

I M M E R S E

The Reading Bible™



PROPHETS

*Almighty God,
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
grant, we pray,
that we might be grounded and settled
in your truth
by the coming of your Holy Spirit
into our hearts.*

*What we do not know,
reveal to us;
what is lacking within us,
make complete;
that which we do know,
confirm in us;
and keep us blameless in your service,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Amen.

I M M E R S E TM
— The Reading Bible —

PROPHETS



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—— Welcome to ——

I M M E R S E

The Bible Reading Experience

The Bible is a great gift. The Creator of all things entered into our human story and spoke to us. He inspired people over many centuries to shape words into books that reveal his mind, bringing wisdom into our lives and light to our paths. But God's biggest intention for the Bible is to invite us into its Story. What God wants for us, more than anything else, is that we make the Bible's great drama of restoration and new life the story of our lives, too.

The appropriate way to receive a gift like this is to come to know the Bible deeply, to lose ourselves in it precisely so that we can find ourselves in it. In other words, we need to immerse ourselves in it—to read God's words at length and without distraction, to read with deeper historical and literary perspective, and to read through the Bible with friends in a regular three-year rhythm. *Immerse: The Bible Reading Experience* has been specially designed for this purpose.

Immerse: The Reading Bible presents each book of the Bible without the distractions of chapter and verse markers, subject headers, or footnotes—all later historical additions to the text. The *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, is presented in a single-column format with easy-to-read type. To provide meaningful perspective, book introductions give historical and literary context, and the books are often reordered chronologically or grouped with books that share similar ancient audiences. Every feature in this unique Bible enhances the opportunity for readers to engage with God's words in simple clarity.

A more complete explanation of this unique Bible presentation can be found in the articles that begin on page 445 at the back of this volume.

— Introduction to —

PROPHETS

THE BIBLE TELLS THE STORY of how God chose the people of Israel for the sake of restoring the whole world. He entered into a series of covenants with Abraham and his descendants in order to move them closer and closer to this goal of being a life-giving blessing to all peoples.

But over and over again, the ancient Israelites failed to honor their covenant obligations to God. The Law of Moses insisted that they give the **LORD** their exclusive allegiance, but they repeatedly turned to worship other gods. The Law provided numerous safeguards for the poor and vulnerable, but the people frequently exploited the weakest of their citizens. In short, Israel failed to be the light to the nations that God was calling them to be.

But God was determined to keep working with this imperfect nation to achieve his goal. So God sent special messengers—the prophets—to call the people back to him. The messages of many of these prophets have been collected and preserved for us, and they now comprise nearly a third of the Bible's First Testament.

The prophets play the role of covenant mediators, calling the people to be loyal to their covenant with the **LORD**. Many of the prophets frame their arguments as “covenant lawsuits” against the people. The prophet Micah, for example, announces at one point, “Listen to the **LORD's** complaint! He has a case against his people.” The prophets establish in their arguments that the people have become unfaithful to God by failing to keep their covenant commitments.

This is why the prophets typically begin their messages with warnings, followed by the announcement of necessary consequences for disobedience. But judgment is never the **LORD's** final word for Israel. Difficult messages of correction and judgment transform into visions of restoration and flourishing life. The prophets see a new future for

Israel—and the world—based solely on God’s good promises and his covenant faithfulness.

The prophets themselves were more street preachers than the authors of books, normally proclaiming the LORD’s messages at the gates of Jerusalem and the Temple. They usually spoke in oracles, which were recorded and serve as the basic literary unit for most of the prophetic books. Prophetic oracles are poems that convey a single idea through several strategies.

The prophets often used visual metaphors from the natural world to help their listeners imagine or picture their messages. Sometimes the metaphors came directly from the prophets’ dramatic visions from God, which cannot easily be described in human terms. At other times, the metaphors were drawn from the prophets’ own circumstances or experiences.

Some oracles were based on the repetition of key ideas—“litanies” (or lists) that drive home an essential point. Amos, for example, describes five different misfortunes that God had brought upon his people and says after each one, “But still you would not return to me.” Prophetic language is typically strong and evokes powerful emotions because so much was at stake in these interventions with Israel.

