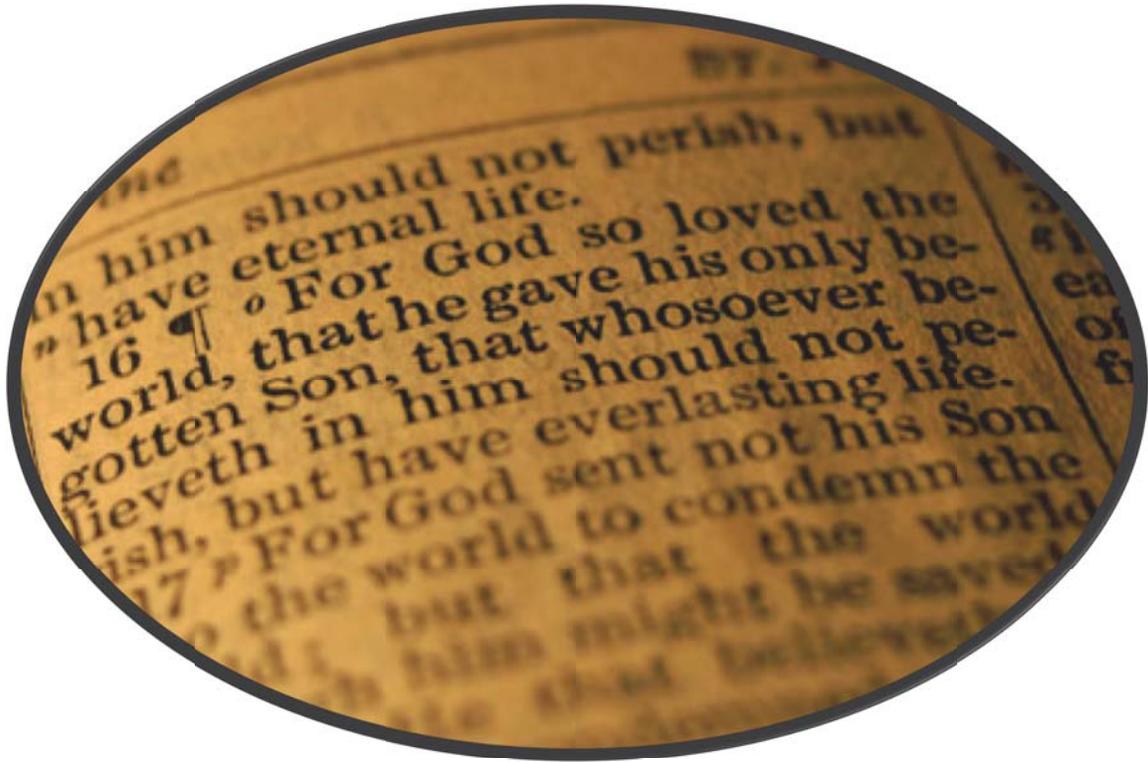


THE HEART OF GOD
THE DECLINE AND FALL
OF ISRAEL



T. M. Moore

A Scriptorium Study

And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets,

He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Luke 24.27

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Heart of God: The Decline and Fall of Israel
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Introduction to *The Decline and Fall of Israel*

The end of Solomon's reign was a disaster for the nation of Israel. Under the foolish leadership of his frivolous, self-centered son, the nation was torn asunder. Ten tribes assembled themselves as the nation of Israel, the northern kingdom, while two tribes remained as the southern kingdom of Judah.

Such a beginning could only end in worse tragedy, as the course of events would ultimately prove.

Our study of the decline and fall of Israel will follow the prophets whom God, in His great love for His people, sent to them from time to time, seeking to woo and win them back to Himself. But the people, under the leadership of sinful kings, priests, and prophets, had no heart for God, His Law, or His ways. After generations of striving with them, God would ultimately give them up to their sinful choices.

Their collapse and destruction bore powerful witness to Judah in the south. But even that was not enough to forestall the end of that kingdom as well, as we shall see.

The Heart of God studies provide a road map through the Scriptures, unfolding key unifying threads and following the development of those matters closest to the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ, from Genesis to Revelation. Through all our study we'll see how the Scriptures lead us to Jesus, and how He, in turn, brings into the presence of our heavenly Father and His Kingdom. There, as we encounter God and His glory, the Spirit can transform us increasingly in to the very image of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We're pleased to provide *Scriptorium* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity with the Lord.

