

# The Cloud

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News and Articles from the St. Cloud Circuit of the LCMS

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## **Prophets?**

*By Rev Joshua Reber (Trinity, Clear Lake; Faith, St. Cloud; editor)*

Happy 2<sup>nd</sup> Anniversary! We started *The Cloud* in September 2023. Others have imitated us, like the Crookston Circuit, but they have since folded after a brave 3 issue run. We applaud your efforts! Publishing a circuit newsletter isn't for everyone.

People often question our readership. "How many people actually read that thing?" It's more than ten and less than a million. I don't get too discouraged about all the naysayers. Nobody seemed to listen to the prophets either, and yet the Prophets make up a significant part of the Old Testament. God knew that the masses would reject the prophets and even kill them, but He kept sending them, and eventually He sent the last Prophet, His Son. So here's another issue of *The Cloud*.

What is a Prophet? It is somebody who sits on the Divine Council. A prophet is someone who listens to God, speaks back to God, and then delivers God's message to the people. Abraham is the first person called a prophet in the Bible. God told Abraham that He was going to destroy Sodom, and Abraham talked back to God and convinced God that He wouldn't destroy Sodom for the sake of five righteous persons. Unfortunately, not even five could be found. God actually listens to the Prophets, just as He actually listens to our prayers.

There are true prophets and there are false prophets. As soon as sinful man heard that God sends prophets, he figured out it was rather profitable (pun intended) to pretend to be a prophet. People like hearing good news, especially when there is no good news to share. How do we tell the difference between a true prophet and a false prophet? **"You may say to yourselves, 'How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?' If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously, so do not be alarmed" (Dt 18:21-22).**

Here's the easy thing for us – the prophetic office has been fulfilled. There are no more Old Testament Prophets. Scripture is no longer being written. **"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb 1:1-2a).** So if anyone claims they're a prophet, stop listening. We still have to distinguish between true and false teachers, though. You can tell who a true preacher is based on if they preach the Bible as the Word of God, the Prophets included.

Jesus said after His resurrection, **"These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled" (Lk 24:44).** Jesus read the Prophets as God's authoritative Word, so we need to do the same. **"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16).** So, the Prophets are breathed out by God and profitable. All of the Bible is applicable to all of life. Our joy is to figure out how it applies. How does Hosea, who God told to marry a prostitute, apply to our world? Pastor Timm tells us in this issue! I think it's a little too obvious how Hosea relates to our day. What does Habakkuk have to say to Christians in 2025? Pastor Gimbel enlightens us on that. Why should I care about Isaiah? Pastor Steege instructs us.

I hope this issue is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness. It's been my joy to edit this newsletter for the last 2 years, and I look forward to whatever God has in store for us in the future.

Any complaints? Email [pastortimm@redeemerstcloud.org](mailto:pastortimm@redeemerstcloud.org), subject line: FREE BEER, and your comment will most certainly be read. ✝

## ISAIAH: The Lord Alone Delivers

*By Rev David Steege (Immanuel, Albany (Farming Township))*

The opening chapter of Isaiah sets the tone for the whole book. To understand Isaiah, we need to see both the history of his day and the purpose of his message. Isaiah was a contemporary of Hosea, who vividly pictured Israel's unfaithfulness through his marriage to a prostitute. God used Hosea's life to demonstrate His mercy—He would take back His wayward people when they repented. This same divine purpose of restoration runs through Isaiah's prophecy and points us to the greater promise fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Isaiah ministered during the reigns of both faithful kings like Hezekiah and wicked rulers such as Ahaz. The people's rebellion and idolatry shaped the spiritual climate of his time. In Isaiah 1, God calls His people to repentance, warning them against empty sacrifices and self-righteousness. Yet even in judgment, He speaks words of hope: **"Come now, let us reason together... though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (Isa 1:18).**

Throughout the book, Isaiah holds before God's people the promise of salvation in Christ. He prophesies of the virgin-born child (Isaiah 7), the Prince of Peace who will establish a kingdom of righteousness (Isaiah 9, 11), and the Suffering Servant pierced for our transgressions (Isaiah 53). These promises remind us that human power always falls short, but God's mercy endures.

Isaiah 45 points to the Persian king Cyrus, whom God would use to bring Israel back from exile. Yet Isaiah shows that this return was not the ultimate deliverance. The greater salvation would come through Christ, the One who rescues His people from sin and death.