Some of the prophets set their oracles to music. This was another way they could ensure that their message would spread and be remembered. Isaiah, for example, introduces one oracle with, “I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard.” This particular oracle presents an extended metaphor, describing Israel as a well-tended vineyard that failed to produce the fruit the Keeper wanted: the justice and righteousness that God had been cultivating in them.

We present these books of the prophets in an order that follows their general historical sequence. As Israel journeys from the time of the empire of Assyria, through the period of the rule of Babylon and then Persia, to the return of the people to their homeland, the prophets are present to speak into Israel’s various historical situations. The collections cannot all be dated precisely. Jonah and Joel are particularly difficult to locate historically, so they are placed last and can be read in view of the larger prophetic tradition.

As Israel’s wayfaring continues through the centuries, the prophets relentlessly remind the people of their true calling. Even through the dark abyss of exile and the loss of land and home, their hope for the future remains. This story is God’s, and at the end of the day he will act to save his people—and his world.

IMMERSED IN AMOS

IN THE FIRST HALF of the eighth century **BC**, the northern kingdom of Israel reached its greatest heights of prosperity and strength under the long reign of Jeroboam II. Israel's leaders and nobles reveled in the glory and power of their economic success and military prowess. They believed that this reflected God's favor and blessings upon them. After all, didn't they bring lavish offerings to their gods at the temple in Bethel, which was the king's sanctuary and a national place of worship, as well as at other shrines such as in Gilgal and Dan?

But their self-satisfaction was disturbed by the words of a shepherd from a small town in the southern kingdom: "The temples of Israel will be destroyed; I will bring the dynasty of King Jeroboam to a sudden end." Why did the prophet Amos bring these dire words to the people? In the midst of their comfort and wealth, the **LORD** had seen the truth: "They trample helpless people in the dust and shove the oppressed out of the way." Israel's brash self-assurance was built on idolatrous worship, gross injustice, and mistreatment of the poor. So God sent his messenger to warn the northern kingdom of their coming judgment and demise.

The leaders of Israel gave Amos's warning all the attention they felt it deserved: They threw him out of the kingdom and told him to take his message back to Judah where he'd come from. So Amos left, but his prophecies were written down to preserve them as an ongoing witness against the injustices that would doom the northern kingdom. He became the earliest of the "writing prophets," whose words have been collected for us in the Bible.

The book of Amos begins by establishing the credibility of his warnings. Its superscription specifies that he received his message "two years before the earthquake." Amos had predicted this: "The earth will tremble for your deeds, and everyone will mourn. The ground will rise like the Nile River at floodtime; it will heave up, then sink again." And when this earthquake came, it was devastating. Geologists have found evidence at multiple sites of widespread and sudden destruction consistent with a massive earthquake late in the reign of Jeroboam II.

After this opening assertion that God truly is speaking through Amos, the book relays a cycle of oracles against the nations that immediately surround Israel. The prophet first announces judgment against these nations, and then, in the seventh oracle, turns to speak against the southern kingdom of Judah. The listeners in the northern kingdom likely would have expected this to be the final oracle, and they would have cheered the condemnation of their neighbors and their closest rivals in Judah. But Amos has been drawing a target with Israel at the center, and he delivers his longest denunciation against the northern kingdom of Israel. Because of their wanton luxury, oppression of the poor, and idolatry, they will be defeated and destroyed.

The rest of the book reinforces this message. It consists of loosely organized and sometimes interwoven short oracles that take up the same themes: Idolatry, injustice, oppression, and debauchery will bring God's judgment, no matter how strong Israel's army or enthusiastic its religious services.

As part of this message of judgment, Amos also relays a series of visions given to him by God that metaphorically depict the coming punishment. These visions are juxtaposed with an account of the expulsion of Amos from the northern kingdom, showing that the people have rejected both God's message and God's genuine messenger.

