

# The Day of Israel's Calamity

**Prepare to Meet Your God**

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I am going to begin this sermon in Proverbs 1. Eventually I am going to be reading perhaps the entire chapter, which is something I do not do very often. In fact, I am going to be reading a great deal during the course of this sermon from time to time.

As I was working on this sermon, it was about twenty percent completed by the time I thought of a verse in Proverbs 1. It just so happened that the Moffatt version of the Bible was lying on my desk, and I decided to pick it up and read the verse out of it. That was when I decided to read the entire chapter.

I have always understood Proverbs in a narrow sense. By that I mean I understood it as our Father in heaven addressing me as an individual. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that. But as I began to read the chapter it began to dawn on me that this is also God addressing the entire nation of Israel collectively as if *it* were only one person. In the same manner, also addressing all the other nations that came into contact with Israel, and are to this day still coming into contact with Israel, each also as single persons interacting with Israel in the course of life, socializing, planning, buying, selling, building, and entering into contracts in the business of life.

As we begin I would like you to think of this as an instruction to your nation portrayed as if the entire population were one person. This is an appropriate application. Everyone within the sound of my voice probably will remember that in Ezekiel 16 Israel is pictured by God as a single female that He finds in deplorable condition, cleans her up, finds her attractive, marries her, and then describes her unfaithful marital behavior. The whole nation was involved, but God portrayed Israel as one single female.

This same principle is true in the Song of Solomon in which a single woman metaphorically represents the entire population of the church. This same principle is true of Lamentations, of Hosea, and to a lesser extent, of Amos. In fact, almost all of the prophetic books are written from this standpoint, but I had never thought of it in regard to Proverbs.

Now picture Proverbs as a father seriously giving counsel to his son who is in his late teens or early twenties—a son who is about the age where he is leaving his home to make his way outside the home, to be more independent of his family than he has ever been before.

I had already titled this sermon "The Day of Israel's Calamity," and the verse that I thought of is Proverbs 1:26, where it says, in the King James Version, "I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear comes."

Our nation has been behaving badly for a long time. It never has been what the Bible describes as a *Christian* nation, but there is nonetheless a foundation for unusually righteous government in the Constitution. At the time the Constitution was framed, the citizenry had a respect for the

framers' concepts of God that are much closer to the truth than they are today.

But brethren, in the past fifty years, in terms of the overall conduct and attitudes, the righteousness in this nation has changed so much it is hardly recognizable for what it used to be. The nation is still powerful all right, but its power is a shallow façade, and I cannot think of anything better than God's own assessment of her as a high-priced well-dressed streetwalker. We are selling ourselves for whatever we can get; and not ourselves only, but our children's future. We are willing to do anything, including conspiring with other nations, to gain advantage, to enter into war, and to make money to sustain the glitzy, corrupt, and violent lifestyle that has become our national way of life.

As a nation we are living spiritually, morally, and ethically as if there is no tomorrow, as if there is no long-range affects attached to our conduct. It is as though we will never have to pay for what we are doing right now. But the day of reckoning is only a few years away now, and that day's dawn is just over the horizon. As we begin in Proverbs, a little bit of preparation is in order.

Proverbs 1:2-6 To know wisdom and instruction: to perceive the words of understanding; to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; to give subtlety to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion. A wise man will hear and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings.

These verses are the specific purpose statement of the entire book, and the key word is the one translated "wisdom."

To the Hebrews, wisdom is not a philosophical sagacity that one might seek to find in academia, but rather it is an intensely practical quality. One source defined it simply as "wise behavior." It is more though than merely common sense, because God's involvement is in the instruction. This wisdom is supported by knowledge gained by much experience in the business of living, combined with a thorough understanding of both the short and the long-range effects of any action. Its source is the One who is truly knowledgeable, comprehending, and righteous. Very simply put, this wisdom is knowing the right action to take in relationships. It has a very strong moral and ethical slant to it. This wisdom contains the direction and the path that a responsible, upright person will follow.

Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Verse 7 is described in the Soncino (a Jewish commentary) as "the motto of the book." The motto is declaring that it approaches wisdom (that is, knowing the right action to take) from God's point of view. Now why? Because God is the Creator of the universe, and without His involvement in one's thinking, one cannot possibly understand the design and purpose for life, and therefore the specific instruction that is given in the rest of the book.

Though the Proverbs are generally applicable to everyone, their primary purpose is to those already *on* the right path—God's begotten children—and thus, if one is going to be in harmony with His purpose, the counsel is absolutely necessary in specific situations. It is that simple. Reverence for God is the essential starting point for finding what action to take, and so the motto is implying that if one divorces God from knowledge, knowledge becomes an instrument of destruction of relationships rather than *con*struction. Therefore, where there is no reverence for God, there is no wisdom, and where there is no wisdom, there is no reverence for God. So wisdom and reverence for God join hand in hand. Reverence for God is the essential starting point for finding what action to take.

