Canaan is to be given to Abraham and his seed after him for an everlasting covenant on the condition, "*I will be their God.*"

Finally comes the stern directive, "*Thou Shalt Keep My Covenant, Therefore, And Thy Seed After Thee In Their Generations.*"

Later, the seed had indeed "multiplied exceedingly" so that a law must be given which would mold the family into a nation. The fundamental condition of the covenant, namely that *He* would be their *God*, became the first commandment of the law "Thou Shalt have no other gods before me." (*Exodus 20:3*) The Law would be given only after the people had sworn to keep the covenant. (*Exodus 19:5-8*)

The *Genesis 17* record of the covenant closes with the giving of the symbol of the covenant, which would later become a command of the Law, *ie.* that every male be circumcised. (*Leviticus 12:3, Deuteronomy 10:16*) It is important that we not miss the symbolism of circumcision. ". . . the uncircumcised manchild whose flesh of his foreskin has not been circumcised, that *soul* shall be cut off from his people; *he hath broken the covenant.*" (*Genesis 17:14*) Circumcision, the symbol of God's agreement with His people was from the beginning intended as a constant warning of the consequences of breaking the covenant. As, in circumcision, flesh was cut off in initiating one into the covenant relationship with God, so a spiritual cutting off from God would result from breaking the covenant. Every Israelite who rejected Jesus, the fulfillment of the covenant, bore in his own body a warning of the consequences! To break the covenant was to forfeit the promise!

Two thousand years after Abraham, the first Christian martyr accused his tormentors of being "uncircumcised in heart and ears," (*Act 7:51*) and later Paul was to write, "We are the circumcision, who worship God in the spirit . . . and have no confidence in the flesh . . ." (*Philippians 3:3* compare *Deuteronomy 30:6*)

From beginning to end, the covenant depended upon *obedient*

MINOR PROPHETS

faith, upon worshipping God "in spirit and truth," rather than upon physical ancestry alone. Any man who failed in this, though he be a direct descendant of Abraham in the flesh and a citizen of the Commonwealth of Israel, could expect to be *cut off* in the spirit from God.

The re-statement of the everlasting covenant to Isaac, Abraham's son, and Jacob, Abraham's grandson, did not change the original purpose of God in calling Abraham and his seed into the covenant relationship with Himself. Nor did the re-affirmation of that same covenant with the nation of Israel at the giving of the Law alter the divine purpose . . . (cf. *Galatians 3:17*)

It was a re-affirmation which took place when God molded the family of Abraham into a nation by giving them the law. God did not make a *new* covenant at Sinai. Rather He gave a law which was to govern the nation who had agreed to the covenant. (*Exodus 19:5-8*) The heart of the covenant was still ". . . in thee shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." The covenant relationship still depended upon *the obedience of faith*. This obedience was now to be expressed in obedience to the law.

So, as Paul informs us, ". . . the covenant, confirmed beforehand by God, the law . . . doth not disannul; so as to make the promise of none effect." (*Galatians 3:17*)

Israel, under the law, was to be a nation of priests. (*Exodus 19:6*) The primary function of the priest is to mediate between God and man and offer sacrifices. As a nation of priests, Israel should have been vitally concerned for the relationship of all peoples to God. The failure of national Israel which turned her divine priesthood into bigotry and her Messianic hopes into nationalistic ambition did not alter the purpose of God in those faithful covenant people *within* the nation. Those who were concerned for the *obedience of faith* rather than nationalism and racial pride were still His people, the *real* Israel.

It was because the majority of Abraham's descendants forgot the main thrust of the covenant toward the blessing of all men, that Paul was constrained to write, ". . . they are not all Israel, that are of Israel." (*Romans 9:6*) In God's eyes, true Israel's primary concern was the covenant and its promise of a divine redeeming Seed. These were a minority among the citizens of the nation of Israel.

The real meaning of the covenant is seen in *Genesis 22:22*. Isaac (Abraham's seed) was sacrificed, showing that the blessing of all nations promised by the covenant could only come about through the sacrifice of the True Seed. Here is also demonstrated the truth that the fulfillment of the covenant depended upon *obedient faith* on the part of the

THE COVENANT THEME

covenant people and not *just* upon the seed's being descended from Abraham.