Later, in Isaiah 51, God calls His people back to the foundation of faith: **"Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the Lord; look to the rock from which you were hewn... to Abraham your father" (Isa 51:1-2a).** Here Isaiah reminds us that the true source of righteousness is God's promise, fulfilled in the person of Jesus.

Isaiah also looks ahead to the return from exile, but even more importantly, to the true comfort that comes in Christ. **"Comfort, comfort my people" (Isa 40:1)** finds its fulfillment in the ministry of John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Jesus. The Servant Songs throughout Isaiah point directly to Christ's sacrificial death and eternal kingdom.

The lesson is clear: human leaders cannot save a culture from its rebellion. Only repentance and faith in God's promises bring renewal. As in Isaiah's day, so also today, we are tempted to chase the things of the world and trust in human strength. But Isaiah calls us to look instead to the Lord, who alone brings forgiveness, righteousness, and eternal hope. ✝

# HOSEA: A Lesson You Missed in Sunday School

By Rev Bruce Timm (Redeemer, St. Cloud; 2<sup>nd</sup> VP MNN)

*(Note: When you read Hosea, remember that "Ephraim" is often used interchangeably with "Israel" in the prophetic literature. Ephraim was one of the sons of Joseph and one of the larger and leading tribes of the Northern Kingdom.)*

God's Word is about marriage from beginning to end. There are small marriages in Scripture—Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Joseph and Mary—but these marriages point to the great marriage: the marriage of God to His people. God creates Adam and Eve for Himself; He binds Himself to them and bestows on them all they have. The Scriptures end with the Spirit and the Bride saying, "Come," and with the heavenly Bridegroom, Jesus, promising, "I am coming soon." He is coming soon to take His bride, the Christian Church, across the threshold of heaven into the resurrection, to the wedding feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom.

Hosea is a sad chapter in the marriages of God's Holy Word. He is the last prophet to preach before the Northern Kingdom of Israel is taken captive by Assyria in 722 B.C. By outward appearances, Israel's marriage to Yahweh looks grand. The nation is enjoying a time of peace and prosperity. But like so many marriages, what you see on the surface is not the reality. Israel is enjoying herself—but not with Yahweh. She is fooling around with other gods, the gods of the nations.

In Sunday School, you may have learned about prophets like Elijah and Elisha, but likely not about Hosea. That's because your Sunday School teacher didn't want to explain words like *harlot*, *whore*, or *prostitute* to your class. Yet those words occur about 25 times in the book of Hosea.

To preach the reality of Israel's sin against Yahweh, Hosea was commanded to take **"a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord."** (1:2) Imagine your new pastor arrives with his wife and three children. Early in your conversation, he reveals that his wife used to be a prostitute. When you appear shocked, he says, "I married her so you could look at her and see how unfaithful you are to God." That would be a hard sermon to see—and hear.

Hosea's wife was named Gomer, and they had three children. Their firstborn was a son, named Jezreel: **"For in just a little while I (Yahweh) will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel."** (1:4) Their next child, a girl, was named Lo-Ruhamah, which means "No Mercy," for Yahweh said, **"I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel or forgive them at all."** (1:6) Their third child, a boy, was named Lo-Ammi, which means "Not My People," for Yahweh said, **"You are not My people, and I am not your God."** (1:9)

While Hosea is filled with accusations of Israel's harlotry, it is also filled with Yahweh's longing to win back His bride. The prophetic event of Hosea taking Gomer as his wife is a testimony to Yahweh's grace and kindness toward an undeserving and unfaithful Israel.

The early chapters of Hosea clearly show God's grace. In chapter 1, God promises that Israel's children will be like the sand of the sea (1:10), echoing His promise to Abraham. Chapter 2 begins with Hosea addressing Judah, the southern kingdom, urging them to say to Israel, "You are my people," and "You

have received mercy,” on behalf of Yahweh. God desires His bride to repent and return, but He does not overlook her sins. He reveals all her unfaithfulness and threatens her with the punishment she deserves—taking away all that she had gained through her adultery. Yet at the end of chapter 2, Yahweh speaks tenderly to Israel: **“I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her.” (2:14)** The Lord speaks of a day when she will once again call Him, “My Husband,” and He promises, **“I will betroth you to Me forever.” (2:16, 19)**

Much of the book reads like a divorce court, as evidence is laid out against Israel and her misdeeds are recounted by Yahweh. In chapter 6, Israel appears to repent, but her repentance is quickly revealed as false and feeble. In chapter 8, the Lord rebukes her for crafting a golden calf to worship and makes the famous threat: **“For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.” (8:7)** Hosea’s most famous prophecy is found in chapter 11, where the Lord, recounting His love for Israel, says, **“Out of Egypt I have called My Son.” (11:1)** This prophecy is fulfilled when Jesus returns from Egypt to Galilee after the death of Herod the Great.