In this verse we are also introduced to the term "foolish." In this book it is wisdom's opposite, and thus it too has a very strong moral and ethical slant to it. It does not indicate any intellectual deficiency. In other words, a person can be a genius and a fool at the same time. It indicates no intellectual deficiency, but rather a moral and ethical deficiency in a person whose reverence for God is either missing entirely, or is at such a low level the person cannot be truly upright in his behavior. In other words, the foolish person, despite being a genius, is going to be so self-centered nothing else really matters. God is out of his view.

As I read this, I want you to think again about this as being addressed to Israel in general, and to the United States of America in particular. I want you to think about our wheeling/dealing national leadership in government, in business, in education, in religion, and in entertainment as we heedlessly plunge onward, ignoring the Great God of creation.

Proverbs 1:8-9 My son, hear the instruction of your father, and forsake not the law of your mother: For they shall be an ornament of grace unto your head, and chains about your neck.

Brethren, think of the very first thing he addresses here.

Proverbs 1:10-19 My son, if sinners entice you, consent you not. If they say, Come with us, let us lay wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause: Let us swallow them up alive as the grave; and whole, as those that go down into the pit: We shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil: Cast in your lot among us; let us all have one purse: My son, walk not you in the way with them; refrain your foot from their path: For their feet run to evil and make haste to shed blood. Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird. And they lay wait for their own blood: they lurk privily for their own lives. So are the ways of everyone that is greedy of gain; which takes away the life of the owners thereof.

In verse 20 there is a bit of a change in the direction of the instruction. In this case wisdom is personified as a single woman crying out to people in the street. From that we can understand what she is going to be crying out is in one sense something that ought to be obvious. It is out in the streets.

Proverbs 1:20-23 Wisdom cries without: she utters her voice in the streets: She cries in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she utters her words, saying, How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? And the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you.

To whom is she speaking "I will pour out my spirit"? She is talking to the church members, to the sons of God, things that should be obvious to us.

Proverbs 1:24-33 Because I have called, and you refused; [In other words, God's wisdom is available to us.] I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; But you have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear comes; When your fear comes as desolation, and your destruction comes as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish comes upon you, Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer: they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkens unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.

As I personally read through this while preparing this message, it dawned on me that in the overall sense, the very first thing God admonishes His children of as they are going out on their own, is to not let the world squeeze them into its mold. He is saying, "Do not follow them! Do not copy their lifestyle. Do not copy what they do."

God is telling us that there are going to be plenty of opportunities to compromise our values to the level of our contemporaries who are *not* on the path to the Kingdom of God. He is telling us that those compromises may look like they are going to bring us profit in acceptance or money or favor, or whatever, but it is going to be short-lived. His first admonishment is to remind us that we indeed are different, that we are under obligation because He has forgiven our sins, and on top of that we have been given a priceless gift in our calling.

He is telling us that we are *holy* and that it is going to be a struggle for us to maintain that way of life when the overwhelming current of the surrounding lifestyles will beckon enticingly to suck us in. But that path is camouflaging quicksand, and if we do not watch out, we are going to be sucked in to our death. In that first paragraph, God is reminding us of our responsibility, and our responsibility is to come out of the world and not allow it to suck us in.

In addition, in that paragraph, He mentions three classes of people: the simple, the scorers,

and the fools. If you look in a modern translation, it will translate "simple" as "the unlearned," meaning those who do not have knowledge of the way of God.

The scorners might be translated as "scoffers." Those who scoff may know some of the truth of God, but they scoff at others that might cause them to have sacrifices to make. And then there are the fools—those who are morally dull. He is telling us that these are the people who are going to try to entice you. They are unlearned. They are scoffers, and they are morally dull.

When we get into the next paragraph, toward the end of the chapter, He is warning us that because He loves us, He will reprove us as life is in progress, and He is urging us to heed His reproof. He is pretty sure that we are going to turn aside because all of us do from time to time. We backslide, and so He urges us to take His reproof. He then says that if we do not heed, then powerful punishments will come, and He will laugh at our calamities because we scoffed at the warnings He gave to us. He will mock us when painful awareness of our sin arises, and we call, but He does not answer. That, brethren, can be an empty, empty feeling.

Do not forget that we are applying this to our nation as well as to ourselves, in order to give sense to what is going on in the United States of America.

Now does God have a clear right to do something like this, even apart from the fact that all nations are His creation? I want you to see something that you are very familiar with, but we are going to touch on it again in Amos 3.

Amos 3:1-3 Hear this word that the Lord has spoken against you, O children of Israel; against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities. [And then He asks:] Can two walk together, except they be agreed?