Since the idea of the covenant relationship between Jehovah and His people is the most basic idea in God's dealing with Israel, it profoundly effects the whole moral and ethical outlook of the prophets (eg. *Micah 4:1-3*). The Law of Moses simply codified the ethical and moral precepts implicit in the covenant. It spelled out the meaning of *obedient faith*.

The call of the prophets was a call to moral and ethical repentance, as well as religious obedience to the law. A call to repentance is never the establishment of a *new* ethic. It is necessarily a plea rather to return to the old. The call of the prophets was a call to keep the *everlasting* covenant by obeying the law of God.

Whether it be Jeremiah or John or Jesus or the church preaching "repentance and remission of sins," (*Luke 24:44-47*) the call is the same. God's people, who have missed the mark of eternal morality implied in the covenant and spelled out in the law, must turn once more to the eternal ethic of Jehovah.

We, who would come into God's family under the New Covenant, without the necessity of first having been under the Old, cannot escape the necessity of repentance by pleading ignorance. Having never become familiar with the codified ethic of the Covenant as established in the law we must nevertheless repent, "for when Gentiles that have not the law do by nature the things of the law, these, not having the law are the law unto themselves, in that they show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness therewith and their thoughts one with another accusing or else excusing them . . ." (*Romans 2:14-15*) The eternal morality of God is universal, else the promise of the covenant to bless all men is not valid.

When Jesus opened the eyes of His apostles to understand the Old Covenant Scriptures in terms of His own identity, ministry, suffering and resurrection, He concluded that the end of it all is "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in *all the nations*, beginning at Jerusalem." (*Luke 24:47*) John's comment on Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, recognized as the "golden text of the Bible" states God's love as universal. (*John 3:16*) God has kept His promise to bless all men in Abraham's Seed.

God's concern that *all* men should hear of the remission of sins and be challenged to return to Him did not *begin* in Luke's Gospel. Nor did God *begin* to love the world the night Jesus was born. In the Old Testament as well as the New, God moves in universal love to

MINOR PROPHETS

redeem *all* men. God loved the whole world of men from the beginning, else Jesus would never have been born!

From the giving of the law it was the nation formed of Abraham's descendants through whom God moved his purpose forward toward the fullness of time (*Galatians 4:4-5*), when the promised Seed of Abraham should appear to bless all men. The task of the prophets was to recall the covenant people to the keeping of the law, not only to preserve their physical national identity but, more significantly, to preserve the spiritual genetic of *obedient faith*. It was this spiritual genetic through which the covenant was to be fulfilled as "they that are of *faith*, the same are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand unto Abraham, saying 'in thee shall all the nations be blessed.'" (*Galatians 3:7-8*)

First century (A.D.) Judaism made the law, which was the means to the greater end of fulfilling the covenant, the end in itself. The nation framed by the law came to be the sole object of God's affection in the mind of the Jew. National ambitions and Jewish welfare as a political kingdom overshadowed the greater purpose of God (*ie.* the blessing of all men by calling them to a new covenant).

This narrow nationalism is understandable, when one considers the Roman yoke under which first century Israel galled. However, we must avoid the pitfall which prevented Israel from accepting the promised Seed of Abraham when He came, namely *the reading of Jewish nationalism into the message of the Old Testament prophets*.

Again to quote W. O. Carver, "The answer to Jewish narrowness was the Jew's Bible!" The task of the prophets was to recall God's covenant people to His law to be used of Him to bless all the nations. Not everyone who could trace his physical ancestry back to Abraham certainly not everyone who was a citizen of the first century Jewish commonwealth, was included. Abraham is the father, not of the Jew *per se*, but of the faithful. (*Galatians 3:7*)

THE REMNANT

Faced with the rebellion of both the northern and southern kingdoms and the impending overthrow of each, the 8th century prophets began to realize that *most* of the physical descendants of Abraham, the children of Israel, were simply not going to "make it." Whatever God was going to accomplish through Israel as a covenant people would be accomplished only through those within the commonwealth who re-

THE COVENANT THEME

mained faithful to the covenant. These the prophets referred to as "the remnant."