### **How does the story end?**

Hosea ends like the rest of the Old Testament—with Christ. Yahweh comes for His bride. Jesus is Lord (Yahweh), and He comes to win and woo His bride, to love her to death, and to cleanse her (you) of your sins. God is gracious to sinners, and Hosea teaches us just how gracious He is. Whenever you sin, you are an adulterer—you have chosen to love another instead of your God. Hosea’s hard word is that we are worse than whores—we actually pay and sacrifice to our false gods for their pleasures.

What do we deserve? Certainly not God’s faithfulness and mercy. Yet that is exactly what He gives—because that is who He is: the God of steadfast love, of longsuffering, of abounding mercy. You cannot truly believe the greatness of the Gospel without seeing the depravity of your sin. That’s what Hosea shows you. ✝

## **HABAKKUK: Walk by Faith, Not by Sight**

*By Rev Dr James Gimbel (St. John’s, Kimball)*

Most of us deplore injustice in the world. If you have ever struggled with the presence of mean, unfair, or unethical practices, you are not alone. If you have questioned why God allows wickedness to survive, you have good company. If you wish for (and cry out) that someone – God, our government, the leaders, or “those people in charge” address all the behaviors that threaten peace and security and well-being, know that it has been done before, and your concern is not new. If you cringe when evil gets rewarded and the righteous suffer, welcome to the team.

Each person is born with a sense of right and wrong, of justice and mercy. Philosophers Immanuel Kant and Jean-Jaques Rousseau observed the general pattern and universal existence of a conscience among humans, identifying it as a “natural predisposition of the mind” (Kant) or an “innate principle of justice and virtue” (Rousseau). Long before them, Plato had argued that each person has an in-born idea (form) of what is right and wrong; Aristotle posited *phronesis* as a process of discerning ethical behavior and striving to achieve the Golden Mean in life. More authoritatively, St. Paul reminds the

Christians in Romans 2:14-15 of the Biblical truth: that God's law is written on every human heart, so even unbelievers are without excuse for not knowing God or doing the right thing.

This was part of Habakkuk's dilemma. Habakkuk lived during the declining years of the Southern Kingdom, after King Manasseh had blatantly disregarded nearly all respect for God's will as he pursued every pagan sin imaginable. Habakkuk's conscience was burdened with the injustices that surrounded him. Habakkuk recalled God's judgment on the Northern Kingdom when they strayed from God and showed disobedient disregard for God's law. Habakkuk knew the outcome of their disobedience: the consequential destruction of Samaria by the vicious pagan Assyrian army. Habakkuk feared a similar outcome on Jerusalem and the Southern Kingdom and yearned for a renewal across Judea.

Habakkuk likely remembered the courageous prayerful dialogues of God and Abraham over mercifully sparing Sodom and Gomorrah over as few as ten faithful believers. Habakkuk certainly recalled Moses defending and interceding for God's people in their wilderness wanderings. So, Habakkuk cried out to God in righteous anger and frustration, hoping that God would *do something* to restore justice to replace the Judeans' blatant disregard for God's will and His ways. In the book's opening verses, Habakkuk reveals that he has been praying long and hard for God to act, pleading with God to actively restore justice, asking **"How long must I cry out (for justice) and You will not listen?" (1:4).**

God's answer must have nearly knocked Habakkuk off his feet. God responds, essentially saying, *yes, I have heard your cry, and I am going to do something about it: I will use the Babylonians to come and punish Jerusalem and Judea on my behalf.*

Habakkuk recoils. Like David before him, Habakkuk would rather receive justice and punishment from the hand of the Lord (who is merciful), than the ruthless Babylonians. The barbaric Babylonians had stopped the Assyrians and driven back the forces of Egypt. Habakkuk argues with God that if God is truly just, He would not employ the service of a wicked and unjust, pagan enemy army. God's response suggests that the difference between a pagan Babylon and a pagan Judea is minimal, but neither changes the nature and work of God.