How can we walk with Him if we are showing by the conduct of our population that we are not in agreement with Him? Israel had, and has had to this day, every opportunity to follow the right way because of God's choosing us. We had the opportunity to have right practical upright behavior in our daily life, and from this to construct a beautiful peaceful culture. But though God deliberately and specifically chose the Israelitish people to reveal Himself to, and raised up prophets and ministers to teach people His words, we have had a steadily diminishing reverence for Him.

Has the United States of America, or for that matter any of the Israelitish nations, been denied access to the Word of God? As a nation, we have rejected wisdom in favor of foolishness that we consider to be exciting fun. Today, as a nation, our approach to life is overwhelmingly secular. Never has any nation in all of time been given so much, only to waste it on sheer foolishness. And thus, here in Amos 3:1-3, He declares His right to punish.

Brethren, the calamities that He hinted at in Proverbs 1 are building, and the question for us is: What are we personally doing about it—we, who *do* have knowledge?

I know, because of who we in the church are, that we are tuned into news reports with a perspective few people in America have, or that those in Canada, or South Africa, or Norway, or

the Netherlands for that matter, have.

I was listening to the radio a short time ago, and I heard an advertisement for the Rush Limbaugh show in which they gave sound bites of comments made on some previous program. One of these was, "Anyone can listen to the news, but fellow Americans, the important thing is, what are you doing about it?"

Brethren, the news is continuously deplorable, but what has been the effect that it has had on *you*? Has it deadened your sensitivity to it? Has it spurred your hopes for the Kingdom of God? Maybe it has gotten you discouraged, that things are moving too slowly, and that we do not have any power to do anything. Has it motivated you to strive all the harder to not get caught up in this world's alluring time and energy wasting tracks?

We have heard God's warning given His children about the consequences of their behavior in Proverbs 1. Now I want you to listen to another warning, and this one is a bit more specific about today's world news. It was given much earlier than Proverbs. It was given all the way back in Deuteronomy 32.

Deuteronomy 32 is part of Moses' final discourse to Israel just before he died. The entire book of Deuteronomy was written in the last month of his tumultuous life. He had had many eventful experiences with Israel as it began its nationhood, and above all of these experiences is that he personally had been in God's very presence.

Moses understood God's purpose for separating Israel from Egypt, especially, and also from other nations in general. I know that in him he had high hopes for a successful conclusion of his labors in getting them established as a strong leading and righteous nation under God. However, God had inspired Moses to be realistic about Israel's spiritual and moral trajectory. Moses had already had many disappointing experiences concerning their behavior, and he could see that they could not hold their focus on God and His way for very long.

It is interesting that Deuteronomy 32 may have been Moses' last thoughts just before he died. God inspired him to see that Israel could not live by faith, and that little by little their conduct would slip to become just like that of the other nations who knew not God at all. He could see that they *would* compromise and copy people who had never been given God's law, and that they had absolutely no concept of what God was working out on earth.

Let us turn to Deuteronomy 32 to look at this beginning part of what God enabled Moses to foresee. What Moses foresaw has already come to pass once before our time in a lesser occurrence, but even so, then it had quite a devastating affect. It resulted in Israel being scattered among the nations to such an extent that they have lost track of their true identity. That was a calamity of major proportions. But brethren, *worse* one is coming! The calamity that is coming will be worse in terms of destruction and abasement of the Israelitish people. On the other hand, it will be better in conclusion, because this time around, because of God's mercy, Israel will repent with a pretty thorough understanding of who they are and why they are here, but brethren, it is not going to be pretty.

We are going to read most of Deuteronomy 32, and I am going to read it from the Revised English Bible. It is certainly understandable in the King James, but I think it is more

understandable in a modern translation. I am going to read verses 1 through 35. Then I will pick it up with verse 43 and read to the end of verse 52.

Deuteronomy 32:1-35 [The Revised English Bible]

Give ear, you heavens, to what I say; listen earth, to the words that I speak. May my teaching fall like raindrops, my words distill like dew, like fine rain on tender grass, like lavish showers on growing plants.

When I proclaim the name of the Lord, you will respond: 'Great is our God, the Creator, whose work is perfect, for all His ways are just, a faithful God who does no wrong; how righteous and true is He!'

Perverted and crooked generation whose faults have proved you no children of His, is this how you repay the Lord, you senseless, stupid people? Is He not your Father who formed you? Did He not make you and establish you? Remember the days of old, think of the years, age upon age; Ask your father to inform you, the elders to tell you.

When the Most High gave each nation its heritage, when He divided all of mankind, He laid down the boundaries for peoples according to the number of the sons of God; but the Lord's share was His own people, Jacob was His allotted portion. [No other nation on earth was God's but Israel.]