Several Hebrew synonyms are used to designate these faithful, but the central idea is the same in each. It is the faithful minority who remain aware of the covenant with God who are to form the "holy seed" for the New Israel (the church) under the new covenant. It is the *remnant alone* who were truly "Israel." The term "remnant" is used in several passages to refer only to the historic few who returned from the Babylonian captivity, but in many more passages the remnant takes on distinct Messianic overtones. It is the faithful few through whom God will bless all nations in fulfillment of His covenant.

These faithful few are a holy seed, a spiritual kernal within the nation. They were to survive the calamities which befell the rebellious nation and become the germ of the eternal people of God. They were to be blessed of God and to be a blessing. The number of the physical descendants of Abraham would be "as the sands of the sea," but only the remnant would be saved. (Compare *Isaiah 10:22* and *Romans 9:27, 11:5*)

Ahijah is the first prophet to utter this idea (*I Kings 16*). Isaiah connects the remnant with the children *who keep the covenant* (*II Kings 19:34*). He recalls the promise to David, (reiterated by the God of the covenant), that the children of the covenant should sit upon the throne, *if the children kept the covenant.*

In *II Kings 21:10-14* is the warning that even the remnant must pass through the captivity because of Baal worship in the land.

Ezra 9:14 expresses concern that the commands of God will again be broken after the return from Babylon and that consequently God would consume them "so that there should be no remnant nor escaping."

Isaiah 10:20-22 records the prophetic visions of the preservation of the remnant: "The people are as the sands of the sea, yet a remnant shall return."

Isaiah 11:11-12 indicates that the remnant includes even some who are of the ten "lost tribes" of the northern kingdom who would be assembled together with the dispersed of Judah.

Isaiah 46:3 promises deliverance to all the remnant of the house of Jacob.

Jeremiah 23:3 sets down the promise of God to "gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them." This promise is accompanied by another; "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a king shall reign and prosper and shall execute judgment in the earth." The

MINOR PROPHETS

echo of these promises is found in *Acts 2:5* when *devout* Jews from every nation under heaven gathered together to hear the first apostolic sermon.

Jeremiah also pictures the joy among the chief of nations that was to accompany the deliverance of the remnant. (*Jeremiah 31:7-ff*)

Ezekiel is less optimistic. He fears for the "full end of the remnant of Israel." (*Ezekiel 11:13*)

Micah 2:12 looks beyond the captivity to the gathering of the remnant. *Micah 4:7* associates the making up of the remnant with the establishment of the Messianic kingdom, and *Micah 5:7-8* depicts the remnant to be "in the midst of many people . . . among the Gentile." It was to these that Paul would go first in every city.

Micah 7:18 takes into account the necessity of redemption even on the part of the faithful few as he portrays God passing over the transgressions of the remnant.

Zephaniah 3:13 makes note of the righteousness of the redeemed remnant.

The point of all this is, of course, that the threat of disaster to the commonwealth of Israel could never exhaust the whole purpose of God. The nation might be, indeed finally was, cut off, but God's purpose in his people would find fulfillment through the faithful remnant.

The scope of this writing, as the final volume of the BIBLE TEXTBOOK SERIES, is the last seven of the minor prophets. We shall now review the highlights of the covenant theme in each of these books in turn. It is suggested that the reader study carefully Jesus' approach to the Old Testament by which He opened the eyes of the Twelve "that they might understand the Scriptures" (*Luke 24:44-49*), and the unfolding of the covenant promise in Acts.

With this approach clearly in mind, it is further suggested that the reader review *all* the Old Testament prophets from Jesus' point of view. It is a rewarding experience to read the Old Testament through His eyes and see the everlasting covenant move forward to its fulfillment in Him and the church, the real Israel of God.

For our present purposes in completing the final volume of the series, we begin with Micah. While the judgments of Micah are leveled against the rebellious covenant people, the *universal* concern of God is seen at once in *Micah 1:2*. Micah's exclamation includes not only "all ye people", the common term for the children of Israel, but ". . . hearken, O earth, and all that therein is." All the nations of the earth have a stake in the repentance of God's covenant people!