The final oracle is the most devastating of all. In it God dismisses the Israelites as his covenant people, saying that the exodus from Egypt should not make them feel more special than any other nation: "'Are you Israelites more important to me than the Ethiopians?' asks the LORD. 'I brought Israel out of Egypt, but I also brought the Philistines from Crete and led the Arameans out of Kir. I, the Sovereign LORD, am watching this sinful nation of Israel. I will destroy it from the face of the earth.'"

But then, in a pattern we will see again and again, the epilogue expresses renewed hope for the future. Amos, the earliest of the prophets, sets a template that God's later messengers will also follow. There will be judgment on God's people because of injustice and unfaithfulness, but then a promised restoration will come through the mercy and love of God. The covenant will prevail: God will reinstate himself as King and heal his land.

AMOS



This message was given to Amos, a shepherd from the town of Tekoa in Judah. He received this message in visions two years before the earthquake, when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam II, the son of Jehoash, was king of Israel.

This is what he saw and heard:

“The LORD’s voice will roar from Zion
and thunder from Jerusalem!
The lush pastures of the shepherds will dry up;
the grass on Mount Carmel will wither and die.”



This is what the LORD says:

“The people of Damascus have sinned again and again,
and I will not let them go unpunished!
They beat down my people in Gilead
as grain is threshed with iron sledges.
So I will send down fire on King Hazael’s palace,
and the fortresses of King Ben-hadad will be destroyed.
I will break down the gates of Damascus
and slaughter the people in the valley of Aven.
I will destroy the ruler in Beth-eden,
and the people of Aram will go as captives to Kir,”
says the LORD.

This is what the LORD says:

“The people of Gaza have sinned again and again,
and I will not let them go unpunished!
They sent whole villages into exile,
selling them as slaves to Edom.

So I will send down fire on the walls of Gaza,
and all its fortresses will be destroyed.
I will slaughter the people of Ashdod
and destroy the king of Ashkelon.
Then I will turn to attack Ekron,
and the few Philistines still left will be killed,”
says the Sovereign LORD.

This is what the LORD says:

“The people of Tyre have sinned again and again,
and I will not let them go unpunished!
They broke their treaty of brotherhood with Israel,
selling whole villages as slaves to Edom.
So I will send down fire on the walls of Tyre,
and all its fortresses will be destroyed.”

This is what the LORD says:

“The people of Edom have sinned again and again,
and I will not let them go unpunished!
They chased down their relatives, the Israelites, with swords,
showing them no mercy.
In their rage, they slashed them continually
and were unrelenting in their anger.
So I will send down fire on Teman,
and the fortresses of Bozrah will be destroyed.”

This is what the LORD says:

“The people of Ammon have sinned again and again,
and I will not let them go unpunished!
When they attacked Gilead to extend their borders,
they ripped open pregnant women with their swords.
So I will send down fire on the walls of Rabbah,
and all its fortresses will be destroyed.
The battle will come upon them with shouts,
like a whirlwind in a mighty storm.
And their king and his princes will go into exile together,”
says the LORD.

This is what the LORD says:

“The people of Moab have sinned again and again,
and I will not let them go unpunished!

They desecrated the bones of Edom's king,
burning them to ashes.
So I will send down fire on the land of Moab,
and all the fortresses in Kerioth will be destroyed.
The people will fall in the noise of battle,
as the warriors shout and the ram's horn sounds.
And I will destroy their king
and slaughter all their princes,"
says the LORD.

This is what the LORD says:

"The people of Judah have sinned again and again,
and I will not let them go unpunished!
They have rejected the instruction of the LORD,
refusing to obey his decrees.
They have been led astray by the same lies
that deceived their ancestors.
So I will send down fire on Judah,
and all the fortresses of Jerusalem will be destroyed."

This is what the LORD says:

"The people of Israel have sinned again and again,
and I will not let them go unpunished!
They sell honorable people for silver
and poor people for a pair of sandals.
They trample helpless people in the dust
and shove the oppressed out of the way.
Both father and son sleep with the same woman,
corrupting my holy name.
At their religious festivals,
they lounge in clothing their debtors put up as security.
In the house of their gods,
they drink wine bought with unjust fines.