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1 Elijah

Read and meditate on 1 Kings 12, 16-19.

Jeroboam had the opportunity to make a great nation of Israel. He had the opportunity, he just didn't have the heart. Like all the kings who would follow him in Israel, Jeroboam was all about one thing – himself. His name would become a permanent byword in Israel, and the nation would follow him into rebellion, dissipation, and destruction. But not without continuous efforts on God's part to spare His wandering flock.

For reflection

1. Jeroboam smeared over his rebellion with a veneer of religion. He called the people to worship God in ways more convenient and democratic, but still enough like what they were familiar with that not many people would have been troubled by the changes. But why could Jeroboam not expect his substitute religion to be pleasing to God? Are we today in danger of substituting *our* view of what it means to follow God for *what God has clearly revealed*? Explain.
2. All the kings of Israel would follow suit with Jeroboam, to a greater or lesser extent. How would you describe the state of things in Israel by the time Ahab had assumed the throne? What does this suggest about the power of sin, especially as it hardens in social and cultural practices and institutions?
3. What appears to have been the work of the prophets in Israel during this time, as we see that work embodied in Elijah? What does it say about God and His heart for His people, that He continued sending these messengers to a rebellious nation?
4. Elijah's name means "My God is Jah(veh)!" In what ways did his ministry demonstrate God's faithfulness to His covenant, both to individual people and to the nation as a whole? Can you see any ways that Elijah's work foreshadows the work of Christ?
5. From what we see in these readings, how would you describe God's attitude toward compromises with pagan religion and any other forms of religion based on mere convenience? What warning is there in this for God's people today?

Summary

Jeroboam led Israel into rebellion, disobedience, and sin. The people of Israel gave up on God and His covenant, but God did not give up on them. He sent His prophets to demonstrate His grace, remind Israel of her calling, demonstrate His hatred of sin, and hold out the promise of restoration. But the people of Israel would not be renewed. What happens in the souls of people – heart, mind, and conscience – who think they know better than God how to manage their lives?

Closing Prayer

O God, the nations have come into Your inheritance;
Your holy temple they have defiled;
They have laid Jerusalem in heaps.
The dead bodies of Your servants
They have given *as* food for the birds of the heavens,
The flesh of Your saints to the beasts of the earth.
Their blood they have shed like water all around Jerusalem,
And *there was* no one to bury *them*.
We have become a reproach to our neighbors,
A scorn and derision to those who are around us.
How long, LORD?

Will You be angry forever?

Psalm 79.1-5

2 Elisha

Read and meditate on 2 Kings 1, 2, 5-7.

Elisha (“My God Saves”) carried on the ministry begun by Elijah, and continued to call Israel to turn from her sin and return to the Lord. Yet neither of these prophets, nor any of their successors, whom we will consider next, were able to turn the people back to their covenant relationship with God.

For reflection

1. How can you see in the relationship between Elijah and Elisha an illustration of the continuity of God’s covenant from generation to generation? How did God confirm that He had transferred Elijah’s authority and power to Elisha?
2. With Elisha, we see a peculiar concern for the Gentile nations – God’s grace extended to them in various ways. Why do we need to know about this? What aspect of God’s covenant is He reminding us of in these vignettes (recall Gen. 12.1-3)?
3. Meditate on 2 Kings 6.15-17. Does this episode remind you of any previous glimpses into the unseen realm? Why are these reminders important? How do they relate to the promises of God’s covenant? What are they meant to accomplish in shoring up our commitment to God and His covenant?
4. Lepers relieved, feeding the hundreds (2 Kgs. 4.42-44), visitations of angels, calling for repentance and faith: How can you see that, in some ways, Jesus (“He saves”) *recapitulates* aspects of the ministry of Elisha? Why was it important that He do that? How does Elisha’s ministry point forward to Jesus?
5. How can you see the grace of God at work in the lepers of Samaria (ch. 7)? What does this story suggest about how the blessings and promises of God’s covenant come to His people?