He found His people in a desert land, in a barren, howling waste. He protected and trained them, He guarded them as the apple of His eye. As an eagle watches over its nest, hovers above its young, spreads its pinions and takes them up, and bears them in its wings, the Lord alone led His people, no alien god at his side.

He made them ride over the heights of the earth and He fed them on the harvest of the fields; He satisfied them with honey from the crags and oil from the flinty rock, [Is that not interesting in these times?] curds from the cattle, milk from herd, the fat of lambs' kidneys, of Bashan rams, and of goats, with the finest flour of wheat; and you, his people, drank red wine from the juice of the grape.

Jacob ate and was well-fed, [Listen now to the deterioration.] Jeshurun [a code name for Israel] grew fat and unruly, they grew fat and bloated and sleek. They forsook God their Maker and dishonored the Rock of their salvation. They roused His jealousy with alien gods and provoked him to anger with abominable practices. They sacrificed to demons that are no gods, to gods who were strangers to them; they consorted with upstart gods from their neighbors, gods whom your fathers did not acknowledge. [The very thing He warned of in Proverbs 1 we find Israel doing.] You forsook the Creator who begot you and ceased to care for God who brought you to birth.

The Lord saw and spurned them; His own sons and daughters provoked His anger. 'I shall hide My face from them,' he said; let Me see what their end will be, for they are a subversive generation, children not to be trusted. They roused My jealousy with a god of no account, with their worthless idols they provoked Me to anger; so I shall rouse their jealousy with a people of no account, with a foolish nation shall I provoke them. [Think of what we are involved in right now.] For fire is set ablaze by My anger, it burns in the depths of Sheol; it devours earth and its harvest and the flames reach the very roots of the mountains.

'I shall heap on them one disaster after another, and expend my arrows on them: pangs of hunger, ravages of plague, and bitter pestilence. I shall harry them with fangs of wild beasts and the poison of creatures that crawl in the dust. The sword will make orphans in the streets, make widows in their homes; it will take toll of young men and girls, of babes in arms as well as of the aged. I had resolved to strike them down and to destroy all memory of them, but I feared that I should be provoked by their foes, that their enemies would take credit, saying, "It was not the Lord, but we who got the upper hand."

They are a nation devoid of good counsel, that lacks all understanding. If only they had the wisdom to discern this and understand what their end is to be! [We are great at ignoring the long-range affect of things.] How could one man rout a thousand of them, how could two put ten thousand to flight, if their Rock had not sold them to their enemies, if the Lord had not handed them over?

[He is saying that we are going to be overwhelmed by a nation that is *nothing* compared to us. How could two of the enemy of the United States of America put a thousand to flight? But you see, the Lord has handed us over to them.]

For the enemy have no Rock like ours; in themselves they are mere fools. Their vines are from the vines of Sodom, grown on the terraces of Gomorrah; their grapes are poisonous, the clusters bitter to the taste. Their wine is the venom of serpent, the cruel poison of asps; all this I have in reserve, sealed up in My storehouses till the day of punishment and vengeance, till the moment when their foot slips, for the day of their downfall is near, their doom is fast approaching.

[There is where we are right now.]

Deuteronomy 32:43-52 [The Revised English Bible] Rejoice with Him, you heavens, bow down, all you gods, before Him, for He will

avenge the blood of His sons and take vengeance on His adversaries; He will punish those who hate Him and cleanse His people's land. These are the words of the song that Moses, when he came with Joshua son of Nun, recited in full in the hearing of the people. When Moses had finished reciting all these words to Israel he said: Take to heart all the warnings which I give you this day: command your children to be careful to observe all the words of this law. For you they are no empty words; they are your very life, and by them you will enjoy long life in the land which you are to occupy after crossing the Jordan.

That same day the Lord said to Moses, 'Go up the mountain of the Abarim, Mount Nebo in Moab, to the east of Jericho, and view the land of Canaan that I am giving to the Israelites for their possession. On this mountain you will die and be gathered to your father's kin, just as Aaron your brother died in Mount Hor and was gathered to his father's kin. This is because both of you broke faith with Me at the waters of Meribah-kadesh in the wilderness of Zin, when you did not uphold My holiness among the Israelites. You may see the land from a distance, but you may not enter the land I am giving to the Israelites.'

That is a very sad ending. That is why I said these may have been Moses' last thoughts.

The emphasis in this song of Moses is to contrast between God's unchanging faithfulness and Israel's fickleness. It becomes very clear, as we get to the end of this chapter, that our national calamities are moral and spiritual. We have departed from the relationship that God established with us and no other nation on earth.

The evidence that we have departed is found in verse 46 in Moses' command "to make sure that we observe all the words of this law." We have not! At the time though when Moses uttered this, the threat was implied. Moses was saying that if we do not do these things, those threats will come to pass, because the faithful God is the One who gave them.