"But as my people watched,
I destroyed the Amorites,
though they were as tall as cedars
and as strong as oaks.
I destroyed the fruit on their branches
and dug out their roots.
It was I who rescued you from Egypt
and led you through the desert for forty years,

so you could possess the land of the Amorites.
 I chose some of your sons to be prophets
 and others to be Nazirites.
 Can you deny this, my people of Israel?”
 asks the LORD.
 “But you caused the Nazirites to sin by making them drink wine,
 and you commanded the prophets, ‘Shut up!’
 “So I will make you groan
 like a wagon loaded down with sheaves of grain.
 Your fastest runners will not get away.
 The strongest among you will become weak.
 Even mighty warriors will be unable to save themselves.
 The archers will not stand their ground.
 The swiftest runners won’t be fast enough to escape.
 Even those riding horses won’t be able to save themselves.
 On that day the most courageous of your fighting men
 will drop their weapons and run for their lives,”
 says the LORD.

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Listen to this message that the LORD has spoken against you, O people of Israel—against the entire family I rescued from Egypt:

“From among all the families on the earth,
 I have been intimate with you alone.
 That is why I must punish you
 for all your sins.”

Can two people walk together
 without agreeing on the direction?
 Does a lion ever roar in a thicket
 without first finding a victim?
 Does a young lion growl in its den
 without first catching its prey?
 Does a bird ever get caught in a trap
 that has no bait?
 Does a trap spring shut
 when there’s nothing to catch?
 When the ram’s horn blows a warning,
 shouldn’t the people be alarmed?
 Does disaster come to a city
 unless the LORD has planned it?

Indeed, the Sovereign LORD never does anything
until he reveals his plans to his servants the prophets.

The lion has roared—
so who isn't frightened?
The Sovereign LORD has spoken—
so who can refuse to proclaim his message?

Announce this to the leaders of Philistia
and to the great ones of Egypt:
"Take your seats now on the hills around Samaria,
and witness the chaos and oppression in Israel."

"My people have forgotten how to do right,"
says the LORD.

"Their fortresses are filled with wealth
taken by theft and violence.

Therefore," says the Sovereign LORD,
"an enemy is coming!

He will surround them and shatter their defenses.
Then he will plunder all their fortresses."

This is what the LORD says:

"A shepherd who tries to rescue a sheep from a lion's mouth
will recover only two legs or a piece of an ear.
So it will be for the Israelites in Samaria lying on luxurious beds,
and for the people of Damascus reclining on couches.

"Now listen to this, and announce it throughout all Israel," says the Lord,
the LORD God of Heaven's Armies.

"On the very day I punish Israel for its sins,
I will destroy the pagan altars at Bethel.

The horns of the altar will be cut off
and fall to the ground.

And I will destroy the beautiful homes of the wealthy—
their winter mansions and their summer houses, too—
all their palaces filled with ivory,"
says the LORD.

Listen to me, you fat cows
living in Samaria,
you women who oppress the poor

and crush the needy,
and who are always calling to your husbands,
“Bring us another drink!”
The Sovereign LORD has sworn this by his holiness:
“The time will come when you will be led away
with hooks in your noses.
Every last one of you will be dragged away
like a fish on a hook!
You will be led out through the ruins of the wall;
you will be thrown from your fortresses,”
says the LORD.

“Go ahead and offer sacrifices to the idols at Bethel.
Keep on disobeying at Gilgal.
Offer sacrifices each morning,
and bring your tithes every three days.
Present your bread made with yeast
as an offering of thanksgiving.
Then give your extra voluntary offerings
so you can brag about it everywhere!
This is the kind of thing you Israelites love to do,”
says the Sovereign LORD.

“I brought hunger to every city
and famine to every town.
But still you would not return to me,”
says the LORD.

“I kept the rain from falling
when your crops needed it the most.
I sent rain on one town
but withheld it from another.
Rain fell on one field,
while another field withered away.
People staggered from town to town looking for water,
but there was never enough.
But still you would not return to me,”
says the LORD.

“I struck your farms and vineyards with blight and mildew.
Locusts devoured all your fig and olive trees.
But still you would not return to me,”
says the LORD.