Summary

With Elijah and Elisha we are reminded that God’s covenant operates at various levels – personal, national, among leaders, among lepers, in heaven, on the earth, within Israel, and toward the Gentile nations. It’s almost as if the stories attached to the lives of these two prophets are trying to say to Israel, “Don’t you understand what you’re missing?” How do the ministries of Elijah and Elisha expand your understanding of the scope and promises of God’s covenant?

Closing Prayer

Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands!
Serve the LORD with gladness;
Come before His presence with singing.
Know that the LORD, He *is* God;
It is He *who* has made us, and not we ourselves;
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.
Enter into His gates with thanksgiving,
And into His courts with praise.
Be thankful to Him, *and* bless His name.
For the LORD *is* good;
His mercy *is* everlasting,
And His truth *endures* to all generations.

Psalm 100

3 God's Word to the Nations

Read and meditate on Jonah, Nahum, and Obadiah.

Part of the great tragedy of Israel's decline and fall was the effect it had – or failed to have – on the surrounding nations. The blessings of God, which He intended for *all* the nations (Gen. 12.1-3), were bottled up in Israel's rebellion. Yet God continued to demonstrate His rule over all peoples. In our readings for today, three more prophets reinforce the message of God's covenant, but also help us to remember the vast scope of the promises God made to Israel.

For reflection

1. God sent Obadiah to the nation Edom, a Gentile neighbor of Israel and Judah. What was the prophet's message to Edom? How does this message reinforce the grace of God toward Israel?
2. How would you summarize the message of the book of Jonah? How does this differ from Obadiah's message to Edom? In what ways does Jonah represent God's hope for Israel?
3. What is the message of Nahum? Does God's judgment against Nineveh differ from His judgment against Israel, as we have seen it in the readings for this week? How does this help us in understanding the scope, privileges, and obligations of God's covenant? Meditate on Romans 1.18-32. How should the reality of God's judgment *today* motivate us in our covenant callings?
4. Why was it important that those to whom these Old Testament books were originally addressed should understand that God has concern for the Gentile nations? But Israel was not in the *least* concerned for the salvation of the Gentile nations. Quite the contrary. Are we more like the faithful *prophets* of Israel or the *people* and *rulers* of Israel, when it comes to our concern for lost people? Explain.
5. What do we learn about God from these five prophets (Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Nahum, and Obadiah)? What do we learn from them about *knowing* the Lord?

Summary

God's covenant is intended for all nations, and all the earth. Part of the tragedy of Israel is that she failed to be the witness to the nations which God intended (recall Deut. 4.5-8). What would you say is the primary message about being the people of God that we should derive from these five prophets?

Closing Prayer

O my God, make them like the whirling dust,
Like the chaff before the wind!
As the fire burns the woods,
And as the flame sets the mountains on fire,
So pursue them with Your tempest,
And frighten them with Your storm.
Fill their faces with shame,
That they may seek Your name, O LORD.
Let them be confounded and dismayed forever;
Yes, let them be put to shame and perish,
That they may know that You, whose name alone *is* the LORD,
Are the Most High over all the earth.

Psalm 83.13-18

4 Hosea

Read and meditate on Hosea 1, 2, 4, 8, 12, and 14.

Let's look a bit more closely at another prophet. Hosea shows us another side of the prophet's calling. His life illustrates the grace of God in the face of the rebellion of His people, and His preaching shows us the patience and justice of the Lord toward covenant-breaking Israel.

For reflection

1. How did God intend Hosea's life to dramatize His relationship with Israel? What does his life suggest for us about *being* witnesses for the Lord?
2. God complained that there was no "knowledge of God" in the land of Israel (Hos. 4.1). But the people protested that they *knew* the Lord (Hos. 8.2). What was God getting at through Hosea? What does it mean to *know* the Lord? Is it possible to *know of* the Lord, and yet not *know* Him? Explain.
3. Notice God's charge against Israel (Hos. 8.1). How did this show up in the lives of the people of Israel? Can we expect to serve and follow God if we don't really know Him? Explain.
4. What did the Lord say would be necessary for Israel to return to Him? What had He done to encourage them in this?
5. Summarize God's promise to Israel as He renewed it in Hosea 14. Since this could not have been referring to *Israel*, as we have been reading about her, to what does this promise refer? How would any faithful Jews in Hosea's day have received this message?