Israel has not been faithful, and these threats are happening, and you know it from the news that you hear. So certain are God's threats that even Moses and Aaron are provided as examples in that because they did not glorify God, they were not allowed to enter into the land. It is a shocking example of God's seriousness. He is the faithful and just God, and what He says happens.

I feel certain that both Moses and Aaron are going to be in God's Kingdom, but at the same time it must have been a sore disappointment for them not to be able to step on the land that they had sacrificed so much for.

Let us move forward in time to Jeremiah 4, when the punishment of Judah was imminent. You will see, as we begin to read here, that God has a conciliatory tone, showing that the door is still open for acceptance, but you will see that the tone changes as we advance through the prophecy. Now unlike what God gave Moses the vision to see, what God gave Jeremiah the vision to see was going to happen during Jeremiah's lifetime. I think that this brief series of

verses is especially appropriate for us, because what Jeremiah saw and what Moses wrote will happen *in our* time. We are going to begin by looking at Jeremiah 3.

Jeremiah 3:6-12 [The Revised English Bible] In the reign of King Josiah the Lord said to me: Do you see what apostate Israel has done, how she went to every hilltop and under every spreading tree, and there committed adultery? Even after she had done all this I thought she would come back to Me, but she did not. That faithless woman, her sister Judah, saw it; she saw too that I had put apostate Israel away and given her a certificate of divorce because she had committed adultery. Yet that faithless woman, her sister Judah, was not afraid; she too went and committed adultery. She defiled the land with her casual prostitution and her adulterous worship of stone and wood. In spite of all this Judah, that faithless woman, has not come back to Me in sincerity, but only in pretense. This is the word of the Lord. The Lord said to me: Apostate Israel is less to blame than that faithless woman Judah. Go and proclaim this message toward the north.

Jeremiah 4:1-4 [Revised English Bible] Israel, He says, if you will come back, if you will come back to Me, says the Lord, if you will banish your loathsome idols in my sight, and go astray no more, if you swear 'by the life of the Lord' in truth, justice, and uprightness, then the nations will pray to be blessed like you and in you *they* will boast. These are the words of the Lord to the people of Judah and Jerusalem: Break up your ground that lies unplowed, do not sow among thorns; circumcise yourselves to the service of the Lord, circumcise your hearts, you people of Judah, you dwellers in Jerusalem, for the fire of my fury may blaze up and burn unquenched, because of your evil actions.

When He says "to plow up the ground," He is telling them to sow a new crop of morality, of righteousness, of goodness, of kindness and mercy. He is telling them to carry their repentance forward, to produce a good kind of crop rather than what they had been producing. We know that they did not repent. In verses 13-18 is the vision that Jeremiah was given.

Jeremiah 4:13-18 [The Revised English Bible] Like clouds the enemy advances, like a whirlwind with his chariots; his horses are swifter than eagles; 'Woe to us, for we are lost!' Jerusalem, cleanse the wrongdoing from your heart and you may yet be saved. How long will harbor within you your evil schemes? News comes from Dan, evil tidings from Mount Ephraim. Tell this to the nations, proclaim the doom to Jerusalem: hordes of invaders are on the way from a distant land, giving voice against the cities of Judah. As a field surrounded by guards she is encircled by them, because she has rebelled against me. This is

the word of the Lord. Your own ways and deeds have brought these things on you; this is your punishment, for your rebellion is seated deep within you.

[In verse 19 we have Jeremiah's reaction to this. He says:]

Jeremiah 4:19-31 [Revised English Bible] O, how I writhe in anguish, how my heart throbs! I cannot keep silence, for I hear the sound of the trumpet [of war], the clamor of the battle cry. Crash follows crash, for the whole land goes down in ruin. Suddenly my tents are thrown down, the curtains in an instant. How long must I see the [battle] standard raised and hear the trumpet call? My people are foolish, they know nothing of me; senseless children, lacking all understanding, clever only in wrongdoing, but of doing right they know nothing. I looked at the earth, and it was chaos, at the heavens, and their light was gone, at the mountains, and they were reeling, and all the hills rocked to and fro. I looked: no one was there, and all the birds of heaven had taken wing. I looked: the fertile land was a wilderness, its towns all razed to the ground before the Lord, before his fierce anger. These are the words of the Lord; The whole land will be desolate, and I shall make an end of it. The earth will be in mourning for this and the heavens above turn black; for I have made known my purpose, and I shall not relent or change it. At the sound of the horsemen and archers every town is in flight; people crawl into the thickets, scramble up among the crags. Every town is deserted, no one lives there. And you, what are you doing? [He asks.] When you dress yourself in scarlet, deck yourself out with gold ornaments, and enlarge your eyes with antimony, you are beautifying yourself to no purpose. Your lovers spurn you and seek your life. I hear a sound as of a woman in labor, the sharp cry of one bearing her first child. [Who is doing this?] It is Zion, gasping for breath, stretching out her hands. 'Ah me! she cries. 'I am weary, weary of slaughter.'