THE COVENANT THEME

When Jesus sat at supper with the two downcast disciples in Emmaus and "beginning from Moses and from all the prophets He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself . . ." (*Luke 24:13-35*) He no doubt recited such passages as *Micah 1:4-5* and *5:2-5*.

Micah sees Jehovah as the Master of all the nations. In his prophecy, as well as that of other Old Testament writers may be traced the outline of the way by which God's sway over all men is to be brought about. People from all nations are to willingly answer the call when He who is Abraham's Seed is born in "Bethlehem Ephrathah . . . little among the thousands of Judah . . . shall come forth . . . whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting . . . (and) the remnant of Israel." (*Micah 5:2-5*)

In *Micah 2:12, 4:7, 5:7, 5:8, and 7:18*, the prophet focuses attention on those few in the nation who were true to the covenant. These are the remnant. The multitudes of Abraham's physical descendants have gone off after strange gods. They have broken the covenant, by disobeying the law, but there is a remnant whose lives of obedient faith are such that God will yet be able to bless all the nations in the Seed of Abraham.

It is the remnant that the Messiah will "put together as the sheep of Bozrah, as the flock in the midst of their fold." It is they who shall "have passed through the gate . . . and thy King shall pass before them, and the Lord on the head of them." (*Micah 2:12-13*)

It is the remnant, "that was cast off of a strong nation . . ." (*ie.* who actually had little to say about the rebellion of the Jewish commonwealth against God) over whom the "Lord shall reign . . . from henceforth, even for ever." (*Micah 4:7*)

The universal outreach of this remnant to bless all the nations is seen in *Micah 5:7-8*. ". . . the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people." It was the few faithful Jews in the synagogue who formed the nucleus of most of the churches established by Paul.

In *Micah 7:18*, it is the remnant whose iniquities are pardoned and whose transgressions are passed over. The prophet sees this as the fulfillment of ". . . the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn to our fathers from the days of old." (*Micah 7:20*) In other words the pardoning of the remnant is seen by Micah as a fulfillment of the covenant.

Micah's Messianic message is the accomplishment, through the faithful few, of that which God set out to do in the call of Abraham.

Zephaniah makes less direct reference to the covenant theme than

MINOR PROPHETS

does Micah, yet the mention he does make is enough to show that he is aware of the importance of his message to the fulfilling of God's promise. His instruction is to "wait ye upon me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up . . . that I may assemble the kingdoms . . . that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one consent." (*Zephaniah 3:8-F*)

The remnant in Zephaniah is more emphatically those who are to return from the captivity (*Zephaniah 2:7*) but even here there are Messianic overtones. "The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth; for they shall feed and lie down and none shall make afraid." (*Zephaniah 3:13*) Here is a people true to the moral and ethical demands of the covenant and of the spirit more than the letter of the law. Here is the unlimited sway of the Lord over the lives of His people. His law is "written in their hearts." (*cf. Jeremiah 31:33*)

Haggai also sees the end of the covenant as the rule of God over all and His people as a blessing to every nation. *It was their gravest error that the Jews identified God's dominion over all men with their own national ambition to become the dominant world power.* The error did not alter God's intent that in Abraham's Seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed.

Haggai's statement in behalf of God is "according to the word that I *covenanted* with you when you came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you; fear ye not." (*Haggai 2:5*) His assurance is that despite the appearance of defeat in the overthrow of the nation, the resources are His to do what He promised in the covenant. (Read *Haggai 2:5-9*)

In *Haggai 1:12-14* it is again the remnant through whom the purpose of God moves forward.

Zechariah has much to say on the covenant theme. In *Zechariah 2:11* the prophet appeals to Messianic fulfillment as proof of divine origin of His message. "Many nations shall join themselves to Jehovah in that day, and shall be my people; and I will dwell in the midst of them."