Summary

Hosea provides a concise summary and overview both of Israel's failings and God's persistent grace and care. But he also holds out a promise of renewal that seems to extend beyond the immediate future *and* the people of Israel as well. What lessons can you derive from Hosea's message for the people of God today?

Closing Prayer

When the LORD brought back the captivity of Zion,
We were like those who dream.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
And our tongue with singing.
Then they said among the nations,
"The LORD has done great things for them."
The LORD has done great things for us,
And we are glad.
Bring back our captivity, O LORD,
As the streams in the South.
Those who sow in tears
Shall reap in joy.
He who continually goes forth weeping,
Bearing seed for sowing,
Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing,
Bringing his sheaves *with him*.

Psalm 126

5 Amos

Read and meditate on Amos 1, 2, 5, 8, and 9.

Amos was a prophet to the nations, but his primary message was to the people of Israel, during the final years of that kingdom. His is not a pretty picture, yet not one totally devoid of hope. God's covenant will continue, and be renewed, even in spite of Israel's rebellion. Remember: Israel (Abram, Gen. 15) did not pass between the pieces of slain animals and walk that covenant path. Only God did.

For reflection

1. On a map, follow Amos' words of judgment against the nations in chapters 1 and 2. Can you see how God was literally surrounding the nation of Israel with judgment? Even placing them in a kind of crosshairs? How can you see that ingratitude and a poor memory factored into Israel's fall? How should that warn us today?
2. What does Amos' prophecy show us about the scope of God's covenant? How far does the sovereignty of God reach? If His people will not be a blessing to the nations (Gen. 12.1-3), where does that leave the nations? If we will not be witnesses to our neighbors, where does that leave our neighbors?
3. Meditate on Romans 2.14, 15. How is it that God was able to hold the Gentile nations culpable for transgression, as we see in Amos 1 and 2?
4. Summarize God's message to Israel. What is repentance? How does repentance factor into our covenant relationship with God? To what can repentance lead?
5. What does Amos mean by a "famine" of hearing the Word (ch. 8)? How can you tell when a people has come under such a famine? How do you see that God's promised restoration (chapter 9) is linked to the promise of a new coming of David's Kingdom? To what does this point forward?

Summary

Even as His people continued rebelling against Him, God sent faithful messengers to remind them of His grace, expose their sin and guilt, warn them of judgment to come, call them to repentance, and hold out the hope of restoration. What do you learn about the heart of God for His people when reading these prophets?

Closing Prayer

I remember the days of old;
I meditate on all Your works;
I muse on the work of Your hands.
I spread out my hands to You;
My soul *longs* for You like a thirsty land. *Selah*
Answer me speedily, O LORD;
My spirit fails!
Do not hide Your face from me,
Lest I be like those who go down into the pit.
Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness in the morning,
For in You do I trust;
Cause me to know the way in which I should walk,
For I lift up my soul to You.

Psalm 143.5-8

6 Micah

Read and meditate on the book of Micah.

Micah is more explicit than any of the prophets we've seen in holding out the promise of restoration. His message was meant as much for the people of Judah as for Israel, though it came to Israel in the final moments of her demise. As we shall see, the great hope held out by Micah was reserved for the times in which *we* live. How should this encourage and instruct us as we read these Old Testament prophets?

For reflection

1. How can you see all three of the unifying threads of Scripture – God's glory, God's people, and God's work of redemption – surfacing in the book of Micah? It's almost as if, as one kingdom falls and another begins its last days, God wanted to remind His people of the things that matter most. Jot down references that point to each of these unifying threads.
2. What was the role of the rulers of Israel – kings and prophets – in the nation's decline and fall? What did they fail to do? How should Micah's message be understood by the rulers of God's people today?
3. Summarize the hope Micah held out for God's people, beginning "in the last days" (Mic. 5.1). When are these "last days" (cf. Acts 2.14-17)? What seem to be the key elements of this hope, as we see them throughout the book?
4. Micah seems almost to provide a script for Israel to use in returning to the Lord (ch. 7). What are the key components of that return?
5. On what basis does God promise to forgive and restore His people (chs. 5, 7)? Is this because of something *they* do, or because of something *God* does? Explain. How do the nations respond to God's great work of redemption on behalf of His people? In what ways does Micah give us insight to the work of Christ, the Messiah of God?