“I sent plagues on you
like the plagues I sent on Egypt long ago.
I killed your young men in war
and led all your horses away.
The stench of death filled the air!
But still you would not return to me,”
says the LORD.

“I destroyed some of your cities,
as I destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.
Those of you who survived
were like charred sticks pulled from a fire.
But still you would not return to me,”
says the LORD.

“Therefore, I will bring upon you all the disasters I have announced.
Prepare to meet your God in judgment, you people of Israel!”

For the LORD is the one who shaped the mountains,
stirs up the winds, and reveals his thoughts to mankind.
He turns the light of dawn into darkness
and treads on the heights of the earth.
The LORD God of Heaven’s Armies is his name!

Listen, you people of Israel! Listen to this funeral song I am singing:

“The virgin Israel has fallen,
never to rise again!
She lies abandoned on the ground,
with no one to help her up.”

The Sovereign LORD says:

“When a city sends a thousand men to battle,
only a hundred will return.
When a town sends a hundred,
only ten will come back alive.”

Now this is what the LORD says to the family of Israel:

“Come back to me and live!
Don’t worship at the pagan altars at Bethel;
don’t go to the shrines at Gilgal or Beersheba.
For the people of Gilgal will be dragged off into exile,

and the people of Bethel will be reduced to nothing.”
Come back to the LORD and live!
Otherwise, he will roar through Israel like a fire,
devouring you completely.
Your gods in Bethel
won't be able to quench the flames.

You twist justice, making it a bitter pill for the oppressed.
You treat the righteous like dirt.

It is the LORD who created the stars,
the Pleiades and Orion.
He turns darkness into morning
and day into night.
He draws up water from the oceans
and pours it down as rain on the land.
The LORD is his name!
With blinding speed and power he destroys the strong,
crushing all their defenses.

How you hate honest judges!
How you despise people who tell the truth!

You trample the poor,
stealing their grain through taxes and unfair rent.
Therefore, though you build beautiful stone houses,
you will never live in them.
Though you plant lush vineyards,
you will never drink wine from them.
For I know the vast number of your sins
and the depth of your rebellions.

You oppress good people by taking bribes
and deprive the poor of justice in the courts.
So those who are smart keep their mouths shut,
for it is an evil time.

Do what is good and run from evil
so that you may live!
Then the LORD God of Heaven's Armies will be your helper,
just as you have claimed.
Hate evil and love what is good;

turn your courts into true halls of justice.
 Perhaps even yet the LORD God of Heaven's Armies
 will have mercy on the remnant of his people.

Therefore, this is what the Lord, the LORD God of Heaven's Armies, says:

"There will be crying in all the public squares
 and mourning in every street.
 Call for the farmers to weep with you,
 and summon professional mourners to wail.
 There will be wailing in every vineyard,
 for I will destroy them all,"
 says the LORD.

What sorrow awaits you who say,
 "If only the day of the LORD were here!"
 You have no idea what you are wishing for.
 That day will bring darkness, not light.
 In that day you will be like a man who runs from a lion—
 only to meet a bear.
 Escaping from the bear, he leans his hand against a wall in his house—
 and he's bitten by a snake.
 Yes, the day of the LORD will be dark and hopeless,
 without a ray of joy or hope.

"I hate all your show and pretense—
 the hypocrisy of your religious festivals and solemn assemblies.
 I will not accept your burnt offerings and grain offerings.
 I won't even notice all your choice peace offerings.
 Away with your noisy hymns of praise!
 I will not listen to the music of your harps.
 Instead, I want to see a mighty flood of justice,
 an endless river of righteous living.

"Was it to me you were bringing sacrifices and offerings during the forty years in the wilderness, Israel? No, you served your pagan gods—Sak-kuth your king god and Kaiwan your star god—the images you made for yourselves. So I will send you into exile, to a land east of Damascus," says the LORD, whose name is the God of Heaven's Armies.

What sorrow awaits you who lounge in luxury in Jerusalem,
 and you who feel secure in Samaria!