This proof is accompanied by the plea "Be silent, all flesh, before Jehovah; for He is waked up out of His holy habitation." (*Zechariah 2:13*)

Zechariah will have none of the nationalistic exclusiveness which developed among the Jews from David to Christ. Rather he gives voice to the assurance that His kingdom shall rule over all and His people shall bless the whole race of men. The Jews identified God's kingdom

THE COVENANT THEME

more and more with their own hopes of political dominion over the earth, but the fulfilling Seed of Abraham was to say, "My kingdom is not of this world . . . my kingdom is not from hence." (*John 18:36*)

The Apostle Paul, wrote to non-Jewish Christians in Colosse that God has delivered us ". . . out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love." (*Colossians 1:13*)

In *Zechariah 6:9-15* the fulfilling Seed is called "The Branch." (compare *Isaiah 4:2, 11:1-ff*) Here proof of the divine authenticity of the prophet's message is that "He shall build the Temple of Jehovah, and shall sit on His throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both . . . and they that are far off shall come and build in the temple of Jehovah." (*cp. Ephesians 2:19-22*)

Paul, who more than any other New Testament writer (except possibly Luke) is aware of the universal outreach of the covenant, echoes these thoughts in the Ephesian letter. In that epistle, which has been called "the greatest piece of writing in all history," the eternal purpose of God and its fulfillment in the church is outlined in amazing completeness. It is not surprising, therefore, to find in the Ephesian letter the ultimate fulfilling of the message of the Prophets.

To those who once were "separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise" (*Ephesians 2:12*) Paul wrote "For He is our peace, who made both one, and brake down the middle wall of partition . . . that He might create in Himself of the two (Jew and Gentile) one new man (human kind)." (*Ephesians 2:14*) This is the crescendo of the symphony to which the prophets wrote prelude. Zechariah's statement "the counsel of peace shall be between them both" (*i.e.* the throne and the temple) is here fulfilled in the cross through the church.

Nor is this all; Zechariah says the Branch "shall build the temple." In the Ephesian letter we learn that this temple is the church" . . . being built upon the foundation of apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a *holy temple* in the Lord; in whom also ye also are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit." (*Ephesians 2:20-ff*)

In *Zechariah 6:15*, the prophet writes a reminder that the promise is conditional; "And this shall come to pass *if* ye will diligently obey the voice of Jehovah your God." The nation of Israel did not diligently obey, but the faithful remnant (true Israel) did.

This is vividly demonstrated in the contrast of the first century Jewish priests and authorities with such men and women as Simeon

MINOR PROPHETS

(*Luke 2:25-35*) and Anna (*Luke 2:36-38*), and Joseph (*Matthew 1-19-ff*) and Nathaniel (*John 1:45-47*) and some five hundred others (*I Corinthians 15:6*) who formed the first Christian fellowship in Jerusalem.

One of the most glaring contrasts between the Kingly Christ and the kingly ambitions of the post-Babylonian Jews is the description of His final entry into Jerusalem. Zechariah wrote "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold thy King cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt, the foal of an ass." (*Zechariah 9:9*) John sees the fulfillment of this in Jesus' choice of beasts for His so-called "triumphal entry" and quotes the prophecy exactly. (*John 12:14-15*) The king the Jews expected would have been more fittingly mounted on a war horse!

The covenant theme is less obvious in Malachi, so we shall reserve comment upon it until later. Enough has been said to establish the covenant theme, "in thee shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," as the pole star of the prophets.

CHAPTER IV

BAAL WORSHIP

Much of the Old Testament, certainly much of the message of the prophets, is indiscernable without at least a perfunctory understanding of the worship of Baal. Every reference to idolatry among God's people unless otherwise specified is a reference to Baal worship. Of the seven immediate neighbors of Israel, only Moab worshipped other *major* deities.

Moab's major deity was Chemosh. It is easily demonstrated that Chemosh was simply Baal with a strong *Jeh* (Jehovah) influence.

Judah worshipped Jehovah, but the influence of Baal was so great that the Jehovah of Judah during the period of the minor prophets is scarcely discernable from Chemosh of Moab. (*eg. Isaiah 66:17*).

Some historians have tried to show that Baal was not one god, but merely a common name ascribed to the local deities of the middle eastern peoples. Careful tracing of the worship performed in his honor, and of the nature ascribed to Baal himself indicates otherwise. The various Baalism worshipped in different localities were one and the same god in various guises and with varying local coloration.