

Our passage joins right on to this declaration of doom. It is as if the prophet, after denouncing the wickedness of the nation, suddenly turned his attention to its godly portion, which consisted of people who were ready unquestioningly to accept the prophet's words as true. These people realized that they themselves, as part of the nation, were implicated in its sin. They did not see any signs of true repentance on the part of the nation as a whole. Therefore they knew that the terrible things the prophet described were sure to take place. This naturally led them almost to give way to despair. Turning his attention to them, the prophet did the work of God by seeking to comfort their hearts. In the succeeding verses God enabled him to look far beyond the coming punishment, and to give the divine assurance that God was not through with Israel, but had great future plans for Jerusalem.

It is important for us to notice that the same three geographical terms that are mentioned in the last verse of chapter 3 occur again in the first two verses of chapter 4. The prediction of destruction applies to these specific places in and around Jerusalem, and so does the promise of glory and blessing. Clearly the passage is describing something that will take place upon this earth. It is not a picture of heaven, nor is it a picture of something that is only in the spiritual realm.

The first two verses of chapter 4 say that these places, which are to suffer so greatly as a result of man's sin, are later to be the scene of great exaltation and glory. The law will go out from Zion. The word of the Lord will go forth from Jerusalem and will reach out to many nations. Verses 3 and 4 make it clear that this does not merely indicate the sending-out of good advice. This law is to be backed with force. Verse 3 declares that the Lord "shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off."