Summary

The book of Micah brings a kind of *culmination* to one stage of Israel's relationship with God – ending in judgment – while it points forward to a *further development* of that relationship "in the last days." Micah himself stands on the cusp between the last days of Israel and the beginning of the last days of Judah. How do you suppose his message would have been received on the part of the people of Judah? How should we receive it today?

Closing Prayer

Teach me Your way, O LORD;
I will walk in Your truth;
Unite my heart to fear Your name.
I will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart,
And I will glorify Your name forevermore.
For great *is* Your mercy toward me,
And You have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.
O God, the proud have risen against me,
And a mob of violent *men* have sought my life,
And have not set You before them.
But You, O Lord, *are* a God full of compassion, and gracious,
Longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth.
Oh, turn to me, and have mercy on me!

Give Your strength to Your servant,
And save the son of Your maidservant.
Show me a sign for good,
That those who hate me may see *it* and be ashamed,
Because You, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.

Psalm 86.11-17

7 Dead End

Read and meditate on 2 Kings 10, 13, 16, and 17.

The story of Israel's decline is like a broken record. Every subsequent king was stuck in the groove cut by Jeroboam – self-interest, compromise, treachery, sin, and judgment. The labors of God's prophets, while not entirely in vain, were not sufficient to rescue Israel from its death spiral. In spite of the grace of God, demonstrated in various ways, and especially through His prophets, Israel continued to follow the wrong path. The story of Israel comes to its tragic end in these chapters.

For reflection

1. Jehu came close to salvaging a heart for God. Nevertheless, he fell short. Meditate on Psalm 119.59, 60. Is it enough merely to root out sin in our lives? Explain.
2. For what reasons did God deliver Israel into the hands of foreign nations? How was this a problem of their own making? Meditate on Hebrews 12.3-11. Does God still deal with His people in this way? Explain.
3. From what you've seen in your reading, what is the most consistently used phrase to describe the kings of Israel? Why do you suppose this is repeated so frequently? What message was the writer trying to convey?
4. How did the situation in Israel affect the people of Judah?
5. What are the primary lessons to be gleaned from the sad story of Israel's decline and fall?

Summary

Israel never righted herself. Instead of seeking the Lord and following His Law, the people continually lapsed into one form or another of pagan religion, together with all the evils attendant thereunto. God patiently bore with them for generations, even sending His spokesmen to call the people back to Himself. But God's patience with willful rebels is not infinite. At some point, He gives them up to their sinful choices, and the consequences that go with them. Meditate on Romans 1.18-32. In what ways is this an apt summary of what happened to Israel?

Closing Prayer

Help us, O God of our salvation,
For the glory of Your name;
And deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins,
For Your name's sake!
Why should the nations say,
"Where *is* their God?"
Let there be known among the nations in our sight
The avenging of the blood of Your servants *which has been* shed.
Let the groaning of the prisoner come before You;
According to the greatness of Your power
Preserve those who are appointed to die;
And return to our neighbors sevenfold into their bosom
Their reproach with which they have reproached You, O Lord.
So we, Your people and sheep of Your pasture,
Will give You thanks forever;
We will show forth Your praise to all generations.

Psalm 79.9-13

For reflection or discussion

1. What seem to have been the primary factors causing the people of Israel to turn away from the Lord and His covenant? What temptations did they fall through, over and over, which led them to greater and greater sin?
2. How would you describe the role of the prophets God sent to Israel during this period? How would you summarize their basic message?
3. In what ways can you see Christ foreshadowed, typified, or otherwise pointed to in the story of the decline and fall of Israel?
4. What do we learn about the power of sin from the experience of Israel, the northern kingdom?
5. What are the most important lessons to emerge from this period of the Old Testament?

Glory to Glory

We are transformed into the image of Jesus Christ *from* the glory we encounter in God's Word *to* the way we live for His glory in the world (2 Cor. 3.12-18; 1 Cor. 10.31).

What have you encountered *of* God's glory in our reading and meditations in this week's studies? That is, how has He shown Himself *to* you more clearly?

How do you expect this *experience* of God's glory to help you *live more consistently for* His glory in the daily details of your life?

What have you learned about yourself from this week's study to help you in knowing more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom? To equip you for serving Christ in your [Personal Mission Field](#)?

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Thank you.