You are famous and popular in Israel,
and people go to you for help.
But go over to Calneh
and see what happened there.
Then go to the great city of Hamath
and down to the Philistine city of Gath.
You are no better than they were,
and look at how they were destroyed.
You push away every thought of coming disaster,
but your actions only bring the day of judgment closer.
How terrible for you who sprawl on ivory beds
and lounge on your couches,
eating the meat of tender lambs from the flock
and of choice calves fattened in the stall.
You sing trivial songs to the sound of the harp
and fancy yourselves to be great musicians like David.
You drink wine by the bowlful
and perfume yourselves with fragrant lotions.
You care nothing about the ruin of your nation.
Therefore, you will be the first to be led away as captives.
Suddenly, all your parties will end.

The Sovereign LORD has sworn by his own name, and this is what he, the LORD God of Heaven's Armies, says:

"I despise the arrogance of Israel,
and I hate their fortresses.
I will give this city
and everything in it to their enemies."

(If there are ten men left in one house, they will all die. And when a relative who is responsible to dispose of the dead goes into the house to carry out the bodies, he will ask the last survivor, "Is anyone else with you?" When the person begins to swear, "No, by . . .," he will interrupt and say, "Stop! Don't even mention the name of the LORD.")

When the LORD gives the command,
homes both great and small will be smashed to pieces.

Can horses gallop over boulders?
Can oxen be used to plow them?
But that's how foolish you are when you turn justice into poison
and the sweet fruit of righteousness into bitterness.

And you brag about your conquest of Lo-debar.

You boast, “Didn’t we take Karnaim by our own strength?”

“O people of Israel, I am about to bring an enemy nation against you,”
says the LORD God of Heaven’s Armies.

“They will oppress you throughout your land—
from Lebo-hamath in the north
to the Arabah Valley in the south.”

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The Sovereign LORD showed me a vision. I saw him preparing to send a vast swarm of locusts over the land. This was after the king’s share had been harvested from the fields and as the main crop was coming up. In my vision the locusts ate every green plant in sight. Then I said, “O Sovereign LORD, please forgive us or we will not survive, for Israel is so small.”

So the LORD relented from this plan. “I will not do it,” he said.

Then the Sovereign LORD showed me another vision. I saw him preparing to punish his people with a great fire. The fire had burned up the depths of the sea and was devouring the entire land. Then I said, “O Sovereign LORD, please stop or we will not survive, for Israel is so small.”

Then the LORD relented from this plan, too. “I will not do that either,” said the Sovereign LORD.

Then he showed me another vision. I saw the Lord standing beside a wall that had been built using a plumb line. He was using a plumb line to see if it was still straight. And the LORD said to me, “Amos, what do you see?”

I answered, “A plumb line.”

And the Lord replied, “I will test my people with this plumb line. I will no longer ignore all their sins. The pagan shrines of your ancestors will be ruined, and the temples of Israel will be destroyed; I will bring the dynasty of King Jeroboam to a sudden end.”

Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent a message to Jeroboam, king of Israel: “Amos is hatching a plot against you right here on your very doorstep! What he is saying is intolerable. He is saying, ‘Jeroboam will soon be killed, and the people of Israel will be sent away into exile.’”

Then Amaziah sent orders to Amos: “Get out of here, you prophet! Go on back to the land of Judah, and earn your living by prophesying there! Don’t bother us with your prophecies here in Bethel. This is the king’s sanctuary and the national place of worship!”

But Amos replied, “I’m not a professional prophet, and I was never trained to be one. I’m just a shepherd, and I take care of sycamore-fig trees. But the LORD called me away from my flock and told me, ‘Go and prophesy to my people in Israel.’ Now then, listen to this message from the LORD:

“You say,
 ‘Don’t prophesy against Israel.
 Stop preaching against my people.’
 But this is what the LORD says:
 ‘Your wife will become a prostitute in this city,
 and your sons and daughters will be killed.
 Your land will be divided up,
 and you yourself will die in a foreign land.
 And the people of Israel will certainly become captives in exile,
 far from their homeland.”

Then the Sovereign LORD showed me another vision. In it I saw a basket filled with ripe fruit. “What do you see, Amos?” he asked.

I replied, “A basket full of ripe fruit.”