Those are sobering words. What we have here is very vivid language used to depict a nation as a solitary woman (Zion) showing her fear as the enemy approaches. As she sees the internal structures of the nation breaking down in the midst of destruction after destruction, finally, in those last verses, she screams in her death throes.

Let us listen to one more prophet—Ezekiel. He speaks on the very same subject, but Ezekiel is unique because, even though he was contemporary with Jeremiah and Daniel, his prophecies are given from an entirely different perspective.

When Judah fell to Nebuchadnezzar's army, Jeremiah was permitted to remain in Judah at God's direction because God had other things for Jeremiah to do right there. Daniel and Ezekiel,

however, were both taken as prisoners of war to Babylon. They were placed in diametrically different circumstances.

Daniel, along with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, was taken right into Nebuchadnezzar's personal jurisdiction, right into the government's educational facility where they were educated in all the wisdom of Babylon. Daniel became part of the government, and it is from that perspective that Daniel's prophecies are given.

Ezekiel, though, was deposited in what amounted to a prisoner-of-war camp on the banks of the Chebar River. His writings are clearly addressed to Israel, not Judah, although things pertaining directly to Judah occasionally appear. But what we have to understand is that by the time Ezekiel even began writing, Israel had already been in captivity for over 120 years. In addition to that, Judah too had already just been defeated by Nebuchadnezzar's army. They had been scattered and taken into captivity; thus the prophecies that Ezekiel was inspired to give against Israel and Judah have to be for a time *following* Ezekiel's lifetime.

I want you to notice a couple of places in the early portions of the book of Ezekiel. I want you to see that it is addressed to Israel. Israel was in captivity. Israel was nowhere around.

Ezekiel 2:1-4 And He said unto me, Son of man, stand upon your feet, and I will speak unto you. And the spirit entered into me when He spoke unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard Him that spoke unto me. And He said unto me, Son of man, I send you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me: they and their fathers have transgressed against Me, even unto this very day. For they are impudent children and stiffhearted. I do send you unto them; and you shall say unto them, Thus says the Lord God.

Ezekiel 3:4-7 And He said unto me, Son of man, go get you unto the house of Israel and speak with My words unto them. For you are not sent to a people of a strange speech and of an hard language, but to the house of Israel: Not to many people of a strange speech and of a hard language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, had I sent you to them they would have hearkened unto you. But the house of Israel will not hearken unto you; for they will not hearken unto Me: for all the house of Israel are impudent and hardhearted.

It is interesting that He told him to *go* to Israel. How could he go to Israel when he was a prisoner in a war camp? He never got there, but his words are in Israel right now.

Ezekiel 6:1-3 And the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel, [Mountains is a symbol of many nations—at least 10] and prophesy against them. And say, You mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord God: Thus says the Lord God to the mountains, and to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys: Behold, I, even I, will bring a sword upon you, and I will

destroy your high places.

These prophecies are for *our* time against the nations of Israel / *N* our time—the time of the end when Israel crashes for the second time, just before Christ's return. Let us listen to what Ezekiel has to say about our time and what just lies ahead. What you hear indicates that Ezekiel could have been reading any major city's newspaper or listening to its television version of the news at six.

Ezekiel 7:1-12 [The Revised English Bible] This word of the Lord came to me: O man, the Lord God says to the land of Israel: The end is coming on the four corners of the earth. [We see a time element here. The end has never come on the whole earth. The time element is *the time of the end*.] Now the end is upon you; I shall unleash My anger against you; I shall call you to account for your conduct and bring all your abominations on your own heads. I shall neither show pity, nor spare you; I shall make you suffer for your conduct and the abominations that are in your midst. Then you will know that I am the Lord. [Pay attention to that thing about "the abominations that are in your midst."] The Lord God says: Disasters are coming, one after another. The end is coming; it is roused against you. Doom is coming upon you, dwellers of the land; the time is coming, the day is near, a day of panic and not of rejoicing. Very soon I shall vent my wrath on you and let my anger spend itself. I shall call you to account for your conduct and bring all your abominations on your own heads. I shall neither show pity nor spare you; I shall make you suffer for your conduct and the abominations that are in your midst. Then you will know that it is I, the Lord, who struck you. The day is coming, doom is here; it has burst upon them. Injustice buds, insolence blossoms. Violence leads the flagrant injustice. Is it not their fault, the fault of their turbulence and tumult? There is nothing but turmoil in them. The time has come, the day has arrived; there is no joy for the buyer, no sorrow for the seller, for their turmoil has called forth my wrath.