In the midst of God's second response, the Lord promises that, though He has not changed His mind about the Babylonian attack against Jerusalem (it would indeed come in 597 BC) and justice coming, yet *the just will live by faith*. Those who are just, even if under Babylonian attack, would live in God's hand, by faith. An echo of Genesis 15:6, where Habakkuk would have learned that *Abram trusted in God and it was credited to him as righteousness*. This concept, literally Habakkuk's phrase, is picked up by St. Paul in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11 and is foundational to Ephesians 2:8-10. Luther cherished this phrase as the central theme of the Sixteenth Century Lutheran Reformation.

As profound as this statement is as a foundational element of our understanding of God's mercy and grace and the core of our Lutheran identity, the "frosting" of this statement, where we see faith-in-action, comes at the end of Habakkuk 3. In an echo of Satan's observation that Job only believed in God because God had given Job a good life rich in blessings, Habakkuk makes a bold confession of a counter-intuitive trust in God.

**<sup>17</sup> Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, <sup>18</sup> yet I**

**will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. <sup>19</sup>God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places.**

Verse 17 paints a fairly grim picture of life without the good blessings of God. Verse 18 is a profound testimony of trusting in the Promises of God, walking by faith and not by sight, that in spite of circumstances, there is still joy in the **“God of my salvation.”** Verse 19 confesses the truth: *this God is my Lord*, and as such, is *my strength*. God gives me agility in life (like the feet of the deer on dangerous places).

This concept would be echoed by the *Threne* (three men in the fiery furnace) where Daniel records their statement: **“Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up” (Dan 3:17-18).** They *trusted* that God would be faithful and deliver them, which He did through the presence of a fourth, like a Son of God, with them in the fire. Jesus would later point the crowds to this absurd concept of spiritual blessing amid external challenges in the Beatitudes of Matthew 5.

Indeed, blessed are we, when we live and walk by faith and not by sight, trusting in the Promises of our gracious God, in spite of our outward circumstances. May we always cherish this truth. +

## **BIO: Rev Dr James Gimbel**

*We're excited to have a PhD who makes passing references to Rousseau and Kant and Aristotle. We're also very excited to have a pastor whose last name rhymes with the town he's in. Sees memes of grace for more.*

Pastor Jim Gimbel is a native of Good Thunder, MN. He worked three years in youth ministry (SD and MN) before attending seminary. He was ordained June 23, 1985, in Kramer, ND where he served Zion/Zion/Faith in Kramer, Gardena, and Towner, ND. Pastor Gimbel served eight years at Immanuel, Fargo, where he worked in Campus, Youth, and Sr. Pastor roles. He served six years at Concordia Publishing House in St. Louis as Sr. Editor of Youth, Family, and Sunday School Materials. He served nearly twelve years as religion, theology, and leadership professor at Concordia University, St. Paul. He served nearly twelve years at Concordia Lutheran Seminary, Edmonton, Alberta, ten years as President and then after initial retirement from the presidency was called back to a faculty post for two years. Over the years, he served as chair of the ND District Youth Committee for a decade, was a CTCR author, editor, and doctrinal reviewer in both LCMS and Lutheran Church-Canada for two decades, and served eight parishes in fringe time as long-term vacancy or interim pastor before starting at St. John's. He and Jill have been married nearly 47 years, and have been blessed with Andy (Laura) and four grandchildren; Abby (Seth) Brashear and three grandchildren; and Joanna (Gavin) Nachtigall and three living grandchildren. Pastor Jim and Jill had already relocated to St. Cloud prior to the call to St. John's, and intent to remain living close to family in St. Cloud. +



# Memes of Grace

Pastor Gimbel in Kimball got us thinking of other good placements that we could orchestrate...



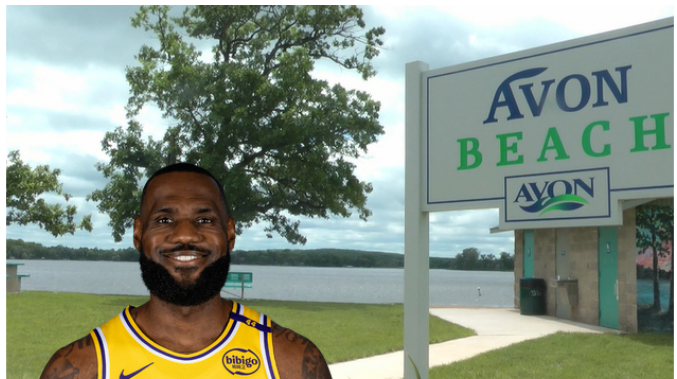
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