Then the LORD said, “Like this fruit, Israel is ripe for punishment! I will not delay their punishment again. In that day the singing in the temple will turn to wailing. Dead bodies will be scattered everywhere. They will be carried out of the city in silence. I, the Sovereign LORD, have spoken!”

Listen to this, you who rob the poor
 and trample down the needy!
 You can’t wait for the Sabbath day to be over
 and the religious festivals to end
 so you can get back to cheating the helpless.
 You measure out grain with dishonest measures
 and cheat the buyer with dishonest scales.
 And you mix the grain you sell
 with chaff swept from the floor.
 Then you enslave poor people
 for one piece of silver or a pair of sandals.

Now the LORD has sworn this oath
 by his own name, the Pride of Israel:
 “I will never forget
 the wicked things you have done!
 The earth will tremble for your deeds,
 and everyone will mourn.

The ground will rise like the Nile River at floodtime;
it will heave up, then sink again.

“In that day,” says the Sovereign LORD,
“I will make the sun go down at noon
and darken the earth while it is still day.
I will turn your celebrations into times of mourning
and your singing into weeping.
You will wear funeral clothes
and shave your heads to show your sorrow—
as if your only son had died.
How very bitter that day will be!

“The time is surely coming,” says the Sovereign LORD,
“when I will send a famine on the land—
not a famine of bread or water
but of hearing the words of the LORD.
People will stagger from sea to sea
and wander from border to border
searching for the word of the LORD,
but they will not find it.
Beautiful girls and strong young men
will grow faint in that day,
thirsting for the LORD’s word.
And those who swear by the shameful idols of Samaria—
who take oaths in the name of the god of Dan
and make vows in the name of the god of Beersheba—
they will all fall down,
never to rise again.”

Then I saw a vision of the Lord standing beside the altar. He said,

“Strike the tops of the Temple columns,
so that the foundation will shake.
Bring down the roof
on the heads of the people below.
I will kill with the sword those who survive.
No one will escape!

“Even if they dig down to the place of the dead,
I will reach down and pull them up.
Even if they climb up into the heavens,
I will bring them down.

Even if they hide at the very top of Mount Carmel,
 I will search them out and capture them.
 Even if they hide at the bottom of the ocean,
 I will send the sea serpent after them to bite them.
 Even if their enemies drive them into exile,
 I will command the sword to kill them there.
 I am determined to bring disaster upon them
 and not to help them.”

The Lord, the LORD of Heaven’s Armies,
 touches the land and it melts,
 and all its people mourn.
 The ground rises like the Nile River at floodtime,
 and then it sinks again.
 The LORD’s home reaches up to the heavens,
 while its foundation is on the earth.
 He draws up water from the oceans
 and pours it down as rain on the land.
 The LORD is his name!

“Are you Israelites more important to me
 than the Ethiopians?” asks the LORD.
 “I brought Israel out of Egypt,
 but I also brought the Philistines from Crete
 and led the Arameans out of Kir.

“I, the Sovereign LORD,
 am watching this sinful nation of Israel.
 I will destroy it
 from the face of the earth.

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But I will never completely destroy the family of Israel,”
 says the LORD.
 “For I will give the command
 and will shake Israel along with the other nations
 as grain is shaken in a sieve,
 yet not one true kernel will be lost.
 But all the sinners will die by the sword—
 all those who say, ‘Nothing bad will happen to us.’
 “In that day I will restore the fallen house of David.
 I will repair its damaged walls.

From the ruins I will rebuild it
and restore its former glory.
And Israel will possess what is left of Edom
and all the nations I have called to be mine.”
The LORD has spoken,
and he will do these things.

“The time will come,” says the LORD,
“when the grain and grapes will grow faster
than they can be harvested.
Then the terraced vineyards on the hills of Israel
will drip with sweet wine!
I will bring my exiled people of Israel
back from distant lands,
and they will rebuild their ruined cities
and live in them again.
They will plant vineyards and gardens;
they will eat their crops and drink their wine.
I will firmly plant them there
in their own land.
They will never again be uprooted
from the land I have given them,”
says the LORD your God.