Ezekiel 7:15-19 [The Revised English Bible] Outside is the sword, inside are pestilence and famine; those in the country will die by the sword, those in the city will be devoured by famine and pestilence. If any escape like moaning doves and take to the mountains, there I will slay them, each for his iniquity, while every hand hangs limp and every knee turns to water. They will go in sackcloth, shuddering from head to foot, with faces downcast and heads close shaved. They will fling their silver into the street and treat their gold like so much filth; their silver and gold will not avail to save them on the day of the Lord's fury.

Ezekiel 7:22-26 [The Revised English Bible] I shall turn My face from them while brigands encroach on My treasured land to defile it

and create confusion, for the land is full of bloodshed, and the city full of violence. I shall let in the most ruthless of nations to take possession of their houses; I shall quell the pride of the strong, and their sanctuaries will be profaned. Shuddering shall come over My people, and they will look in vain for peace. Tempest will follow upon tempest, and rumor upon rumor. People will pester a prophet for a vision; there will be no more guidance from a priest, no counsel from elders.

The important principle in all of this for us is that God's Word is sure, and that we have received plenty of warnings from sermons. In some cases I know that people may be sick of hearing them, implying that living on the gun lap and hearing it so frequently is itself a considerable stress, and I agree.

But have you noticed we are receiving warnings of major calamities from the world itself? Among the foremost, I might add, might be from the world of entertainment. How many disaster movies have recently appeared on the scene in the last several years? How about the movies *Deep Impact* and *Armageddon* that focused our attention on things falling from outer space? Those very things are prophesied in Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 13, and Revelation 6.

And then there was a recent movie *9.5*, describing a massive earthquake occurring in Southern California. Not only did Jesus predict earthquakes, but also in Zechariah 14 He prophesies of an earthquake that is going to split the Mount of Olives right down the middle, and yet another great earthquake at the time of the seventh plague in Revelation 16:18 that is simply called the greatest earthquake ever. No other earthquake ever occurred like it. Every island will move out of its place. The mountains are going to be leveled. The valleys will rise. It is going to cause a major, major restructuring of earth's face.

Back in the early 1980s Mount Saint Helens literally blew up like a massive bomb going off. Mercifully, it took place in a lightly populated area, but now we are seeing by a movie the possibility of a volcano brewing under Yellowstone National Park. The whole western United States and Canada are part of the same "ring of fire" that produced those major earthquakes in Japan, in the Philippines, and in Indonesia. It was that "ring of fire" that produced the earthquake that in turn produced a tsunami that took the lives of over 100,000 people.

Now how about the fairly recent movie *The Day After Tomorrow* that forecast drastic changes in the weather? I do not believe those things are going to occur the way they say, but nonetheless, people are thinking about these things. The Bible clearly does prophesy famines in numerous places, and famines can be produced by too much rain, too little rain, by extremes in the weather such as rain not coming at the right time, too early or too late, even though the annual amount of rain does not vary very much, or a freeze comes at just the right time after the trees have budded.

Most recently a movie appeared on television about a locust invasion being produced by man-manipulated genetic experiments that run amuck, escaping their containment, and then devastating crops. Far out? Maybe. Are men messing around with the genetic structure of things? Have they found ways of producing super bugs? Yes, they have, and there are plenty of

rumors from the conspiracy theorists that things like AIDS might have been man-produced and deliberately let loose in order to devastate the populations of certain areas.

There was the movie *Outbreak* showing an Ebola virus pestilence running amuck in an American city, devastating its population. Well, it has not happened in the United States, but is AIDS wreaking havoc to a number of nations in Africa? It most certainly is.

Have you noticed that the great devastating life-taking natural calamities, as well as the pestilences, have occurred in *Gentile* nations, rather than the Israelitish nations? It is true. Do you know what that reminds me of? It reminds me of Amos 1. Let us turn there.

Amos 1:1 The words of Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning *Israel* in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.

The book of Amos was written to the nation of Israel—the ten tribes to the north. Is it not interesting that beginning in verse 3 the prophecies begin. Are they against Israel? No. They are against the Gentile nation Damascus. In verse 6 they are against the Gentile nation Gaza. In verse 9 against the Gentile nation Tyre. In verse 11 against the Gentile nation Edom. In verse 13 against the Gentile nation Ammon. In Amos 2:1, the prophecy is against the nation Moab. These are six Gentile nations that God carries judgment out against before He even gets to Israel. Now why did He do that? He did it as a warning to Israel. "This is what is going to happen to you!"

With my growing up in a rural area, I get the picture of a hawk circling around overhead. That hawk is God. He is circling around looking for prey, and suddenly He dives down on one Gentile rodent after another, and then the seventh one He comes down against is Judah.

Amos 2:4 Thus says the Lord; For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have despised the law of the Lord.

Not until He gets to Judah and Israel does He mention His *law* as the reason why He is bringing these punishments. The other nations did not have a relationship with Him. They were not married to Him. They were not expected to carry out the duties and responsibilities and obligations of a wife. They were not expected to carry out His law—His family law. So Judah gets punished for breaking God's law.

Then beginning in verse 6 come the judgments against Israel. That one is quite long and is detailed. It is very interesting. Even though it amounts to the same thing that He had against Judah, He specifies the injustice that is in our land, and how the leadership is taking advantage of the weak, the poor, and getting rich off their backs, using and abusing them in the wrong way. It is in vivid language like, "They will sell you for a pair of sandals." That was all the worker was worth [to them]. He gets on Israel for social injustices.

The reason that this reminds me of Amos is what is going on in the world right now, with all of the plagues and calamities falling against the Gentile nations. They have been the ones primarily devastated in war, not us. God is doing these things as a warning against Israel, giving us an opportunity to repent, giving us time. So the major theme to me of the book of Amos is, "Israel, Prepare to meet your God!"

Israel and Judah did not take the warning then, and it does not look as though we will take it in our day either. However, already devastating social and cultural calamities are impacting upon the Israelitish countries. Do you know what it is? I will tell you what I think it is. It is the destruction of the family. We have not been hit by these great national calamities yet, but our whole culture is falling apart because we are disregarding the responsibility that God puts on husband and wife to maintain a good family structure and to produce righteous children who can live in peace and harmony.

There have been a number of things that have impacted upon this, and I will give them to you: World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, Iraq War, Round 1; Iraq War, Round 2.

Beginning in the sixties there was the very widely distributed and accepted concepts of the feminism movement which has devastated families right in the home and the economic front, leading women right away from their major responsibility through delusions of fame and power.

On the other hand, men are taught that the epitome of success is athletic or business fame and fortune, or a collection, let us say, of grown-up toys, so that even when he is at home he is not really at home. His mind is somewhere else, ignoring the family, and materialism is the god.

Then there is the homosexual movement and so-called "civil marriages." And impacting very greatly is the government and court's attitude toward divorce, making them extremely easy to obtain so that there is "no fault," and denies family of the balanced leadership of a husband and a wife.

According to researcher, Shere Hite, ninety-one percent of all divorces are filed by women. It has become the woman's way to get out of a difficult situation, and the courts and the government have enabled it, making the state (meaning you and me) liable for supporting her through taxation. Actually, in many cases in many states, this makes the man technically a criminal, even though, in many cases, he is every bit as responsible as the woman has not been.

Do you know when the first "no fault" divorce law was signed into law? It was in California in 1969. Ronald Reagan signed it into law. At that time, according to U.S. census statistics, there were just above four million divorced people in the United States total: men and women. In less than twenty years that figure had climbed to eighteen and one-half million. How many children's lives have been ruined in the process, because they are the ones that really suffer? Is it any wonder that we have violence in the street?

We have women getting pregnant when they are 14, 15, and 16 years old. They do not know which end is up, irresponsibly impregnated by another 15 year old who does not know which end is up either. Our nation is being devastated on the home front.

Then there is abortion, so that the self-absorbed can shed the responsibility of an unwanted

child. And now euthanasia looms on the horizon so that families can get rid of the unwanted elderly.

Entertainment weighs in very heavily, depicting fornication, adultery, and living together unmarried as an attractive alternative. And perhaps worst of all is religion's abandonment of God's instruction regarding the roles and responsibilities of husband and wife so that nobody, seemingly, has to answer to God.

Brethren, the calamities are not the destruction of our physical environment *yet*. That is coming. But we are destroying the nation's strength through a cancerous immorality because right values are not being taught and enforced right within the family. One of the prophecies of Ezekiel given for our time declares that there is so much violent crime that the blood of one crime touches the blood of another crime.

Everyday we hear statistics from war-torn Iraq that two are killed here, three are killed there, five are killed there. One time fifty or so were killed in one bomb incident. But I want you to compare this. Are you aware that in 2002, in California alone, there were 2,395 murders? That is six and one-half murders a day. Is California at war too? Yes, but it is undeclared. It is husband killing wife. It is wife killing husband. It is husband killing children. It is wife killing children. It is friend killing friends. We are going to be punished for our conduct —we who have been given every opportunity to live God's way have turned our backs.

Let us finish with a very familiar scripture in Romans 13.

Romans 13:10 Love works no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

What is our responsibility? Moses said, "Observe the law." That law defines love, and love fulfills the law.

Romans 13:11-14 And that [connected to verse 10], knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day: not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put you on the Lord Jesus Christ; and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof.

Our responsibility is to conduct ourselves according to the instruction that God has given us, so let us not do like He warns there in Proverbs 1. Let us not let the world squeeze us into its mold.